

YOUTH



Reference Reflection No 1, made of kiln-formed glass and mixed media, by Du Meng.

Art of glass

Chinese artist Du Meng has overcome personal adversity to achieve her goals and push the boundaries of the medium she uses, **Chen Nan** reports.



From top: Du's glass artworks in mixed media, named Little Talks, As the Land Sleeps, Once Upon a Time, and Everywhere, Nowhere.

In 2008, after Du Meng finished her undergraduate studies and obtained her bachelor's degree in visual communication from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, she made her first trip to the United States and saw an exhibition of works by US glass sculptor, Dale Chihuly.

The exhibition changed the way Du looked at glass and opened her eyes to the possibilities offered by the material for artistic expression.

"I saw the greatness and the art in a commonly seen material. It is versatile in scale and color, which organically shaped my creativity," says Du, 33. "Personally, I am reticent when communicating with people I meet for the first time, but as an artist, I can talk with people through my artwork. Glass art is my language."

Inspired by Chihuly, she took the bold decision to embark on the further study of glass art at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where she obtained her master's in 2013 — the first Chinese student to graduate from its school for American crafts.

After a few twists and turns, she managed to excel in the field and, after graduation, continued to work as an artist in residence as part of the school's art glass program.

However, it has not been easy and she has encountered numerous obstacles on her artistic journey. The process of creating her glass artworks has taken a physical toll, with Du enduring sleepless nights, starvation and even pain.

A good example of this process is her piece titled *One Day*, which comprises five different glass figures of a young girl. It took Du about three years to finish.

After picturing the piece, she began by sculpting the figures from wax, from which she made a mold. When clean, the empty mold was filled with pieces of glass and heated to about 1,000 C. As it melted, it formed a flame-red liquid which then cooled to form the glass artwork.

"When I start an art piece, even I myself don't have a clear idea, just a feeling," she explains. "However, as I work with the material, the piece grows organically, like it has its own personality."

"Glass art technique is sophisticated. A small mistake can bring failure to the piece, such as the process of annealing, which puts the material under a lot of strain as it reaches room temperature and the glass may break as it cools."

During her six-year stay in the US,



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Du Meng, 33, artist

she polished her skills and experimented with her artistic ideas. Like many Chinese overseas students, Du struggled with the language barrier, academic issues and homesickness. In 2016, she returned to China.

"I once questioned my career as an artist, with the financial pressure and the fact that glass art has a minority appeal, especially in China. Many of my friends, who also studied glass art abroad, have given up the art form. It's really frustrating," Du says. "It seemed that I was the only one left behind while many others moved forward."

Her turning point came in 2016 when the artist won an honorable mention at the International Exhibition of Glass Kanazawa in Japan. As the first Chinese artist to win the prestigious award, it gave her confidence and made her more determined to pursue her glass art career.

In August, she exhibited her works at a group exhibition, entitled *Four Types of Summer*, at KWM art center in Beijing. Last year, she hosted a solo exhibition, *Du Meng: The Room*, at

the Shanghai Museum of Glass.

On Nov 16, she will once again display her works at a group exhibition — this time in the US — entitled *Mind the Gap*, which gathers six contemporary Chinese female artists from the US and China. The exhibition, to be held at the Delaware Contemporary art space, will run through Jan 30, 2020.

Du will launch a solo exhibition, titled *Embers*, at the Fou Gallery in New York on Nov 30, the same venue where she held her first solo exhibition, *The Climb, The Fall*, in 2016. The upcoming event took over a year to prepare, with Du creating her pieces in Japan, China and the US.

"From a young creator, trying to find her own artistic expression, to a mature artist, we've seen Du's growth," says He Yu, founder of Fou Gallery.

"She is one of the few young Chinese artists who has devoted herself to glass art. When I first saw her work, I was very surprised by the way she presented her art," recalls Li He, owner of a Beijing-based store for handmade art called Dairuhe. She met Du in 2017 and has collaborated with the artist by displaying Du's works in her shop.

Born in downtown Beijing, Du constantly expresses feelings influenced by her upbringing and reflections on her changing life through her dreamlike glass figures.

In one of her earlier works from 2013, she made a pair of white shoes based on her childhood memories of growing up in Beijing. The artwork, entitled *Bai*, combines kiln-formed glass and mixed media, such as tea.

She has used tea, which is deeply associated with traditional Chinese culture, in her work since she accidentally spilled some on a piece she was working on. As tea naturally absorbed into the glass, the artist was drawn to the color.

By combining tea and glass, Du has made artworks depicting swallows and leaves, through which she created a subtle language to tell her stories.

"A lot of my work is trying to capture a certain moment that I would not like to forget. All of them carry a subtle sense of belonging that I want to share with the viewer," Du says. "I don't expect the viewer to have the same feeling as I do, but it is very exciting to see how people respond to a piece with their own personal memories and feelings. It is like having a silent conversation with them."

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From top: Du's glass artworks, named Once Upon a Time, Ephemeral, Once Upon a Time, and One Day.

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Italian student chases his dream

HEFEI — Mauro Dellisanti from Italy just changed his cover photo on WeChat to one in which he is standing in a suit against the backdrop of the recent World Manufacturing Convention in Hefei, Anhui province.

The 23-year-old is a postgraduate student majoring in Chinese economics at Fudan University in Shanghai, who now plans to start his business in China because of "the rising importance of China on the world stage and the opportunities of the Chinese market".

Since he obtained his bachelor's degree at the University of Glasgow in Britain, his choice to open a Chinese sales branch of Glasgow-based Android and IOS app developer, Motovate Ltd, has become his focus.

Dellisanti attended the convention held last month in Hefei in East China's emerging manufacturing hub, to develop business contacts. According to the organizers, the four-day event brought together more than 4,000 representatives from over 60 countries and regions, including senior managers from some Global Fortune 500 companies.

By attending events, such as matchmaking conferences, Dellisanti hopes to build a network in China. "I hope to meet new people from around China, as well as representatives of international companies based in China, to tell them what we offer, get their impressions and seek future cooperation," he says. "I think all of these objectives have been achieved."

After spending time attaining an in-depth knowledge of China's economy, he decided he needed to see it firsthand.

In August last year, Dellisanti arrived in Shanghai. He left the airport and was filled with joy taking a taxi to his new home. It was at that moment he "truly understood where I was and what my ambition was".

He has now lived in China for over a year, which has changed his impression of the country, and he hoped he could help his family learn more about it.

"I try to change my friends' and relatives' thoughts about China, especially on the quality of infrastructure, the rise of IT companies and the support of the government for private businesses."

For him, China represents a market with big potential for growth. He is marketing an app he designed to manage employees' schedules.

"I believe there is a market for our product (in China), especially in hospitality, healthcare and logistics," he says. "We will be able to better learn what the Chinese market is asking for by physically being here, so that we can adapt and improve our product."

To achieve his dream, Dellisanti is putting more effort into learning Mandarin.

"I need to improve, because I'm going around conferences like the manufacturing convention and joining networking sessions from the chambers of commerce, mostly working on gaining contacts."

XINHUA

Embarking on a career in planting trees

TIANJIN — Wang Kun, who was previously a white-collar worker in Beijing, now takes care of 300,000 trees scattered across the landscape in his hometown in North China's Tianjin.

"Planting trees improves air quality and enriches urban color," says the 32-year-old who grows trees on a 33.3-hectare planting base.

Wang mainly plants multiple acer rubrum trees with names like "red sunset", "autumn blaze" and "autumn fantasy". Unlike the commonly planted willows and poplars, the salt-tolerant maples brighten the autumn months with brilliant red leaves.

In a spacious greenhouse, mist irrigation starts every few minutes to ensure the 20,000-odd rubrum trees take root in the sandy soil.

The idea of embarking on a career in planting trees popped into Wang's mind six years ago, when he finally saw the wood from the trees.

"There was a lack of color in autumn as we had so many yellow-dominated trees," Wang recalls.

However, it was not an easy start. Wang, who studied packaging engineering in college, did not have green fingers.

After learning from books and doing fieldwork, Wang felt he was finally ready to start his business.

He bought tens of thousands of "red sunset" maple saplings and took good care of them. Unfortunately, all of them died.

The money loss rankled with his family. Wang turned to experts and conducted repeated experiments by constantly adjusting the temperature, humidity, light and soil in his greenhouse.

Through trial and error, he eventually found half of the saplings survived. Then, that number grew to 90 percent.

Liang Xiaogang from Cashway Fintech has been satisfied with the 50 autumn blazes he bought from Wang to celebrate the company's

15th anniversary and looks forward to enjoying the cascade of red leaves in late fall.

Landscape gardens hold an important position in traditional Chinese culture and reflect people's aesthetic appreciation and the realm of life, says Wang Guangqiang, a Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts graduate and now assistant professor at Macao University of Science and Technology.

"The landscape design industry will flourish as the construction of the urban environment continues," Wang notes.

XINHUA



Growing maple trees in his hometown, Tianjin, has become a colorful career for Wang Kun, who quit a white-collar job in Beijing to become a farmer years ago. YOU SIXING / FOR CHINA DAILY