

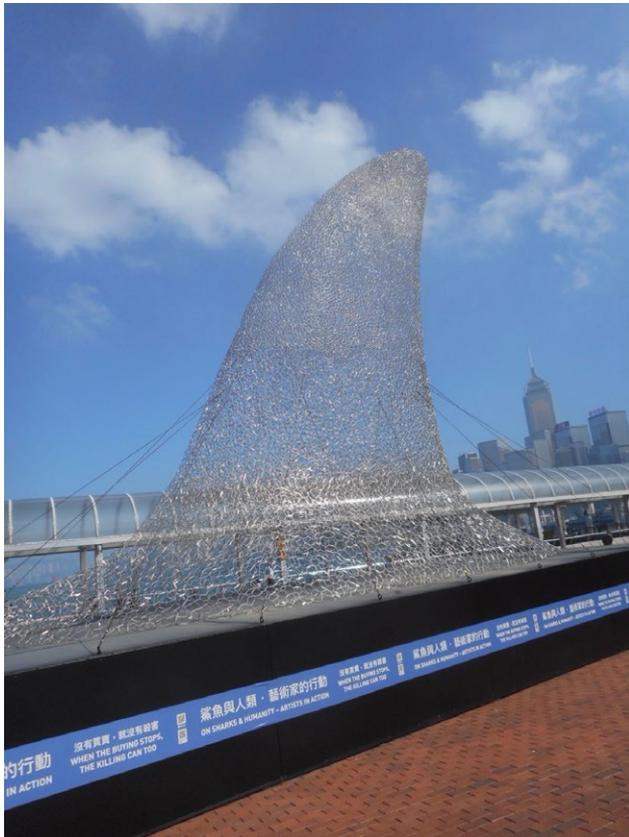
# On Sharks and Humanity, an Art Exhibit at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum

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Many museum exhibits feature fishes and marine mammals (especially cetaceans) with the aim of informing and educating the public, but also providing a conservation message. Recent examples include the blue whale *Balaenoptera musculus* exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum in Ottawa ([www.rom.on.ca/en/blue-whale](http://www.rom.on.ca/en/blue-whale)) and the shark exhibits at the New England Aquarium ([www.neaq.org/exhibit/science-of-sharks](http://www.neaq.org/exhibit/science-of-sharks)) and the Boston Museum of Science ([www.mos.org/4d/shark](http://www.mos.org/4d/shark)). However, it is much less frequent to see an exhibit that expresses the conservation message through art. Such a combination has the possibility of incorporating strong emotions in an abstract way, thus making the message that much more powerful. A unique example of such an exhibit is the *On Sharks and Humanity* exhibit at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum.

The exhibition, which has both inside and outdoor sections, is on its fifth stop after successful stays in Monaco, Moscow, Beijing, and Singapore. Thirty-six international artists from seven countries (China, Austria, Germany, Monaco, Spain, France, and the United States) were commissioned to make statements on our relationship with sharks with the aim of raising public awareness of the pivotal role sharks play in oceanic ecosystems and the urgent need for shark conservation. As might be expected, the artists tackle the topic in largely unique and personal ways.

The outdoor exhibits are large, engineered, and interact with their environment in interesting ways, providing distinctive day and night perspectives. The massive steel shark fin made up of web-like bubbles (*Butterfly in Love with the Flower*



The massive steel shark fin made up of web-like bubbles by Zheng Lu.



"Who Should Be Scared" piece by Philippe Pasqua.

by Zheng Lu) is the best example of that interaction, its massive size and transparency reflecting and absorbing the surrounding environment and representing the idea that such a powerful creature can disappear as a result of human actions. Its title refers to a Chinese poem where a butterfly falls in love with an about-to-disappear flower. Similarly, spectacular because of its massive size, wide-open mouth, and shiny metallic construction is the *Who Should Be Scared* piece (by Philippe Pasqua), which now stands by the entrance escalator but which at some point seems to have been hung as if recently harvested.

The inside pieces are much harder to describe, ranging from realistic to abstract and including sculpture, painting, and photography. For example, Liu Zining's oil painting *Blue* is a large but hyperrealistic image of a shark's eye meant to represent the shark's sorrow after having its fin cut by humans. Among the sculptural highlights are Wang Luyan's mixed media massive installation *Downward Force on Upward Moving Objects*, which presents a mass of stainless steel buoys pierced by iron rods at different levels, suggesting "that mankind's unrestrained desire is as indomitable a force as the buoyancy of a float." Similarly, Li Jiwei's *Forgotten Landscape* uses half abstract objects that, while rotating, align themselves to create a shark profile symbolizing the ephemeral/transient existence of sharks faced by the threat of human interactions.

Although the interpretations and styles are diverse, each has an inner strength that in combination creates a provocative sensation. The exhibition provides a holistic experience that inspires the audience to learn more about the largely unknown world of sharks and their role in the marine ecosystem and, by doing so, provokes conservation action. 