

Honorary Fellow A Citation



Professor Wu Weishan, PhD (Hon)

At the time of Creation, when the world was formless and in chaos, divine providence shaped earth into man and woman. This marked the beginning of human life. Artists in later ages also shaped earth and clay into human form, as if re-enacting the creation process. Sculpted figures, by their own nature, are physical, inanimate forms, but beyond their substance as a medium of expression, there is endless life, each with its own metaphysical style and spirit, whether expressed or concealed, invoking response from posterity. Professor Wu Weishan once said that sculpture was to study, to probe. He opined that sculpture was situated between the realistic and the abstract, and would present itself in a form that would be true to nature. For 20 years Professor Wu has, with his bare hands and his tools and through his consummate artistry, created over 500 sculptures of human figures. In seasoned, precise linear language, the sculptor speaks of life in many and varied forms, and brings in a new era of freehand sculpture.

A native of Dongtai in Jiangsu province, Professor Wu Weishan was born into a scholarly family in 1962, where all five generations were academics and adept in calligraphy and painting. Professor Wu was thus brought up in the scenic beauty of the Jiangnan region and, nurtured by the benevolent *genius loci* and steeped in the humanistic culture of his homeland, he developed a keen discernment in persons and matters around him, and a compassionate attitude towards human behaviour. When he was 17 he studied at Wuxi, and he had a chance meeting with an old artisan who created clay figurines, vivid and moist, by simple manipulation with his fingers of the lump of clay in his palm. The young Wu was dumbfounded, and overjoyed. Since that moment, as if alchemy had taken place, Wu Weishan took up sculpture as his life career, without reproach or regret. Later on he studied at the Department of Fine Arts of Nanjing Normal University, and the psychology of art at Peking University. These studies helped to gradually expand the scope of his knowledge, intensify his understanding of human anatomy as well as human psychology, and enable him to command, with greater precision, the artistic language and build up his personal stylistics in sculpture. In 1996 he visited the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands, and in 1997 he studied at the Department of Sculpture of the School of Art at the University of Washington in the United States. While there is always much to learn from outside one's own professional and aesthetic tradition, the sculpture of Professor Wu gradually began to show tints of western elements, and his artistic creations now bore the influence of modern expressionism in their forms. To these he blended in the innovations brought by the visual revolution. Professor Wu thus sought to integrate the merits of different schools and traditions, and we can see for example the admixture of clay and bronze in his sculpted works so that they show back to front, suggesting a sense of *discordia concors*. Traditional elegance and subtlety and modernistic exaggerations and distortions complement and yet conflict with each other, triggering off sparks that illuminate the palace of the Muses and its many rooms.



Professor Wu said that innovation was at the heart of a nation's progress, and an artist must seek energy from the primaeval inner drive in order that his artistic creations might be invested with life. Professor Wu has always had his country on his mind, and he never let go of the chance to learn from the ordinary people. He has created the sculptures of a good number of sages and wise people, both Chinese and foreign, and these figures, whether standing alone or in groups, all vary in size and shape, and in their spirit. For example, there is the modest, respectful, composed and benevolent Confucius, the Laotze who holds that Heaven and Mankind are at one, the regal dignity of the Queen of the Netherlands, the old Buddhist monk full of Zen wisdom, the resolute and uncompromising nonchalance of Luxun, and the purity and mellowness of Qi Baishi. Through the combination of simple geometric shapes he showcases the union of flesh and blood in a mother and child sculpture, and through the much distorted and gnarled body shapes, he recreates the soundless cries of the Nanjing Massacre. Whether it is a miniature item, a group of figures, or a standing figure rising to several hundred feet in height, Professor Wu's works engage the attention of viewers, who would stand in front of the figures, stare, and meditate. Professor Wu's production generally takes this process: first he observes and conceives for a long period of time, then when inspiration strikes, he immediately proceeds with his hands and tools. He promptly eliminate the cumbersome to keep things simple, stripping the figure down to its bones and sinews, that is, retaining the spirit and letting it express the individual's form. In 2003 his sculpture *Sleeping Child* was presented with the Pangolin Award by the Society of Portrait Sculptors. It is a bronze figure barely two inches in width, showing a sleeping child with a slightly plump face, that of a young child fast asleep, with a simple naivete on his lips and cheeks. Whose child is this, or is he the universal representation of childhood innocence? It is expressive art in its purest and most direct form, and is capable of causing resonance in different cultural traditions.

Professor Wu has exhibited extensively in many cities in Europe, America and Asia, and his historical figures are now on display in museums and campuses of universities in over 20 countries. In the Nanjing Museum, there is the Wu Weishan Cultural Figures Sculpture Gallery. At the Macao Polytechnic Institute, there is a Sculpture Studio of Professor Wu Weishan. In Inje University, Busan, Korea, there is a Wu Weishan Sculpture Park. His masterpiece, *Confucius*, is displayed at the Fitzwilliam Museum in England. In 2002 Professor Wu conducted a Forum on Contemporary Sculpture in China at Nanjing University, a grand occasion attended by scholars from all over the country and at which the present conditions of the art of sculpture in China were studied in great depth, and macro plans for future development were mapped out. In 2006, the National Art Museum of China staged *Casting the Soul with the Literary Heart—Exhibition of Wu Weishan's Sculptural Works*, being the largest show that the museum had mounted for an individual artist. In 2008, Professor Wu hosted the project "Stylistic Changes in Ancient Chinese Sculpture", which was an art programme under the National Social Science Foundation. In 1998 he founded the Institute of Sculpture Arts at Nanjing University and took up its directorship. Then Professor Wu established the Academy of Fine Arts at Nanjing University in 2003, and served as its director. In 2007 he became the president of the China Sculpture Academy of the



Chinese National Academy of Arts, and was appointed by the PRC Ministry of Culture as the director of the Institute of Arts of the Chinese National Academy of Arts in 2009.

Professor Wu has visited The Chinese University of Hong Kong on a number of occasions, and gave the Wu Weishan Sculptures and Paintings Exhibition on our campus. In 2002 he was invited by New Asia College to be a S. Y. Chung Visiting Fellow, and opportunity arose for Professor Wu to sculpt the statues of some CUHK luminaries, including Dr. Choh-ming Li, Professor Ch'ien Mu, Professor Yang Chen-ning, Dr. the Honourable Simon Li Fook-sean, and Professor the Honourable Jao Tsung-I. The creation of the statue of Professor Charles K. Kao is now in progress. Immense blessing has been bestowed on The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and its campus is such an auspicious site, that so many leading stars in the intellectual firmament should have sojourned here, and long may their words of wisdom be perpetuated, as their statues radiate in the eternal light of the celestial bodies.

Professor Wu is in his prime and at the height of his creative powers, his sculpture being of such matchless magnificence. His creations issue from the compassion inside him, and his success owes much to his steadfastness. He is at the frontier of artistic development, and he has expanded the horizons of sculpture, given new meaning and definition to artistic matters and issues. From the vertical axis of time he picks important historical remembrances, create cubic images of them, and place them on the horizontal axle of space, displaying them at different places. Those who have a keen interest may review the present in the light of the past, and realize that effort for the future may yet be in place. This is a cultural mission that Professor Wu has bound himself to. It is a weighty burden, and there is a long way to go. Mr. Chairman, may I now present Professor Wu Weishan for award of an Honorary Fellowship of the University.