

► Session 2:

# Creativity Adds Value

16 November Morning

Moderator: **Ms Catherine KWAI**  
Founder, Kwai Fung Culture and Communications Co. Ltd.

*A Moment of Eternality*

**Mr CAI Guo Qiang**  
Renowned Artist

*A Case Study of Nhung's Ceramics in Phu Lang  
Village-Bac Ninh Province, Viet Nam*

**Ms DO Thi Thanh Thuy**  
Researcher of the Viet Nam Institute for  
Culture and Information

*The Building of an Earth Art Museum*

**Mr TAN Swie Hian**  
Winner of World Economic Forum  
Crystal Award 2003

*An Architectural Experience in Bali*

**Mr Gianni FRANCIONE**  
Architect of GMarchitects, Indonesia

*Globalisation and Cultural Mistranslation*

**Mr GU Wenda**  
Renowned Artist

**Question and Answer**

**Mr CAI Guo Qiang**  
Renowned Artist



## A Moment of Eternality

I would not be applying for any franchise, copyright or patent. For an artist, sometimes it is difficult to repeat something, so even though I have managed to create this rainbow effect in one of my works, it is not possible for me to create the same thing in Singapore or in Hong Kong.

This is the first time I have come to Hong Kong. For me, Hong Kong is both very close and also very far away, because I was born in Beijing, and I passed by Hong Kong on my way to the US and also during my other trips to other places, but I never really stayed. That is why Hong Kong is also very close to me. I just arrived last night and I can see that Hong Kong is very magnificent. I am living on the 15th floor and the room has a very magnificent view.

I have a videotape showing my explosion works, and I will have a slide presentation, introducing my different works in different cities.

(Video shown) When I was doing this work, Mr Gu Wenda was also with me. There was a kite and it was thrown and exploded up to the sky. When I prepared this work, I was seated in the centre, so the vibration and also my heartbeat were recorded. Also my wife's heartbeat was recorded in an ECM. This was in 1993. So the explosion was right outside the Great Wall, outside of Jiayuguan.

The first project in Taiwan. Some 200 missiles were fired, and we staged the show for ten minutes; no aeroplanes were allowed to fly during that time.

The clothing on the catwalk. The clothes sold like hot cakes and they did not manage to arrive at the shops.

### THE MOMENTS OF EXPLOSION

'Cai Guo Qiang, Shanghai Art Museum' (2002). So I just did the explosion. You can see the spectators there. It was really crowded. It attracted quite a crowd. So it is like a dragon and some seeds would remain, and it would be exploding from right inside the museum to outside the museum. This art museum is being renovated, and this is the first project that I did with the Chinese Government in Shanghai. We can see the red carpet after the explosion. So you can see the red peonies. The theme of this is the dragon. So it is like a dragon. They look like bigger dragons. The entire Bund is linked up. The theme is blue and you can see the stars and also some symbolic fireworks, for example, UFOs. You can see that we have remote control and all the buildings are linked and explosive devices are placed the rooftops. You can also have keyboards, then when music is played, there will also be explosions and a fireworks display. It is like a fountain, a very big fountain. At the climax, we had about 2,000 lanterns flying in the sky over the Pearl of the Orient TV Tower. So they would be like parachutes landing very slowly.

Question & Answer

EXPLOSION ECOLOGY

**Q.** I would like to ask two questions. First, in your works, very often you would like the use of architectural structure, for example museums, towers, workshops and power-generating plants. Would that cause any destruction to these structures? We are talking about environmental protection worldwide, yet your works after the explosion would somehow cause problems to air quality and also the environment. So, in your creation, how are you going to overcome these problems?

**CAI GUO QIANG:** On the first question, with regard to the structures, basically that would not be a problem, because you can see the cables and so on. We have steel cables and also we have gondolas hanging down from the subjects and the substances. Also in the bund, because the bund is a state-protected heritage, we have to be careful, and also the explosion would need to be thought out very carefully, because that would have an impact on the buildings. Also, the Great Wall is one of the five great heritage relics of the world, so we have to be very careful, and sometimes we have to carry out experiments before hand. We have to discuss the technical details because I have to be responsible for my works. But I also have to be responsible for the ideas of the officials. Sometimes they would be crazier than myself. For example, they would be placing some of the explosives in a ten-inch box and they would try to be more ambitious

'Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters' (1993). In the course of the work we have to link up the wire and also the explosives. It was back in 1993 and I was living in the Japanese Consulate. The Consulate people had a better understanding about the technical requirements, and they told us that you did not need to apply for approval, because if you ask me we will have to ask the Public Security Bureau and we will have to ask the Ministry of Security, so just go ahead with what you plan to do and just ask the Municipal Government, and if they give you approval then you can just go ahead.

(PowerPoint presentation) The Great Wall is a very long wall, we had about 10,000 miles, and when we had this explosion works, some 10,000 people came out to watch the exhibition. I did not have sufficient funding so I asked an organization which supported me and provided me with a lot of technical support, and they were Hong Kong people and also Japanese and Americans, so they gave me about US\$3,000. So \$1,000 was given to me, and \$1,500 was given to me for the project. So I got support from that organisation.

'The Earth Has Its Black Hole Too' (1994). There was an opening ceremony in Japen and I was asked to stage this explosion works. The missile was fired to about 600 metres high. That was a symbolic thing because the atomic bomb exploded at about 600 metres from the ground. So I was staging this at around the same height as where the atomic bomb exploded. They tried to take the ignition from inside and I was trying to display that in the 20th century; two matters were very important to us.

One was the fire, the igniting in the sky, and the Japanese emperor was very worried. He was worried about the implication that there could be war, but then they felt that the atomic bomb was a bad thing, so many people felt that way, but then they said that whatever exploded in the sky, whatever fire was coming from the sky, it did not really matter because it was just a piece of work. But other people felt that a flame coming from the sky was not very auspicious.

SIGNS OF THE MUSHROOM CLOUDS,  
FIREWORKS AND SMOKE

In the US I had to adopt a different approach, because in the US you had to approach different art galleries and you would have to show them paintings, but then I just told them, 'Can I go to the atomic bomb testing ground to do this?', and they said that I had to make an application. I went there and I had some firecrackers from China and I tried to install them somewhere, I dug up the ground and I also had some adhesive tape and so on. When I arrived at the place I took out the firecrackers and ignited it, and a mushroom cloud appeared. In fact the hole was a very small one. So it was a very small piece of explosion works. But it was subsequently widely reported, and they felt that the explosion was a very precise one because I used the special device.

I went to New York, I did not seek approval but then I tried it again, and many

people took pictures of that. I did not dare to stay for too long in one spot, so I just did it there.

'Transient Rainbow' (2002) .We had to use fireworks in the explosion, and some of them will have to be launched from some cranes. So how did I create this flower or rainbow effect? Because they had different trips in the computer and the computer would know what time certain works would be exploded. So it is automatic. You would have 1,000 fireworks and then different explosive devices would be exploding at different times. That would also create this artistic effect; it is like a rainbow.

Now you can also see from the earlier pictures, '9/11' also had a very serious impact on my pictures because prior to that event I was in Manhattan, I did it in Manhattan, and afterwards, the city was destroyed - after '9/11' it was easier to launch this project in New York and in Central park. In fact the mayor's office was directly involved in the project. Without the mayor's office direct involvement, it would have cost me a lot more, because with the mayor's office assisting me, they would be keeping the law and order there. We also could use submarines and also divert the traffic, so on and so forth, and all the aeroplanes would stop flying during that time. We were doing this on a particular bridge.

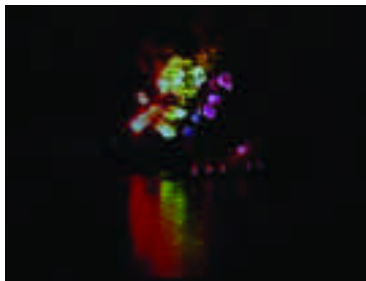
When I was in China in 1993, the situation was very different, but then subsequently there were a lot of changes in China. During the APEC forum, the Chinese leaders asked me to come over to do something unprecedented and something that could not be followed afterwards. That was the initial thinking. Subsequently, we had the '9/11' event, and then they also thought that Bush would be in China as well, so we had to be careful, and also the project would have to tie in with the changes of the time, and also the implications. But then at the very beginning when we started the project, the Central Government's plan was that it had to be something magnificent, it had to be something spectacular, so they gave me a lot of support. But then on the other hand, they were very worried about something else. Subsequently, we decided that we had to do this spectacular thing, something unprecedented, something that would not be followed afterwards, at whatever cost that would be required.

'APEC City Scape Fireworks Show' (2001) Initially, I had this plan, that the fire would be coming from both sides of the Bund, and then they would be like two lines and be fired to the sky, and there would be an illuminated light line of about 200 metres long. The line would have to be hung in the middle of the sky, and it would be like an airship, and if any aeroplanes flew over the sky during that time they would be struck down.

In Manhattan and also in the western countries, they are very free, and if you want to use explosives you would also have to negotiate with the private sector, and the government would not be able to have any say, but then in Shanghai, you can just talk to the government and then we can have the explosions right on the rooftops of the buildings, and the landlords would be standing on the

and I would tell them, even though it is quite a distance from the explosion site or from the buildings, the impact could be very devastating and cause destruction. Sometimes they would ask me to tell them the technical aspect from the scientific perspective.

The second point is about environmental protection. Basically, for us, there is no consideration of environmental protection because definitely you will have to find wood and use wood, and if you use rocks and stones, originally they will have to be on the mountains and you will have to do some inscription on the environment. Definitely you will cause some damage to the environment. But then you will have to do it in a responsible manner, for civilization cannot just rely on environmental protection, because in this age we have to look at our ideals and also our dreams. Also we have to be very careful because people would like to admire the fireworks display, but afterwards there would also be pollution, refuse and garbage, dumping refuse everywhere. So to a certain extent we would not be able to protect the environment. But then there is a balance to be struck and basically it is a matter of concept. For example, for my fireworks display, the display time would be very short but the impact would be very strong. In comparison to wars and also contests and competitions, I think we would be using less explosives.



ground and welcoming this. They would also be prepared to demolish whatever required in order to help us stage the project. So for public arts and the power of such art forms, the government would also be able to have a say and to make changes for these projects.

Paris. It was the Year of China, it was in Paris and I was invited to explode this Chinese pagoda right outside of the Eiffel Tower, and the Chinese President, Mr Hu Jintao, was also there. He was also the one who pressed the button. The pagoda was the effect of the fireworks. Right opposite the Eiffel Tower you can also see this Chinese pagoda or tower.

They got me this budget of about US\$1 million but then the Chinese Government was giving this funding to the Chinese Consulate in Paris and then the French Government would possibly give you the funding. A finance company was involved, and it was considering whether or not the fountain would be affected, because if there should be an explosion right on top of the fountain, they had to make sure that the fountain's foundation would not be affected. We also felt that because of the time pressure we would have to approach the French President, if we could not make things work. So all sides worked very hard for that, and some 7,000 fireworks were involved. Every one of those was linked to a computer chip. It was basically operated by the computer. Many people from the President's office were there. They said that we had to apply for approval. But then we could not possibly get the approval because it involved so many explosives, and we also would have to submit all the drafts and layout plans for approval if we had to go through the proper channel. So we just bypassed all those and we managed to do it. Afterwards, they still allowed me to do this outside of Versailles. So we had many of these fireworks at carnivals.

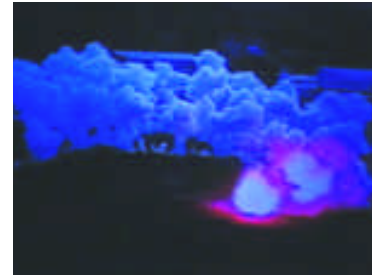
The World Expo in Japan. The theme is 'nature'. We had this thing in the sky, and this is very much part of the environmental campaign. Afterwards, we had this ground for fireworks display and explosion works, and right nearby we had the rail tracks. So it is like a dragon in the sky. Then on the ground we had a train. So the train was moving and the fireworks were also displayed.

Another one is in commemoration of the Iraq War and the deaths. So we were testing this black cloud, and every time when I tried this, many people would be involved. This company would also be able to make a profit, and for me it is just a piece of artwork. I would not be applying for any franchise, copyright or patent. For an artist, sometimes it is difficult to repeat something, so even though I have managed to create this rainbow effect in one of my works, it is not possible for me to create the same thing in Singapore or in Hong Kong.

## ETERNAL FIRE THAT GOES OFF JUST ONCE

A recent one, in one of the aviation bases in the US. I used six planes and they would give out this white smoke, and it is like a 30-metre-long smoke. It is like mountains and also water. This is also a very dangerous, perilous display. Subsequently, the air show was cancelled. But then after about ten odd seconds the show continued, and then the next day we tried this again. The weather was not very fine, it was very cloudy, and we did not have a clear sky. Also, during the two-hour check, the pilot died because the aeroplane had mechanical problems. He is not an artist. But then everybody was talking about him. But then he was an adventurer rather than an artist.

This is just to show what it is like in a war. The spectators were all there and they almost forgot what happened the day before. You had a lot of fighter planes. My aeroplane was there. So I was like painting mountains, rivers, and also the scenery. 🌈



Ms DO Thi Thanh Thuy

Researcher of the Viet Nam Institute for Culture and Information

# A Case study of Nhung's Ceramics in Phu Lang Village - Bac Ninh Province, Viet Nam



The artistic creativity of Nhung and other painters of the village has promoted Phu Lang ceramics to a new step. Ceramic products have found a new position in interior decoration of modern life and serve the people's aesthetic needs.

As we know, creativity is one of the outstanding abilities of humankind. It helps us to survive and adapt through constantly changing contexts, to discover new possibilities and to achieve self-improvement. Creativity is the most striking defining characteristic in the field of culture, which is why people often call the cultural sector 'the creative sector'. So, why and how is creativity in the arts so important? Is it for economic reasons and for artistic, socio-cultural values? The preposition 'and' here can provoke a debate about what is the priority in the arts and the cultural sector. How can creativity be encouraged? What are the conditions necessary for creativity to blossom? To answer these questions, I decided to investigate one case study. Because a case study presents only a singular experience, it vividly and specifically sheds light on some of the issues of our topic in a particular context.

Phu Lang is one of the three ceramic centres in northern Viet Nam. Ceramics have been developed here since the 14th century. For hundreds of years, the people in Phu Lang mainly produced ceramics houseware, such as pots, for the use of farmers in rural areas. They used traditional techniques. But since the 1990s, Phu Lang has been in a condition of degradation, because of the increased production of modern and cheap housewares. A dramatic change happened in 2000, when Vu Huu Nhung studied fine art, which breathed new life into traditional ceramics. He combined contemporary artistic design and mosaic decoration to traditional materials. He opened his own business and taught villagers to produce artistic potteries. His business has successfully grown from ten workers in 2002 to over 100 workers in 2004. The villagers, though they have not been trained officially, are very talented, according to Nhung, and very quick learners. Nhung became the owner of the company and also a teacher for the villagers. Thanks to his creativity, traditional ceramics have been transformed from houseware to a kind of fine art.


## RE-BIRTH OF TRADITIONAL CRAFT INTO FINE ART

Following Nhung, many villagers have established businesses, selling artistic pottery to many people in the city, in the domestic market to the middle class who would like to decorate their houses in an artistic way, and he even achieved a sharp increase in export, selling to many countries in the world like Japan, China, even Italy. The village also draws a lot of tourists coming here daily and especially at the weekend. So Phu Lang village has come to a new period of development from houseware, making pottery for houseware, to a kind of fine art.

Obviously, Nhung's artistic creativity has contributed significantly, though in very simple ways, to economic, social and cultural values. Phu Lang ceramic village, in the degradation, has been restored to life in a new period of development. Phu Lang products have been diversified in both types and functional uses, from the usual ceramic utensils used for the people's daily life in rural areas, such as food containers to cooking utensils. The artistic creativity of Nhung and other painters of the village have promoted Phu Lang ceramics to a new step. Ceramic products have found a new position in interior decoration of modern life and serve the people's aesthetic needs. Nhung's ceramic business has been more and more broadened together with the appearance of other artistic ceramic enterprises.

This transition has created many jobs for the villagers and the restoration of Phu Lang ceramics village. There are various kinds of artistic potteries here, especially multiplying the economic value of the ceramic products. For instance, an artistic ceramic jar has been sold for a 15 to 20 times higher value in comparison with the price of a traditional ceramic jar. So the villagers can have a stable income, and many people do not have to go to the city to find jobs anymore. So the economic, social and cultural values of Nhung's artistic creativity can be summarised as follows: They are revitalising a dying traditional ceramic village, providing increased employment opportunities with higher income for villagers, and improving the reputation of Phu Lang.

The contribution of Vu Huu Nhung and other artists have opened up a new period of development for Phu Lang, transforming the traditional Phu Lang pottery into artwork of a much higher value, and changing the face of Phu Lang for the future.

Next, I would like to give you some analysis of this case study. What I found interesting about this case study is the changing context the motive for creativity. The change of contexts represents one of the motivating forces to push up creativity for a better appropriateness and development. Nhung's ceramics came into being in the contexts of industrialization and modernisation of the country. You can see that life is changing constantly. In the past, Vietnamese people liked unity and the natural features of things, such as when building houses, they used unpainted wood; in eating they were fond of the natural taste of food. Their life was attached closely to ceramics. When they die, the skeleton was kept in a ceramics coffin. But life has changed. The traditional houses, for example, have gradually disappeared and been replaced by high-storey buildings. In the past we used to wear brown clothes, but now fashion is very diversified. The same with ceramics: usual ceramic utensils are not widely used anymore. We rarely see water jugs in rural areas now. This changing context demands new ideas to be formulated to help Phu Lang villagers better adapt to modern life. 

## Question & Answer

### MARKETING & GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

**Q.** I would ask Ms Do about the promotion of ceramic products - in commercial terms, how to market that product, so that everyone knows about it in Viet Nam. How do you promote your products from the village?

**DO THI THANH THUY:** I think you raised a very good question. I found that Nhung's ceramics could find its place in the market, not only because of its artistic creativity, but also its result from very tremendous effort in marketing and promotions. The artist Nhung had his strategy and tactic to promote his ceramics to the market, such as he offered his products as a gift to high-profile officials of Viet Nam and to foreigners as well. He even produced a lot of posters to distribute to the customers. He had a discount for the person who purchased a high volume of products. So there are a lot of promotion. And thanks to this activity, I think Nhung's artistic pottery can come to reach people in the cities and overseas.

**CATHERINE KWAI:** So did the government involve any help, for example, policy or financial support?

**DO THI THANH THUY:** Yes, I think recently the Vietnamese Government has created a lot of favourable conditions in the private sector



compared to the past. We do not have a lot of financial support, but in the case of Nhung's ceramics, the local government gave him a land allotment, so he could have the space to produce ceramics because this kind of handicrafts need a lot of space. The local government also supported him to open a new road. This new road facilitated Nhung's ceramics, because I remember four years ago it was very difficult for tourists to come to the village; the road was in a very bad condition. Right now, the trucks can go in and a lot of products go out to the cities.

thinking about ceramics firing by gas. He even intends to establish very big scenery where tourists can come and observe the scenery of the Phu Lang village in the past, because he thinks that in ten years the scenery of Phu Lang right now will have changed dramatically, so the tourists can enjoy it. The question you raised touched on the issue of tradition and creativity. I think creativities always enhance tradition, and we should not be so rigid because we have to find something useful and applicable to us, that will give us enjoyment. So I think we keep our theories but we change the shape.



## FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFT

**Q.** Would there still be room for development on top of the traditional basis? Apart from the traditional elements, is there any possibility of sustainable development? I hope that the Vietnamese speaker can take a forward-looking view of this matter.



**DO THI THANH THUY:** Thank you for the question. The production of ceramics can pollute the environment, and there are many other issues like the use of wood to fire ceramics. But in the future, when the wood is running out, what energies can the local people use for making ceramics? I think, because the context changes constantly, it requires people to be creative and adapt to the changing conditions. Nhung's ceramics are very vivid clay, and he considers the conditions, too. He said, in the future, where the wood runs out, he is

# The Building of an Earth Art Museum

## Mr TAN Swie Hian

Winner of World Economic  
Forum Crystal Award 2003



To blend art with nature is not to alter entirely the ecological originality, but to embellish nature with a slight addition so that viewers will have fresh impressions of nature's features and gain a different significance and feeling than what is normally perceived.

The All-Wisdom Gardens – Tan Swie Hian Earth Art Museum is a joint venture in cultural tourism industry between Chinese and Singaporean private enterprises, a grand-scale development project integrating ecology, the humanities and art. The Chinese partner provided the land, and the Singaporean partners provided capital and artistic creation. It is located within the scenic National Forest Park of the Little Pearl Hill (Xiaozhushan) in Qingdao of the province of Shandong. Named after me, the museum is being created by me single-handedly. On the understanding of preserving the ecological surroundings and through the blend of the Chinese calligraphy brushwork and the language of contemporary art, I am interpreting the cultural classics of all humanity on a mountain range. The museum has completed about a third of its planned artworks since its building started in 2001.

Originated in the United States in the 1960s and subsequently current also in Europe, earth art was a trend of artistic thought where sculptors, after having perceived the limits of the walls of museum, advocated leaving the museum and going to the wilderness and the desert in nature to create. It was certainly a rebellion, but also a return to ancient experiences as the Pyramids in Egypt, the Stonehenge in England, the sand-works by the Indians and the cave paintings, cliff carvings, grotto sculptures in ancient China are all within the genre of earthworks. To blend art with nature is not to alter entirely the ecological originality, but to embellish nature with a slight addition so that the viewer will have fresh impressions of nature's features and gain a different significance and feeling than what is normally perceived.

## INTERPRETATION OF ECOLOGY, HUMANITIES AND ART

The All-Wisdom Gardens occupies a wooded mountain range of about two square kilometres. It provides a complete journey of eight kilometres in four sections, namely, the Bodhichitta Path, the Kalyanamipra Realm, the Sambodhi Summit and the Vairocana Landscape. The traveller enters the gardens by the grand Archway of Pure Vision: on the boulders along the Bodhichitta Path, the portraits are done with the Chinese brush and ink, of giants in the fields of science and technology and humanities such as Lu Xun, Shakespeare, Einstein and others, who had cast great influences on the process of human history and civilisation. The traveller follows these pioneers into the track of the lotus-shaped mountain, zigzags through forest, and in the footsteps of Sudhana, the truth seeker in the Avatamsaka Sutra, he enters the Dharma realm

to visit along the ascending mountain path 53 intimate enlightened beings to experience with them the process of purifying the body/mind on various spiritual planes. After having climbed 1,299 stairs, the traveller reaches the summit of the Little Pearl Hill, which is 730 metres above sea level. A cliff face of the summit which measures 88 metres high is enveloped in an inscription of 294 characters in calligraphy running script of the Heart Sutra, covering a carved surface of about 2,000 square metres, with every character measuring as big as four square metres, making the Heart Sutra Cliff look like a magnificent cathedral.

After the Sambodhi Summit, the traveller then descends from a debate platform at the peak into the last section of the gardens. The earthworks planned for this section will be based on the finest experiences by various peoples worldwide in their pursuit for truth, and created in tandem with the natural shapes of the rocks of the mountain, allowing the traveller to feel the interconnectedness of all things and the universal love of all beings, and realise that the blood in the vessels of all human beings is red. Hence, the journey through the All-Wisdom Gardens is one of the pursuits of truth through the synthesis of natural beauty and artistic beauty.

Many works in the gardens show very little man-made addition. The creating method was to follow the textures and shapes of the mountain rocks in order to discover their particular forms and to make visible the significance of the works by carving a few words on the rocks by their sides. Then the creator further explored the relationship between the particular forms in order to make visible the significance of the whole Sutra. This is in line with how Michelangelo saw the whole Pieta trapped in a block of marble and what Rodin had said, 'The world does not lack beauty, but it lacks discovery.' The artist who is a part of nature is with the mountains and rivers in a very friendly attitude; like a child playing around his mother, his works blossom naturally like flowers.

**DEDICATION TO THE BEAUTY OF NATURE AND  
THE NATURE OF TIME**

Besides, I also employed the traditional cliff carving method to create: to do calligraphy and painting onto the rocks or the cliff face directly which are then carved out by carvers. The dexterity of over 200 carvers from Quyang of the province of Hebei shows the power of the miraculous craft. All the artworks in the gardens possess a common feature, i.e. they are colossal: The Archway of Pure Vision weighs 1,040 tonnes, the Heart Cliff measures 20 storeys high, Bhiksu Haiyun cliff relief is 22 metres high and 25 metre wide, and the Magnificent Pavilion is like a town let. The picturesque scenery of mountains and rivers is naturally, overwhelmingly arresting. But the man-made artistic addition can make the particular features of the natural scenery look more focused. Hence, human creativity adds value to the creativity of mountains and rivers. The difference between the West Lake and the East Lake, apart from the

size, is the descriptions, recitations and eulogies of the West Lake by poets and artists of all generations. Otherwise, it could have been like hundreds and thousands of natural lakes on earth which repeat themselves monotonously. And to create is the artist's bounden duty; like a bee which keeps on gathering nectar to make honey, he keeps on working, oblivious of himself. Whether or not his creation will spread far and wide in the long river of Time hinges on an everlasting test. Therefore, when the All Wisdom Gardens will some day be completed, adding fresh resources to cultural tourism, I shall dedicate it to Time. 🌈



**Mr Gianni  
FRANCIONE**

Architect of GMarchitects,  
Indonesia



## An Architectural Experience in Bali

The feeling of continuity between inside and outside, in order to achieve symbiosis between architecture and the natural environment, is a constant quest of our work. It is part of a more general philosophy of 'tropical organic architecture' that can be expressed in different ways.

I believe that anyone approaching the theme of creativity in Asia cannot ignore the island of Bali, which for the last 15 years has been not only a magnet for tourism but also the centre of a strong creative force involving various sectors, commercial as well as cultural and artistic.

I have had the opportunity and the privilege, together with others, to be a witness and a participant of the beginning and the development of a creative process on the island, regarding in particular the field of private residential architecture. This process started at the beginning of the 1990s, and it has been developing until now, thanks to the concurrence of several factors. I would like to consider briefly these factors and illustrate to you, their distinctive features which have contributed to inject energy and creativity into my work.

### CREATIVITY IN RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

The first factor we are going to consider is geographical, and in particular the climatic conditions. Bali has a hot and humid climate, like all the other tropical places, but because of its geographical position, it benefits from a quite particular windy and mild weather. In terms of living, it means that you are not necessarily obliged to live in a full air-conditioned ambience. From an architectural point of view, it means the possibility to design villas open to the surrounding nature, and it gives a great freedom in the design. I would like to show you with a couple of examples of how the results can be in terms of living.

A modernistic outline of one villa where two triangle-shaped twin roofs are completely open into the garden: The interior space under these roofs is articulated on different levels. One of them houses the dining area below and an all-wood mezzanine relaxation area, which both overlook the garden. In the other there is a living area that is protected aside by the sloping wooden roof structure yet again fully open to the surrounding vegetation.

Another project with a contemporary design characterised by sloping planes of the roofs which form the shelter of an open-sided villa: Inside, you can see the roof structure forms an interim between the house and the nature and provides a sensation of intimacy and security, but at the same time the living area looks out to the garden where a stone pathway leads to the pool and to a traditional Balinese altar. Bali, with its altars and its temples, and its great variety of landscapes, offers a continuous source of inspiration for architects and artists.

The second geographical factor is the environmental condition. The tropical vegetation in Bali becomes an inspiring element of any new project for us, and

its integration with the other elements of the design becomes crucial for any architectural outcome. For example, the concept of the traditional doorway, that commonly in architecture symbolises a precise division between the inside and the outside, can change its function, becoming a more 'friendly' and connecting element of the architecture. The simple geometrical composition of this house is, with the particular shape of the roofs touching the ground, and the entrance is just a central cut between the two wings under a sheet of glass. From the inside, the entrance allows light to enter, as well as a continuous and refreshing in-and-out airflow. It looks quite friendly to me.

In another project, the doorway can even disappear, and it is replaced by what we call an indoor/outdoor transition area, that really becomes a unifying element between the internal living space and the nature outside. Here in this project, the entrance is just located below the two wide inclined wings of the roof. Here, below the wooden shingles of the geometric roof, it is marked only by a single step and a change in the floor's material. The feeling of the continuity between inside and outside, in order to achieve symbiosis between architecture and the natural environment, is a constant quest of our work. It is part of a more general philosophy of 'tropical organic architecture' that can be expressed in different ways.



## DESIGN OF LOVING OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The second factor is the social factor. The combination of the climatic and environmental conditions has induced a natural attraction of various creative people to Bali, from every part of the world, with fresh ideas, and keen to experiment and exchange their own talent. Everybody always has been warmly welcomed in a tolerant, multi-racial and open social context. The island has become a crossroads of different cultures.

In the particular niche (that is the private residential architecture), the variety of the needs and the aesthetical standard of the clients have stimulated both interior designers and architects. Feng Shui, minimalism, functionalism, vernacular sources and ethnic inspirations have been elaborated and transformed into an eclectic result which, in my last book *Bali Houses* that I wrote on this subject, I named 'new tropical internationalism'.

The third factor is the economic factor. This is a very simple basic factor, but not minor. On the island, we have inexpensive and talented local workforce and a large availability of good quality natural materials for walls, roofing, flooring, everything, and at low cost. That gives the possibility not only to lower the basic building costs, but also enables great variety of aesthetic suggestions and solutions, and allows good-quality architectural results for a reasonable price. Here, you have just an example of how the variety of materials and textures can become an aesthetical element in a project. Iron wood tables, hard stone slates, soft stones, all coming from Bali, differently coloured and textured.

**FLEXIBLE ARTISANS; EXPERIMENTAL ROOFS**

Now we go to the main factor which is the technical factor. In Bali, there is a strong tradition not only of handicrafts but also of excellent woodworks. The local artisans are not only skilled and capable but also flexible to adopt and experiment in new technologies. They never say no. Their positive attitude has become an element of great importance for the development and the experimentation of one of the main characteristic elements in our projects: that is the roofs.

Throughout all our projects, we have been constantly challenging the tradition of Balinese craftsmanship. We combined an overall use of local materials and traditional structural knowledge, together with an application of appropriate technology to try to experiment and express original form, and shapes.



I give you here an overall display of this evolution. You see that the original thatched roof has been replaced with ironwood shingles. Meanwhile, the shapes of the roofs start evolving and become more and more unconventional. When we design, we always like to give a nickname to each project: armadillo project, a praying mantis project, a flying butterfly project, a manta ray project. Then finally we move into experimental curved shapes, arriving at what we call the keel project.

It is important for me to stress the fact that all these projects have been accomplished in Bali, and that the collaboration with the local woodworkers has been inspirational not only for the examples you have just seen, but also for these projects that are currently in process and represent our future development.

**NEW TROPICAL INTERNATIONALISM IN THE TOURIST'S HEAVEN**

Bali is a well-known tourist destination. We just move to the last factor, just to make the final consideration. Tourism has generated big economic investments on the island and at the same time has fostered a rapid economic growth. Thousands of foreigners, many of whom are engaged in some kind of commercial or artistic activity, have made Bali their home. The result was a rapid development of a new local building market. The demand for private villas and residences has been high. This vast clientele has generated opportunities for architects and designers, which were able to express their own creativity through new projects. Those started to be published and recognised internationally. The result at the end was a further increase of demand, more international, and this kind of virtuous circle has promoted the export of the formerly vaguely called 'Bali-style' and now we know it as 'new tropical internationalism'. Under this name, Bali's villas and private residences have become one of the new references for contemporary tropical living, and their expression, rising quality and fresh approach to the nature have put them centre stage in the tropical design world. 🌿

## Mr GU Wenda

Renowned Artist

# Globalisation and Cultural Mistranslation



Culture cannot be translated or precisely translated. I feel that the English translation of a Tang poem is just a translated meaning; it has lost all the beautiful sounds and the many layers and the artistic value of the poem. What I did is, I used the English version to retranslate back to Chinese, but using English sounds to find the Chinese characters. So the new Tang poem's sounds actually mimic to the English version of the Tang poem. The new poem becomes surrealistic and humoristic, and becomes a kind of contemporary poem.

I have been a professional artist for 15 or 20 years, so I have done some works. I will show two major works, so you can just have a glance.

The first one I will talk about is the United Nations project. It began in 1993 and is still ongoing and has done 30 monumental projects in different countries around the world. In total, about two million people around the world have donated their hair into my work during these years. This project is actually conceptually and geographically complicated because it goes around the world. I set up the strategy that under the United Nations project you have national monuments.

## MONUMENTS OF HUMAN TRANSCENDENCE

The China monument. The canopies and the walls, are all made purely of hair, and the fake languages which I invented are actually woven into the hair walls and hair ceilings. From the ceiling you can see these big characters actually are a combination of Chinese characters and English letters. It is very dark. The table and chair setting, as the negotiation table, for the cultural negotiation, and the negotiators actually sit on a TV monitor, which negotiates the cultural differences, according to the walls of different languages. So you actually sit on the clouds, you fly, to transcend the boundaries of the cultures, the limitations of the cultures. As you know, all the hair, when you go to a barber shop, you cut off your hair, you do not even look at it, and this is a kind of body waste. For this work, the body waste is like human recycling, so it transcends into a rising spirit. The hair curtains are against the light; you can see all these various sparks to shine on the human body.

More significantly, the hair is not like an object, a piece of stone, canvas or wood. It is from all people. So when people look at the work, they actually look at themselves. They close the gap between the viewing audience and the object. These letters are all a combination of Chinese seal script and the English letters. This is a work actually invented for the Johannesburg Biennale, and this is a hair screen wall. It is completed 40 feet tall and 44 feet wide, and on the



Question & Answer

UTOPIA AND ITS HAIR

Q. What does hair represent?

**GU WENDA:** Hair is a very symbolic thing from a religious, cultural, historical and also personal point of view. So hair would help a lot of things and if you go to the library you would be able to find a lot of things about the source of hair, and the religious implications and so on. I can cite an example. For the Jewish religion, Samson's hair represents strength; and in India, hair also symbolises power and spirit. When you go to India, if you ask people for their hair, it would be very difficult because they take it very seriously. So I used hair in my works, and basically it is a United Nations project – the UN is not able to make the concept of utopia into a reality. That is why we try to use this concept of hair, and a total of two million people contributed to my project. So people represent themselves, and it is not just an object. They are humans, and the process is rather complicated.

Another interpretation is that this millennium is a biological millennium. In other words, the human or mankind is our physical revolution. So my work is trying to translate this value that is from Chinese culture; we try to make use of something in our daily living and we try to translate it into an art form. For example, we are talking about this material that we use in life, and we use our human DNA and we try to paint it into our paintings.

ground are scatterings of African hair. So the work actually has two patterns: in the centre are the fake languages, or Chinese, English, Hindi and Arabic, and on both sides you can see the patterns, like islands or a map; the composition is by the different kinds of colour hair. So we can see a kind of racial boundaries. This work we call 'The Praying Wall of the World'. The whole piece is actually done by pure hair.

THE POETICS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

Another project was designed for the National Gallery in Australia in 2002, an Australian monument. The ceiling panels are made out of people's hair of the Pacific Asian countries. The vertical walls are made out of Australian hair, the two walls together make an 'X' shape. The middle is a kind of entrance and an opening. On the wall there are two phrases to identify the modern Australian people. Actually, this work still generates a bit of discussion in Australia, because most people pay attention to this kind of psychological, physical existence, but it is being ignored all the time. The phrase 'genetically British', the immigrants from England, and the other phrase, 'geographically Pacific', are the core psychology of the Australian people today. So my United Nations project has national monuments, each monument uses local hair, local history and culture, to form their work; their existence is actually through the Chinese interpretation, which is my mind and my hands.

Another is a work done at the turn of the century, and the work is called 'The Bible of the Millennium'. I used a biblical story as the basis to create this work. You can see all the hair panels made out of human hair. The size of this work is from the skylight to the atrium, 75 feet tall. The structure is actually overlapping. First is the western culture, a cross, and on the other side, gigantic figure, and each hair panel is just like an enlarged ancient jade suit from an ancient Chinese tomb. This is West and East overlapping to create this structure. Another project is my design for the title of the University of Pittsburg. The first yellow line is the title of the University of Pittsburg. Then the red line actually is my translation of the University of Pittsburg. The third line is the translation. It becomes a kind of Chinese poem. In this way, I elevated Chinese scholarly calligraphy into pop art and metropolitan city life today.

There is a project I began in 1993, and at about the end of this year, the 50 stone tablets will be completed. Each stone tablet weighs about one and a half tonnes. It took me about 11 years to complete this research and finally produce this work, because of finding the quarry of the slate which matches the ancient stone tablets which are preserved in the Xian Museum called the 'stone tablets museum'. Throughout several years, I find the best engravers in China. They are professional engravers through their generations, the family heritage. Stone from the quarry actually is from the side of the emperor's tomb, which is forbidden to take. I go through processes to get these stones. The regulation is all the stones have to be taken by hand; there is no explosion, because it creates cracks and affects quality. The concept of the work actually is rather

complicated, involving computer technology. But the process of creation actually follows the traditional method from the beginning to the end.

## TRANSLATION AND RETRANSLATION

This is my stone studio in Xian. In order to get a kind of large slate, one out of three is okay for the carving, and each stone carving contains one Chinese ancient poem from the Tang Dynasty. Then in the 1940s, a well-known American journalist translated these Tang poems into an English version. Now it has become an Asian study textbook. My point of view is that culture cannot be translated or precisely translated. I feel that the English translation of a Tang poem is just a translated meaning; it has lost all the beautiful sounds and the many layers and the artistic value of the poem. What I did is, I used the English version to retranslate back to Chinese, but using English sounds to find the Chinese characters. So, the new Tang poem's sounds actually mimic to the English version of the Tang poem. The new poem becomes surrealistic and humoristic, and becomes a kind of contemporary poem. So, the main text on this stone in English becomes new. That is the whole concept about cultural exchange and misunderstandings.

By the end of this year, the 15 stones will be completed. Most likely, the first complete setting will be shown next year, in Shenzhen. The stone is serene in a sense, and is a massive stone in the other sense, like a comparison of silk and iron. The text is so dedicated and it is a kind of complicated process to translate and retranslate between cultures. 