



Left: Lao Kwok Hung at work on its latest project. **Below right:** "Agatha," a woman in a wheelchair inspired by a person Hung met in real life. **Bottom:** "Demier Conseil," (Last advice). "I have found a chemistry between this technique, which is undoubtedly very modern, and my cultural roots. Chinese art is mainly an art based on dynamic lines. Just think about Chinese calligraphy. Today my brushstrokes are iron rods and drops of fused matter."

Let's call them my apprenticeship in art, or better, my experience of how to survive in the desert, an environment where the only thing essential is water. Well, the source of that water, the call to beauty, has always been in my heart. Many times, even when working at jobs which were not strictly artistic, I tried to perform them with the same creativity and perfection I required from myself when I danced and sang before a critical and demanding public with the musical group Gen Rosso. Then for years I worked as a typist and layout designer for *New City* magazine in the Philippines. While focusing on drawing the lines from one side of the page to the

other, I often evoked the steps I executed as a ballet dancer on stage: moments in which one has to give everything. The situations in which I found myself may have been different, but what I was doing was always an occasion to exercise creativity and I always had a demanding public before me."

I look at the iron sculptures which seem to stare at me and ask Hung how they originated.

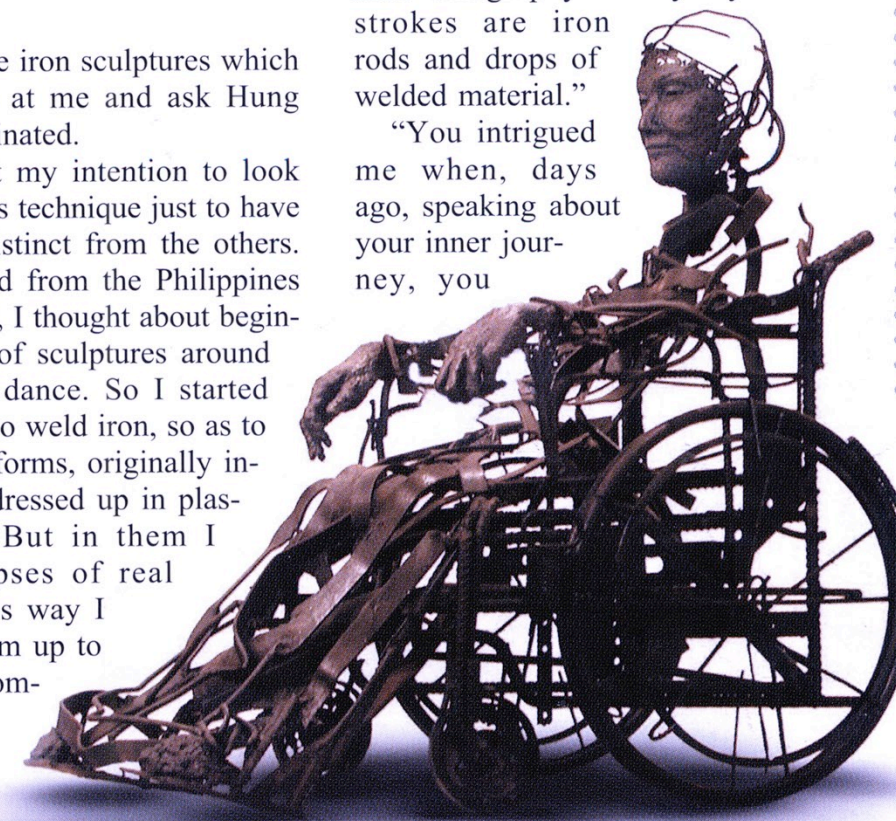
"It was not my intention to look for a hazardous technique just to have a technique distinct from the others. When I moved from the Philippines to Switzerland, I thought about beginning a series of sculptures around the theme of dance. So I started learning how to weld iron, so as to build slender forms, originally intended to be dressed up in plaster or clay. But in them I caught glimpses of real sculptures; this way I elaborated them up to the point of completing them, almost exclusively us-

ing iron and fire."

"Why do you like these materials?"

"I have found a chemistry between this technique, which is undoubtedly very modern, and my cultural roots. Chinese art is mainly an art based on dynamic lines, as in the case of Chinese calligraphy. Today my brushstrokes are iron rods and drops of welded material."

"You intrigued me when, days ago, speaking about your inner journey, you



mentioned the Silk Road."

"Because it connected China to Italy. It's a symbol of the dialogue between East and West. A recurrent theme which reminds me every day of a united world."

The silent look of Hung brings back memories of when we had tried to bridge our cultural divide... "The dialogue with the material to be sculptured teaches me the art of dialogue with people. For me, to enter into a relationship is synonymous with crossing over into the territory of the other person and vice versa: I need to remove my shoes, to cut off my own roots, before entering that sacred place which is the soul of the other."

"An artist friend of mine, Roberto Cipollone, for whom I have a great respect, came to visit me at work one

day. From the door of my studio he saw one of my recent works and stopped to admire it, without entering. When I went out to greet him, Roberto congratulated me: he was so happy that I had discovered my artistic vein that his rejoicing was greater than mine. He literally started dancing in front of that sculpture. Between us, we also exchanged observations and criticisms, but that day he convinced me. He knew how to enter my studio respectfully, on tiptoe."

I look at one of Hung's works called "Agatha," a woman in a wheelchair,



Hung in front of one of his works during a convention of artists. "The figurative style I have chosen helps me to narrate my life experiences," he says.

chair, and spontaneously I dub it: "Queen on a Throne."

"The figurative style I have chosen helps me to narrate my life experiences. 'Agatha' and 'The Prodigal Son' are works inspired by true heroes I have met—a housewife and a drug addict who has since died of AIDS. 'The Survivor' instead is my prayer for peace after September 11."

"Do they not represent anguish, ugliness and death?"

"Certainly, but with the possibility of resurrection."

I approach the oxyhydrogen blow-

pipe, take it in my hands and with it touch the right hand of "The Violinist." "Three thousand degrees of sweetness," I tell Hung.

"Here," he says, "the law of fire takes over. Nature transforms things in a slow and progressive way, while fire liquefies iron in short, dramatic moments. But then iron quickly reacquires a new form. A friend has coined the term *Metalmorphosis* for my works."

"It's a game between you, the fire and the iron; a game whose sparks not only land on your skin but, perhaps, also touch something else in you," I venture.

He allows me to probe and starts to share some of his struggles: "Imagine a battle where the flames of love, so to speak, are up against the flames of hate or revenge which we can also sometimes feel in our hearts. A fire stronger than everything else comes, consumes everything and spares only the truth: this is the call I feel and it constantly speaks to me during the long hours I work alone."

It's already late. Leaving Hung's studio I don't even dare touch a sculpture, but I caress them one by one with a personal glance. Now at the door, I ask the last question: "To what expressive style does the life you tell with your works belong?"

"I leave the task to historians and critics. Recently a scholar friend of mine explained to me in literary terms the poetry he finds in my sculptures. While listening I realized that a dream I always cherished was coming true: to one day see cultured personalities, artists, philosophers, etc. not always alone in their solitude, but also in dialogue with one another before the world." ☺

Behind the SPARKS

It's a cool spring morning inside Hung's studio in Loppiano (Florence). Settling down on a bench with the lights off, I immediately feel engaged in dialogue: his works talk to me in the faint light. I wait in silence until Hung arrives.

"Sculptured lines in air and forms revealing new horizons; emptiness chasing fullness," I comment.

"If you look at them sideways, these sculptures seem to be unfinished works, don't they? Every piece seems to embody an original design. I'm convinced that each human being is

Joseph Bush

An interview with Lao Kwok Hung, a Chinese focolarino, who finds sculpture the right medium to express his calling to beauty.

called to realize a project, a plan they have within them. One can better understand this plan when seeking the balance between emptiness and fullness."

"The last time we talked about your work," I told him, "you were at a certain point of your human and artistic journey; I know that since then you have traveled a lot..."

"I have lived years of inactivity—as you may well know—not working actively as an artist, but they were years equally important to my formation, in the Philippines and in Korea.

