

World-Renowned Hong Kong Sculptor Adds a Festive Touch to Dublin

By Patricia Koning

Driving east on Dublin Boulevard, you might think you just saw a large pair of red chopsticks in a shopping center on your right, just before Santa Rita Road. Even if you were starving for Chinese food at the time, you weren't seeing things—rather, you caught a glimpse of “Festivity,” a sculpture by world-renowned artist Aries Lee.

Lee was born in Hong Kong and educated in Japan and Germany. He has exhibited at major museums in China, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States and has received numerous awards, including Hong Kong's Sculptor of the Year Award in 1991.

In 1990, he was commissioned to create three sculptures for the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, which were unveiled by the Prince Charles of Wales and the late Princess Diana. More recently, he has been named one of two finalists in a public art competition for the grand entrance to the Beijing Olympics.

The image of chopsticks is intentional, says Karen Kam, project coordinator for the Ulferts Center, home of the Festivity Sculpture. The Dublin Ulferts Center is located at 4288 Dublin Boulevard between John Monego Court and Glynnis Rose Drive.

“When we planned this space, we decided that at least one half would be for food and dining. In this area there aren't too many choices for Asian cuisine, so we wanted to offer a lot of variety in this one space,” she says. “We wanted a theme of chopsticks, representing Asian culture and cuisine.”

The Center is anchored by Ulferts Furniture and the Koi Garden Dim Sum & Seafood Restaurant and includes a total of 26 specialty retailers, services, restaurants, and food shops. Among the dining choices are AA Tofu House and Korean BBQ, Abba Gourmet Cal-Italian Grill, Halu Shabu Shabu, House of Sake, Kee Wah Bakery, Macau Bistro, Osaka Ramen, Singapore Old Town Café, Thai Basil Express, Vin Pearl Fine Vietnamese



Cuisine, and Zoie Café.

“We wanted this center to be a place where people can come together and enjoy dinner, family gatherings, and celebrations of all kinds,” says Kam. “So we needed just the right centerpiece.”

Ulferts Center management conducted a thorough search of artists and settled on Lee, in part because his style, using large, metallic pieces, fit with their vision. “Festivity” is made of stainless steel with a unique red powder, coated with a matte finish on the top and balanced by a reflective mirror finish at the bottom.

Red, explains Kam, is a significant color for the Chinese culture, indicating happiness and prosperity. At the base of the chopsticks are a large sphere, representing the boundless sky, and a large cube, representing the abundant earth. The use of these two shapes also represents acceptance of all kinds of people.

The sphere and cube motif is carried into the base. The chopsticks, sphere, and cube rest on a circular platform, which in turn rests on a square platform. Surrounding the sculptor are 18 water jets. Again, the number of jets is intentional—18 is a lucky

number in Chinese culture.

The fountain also relates to a reality of the City of Dublin—summers can be very hot. Kam says the fountain is intended to have a soothing, cooling effect.

“Festivity” falls right into place with the City of Dublin's vision for public art, says John Hartnett, Heritage and Cultural Arts Supervisor for the City of Dublin.

“Public art creates a unique sense of place and a strong identity for the city as a whole,” he explains. “This vision is furthered through a city-wide collection of artworks within the community that enhance our urban planning goals and portray the vision and dreams of the community. This remarkable sculptor accomplishes all of these things.”