

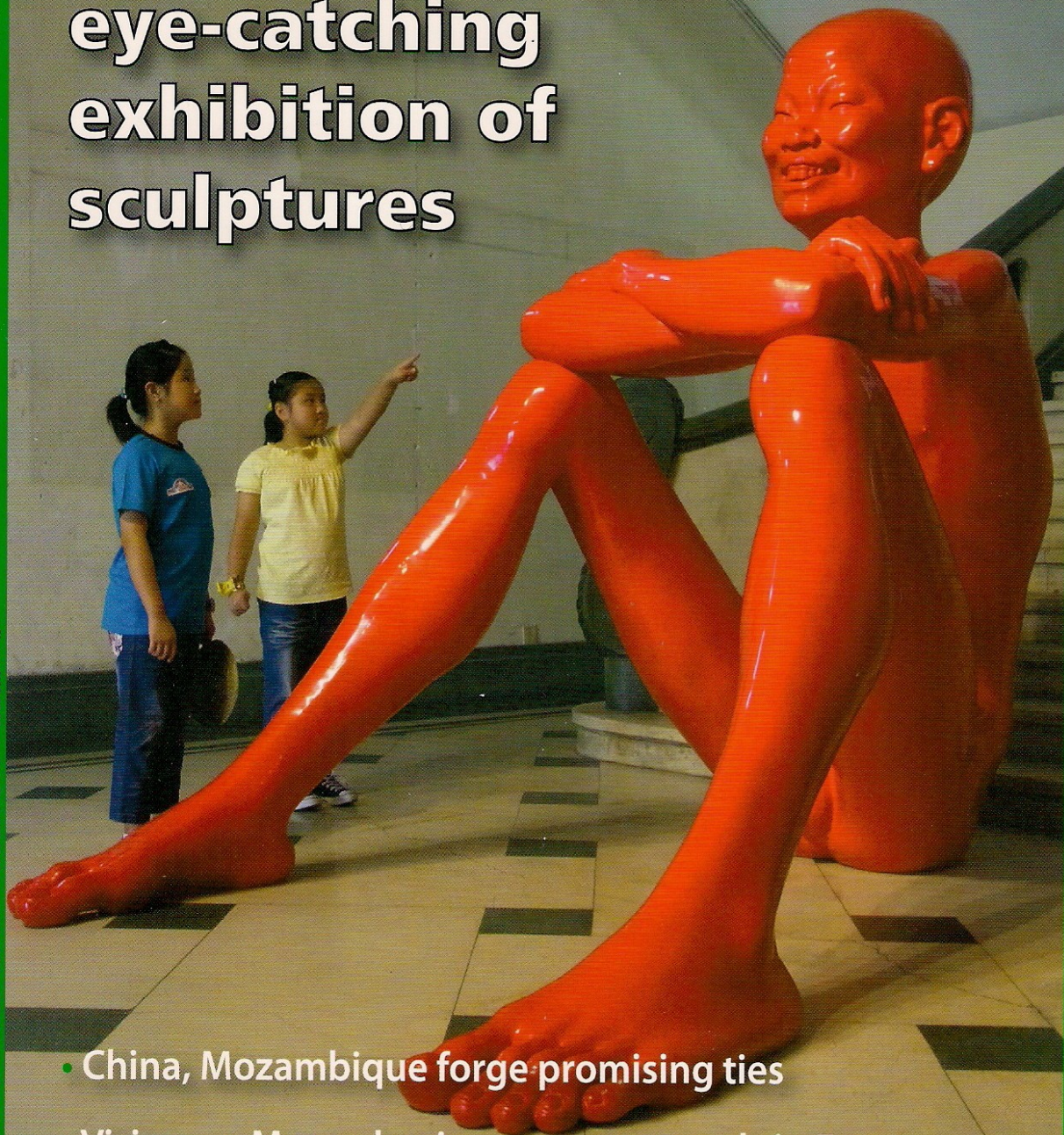
macao

OCTOBER 2011

Quarterly

www.macaomagazine.net

Macao hosts eye-catching exhibition of sculptures



- China, Mozambique forge promising ties
- Visionary Macao businessman succeeds in France
- Macao Music Festival: A Feast for the Ears

Macao MOP 30.00 • Hong Kong HKD 30.00 • mainland China RMB 30.00 • Overseas USD 4.00



ISSN 2076-5479
9 772076 547009



Italian puppeteer in Taiwan

Massimo Godoli Pelli

Massimo Godoli Pelli, an Italian, worked as a puppeteer with the Taipei Puppet Museum from 2000 to 2010, before he left to set up his own company.

His fascination with Taiwan puppets came through a love affair with a lady from Tainan, whom he met on his first visit to the island in 1999. She acted as his interpreter while he performed at an international puppet festival for two weeks in Yunlin, the home of the art in Taiwan. She came to visit him in his hometown of Ravenna, in northeast Italy, and the two decided to stay together. Since she could not find a good job in Italy, they moved to Taiwan in September 2000 and got married in 2002. She works for a large financial company. "I want to be a puppeteer until my dying day," he said. "But, without my wife, I could not continue here. I would have to leave Taiwan and seek work abroad, probably in Britain, where there are many great puppet companies."

Hooked from childhood

As with Ruizendaal, Pelli's fascination with puppets began at an early age. "I saw a show for the first time in 1968 when I was seven, in our school. The ticket

was very expensive and my mother did not want to pay but she had to. It was our only entertainment of the year. It was very exciting. I loved the joy and the atmosphere." The show was performed by the grandfather of Mauro, one of his classmates. The old man was the fifth generation of a family of puppeteers called Familia Monticelli, founded in the 18th century. Pelli started to visit Mauro's home, 200 metres away, and saw the old man making some puppets himself, buying them and being given them. "During hard times, the troupe performed on farms and were paid in the form of food. Sometimes, they even used the puppet heads for firewood."

In 1979, the grandfather, in his 80s, became unable to continue, so Mauro took over the company because he did not want it to die, and Pelli joined him. His mother opposed this career, deeming it unstable and poorly paid. Unmarried, she worked as a nurse in a hospital, raising two children on a meagre income; their house, in an old quarter of Ravenna, did not have a toilet. "She wanted me to have a more stable career. I was a very good waiter and had been invited to work at the London Hilton at the age of 17. I declined because I was afraid and did not speak English. I did not tell my mother."

For 20 years from 1979, Pelli worked mainly as a puppeteer for the troupe. They changed the name to Teatro Del Drago, after characters in books by JR Tolkein, whose stories they performed. They did traditional and modern shows and a stint of three months with a company in Brighton, England. "But I did not earn enough money. Sometimes I had to quit, working in a hotel for two years and making aluminium windows for three years, but I always wanted to go back." He paid money regularly to his mother but she continued to criticise him for his choice of career.

Life change

His life changed in 1999, when he came to Taiwan for the international puppet festival and met Miss Liu. It was no easy decision to leave Italy and the troupe where he had worked for 20 years; Mauro had been his closest friend since 1966. "I told them in advance that I was leaving but they did not believe me. When I did, they had to cancel some engagements and do extra rehearsals. It was also sad for my mother, who is 75.

She has a heart condition and cannot fly; so she has never come to Taiwan. When I return to Ravenna now, I feel like a foreigner. I call Mauro, who says that he is very busy and can see me only once."

From 2000 to 2008, he worked full-time for the Taipei Puppet Museum and then part-time for two years, before he left to set up his own company, Uncle Pippo and Kaku Theatre, which has four people. They perform in schools and ask children to make puppets and stage a performance. "In Taiwan, the audiences are lively and enthusiastic, it is part of the culture. In Italy, it is only entertainment and there is not even the money to open a small puppet museum in Ravenna. But it is hard to survive in Taiwan as a puppeteer unless you are very famous. I could not continue without the financial support of my wife."

He has performed three times in Macao. "I enjoyed the good audiences, the atmosphere and the food. Some of it is like a European city, with its vitality, culture and good living." His brother, Mattia Peli, is a well-known Italian musician, composer and conductor.

