

The Development of Public Art in Beijing

Beijing is the capital of China. The past half-century saw the development of public art in Beijing. City sculptures, murals and furniture that compose the main part of public art have made their staunch way of development in Beijing, and they also tell the stories of Beijing, a city with a long history in their unique artistic forms.

I. City Sculpture Organizational Building

China began its city sculpture construction in 1982 and established the leading group of capital city sculptural art.

The capital city sculptural art committee was established then on the basis of the leading group of capital city sculptural art in 1984. The construction principle of “taking up important positions” in building city sculpture was put forward.

In 1995, Beijing held the conference on Beijing city sculptures. It was required on the conference that the work of city sculpture should be given the same importance as the work of city spiritual civilization project. And a three-year development plan was worked out. The conference also exerted influence of publicity, warming-up and popularization on the development of Beijing’s city sculptures.

The decision of establishing the administrative office of Beijing’s city sculptures was made by the leading group of the capital city sculpture construction in 1996. In 1997 the administrative office of Beijing’s city sculptures was officially established.

II. Draw up Administrative Regulations on City Sculpture Construction and Improve Administrative Level on City Sculptures

As a new art construction undertaking in China, there’s no regulated administrative file of reference on city sculptures. Starting from ignorance and after years of practice and experience, some local administrative regulations and decree files were drawn up. These all set concrete basis for the development of Beijing city sculptures, and ensured its active, stable and healthy development.

The Beijing municipal government promulgated Temporary Regulations on Beijing City

Sculpture Construction and Administration in 1988, which was the first regulation on city sculpture construction in China. The regulations pointed out that the competent department of city planning is responsible for the examination and approval of city sculpture construction, which set city sculpture works onto the road of city planning and administration and conquered the blindness and arbitrariness in the work of city sculpture.

In 1993 the capital planning and construction committee office and the capital city sculptural art committee published the Beijing City Sculpture Construction-Planning Outline, which gave a description of rules, administrations, measures and contents of Beijing city sculpture construction, and functioned as an active guidance to the development of Beijing city sculptures.

In 1996 after the administrative office of Beijing's city sculptures was established, the Survey on the Situation of Beijing City Sculptures was carried out firstly. It analyzed in detail the advantages and disadvantages of Beijing city sculptures, and put forward constructive ideas on the future development of city sculptures in Beijing.

III. Develop City Sculpture Space and Promote City Sculpture Construction in an Active and Stable Manner

Sculptures in Beijing have a long history with a number of outdoor sculptures preserved. But there's no public art or the concept of city sculptures. Most sculptures were built in temples in famous mountains and imperial gardens. They served for feudal emperors' and religious interests. The modern city sculpture included in city public art has been a new thing in the past five decades.

1. Since the foundation of PRC, city sculptures have truly become the art of people and the art of environment. People's Hero Monumental Tower is unanimously regarded as the

representative of city sculptures in China.

2. In the 1950s, some building decoration sculptures were set up in coordination of the Ten Grand Buildings.

3. During the period of Great Cultural Revolution (from the 1960s to the 1970s), sculptures served for some particular political favors. The one built most was the sculpture of Chairman Mao Zedong. Meanwhile sculptures of workers, farmers and soldiers were popular.

4. Since the Reform and Opening-up to the outside world (from the 1980s to the early 1990s), city sculptures were filled with new contents. There were hundreds of schools of thoughts competed in building city sculptures, which made it of different tastes. We could find city sculptures in parks of urban and rural areas, in green lands and residential areas, along streets and beside large buildings.

5. Flourishing development of city sculptures (from the 1990s to the early 21 century). The founding of Beijing city sculpture construction administrative office has promoted the city sculpture development in an unprecedented rate of more order and in a larger scale. In the work of city sculptures, concepts have been made anew, resources integrated, markets developed, and sculptures planned in coordination of key projects, the whole street and the whole park. Activities related to city sculptures such as exhibitions, lectures, discussions, exchanges and submissions have developed in an all round way.

IV. City Sculptures Being Brought Into Line With the World.

From July to October 2002, the Cultural Ministry of PRC and the Beijing municipal government held successfully 2002 Beijing International Urban Sculptural Art Exhibition in Beijing International Sculpture Park located on the west extension of Chang'An Street. 240 pieces of sculptures of 40 countries were selected to exhibit from 2400 pieces of sculptures of

62 countries. So far in China even in the world the exhibition concentrated and displayed the international urban sculptural arts at the highest level, in the largest scale and the most diversified forms and with the richest contents. It was not only an international art exhibition and cultural exchange, but also a summary and display of China and international sculptural art development. Still it was an important art diplomatic activity of Beijing, China. The whole exhibition showed the public the important meaning of city sculptures as city culture, enriching the artistic scenery of city culture and improving the city cultural level of Beijing as an international metropolis. The international city sculptural art exhibition, which lasted for nearly four months, achieved the desired results. It really embodied the theme of “exchange, integrate, and surpass”. After 4 months’ exhibition, the Beijing International Sculpture Park was chosen through public appraisal as one of the top ten exquisite parks in Beijing in 2002. In 2003 the second stage construction project of Beijing International Sculpture Park was completed, the number of sculptures boasted by the park reached 180.

V. Promote Sculpture Creation in New Forms and Encourage New Sculptures by a New Batch of Gifted People

Since the founding of Beijing city sculpture construction office, sculpture exhibitions have been promoted actively. Many new forms from the individual creation exhibitions of artists to city sculpture design exhibitions and from indoor shelf sculptures to outdoor sculptures in public space as well as from experts’ appraisal to public vote promote sculpture creation, encourage a new batch of gifted people and exercise the group, which have drawn the attention from the society and public.

1. 1998 was the year of sculpture exhibitions. It was also the first year since the

establishment of Beijing city sculpture construction office. Many exhibitions were designed, and many units and individuals responded actively. As a result, tens of sculpture exhibitions were held. 1998, therefore, was called the year of sculpture exhibition in the field.

2. “New Century’s Hope” Urban Sculpture Design Scheme Exhibition. In early 1999, “New Century’s Hope” City Sculpture Planning Scheme Exhibition was held. It was the first city sculpture design scheme exhibition that took cities as the theme. It received more than 850 submissions, in which 120 pieces were selected to hold a three dimensional scheme exhibition. The leaders of the Beijing municipal government visited the exhibition and selected 8 from the total to build on Chang’An Street.

3. New Beijing, Great Olympics Sports Sculpture Exhibition added appeals to the bid for the 2008 Olympic games. More than 700 design schemes from 24 provinces were submitted. From May to July in 2001, New Beijing, Great Olympics Sports Sculpture Exhibition was held on Wangfujing Street.

4. From June to July 2001 at Xidan Cultural Plaza, “2001 Time & Space Platform Sculpture Works Exhibition” was held. It called on quickening steps in constructing city sculptures and perfecting the city environment.

5. “Integrate Nature, Share Space, Build Life” Serial Theme Sculpture Exhibitions. The year 2003 saw the war between human beings and SARS, a kind of invisible, penetrating and ruthless virus. In the fight against SARS, our artists eulogized kindness, expressed love with their hearts, passion and languages in special expressive ways. On June 5, the World

Environment Day, a comprehensive art net exhibition of “integrate nature, share space, build life” was held through the net in diversified art forms such as calligraphy, painting and sculpture etc. On July 5, another sculpture exhibition was held on Wangfujing Street. At the end of September “Cherish our Homeland” Sculpture Works Exhibition was held in Beijing International Sculpture Park.

6. Blue Space---Beijing Aquarium Theme Sculpture Invitation Exhibition. There were 41 pieces in the first exhibition in 2002, and 96 for the second in 2003.

7. In Retrospect of the Fifty Years---Beijing Sculptural Art Documentary Exhibition. It was held in 2002, which systematically recounted the 53-year-long history of Beijing sculpture development since the foundation of PRC. Many materials were shown to the public for the first time. It was an exhibition with rescuing meaning and with many invaluable historical materials. Through the exhibition, the moving stories behind the creation of the artists working without attracting public attention were redisplayed. It not only made people deeply understand the creation road of the old, middle-aged and young artists, clarified Beijing sculptural art development, but also made more people focus their attention to Beijing sculptural art development and support Beijing city sculpture construction. The documentary exhibition laid more emphasis on introducing those representative sculpture works of Beijing in different periods since the foundation of PRC in different forms such as words, pictures, sculptures and multi-media displays. It also introduced photos in the process of creation, manuscripts, and original pieces, sketches of the sculpture and the stories behind the creation. The exhibition shared strong reference value and instructive meaning to the development of sculptural art in Beijing and China as well.

8. “Childishness, Greenness, Future” Award Winning Works Exhibition of National Children Sculpture Design Competition. It was held in support of quality-oriented education. It aimed at encouraging children to take an active part in public art activities, improving children’s artistic qualities, enlightening children to express their longings to the future through sculpture design and other image art, and exerting their imaginative and creative abilities to use different kinds of artistic materials.

It was a sculpture competition for the children in China for the first time. More than one thousand pieces of works were received with different themes and particular imagination, being full of childlike innocence. In the exhibition there were clay sculptures, potteries, color sculptures, paper and wood sculptures, and comprehensive materials and abandoned materials used etc. which fully displayed children’s intelligence and artistic endowment.

Conclusion

An excellent piece of urban sculpture may become the symbol of a country, a city, a region or an age’s culture. It both serves the contemporary times and leaves indelible footprints of historical periods. Just like the culture in the Tang Dynasty of our country and that in ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome and after many years of rinse by history, many things submerged while the sculptures of concrete materials have been preserved and become the witness of history and comparison of human culture. Beijing, as other famous historic cultural cities in the world, will make its efforts to the development of urban public art, and make it serve the people and society.

1. 31, 2005.