

Q+A | LU WEI
BEIJING VICE-MAYOR

Culture Week tells Beijing's story to the world

Q: Why is the Beijing government hosting Beijing Culture Week during the London Olympics? Who is the event's target audience?

A: Beijing hosted "truly exceptional Games" as International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge said at the Games' closing ceremony in 2008.

During the Beijing Olympics, London hosted many cultural events in Beijing, which impressed local residents with their diversity, confidence and pursuit of artistic refinement.

We are now kicking off Beijing Culture Week to deliver our best wishes for the London Olympics and all Chinese athletes who will compete in the Games.

Beijing is open to different cultures. We not only introduce them to residents here, but also present our own culture to the world.

We hope that through the Beijing Culture Week more people will learn about the true China, its culture and its achievements since the reform and opening up.

Q: What makes Beijing's culture unique? How will Beijing Culture Week present it to the world?

A: Beijing inherits traditions and embraces the future.

As a capital city for 800 years in a 5,000-year-old civilization, Beijing inherits splendid traditional Chinese culture. In Beijing Culture Week, we will bring Peking Opera, Kunqu Opera and acrobatics, among other performances that appeal to people interested in traditional Chinese culture.

People will also see the Beijing Symphony Orchestra playing the world's most classic compositions. We will also present China's own Three Tenors: Dai Yuqiang, Warren Mok and Wei Song.

I met Placido Domingo in Beijing recently, and he said he was impressed by the Three Tenors of China. You may soon see their cooperation.

Q: What legacy has the Beijing Olympics left for the city?

A: We initiated the philosophies of Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics and People's Olympics in 2008. The philosophy has endowed our storied city with new appeal.

We have better awareness of environmental protection now, and we work hard on improving the air quality and tackling traffic congestion.

We work to integrate technological innovation and the historical city. A more human-oriented philosophy is widely accepted, and we make policies to improve people's life.

Q: Beijing now identifies itself as an international city with Chinese characteristics. Could you further explain this new identity?

A: Beijing has the openness of an international metropolis — for example, every day in the city, cultural events from various countries are staged. We will build 100 more theaters to host more cultural events from different countries.

At the same time, as the capital city, Beijing knows the importance of maintaining traditions. A grand performance featuring the traditional cultures of China's ethnic groups has just closed its curtain in Beijing.

There is no universal mode for city planning. I don't think the London mode applies to New York, nor the New York mode to Tokyo. What we can do is to explore our own characteristics and the needs of our own residents, to seek a Beijing style of development.



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Playing in the Bridal Chamber — Auspicious Smoke, by Wang Yidong.

Realistic and redolent of China

A featured artist at the Chinese Oil Painting Art Exhibition in London, Wang Yidong reflects the country's rural ethos, **Zhang Zixuan** reports.

The bride's red quilted jacket and trousers stand out among the blue and gray-colored throng, enlivening the snowy mountain scene.

As a child growing up in the Yimeng Mountain area of Shandong province, artist Wang Yidong memorized this scene and has repeatedly portrayed the girl in red on canvas.

For example, at the upcoming 2012 Chinese Oil Painting Art Exhibition in London, Wang portrays a teenage girl in a red vest eating a ripe pomegranate. The painting's name, *The Pomegranate Is Ripe*, is a play on words that indicates the girl's coming of age.

The 57-year-old recalls the poverty of his hometown by recounting the story of his fifth uncle's wedding, when the fish dish at the center of the table was an imitation made of wood, with a coating of real sauce.

But the country's leading Realistic artist believes poverty actually preserves tradition, which he defines as the "thick accretion of culture".

Wang's relatives and his rural mountain scenes, and especially girls from the countryside in red clothes, have become the painter's signature subjects.

"I am a man. There is nothing more natural than appreciating feminine beauty," he said.

Wang's exceptional painting skills are due in part to seven years of training at Shandong Art School and then the Central Academy of Fine Arts during the 1970s and 1980s.

And even though he is aware of the huge variety of contemporary art forms, Wang sticks to Realism.

He rejects the idea of distancing himself from his audience and refuses to "be manipulated by the market or trends of thought".

"Painting can never abandon technique," he said, adding that great artworks touch the viewer because the underlying technique is outstanding.

Wang says the more he paints, the more difficult Realism is for him.

Even so, he admits that despite the time and effort he spends on painting a Realistic work, viewers tend to be more critical because they can relatively easily detect the flaws.



Above: A Girl's Portrait, by Wang Yidong.

Top right: Wang Yidong poses in front of one of his works, displayed in London from July 24 to 31.

Right: The Pomegranate is Ripe, by Wang Yidong

"Those few of us who still pursue Realism are somewhat crazy," he said. "Wang is trying to create the sense of abstract in a realistic image. Such abstraction reflects the purity of art, and somehow adds a bitter flavor to the work," artist Zhu Naizheng commented.

Wang admires Western artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Ingres and Vermeer, but he dares to question these masters and imitates their techniques in a selective way.

His one-year stay in the United States in 1987 and later overseas visits have convinced him that "even if techniques can be fully adopted from the West, nothing else can".

"I need to refine the subject out of

my original culture."

So Wang paints the Chinese red color of the village girl's quilted jacket and trousers in Western Realistic strokes. And he travels in rural North China and culturally similar places to his hometown, to seek further inspiration.

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And it has been a successful approach. Wang's artworks have been exhibited in many countries and set

records at auctions — but he is still ambitious.

"I have so many paintings to complete."

His newest project features a huge rural wedding of more than 100 figures in Shanxi's Taihang Mountain area.

As a "rehearsal" for the painting that will have "intense sunshine", Wang spent one month in France and did more than 40 paintings in Provence, which is famed for its natural light.

The 3.5-meter-long and 1.8-meter-high work is expected to be finished by 2014. "It will be my largest painting," he said.