

ARTS

Drawing out dualities in molten metal

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BANGKOK-based French artist Val Goutard is obsessed with dualities. Men can do so much – build the pyramids for instance, and migrate across great distances – yet they can be brought down by diseases and war. In the same way, she draws out the duality of bronze – which is a weighty metal but can be used to express fragility.

"Dualities bring balance for me, and I don't mean moderation. I want my sculptures to bring out that quality of duality... to represent human sensitivity on a monumental scale," she says, adding that the "feelings" embodied or evoked by the sculptures mustn't be overshadowed by their overall dimension.

Going only by the name "Val", the 46-year-old French sculptor has been based in Bangkok since 2004, while

the former marketing professional gave herself five years to see whether she could pursue her passion on a full-time basis, she achieved her goal in just two years.

Her debut exhibition in Bangkok in 2004, led to exhibitions in Hong Kong (2006), Singapore and France (2008) and then China and Taiwan in 2009.

This year, she returns to Singapore for a solo, showcasing 37 works – no longer a budding artist, but one who has commissions all over Asia. She has monumental pieces at Sofitel Bangkok in Thailand, Arch & Art museum in Taichung, Taiwan, as well as the University of Shantou in Shantou, Guangdong, China.

Most recently, Val has been commissioned by two different developers: Allgreen Properties in Singapore and Chong Hong Constructions in Taipei. For Allgreen Properties, Val is



Balance III (above) will be part of French sculptor Val Goutard's works installed at New Time Square in Taipei. She works with bronze to coax out her visions.
PHOTO: REDSEA GALLERY

working on a sculpture titled Footsteps II, which will be placed at the entrance of the condominium by the end of December. For Chong Hong Constructions, Val has been commissioned to create a sculpture for New Time Square in Taipei.

Her own monumental journey in art began with a first step – when an artist friend introduced her to working with clay. It ignited a passion, and she spent two years learning sculpting from an artist in Paris.

From clay, she was attracted to bronze, and for practical reasons, started using wax (for casting bronze). "My creations can be very thin, tall and fragile and could not be done with clay. So wax allows me much more flexibility," she explains.

For 10 years now, the 46-year-old has been working exclusively with metal wires, foam and wax to compose her creations. Sometimes, she also uses resin. "I like the possibilities that bronze offers with welding. I like the preciousness of the metal, the his-

torical aspect of it, the weight and the strength of it."

Val often plays with the idea of "void" in her creations, and because a void can't be moulded, a sculpture has to be cut in many pieces before starting the casting process. The process is quite technical and complicated, and she works with two foundries in Thailand. "I spend weeks working on a sculpture, moving details around, and when the 'this is it' moment arrives – I have to stop as going further could damage this very balance I feel at a given moment. That's when I finish my creation and start the complete process of having it cast in bronze. My only goal is to preserve this magic and fragile sensation through the long and technical process," she says.

It takes time and experience to know the techniques, the limitations and the possibilities of the material. Wax sculptures are cut in parts, moulded in elastomer for another wax relief.

Foundries then do a "one use only" ceramic mould on the spare parts, cast the parts in bronze then break the ceramic moulds to free the

bronze. For Val, the difficult part is putting all the pieces back together. "I'm obsessed with finding again this magic I once felt looking at my wax creation," she relates.

It takes teamwork and trust to create her works, she adds. It extends to her partnerships with various galleries. Her first major work was with Philippe Staib Gallery in Shanghai, whom she talked to several times before she created her work two years later.

She'd also met Chris Churcher of RedSea Gallery seven years ago, when he visited her at her studio several times a year, and organising her first solo in Singapore in 2008 and her current one. Prices for the works range from \$55,000 to \$5110,000.

"Together with my husband, the three of us planned this current solo exhibition since 2012. My energies were driven towards this exhibition, and now, I'm showing the outside world what I've been doing. There is a sense of vertigo – both fantastic and frightening."

Presence, by Val, are now on show at RedSea Gallery until Nov 2. The Gallery is at 9 Dempsey Road, #01-10 Dempsey Hill, and it's open daily from 9.30am-9pm