

Chinese robotics artist makes real-life 'Transformers'

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In the suburbs of China's capital, a 32-year-old engineer creates the kind of larger-than-life, shapeshifting robots that most have only seen in "Transformers" movies.

Sun Shiqian's roomy warehouse on the outskirts of Beijing houses a hulking menagerie, from a sleepy cow to a fiery metal dragon that stands 4.9 metres (16 feet) tall at the flip of a switch.

A graduate of China's prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts, Sun worked as an engineer before deciding to devote himself full-time to what he calls "robot arts".

"As a child, I loved watching cartoons with robots," Sun told AFP.

"But I noticed that they were all from either Japan or the United States. There were no Chinese robots."

At the World Robot Conference in Beijing last month, the sculptor showcased an ox with the mechanical ability to transform into a robot "gladiator," equipped with steel abs and all.

The android is part of his series based on the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac.

This June, Sun unveiled a 5-metre tall "Monkey King" inspired by the simian protagonist of China's famed "Journey to the West". Like his

model, the 5-tonne robot holds a golden cudgel—except his is 6.3 metres (21 feet) long.

The next model of "Monkey King" is slated to challenge an American giant robot to a duel next year.

Robots with Chinese characteristics

Sun grew up on an island off the coast of Dalian in northeast China. His family could not afford many toys, but his father, a former soldier, would often show him simple blueprints of weapons that were used in combat.

Using these blueprints and sheets of cardboard, Sun fashioned miniature fighting dragons and other creatures.

"I began to like art more and more, and I made increasingly complex robots in my spare time," he said.

After leaving his engineering post in 2011, Sun focused his energy on designing robots—some costing upwards of one million yuan (\$150,000)—and making his visions a reality.

In 2014, he was commissioned by Paramount Movies to make robot sculptures to promote "Transformers: Age of Extinction", which broke box-office records in China.

One model was exhibited at the historic Qianmen Gate, which formerly guarded the entrance to the Imperial City in Beijing.

"People asked me, why are they putting foreign art in front of Qianmen?" Sun recalled.

"This had a big impact on me, because they recognised that this robot did not have Chinese origins. From then on, my dream has been to create [robot](#) art that is distinctly Chinese."

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