

Life STYLE

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Jimmy Choo's creative
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new masculine side >PAGE 6



Photo: Dickson Lee



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The Leapers consists of six figures that British artist David Williams-Ellis sculpted last year in Cumbria, northwest England, and shipped to the International Financial Centre in Shanghai

Figuratively speaking

British sculptor David Williams-Ellis is bringing Asian cities to life with his graceful works, writes Harriet Ormsby

Demand for bigger and braver sculptures is rising in Asia, and Hong Kong has become the gateway for Western artists to the region, says British figurative sculptor David Williams-Ellis.

"It's possible to do anything here now," says Williams-Ellis, who is visiting this week to follow up on increased interest in his work. "Whether that's always been the case, I don't know, but in terms of art, Hong Kong is now a capital."

People don't just want to earn money in art, but also to savour it, he says. "It's a great opportunity for me to get new collectors and bigger projects."

Williams-Ellis, born in Northern Ireland, began sculpting as a child. He considers himself fortunate that he had great art teachers who encouraged him, and when he left school, sculpture was the obvious direction.

Receiving classical training in Italy, he studied drawing under Nerina Simi in Florence and worked as an apprentice marble carver in Carrara before returning to London and setting up a studio in a "marvellous dilapidated building".

Williams-Ellis describes his early career as idyllic and bohemian. "People wanted my work from an early age, and there was never any looking back."

He is now based in Wales, where the sprawling gardens of his home and studio are dotted with peaceful, poised figures. He creates graceful sculptures in clay before casting them in bronze, glass or silver.

"I love the variation – working small and large with different materials. It all adds to the excitement," he says.

"Different places have different solutions. Especially when you're doing commissioned work in a big building, you want different results."

His work can be seen in public and private spaces all over the world, but increasingly his commissions are coming from Asia.

"In Europe things are quietening

down," he says. "There are very few buildings being built, and it's the same in North America."

Many large Japanese commissions brought him to Asia for the first time in the 1990s. "At that time, I came via Hong Kong, and people didn't seem that interested in sculpture," says Williams-Ellis.

He didn't return to Hong Kong until 2000, when Swire Properties commissioned him to sculpt *The Watcher*, for its headquarters at Island East in Quarry Bay.

More recently, demand for his work has spread to the mainland. In Shanghai, a series of six figures called *The Leapers* dance through the air outside the International Financial Centre.

"I love doing work here, as there are so many interesting buildings," he says. "In a way, figurative sculpture gives them a definition that abstract sculpture doesn't."

Williams-Ellis believes a city such

In a way, figurative sculpture gives buildings here a definition that abstract sculpture doesn't

DAVID WILLIAMS-ELLIS

as Hong Kong could benefit from more public sculptures.

"Lots of concrete, stone and tarmac all look very similar, and having a figure in situ gives people a point to recognise. Or it makes a statement for an area," he says. "You take a path outside the corner of a building, and you put a sculpture in, and it gives people a point to meet and hopefully enjoy."

The effect is the same in buildings but on a larger scale.

"Life can be very dull without a lot to look at, and sculpture is a way of enhancing it," says Williams-Ellis. "In Beijing and Shanghai, people want to give definition to the streets. If you put giant figures up quite high – a big sweep above head height – they would be amazing."

Two huge projects are pending on the mainland. "We'll have to wait and see, but they are massive," he says. "It's terrifying, but great." lifestyle@scmp.com



Louise on a Pillar, a bronze by Williams-Ellis (right). Photo: Jonathan Wong

