

MIT List Center

Cai Guo-Qaing

Ring Stone, a 2010 work by Chinese-born artist, Cai Guo-Qiang, unites the Sloan School of Management's educational ties to China, with the school's appreciation of that country's cultural contributions. Cai Guo-Qiang typically explores cycles of creation and destruction in nature and society, often using fireworks or gunpowder to spectacular effect. Here, 12 indivisible links are carved from a single piece of granite.

[SPEAKING CHINESE]

I wanted people to wonder, how did this end up here? How is it made? I traveled back to my hometown Quanzhou, and I went to the quarry to find the biggest chunk of stone there, and then I worked with Chinese artisans who used both machinery and hand carving to cut the stone. The sculpture started off as a 16-metric-ton piece of rock, and then it was trimmed down so it could fit inside an ocean container. The links signify an individual's relationship to society, the infinite cycle of life and the seasons. And more specifically, both the 12 months of the calendar and the animals of the Chinese zodiac. Interspersed amidst the stone links are seven Asian pine trees.

[SPEAKING CHINESE]

Pine trees often grow quite well in very hostile environments, even through a crevice of a rock. In traditional Chinese art and literature, pine trees represent this very persistent spirit. So when I decided to introduce a plant element, I was thinking the artwork would become a living thing of its own, and that it would change with seasons. Whenever you mention MIT, people associate it with science and technology, and it's a very rhetorical, logical place. So I wanted to bring in something that's perhaps a little irrational from nature.

Ring Stone was made as part of the MIT Percent-for-Art, a program of the List Visual Arts Center. Begun in 1968, the initiative allocates a portion of the budget from each new building project or major renovation to the purchase or commission of art for public space.