



STRETCH YOUR IMAGINATION: Made with 6,000 sheets of paper, this Michelangelo bust by Li Hongbo is as flexible as statues can get

Paper will live on

Mahalakshmi.P@timesgroup.com

The world may slowly be going the paperless way, but that doesn't faze Beijing-based artist Li Hongbo who uses the material to create sculptures that mystify and wow art lovers the world over. "From newspapers and books to coasters, posters and even tea packets, I think the paper culture is still alive. It's such an ubiquitous, accessible material, but as an artist, I love to challenge people's perceptions of something they know so much about and I try to do that through my sculptures," says Hongbo, who is in the city to take part in Art Bengaluru 2015.

With sculptures that can literally be played around with, 'much like a big slinky', challenging people's perceptions is something that Hongbo's successfully been doing since 2007, when he had his first exhibition. A former book publisher and editor, Hongbo's decision to be a paper sculptor seems like a natural choice, but the fondness for the material, he says, stemmed from his childhood years that were spent "playing with traditional Chinese paper toys and dabbling in paper crafts like origami. Of course, the only difference is that today, instead of making miniature pieces, I make sculptures that can stretch up to 200 ft."

CHINESE SCULPTOR LI HONGBO IS AN ADVOCATE FOR INTERACTIVE ART

Using a material as fragile as paper requires Hongbo to experiment and try out new techniques and ideas all the time. For instance, his 2014 exhibition, Tools of Study, exhibited in New York, saw him make stretchable, paper busts (made by glueing in 1000s of sheets of paper) of classical masterpieces like Michelangelo and David, and a recent installation for the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia had him work with 6000kgs of paper.

"I believe that some of the best experimental ideas come from living and observing life," is Hongbo's rather simplistic answer. But more than just thinking up a grandiose concept, what he really aims for while crafting out works of magic from paper, is "making participative art — one where a viewer chooses to touch and interact with my creation rather than place it on a pedestal. Only when people participate with it does art work." And just as simple is his take on censorship and freedom of expression in China. "As far as freedom of expression is concerned, I think China is pretty well-placed on the world stage — in the sense that for all censorship that happens, people there still find mediums to express themselves. But that holds true for any country. Anytime a restriction is imposed upon, people will find ways to resist it."