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## Paper art exhibition in Beijing pushes the envelope

By Shen Li

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If you think the term "paper art" is just limited to paper-cutting and paper folding like origami, think again. Today's Art Museum in Beijing has opened an exhibition which will definitely expand your understanding of this ancient yet ever-evolving art form.

A massive installation created by contemporary Chinese artist Li Hongbo looks like a sea of flowers. Upon closer look, it shows bullets, pistols and machine guns.

Li is the head of the country's first paper art research institute. He is helping co-curate this special paper art exhibition.

Titled "A Tribute to Tradition – An Exhibition of Contemporary Paper Artworks," the show has

gathered 58 contemporary artists and art academy teachers from around the country.

Spanning from paper-cutting and installation to sculpture and relief, the exhibits showcase Chinese craftsmanship, creativity and innovation.



Li Hongbo's installation. /Today's Art Museum

Speaking about his inspirations, Li explained, "I was greatly inspired by the traditional Chinese paper lantern. It could be folded and was easy to carry around. From that I saw the possibility of going from two-dimensional to three-dimensional. And you see here in my work 'A Sea of Flowers.' Paper really helps to bring out the contrast of war and peace."

Paper was at the heart of artistic creation for a long time, but its predominance has been challenged by other mediums in recent times. Still, artists are willing to push the envelope and explore many possibilities of paper art.

Another stunning paper sculpture created by Li looks no different from a plaster bust used for drawing practice in many art classrooms in the world.

But it isn't until the artist starts stretching the bust in every direction that one realizes it is more than what meets the eye.

The exhibition is full of these kind of hidden surprises.

"For many Chinese, paper was seen as the bearer of our culture, and it was an intimate part of our life. For example, this knitting work behind me was actually made with newspapers," said Yan Yan, curator of Today's Art Museum.

"With proper safety measures in place, we still want to provide the public with a space where they can admire art during the COVID-19 pandemic. There's a social responsibility for cultural institutions like us to educate the public," she said.

The show runs till August 3 in Beijing before touring in other cities, including Ji'nan, Shenyang, Xi'an and Wuhan.