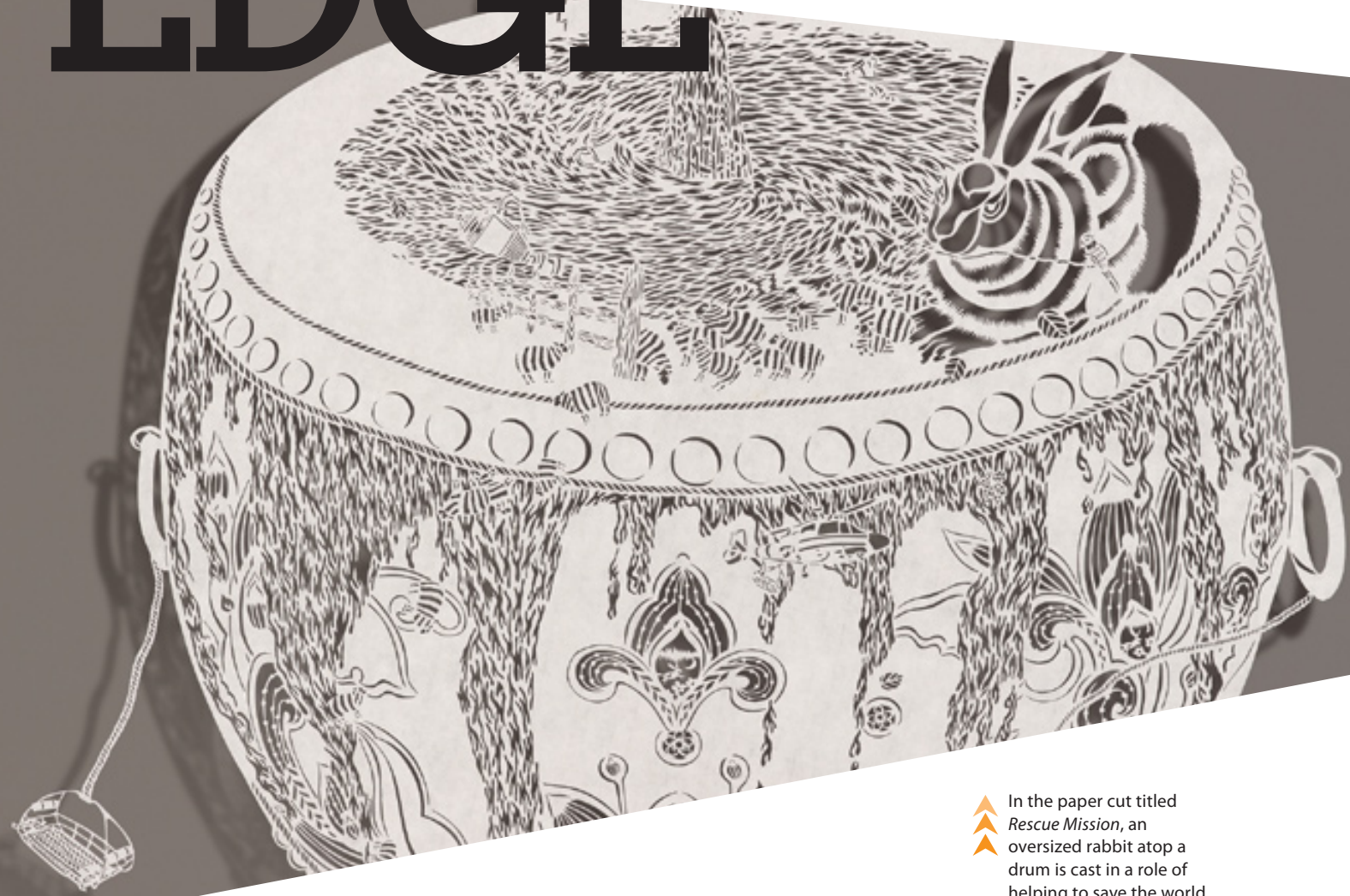


CUTTING EDGE



▲ In the paper cut titled *Rescue Mission*, an oversized rabbit atop a drum is cast in a role of helping to save the world.

In Bovey Lee's intricate paper cuts, viewers see how a traditional handicraft lends itself to contemporary art that explores issues layered with meanings

TEXT KENNETH LEE PHOTOS BOVEY LEE

Artists are sometimes constrained by the dichotomy of technique and creative freedom. On one hand, the more intricate, accurate and technically-true an artwork is, the less freedom it seems an artist has, to emote. Successfully balancing these two poles results in classics, and the greats of the Renaissance to Brit Art today, can trace their trajectory to fame back to when they first mastered this paradox.

Paper-cutout artist Bovey Lee, shows such a mastery. Her works are an amalgamation of feelings and accurate detail, that cannot but evoke a tide of emotion in the viewer, whether fear, wonder or confusion. Take for example, her series dedicated to nuclear power. Above the wonderfully etched cooling towers, whose curves and underlying structures are so laser-precise in angles and form that they are immediately recognisable, is a



smorgasbord of activity that lets loose a torrent of feelings in the viewer.

To bring an ancient Chinese art to this level of relevance and emotive power is an achievement that deserves recognition.

"The underlying themes in my paper cutouts are power, sacrifice, and survival," says the Hong Kong-born, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-based artist. Featured prominently in her pieces are cognitively dissonant items that ask difficult questions.

Lee says she chose and delights in paper-cutting as a medium because it is an ideal fit for her skills and creativity.

"I cut paper because this tradition is the link that best combines my skills, creativity, and personality, and frees me to create these dramatic stories."

"Prior to making paper cutouts, I had worked with digital media for a decade and really missed my roots as a Chinese calligrapher and painter. Most of all, I missed creating with my hands. After my first foray into paper cutting, I found paper cutting to be the medium in which I can integrate all my skills and interests, while it is kind of marginal and affords me the opportunity to redefine and expand it as a contemporary, global art form. It really suits my sense of aesthetics."

Using sophisticated computer software to digitise her draft sketches, Lee is able to put both 21st century technology and her technical mastery to full use.

"Each impossibly thin strip of paper that I cut

is integral in forming a broad narrative, a reservoir of visual and conceptual expressions that move between past, present, and future."

It is particularly important to think through every step before the cutting commences.

"Once I start cutting, there's no turning back. I have to be very certain about what I want to do and execute with great care to avoid any irreversible mistake. Its high level of precision and accuracy requires every second of total concentration and focus, which makes it very time-consuming and laborious. But there's a sense of accomplishment like no other," adds Lee, who usually spends several months, cutting 10 to 12 hours a day, on a piece.

Bovey Lee has teamed up with Pacific Place shopping mall in Admiralty to present a stunning collection of her artwork in a display titled "Butterfly Bliss". Her installations will also celebrate the Year of The Rabbit, with the animal playing a prominent role in her cutouts, which also feature the butterfly motif.

She says she would like to show that contemporary paper cutting can play a role in fulfilling the medium's traditional celebratory function. Her work is also represented by the Grotto Fine Art Gallery in Hong Kong.

Says Lee: "I want to share the thrill when I so gingerly pick the cutout up and it does not fall apart. In a world of rush and hurry, I particularly love how my works make me pay attention, slow down, breathe lightly, and move delicately." ▲

▲ Bovey Lee says paper cutting frees her to create dramatic stories

