

# Growing in Stature

After 10 years in a marketing job, French artist Val carved out a new life for herself, as a sculptor. SHAMUS SILLAR spoke with Val in the lead up to her solo exhibition, Theatre of Life, at REDSEA Gallery this month.

*Photos by Roland Neveu*

**You are French, with a childhood background in South America and Africa. Why have you made Asia your home?**

I first came to the Far East in my twenties, but it was only during a second trip about ten years later in Vietnam, that Asia specifically grabbed my attention. I began finding answers to questions I'd been wondering about for some time regarding my professional activity. I took personal decisions during the journey that led me to become a professional sculptor. A few years later, I decided to settle down in Asia and I chose Bangkok as my home; it's a place that has given me great opportunities at the right time in my life.

**Describe your Bangkok studio to us.**

I live in Bangkapi in the northeast of the city. It has an old Bangkok flavour with traditional Thai houses and canals. I live and work in a quiet area surrounded by coconuts and palm trees. My husband and I love gardening and my studio is completely open to our tropical garden with plenty of sunlight. In the studio itself, it's a mix of water tanks – where I keep all my wax figures away from the Bangkok heat – plus tables, stands, tools and utensils, which I reorganise according to my needs for the piece I'm working on.







**Were you in Bangkok during the recent troubles?**

Yes, I was here for the whole political unrest but like most Bangkokians I was not directly affected as the protests took place in another part of town. I love Thailand and Thai people, and these events made me feel very sorry for them. I sincerely hope there's a peaceful solution to the crisis.

**What is the inspiration behind your sculptures?**

My work is a whole; you cannot separate one sculpture from the other – I follow my inspiration, so each sculpture leads to the next one. At the same time, my work is really the reflection of my personal feelings. I also have a notebook where I write ideas. So my creativity comes from these three components: working on a sculpture gives me ideas for the next piece, feelings guide my fingers, and the external world provides stimulation.

**And how is a piece made?**

There are two different processes in sculpture: the creation of a new piece and, if I decide to keep it, the reproduction in bronze. I work on new pieces in my studio and I work at a foundry for the reproduction; they are two very different atmospheres, one very quiet, one hot and noisy, but both full of energy.

At the foundry, I correct my lost wax, I work on the welding of different sculpture parts and I work on the patinas. Once my creation is complete in wax, clay or plaster, I need three to six weeks to cast the sculpture in bronze.

**The dominant recurring motif in your art is a tiny, slender figure perched on some kind of support. Who are these people and what are they doing in these places?**

What I am fond of, what I look for in literature and theatre, is everything regarding humanity – weaknesses, strengths, doubts, happiness, and questioning life. I've always been fascinated by how small we are in the world and the universe; and by how many human beings have been on earth before us. Yet there is still a dream here for many of us – not just a dream, but the amazing realisation of dreams. We need to believe very strongly in our capacities and abilities, that our dreams are the right thing. So, very spontaneously, my work represents these men and women who are small compared to the world surrounding them, yet full of passion.

**Do you have a daily routine with your work?**

I wake up early, around 6am, and I've usually started by 7. I think I'm a hard worker – when I have events to prepare for, or whenever I feel inspired in general, it's difficult to stop; I need to go on. Then when I finish a collection or a large sculpture, I have a break for a few days to let the tension subside.



### Who are your heroes?

All the anonymous artists who worked on the huge and fabulous bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat; all the writers who have brought me wonderful pleasure; all those people dedicating their lives to others.

In terms of specific artists, I'm fond of Brueghel – some of my compositions with many characters are inspired by his paintings; also Rodin and Picasso for their extraordinary talent and strength, Giacometti and Soutine for the sensitive suffering they poured into their art, and Matisse for his colours and beauty and for being a self-made artist.

### Do you have a message for budding sculptors?

Two indispensable things: work a lot and let the doors open to your creativity.

### Is there anything you miss about being a marketing manager?

Absolutely nothing. I feel so relieved to have discovered sculpting. This is my life now and every day I feel grateful to have met this art form on my road. 🙏



### From the Gallery Director

For many years, I had been looking for figurative and minimalistic sculptures to complement our collection. Two years ago, I finally stumbled upon the sleek and elegant figures by French sculptor, Val. They were precisely what I was after.

What I find so engaging about Val's work is that her ideas are endless. She discovers sources for inspiration in everyday situations and characters. For instance, the piece titled "Inle Balance" was inspired by Val's observation, while honeymooning in Myanmar, of the movements of a man guiding his boat across Lake Inle. In this piece, she truly captures the boatman's skill at manipulating his vessel full of goods. The analogy of the boatman is identifiable to anyone viewing the sculpture; it's as if they experienced it for themselves.

Val's works have been continually well received, and we're honoured to be associated with her in our galleries here in Singapore and in Brisbane, Australia.

– Chris Churcher

Val's exhibition runs from 18 September to 16 October. REDSEA Gallery is at Block 9 Dempsey Road, #01-10 Dempsey Hill. For more info, call 6732 6711 or visit [www.redseagallery.com](http://www.redseagallery.com).

