

Art from
Canada



“Art” and “Culture” are like Siamese twins; it is difficult to distinguish their relevance as also which came first. Like this story, that could begin with the first Italian Jesuit priest who found his way to China or decades later with Dionisio Cimarelli as he carved out his predecessor in gold, combining antique perfection with contemporary art.

The idea of an Italian lost in the Forbidden City is quite romantic, although Dionisio Cimarelli is not the first of his kind. In the beginning there was Marco Polo recounting tall tales in the court of Kublai Khan. One really doesn't know what secrets Marco may have revealed or what conceits he weaved, but one can imagine them to be something like Italo Calvino's writings in *Invisible Cities*. In this 1972 classic novella, Marco Polo describes 55 cities from his travels to Kublai Khan, when in reality he only described the city of Florence using different emotions – nostalgia, love, hunger, pity – and different perspectives of a traveller, a lover, an old man...

Dionisio Cimarelli's sculptures are somewhat like the cities described by Marco Polo: fascinating, beautiful and nostalgic, but foremost they are conceits.

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While they look like traditional sculptures, some carved with Florence in mind and some with a Chinese hand, only a careful inspection of the curves and intricacies reveals the inherent satire in the works. It is also noteworthy that the sculptor in Cimarelli has not only taken the road 'less taken' by but walked on it backwards, almost akin to the curious case of our friend Benjamin Button. Cimarelli began with abstract sculptures only to later arrive at traditional forms, much like Shakespeare finding universal truths in *A winter's Tale* or *Tempest* at a later age.

Cimarelli's latest work brings to focus yet another Italian, Matteo Ricci, who travelled all the way to China and is locally known as Li Madou. Ricci was an Italian Jesuit priest who introduced western mathematical ideas in China, during the 1500s. His sculpture is completely done in gold and features gilded Chinese calligraphy all over it, which in fact is Cimarelli's name, written in Chinese characters. It took Cimarelli six weeks to model and another twelve weeks to finish the sculpture. ■

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