

# A LEGACY SET IN STONE

Influential late sculptor's views about art are still a source of inspiration for modern-day artists

By LIN QI

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One of the things that the late sculptor Liu Kaiqu (1904-93) told his postgraduate students at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in the 1950s was that a genuine sculptor should have the heart and mind of Pygmalion.

In Greek mythology, Pygmalion — the king of Cyprus, who is also a sculptor — falls in love with one of his works, an ivory statue named Galatea. And he is so obsessed with it that he keeps fashioning it to perfection and admires it every day.

Finally, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, gives life to Galatea. She marries Pygmalion and bears him a daughter.

Liu was among the first Chinese students to attend the prestigious National High School of Fine Arts in Paris in the 1920s.

In his words, a good sculpture

should not only look alive but also "be granted with a soul and, essentially, a sense of eternity and independence". And to achieve that goal, he said, a work that will stand the test of time should reveal one's historical and cultural heritage, as well as national spirit.

Liu's views of art were shaped during a time when his motherland was torn by poverty, chaos and foreign invasions.

And those views are reflected in 34 sculptures by artists from home and abroad that won the seventh Liu Kaiqu Awards International Sculpture Exhibition in late October. Launched in 2011, the awards are an annual initiative run by the China Sculpture Institute in Beijing and Wuhu's city government.

The works are now on display at the Wuhu Sculpture Park in Wuhu, a laid-back city on the banks of the Yangtze River in East China's Anhui province. The winning pieces will be displayed for a year until the next awards ceremony takes place.

The awards are named after Liu to mark his place in modern Chinese sculpture and his legacy, which records the course of national liberation and uprising from the ruins of war.

Liu was a member of the design



Winning works from previous Liu Kaiqu Awards are on permanent display at the Wuhu Sculpture Art Gallery, in Wuhu, East China's Anhui province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

team for the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tian'anmen Square, which was completed in 1958.

The sculptural reliefs on the monument show 10 key events between the start of the First Opium War in 1840 and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Liu also sculpted dozens of statues of important figures in modern China, such as the great Chinese statesman Sun Yat-sen. And he portrayed unsung heroes, including soldiers fighting Japanese invaders and farmers toiling on land.

Today's sculptors work in quite a different context — social stability and material affluence.

Yu Chenxing, a teacher of sculpture at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, capital of East China's Zhejiang province, won this year's only gold award for his work, *Prediction*.

The stainless-steel sculpture that is several meters high depicts a Chinese abacus but with a new look. The giant abacus gradually narrows on one side to a pointed end, looking like a silver ladder stretching up high into the sky.

Yu said: "The abacus is a great invention, but we no longer rely on it for calculations. So the reason the abacus matters to us now is not for its form but for the wisdom the age-old tool encapsulates that we can still relate to."

He said the work invites the audience to not only take pride in China's rich, longstanding civilization but also to ask what today's Chinese can do to create a new height of thinking.

Yu first participated in the awards in 2013 when his work *Jiangnan* won a bronze. It depicted a cluster of bamboo on top of which sat a

bamboo chair.

Speaking about the work, Yu said he was inspired by his childhood home surrounded by bamboo. The evergreen plant was then the main material to make home appliances.

A small model of *Jiangnan* is exhibited together with over 100 works from the previous Liu Kaiqu Awards at a permanent display at the Wuhu Sculpture Art Gallery inside the sculpture park.

Zeng Chenggang, who chairs the China Sculpture Institute, said that sculpture is even more rooted in people's minds in Wuhu because of the Liu Kaiqu Awards and exhibition, and the annual event has helped deepen people's understanding of art.

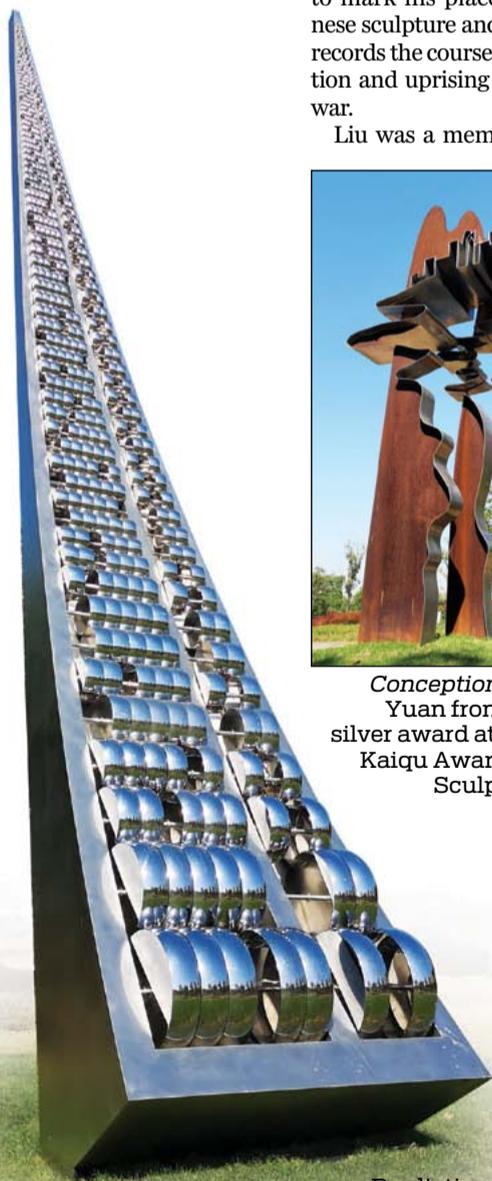
"This increasing intimacy between sculptures and people shows that art is contributing notably to enriching Wuhu's landscape, making it more enchanting for both locals and visitors," he said.

Sculptor Pan He said he and Liu were among the first few in the late 1970s to realize the importance of promoting sculptures in outdoor venues, in addition to museums, to receive more exposure.

Pan said a city needs not only extensive green areas and squares but also culture that can be spread through public art, such as sculptures. Artists should also use this opportunity to express ideas that can become timeless, he added.

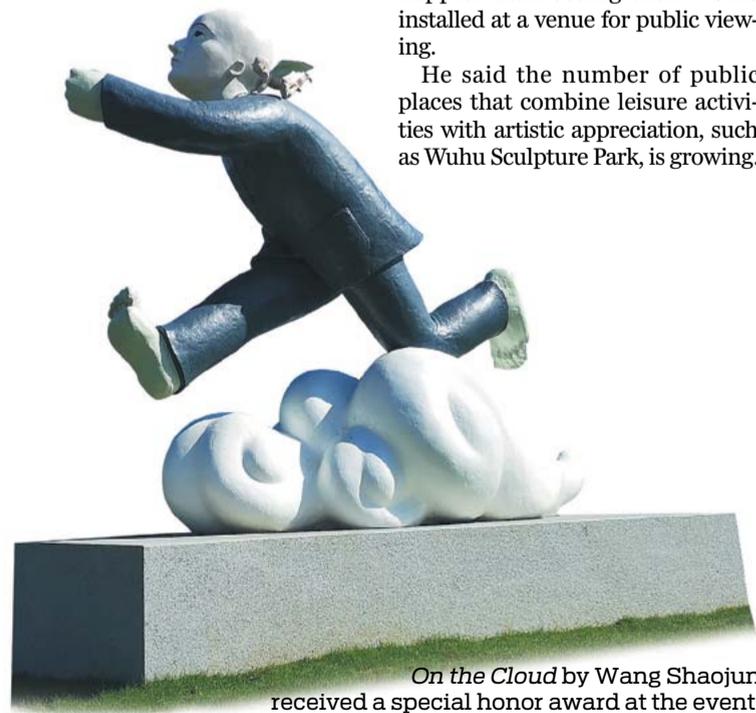
Yu said nothing makes sculptors happier than seeing their works installed at a venue for public viewing.

He said the number of public places that combine leisure activities with artistic appreciation, such as Wuhu Sculpture Park, is growing.



*Conception in Sight* by Zhu Yuan from China won the silver award at the seventh Liu Kaiqu Awards International Sculpture Exhibition.

*Prediction* by Yu Chenxing from China won the gold award at this year's Liu Kaiqu Awards.



*On the Cloud* by Wang Shaojun received a special honor award at the event.