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Steve Cousins is performing street balloon shows three times a day in the Expo Garden.

Balloon guy celebrates silliness

By TANG ZHIHAO
CHINA DAILY

Steve Cousins believes adults and children can both enjoy balloons, a claim he elaborates on in his new street show, "The Balloon Guy Steve Cousins".

The 32-year-old Australian street art entertainer was invited to perform in front of the Malaysia Pavilion three times each afternoon (2 pm, 4 pm, 6 pm) until Oct 17.

By climbing in and out of a giant red balloon using different poses, Cousins takes the audience on an imaginative journey that exposes them to such things as a balloon dog moving on a carpet, and a superhero holding a giant balloon.

"I think my show is a celebration of silliness," said Cousins, who got into street art after graduating from the University of Newcastle in Australia. "The message from my show is: we are never too old to play."

Cousins' show, which includes other elements such as playing with fire and toothbrush twiddling, has been gaining popularity since he performed during the Expo's Australia Street Festival.

"I think that contact with the arts brings personal development and positive social change," said Cousins. "The theme of the current Expo is 'Better City, Better Life' and one of my messages is 'Better Smile, Better Life'."

He said he fell in love with balloons as a young child.

"When I was 2 years old, the first drawing I ever made was of a balloon. I was fascinated with them. Now I see balloons as a symbol of innocence."

Cousins, who is performing in China for the first time, said he made several adjustments to his show to reel in the Chinese audience, such as adding explanations in Mandarin.

"My music tells a lot of the story, and it explains what I am doing. I think a lot of people here didn't recognize the music because it was in English. So something was getting lost in translation," he said. "I now have an introduction about my superhero being silly, which makes people smile."

To better entertain the audience and deal with the language barrier, Cousins introduced more physical gestures into his performance.

He said he plans to write a book about his journey traveling the world with balloons.

"It will be a book of pictures," said Cousins. "What I am enjoying doing is meeting people in their natural habitat, such as in the market or a village, so I'd like to take what I do to them."

'Servant of God' lives on

Matteo Ricci gets something of a Gucci makeover with a gilded sculpture at the Italy Pavilion, **Yu Ran** reports.

Italian sculptor Dionisio Cimarelli was keen to combine Italian and Chinese culture in his 1.5-meter-tall gilded sculpture of Italian missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), which is displayed on the third floor of the Italy Pavilion.

"It was a great honor for me to be commissioned to make this sculpture of Ricci, who is the most influential person in my life. I come from the region of Italy where Ricci was born," said Cimarelli, who has lived in Shanghai for six years.

The sculpture is on display inside the pavilion's Matteo Ricci Exhibition Hall to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the priest's death.

Ricci, or Li Madou as he is known in China, is one of the best-known foreigners in Chinese history.

He entered the Imperial Palace in Beijing as the first foreign missionary during the reign of Emperor Wanli during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Ricci, an expert in Chinese language, calligraphy and culture, made Western developments in mathematics available in Chinese.

His likeness inside one of the Expo Garden's most popular pavilions took the artist six weeks to model, and twice as long to complete. Gilded calligraphy shows Cimarelli's name in Chinese characters.

"Most of my works have this kind of calligraphy, as it is a unique logo of mine," he said.

The Italian said his hard work — he spent up to 14 hours a day to finish the job — has paid off given the buzz surrounding the piece from visitors worldwide.

Cimarelli hand-made all the materials, including the plaster for the models.

"Except for the final process of adding the calligraphy, which contains a total of 2,700 characters, and which took a professional calligrapher six weeks to do, I worked by myself most of the time, as it was easier to concentrate," he said.

Cimarelli has worked as a sculptor for about 15 years. He began fashioning abstract forms, but gradually migrated over to more classical ones — bereft of their earlier cynicism.

Cimarelli said that his work took a fresh turn when he worked at the Louvre in Paris for several years.

He found his way back to classical forms by searching



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Dionisio Cimarelli spent up to 14 hours a day finishing his Matteo Ricci sculpture.

for antique models.

He said he became fascinated by Chinese art and culture when he first visited China in 1986, at which time he came to see the country as a repository for antique and classical models.

"This country is like a magnet that draws me closer," he said.

Cimarelli has paid several visits to Jingdezhen, the cradle of Chinese porcelain in Jiangxi province, during his travels around the country. He studied porcelain-crafting techniques there.

"Chinese porcelain is one of the most difficult materials I've ever applied, and it is totally different from other materials, which are usually relatively easy to make," said Cimarelli, who has been producing ceramic sculptures for over a decade.

He is now working as an art supervisor for a major architectural project in Shanghai called Zhongkai Sheshan Luxury Villas.

"My current project is aimed at combining 10 different Chinese and European concepts into designing villas so visitors can get the best of both worlds," he said.



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