

The force of inspiration on imagination

Imagination without inspiration can be wonderful, but to have imagination driven by inspiration, then one finds oneself in the aura of true greatness.

By John Rowe, Secretary-General, ISSF



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I beg, with all due deference and respect, to differ from HRH the Prince of Wales, who both favours and energetically promotes the retention of older generations of architecture. Whilst I concede readily that many of our older buildings have a lasting grandeur and a charm of their own, I revel in the emergence of a modern era of design in architecture – indeed I embrace it. Simply put, the excitement of the Burj Khalifa would not have been possible without the use of modern architectural standards. And even a building that has now reached the grand old age of 87 (the Chrysler Building in New York) has demonstrated with remarkable clarity how stainless steel retains its aesthetic charm and lustre for many years. The Socony-Mobil Building in New York was the first to be completely clad in stainless steel in 1956, and, when it was first cleaned, in 2016, using simple everyday household cleaning materials, the original lustre shone brightly through.

Having clearly established the credentials of stainless steel on a variety of new buildings such as the Jin Mao Tower in Shanghai and the Lloyds Bank Building in London, both of which were ahead of their times, it took the boldness of a new generation

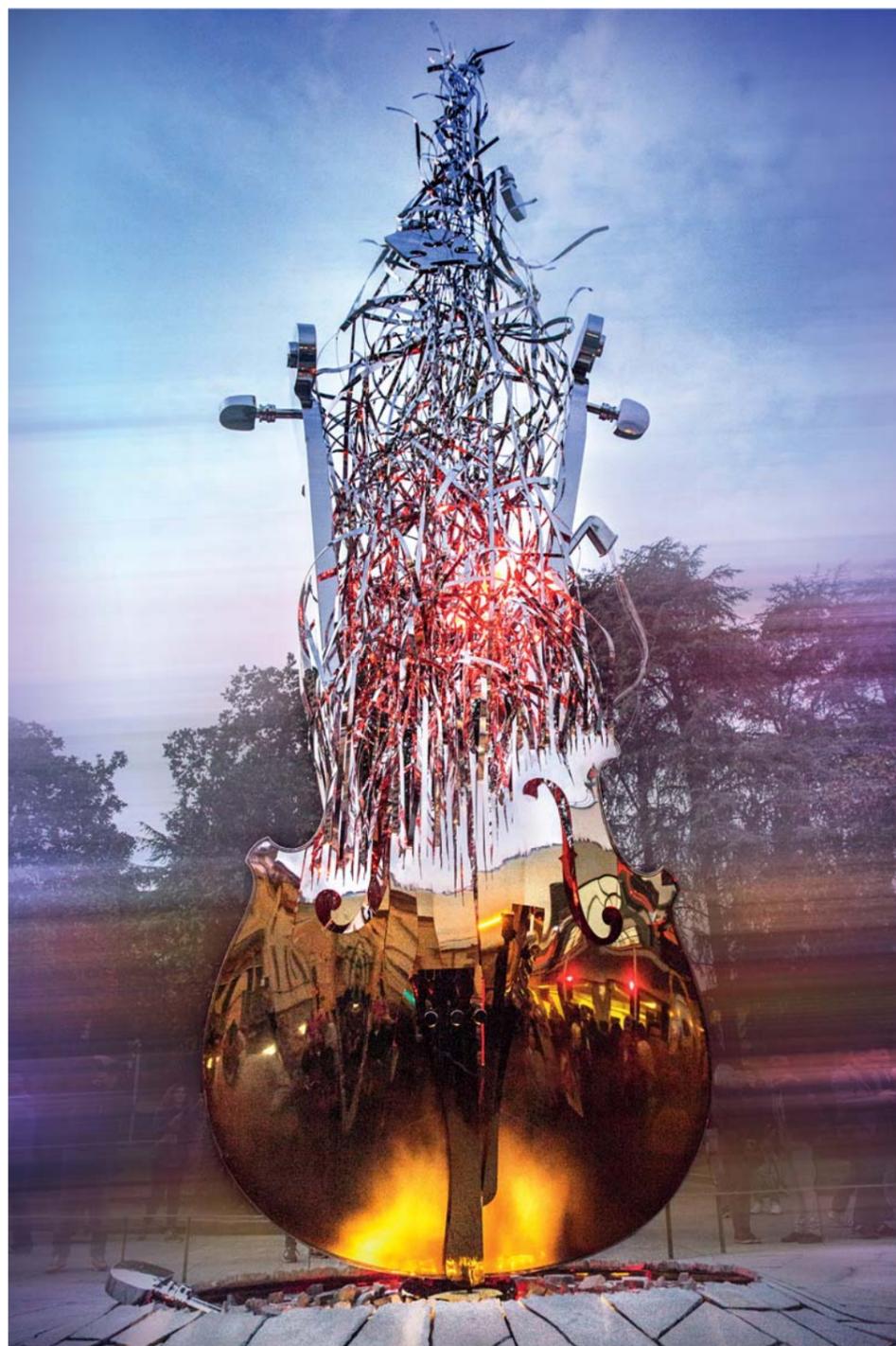
of designs, such as the Len Lye Centre in New Plymouth, New Zealand, to stir the soul. These are the harbingers of a new direction for architecture and its designs are brightening our cities and landscapes across the globe.

A similarly imaginative use of architecture is to be found in the project for the quite spectacular Rose Building in Beijing by the firm NEXT Architects, in the Louis Vuitton Museum in Paris and in Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The ISSF brochure on *Stainless Steel in Architectural Applications* is an endless catalogue of similarly inspirational creativity, which I hope will provide the inspiration to the new generation of architects to open their minds and imaginations, and to strive continually for the outside of the fabled envelope.

But, quite apart from the birth of a spectacular new generation of buildings, we are in the midst of an equally inspiring range of new artwork in street furniture and in municipal sculptures, not all of which, to be sure, have used stainless steel, but a growing number of them have, and the results are often breathtaking. One has only to approach the stainless steel sculpture *L'anima della città* (The Soul of the City) of a violin in Cremona, the cradle of truly great stringed instruments, and to hear the hauntingly sweet tones of the violin music, to be cast back to a foregone age when craftsmen of great skill fashioned masterpieces such as the Stradivarius, many of which still exist today, though they command huge prices at auction. Few materials match the ability of stainless steel to be both aesthetically pleasing and long-lasting, due to its amazing ability to resist the ravages of corrosion.

So, let us ponder for a moment the miraculous surges of inspirational imagination, which have arisen from time to time and have added greatly to the common good of humanity.

Take a moment. Lean back in your chairs and let your memories wander to an earlier age. An age when the magic of the movies first inspired the genius of a cartoon artist named Walt Disney, whose visionary genius created an empire that stands to this day. Childhood lives and memories, and, above all, imaginations were shaped and developed, and in most cases, enriched by the exquisite beauty of films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, or *The Jungle Book*, or *The Lion King*, and the mind boggled at the technical genius that lay behind each scene. Or even his many peopled pictures, such as *The Love Bug*. These are films you can return to again and



L'anima della città. Manufacturing, construction, electro-colouring, and installation: Steel Color Spa, www.steelcolor.com / Project: arch. Giorgio Palù / Photo by Mattia Aquila, from: *Inossidabile 206*, www.centroinox.it

again on rainy afternoons to be transported to a temporarily better place, or to keep your children or grandchildren entranced.

It is what the adult world does with those seeds of imagination that is truly inspiring. All artists take their inspiration where they can find it, and architects and designers are really artists with greatly enlarged canvasses. Recent

articles in this newspaper have featured a number of magnificent buildings featuring the beauty, flexibility and corrosion resistance of stainless steel.

What I want to do on this occasion is to move away from the conventional and to demonstrate the vivid imaginations that have driven a new generation of artists behind six truly inspiring pieces.



Len Lye Centre, designed by Patterson Architects. Photo by Patrick Reynolds



Rose Museum. Photo by Xiao Kaixiong / photo courtesy of NEXT Architects



Beijing Boulder Art, designed by Sino Sculpture Group

Beijing Boulder Art

This amazing piece was created by the Beijing Sino Sculpture Group and features a stainless steel panel 25 metres long and six metres high, beautifully polished to a mirror finish. It looks for all the world as though a magic boulder has been split in half, apparently revealing a magnificent jewel within. This piece has been placed in the private garden of Corporate Structure – like something out of *The Living Desert*, the first of two movies made by Disney, featuring only flora and fauna, with no people or animations. It was the precursor of the great series subsequently created for the BBC by Sir David Attenborough, although, of course, Attenborough included people in his feature films.

Naoshima Pavilion

The port side of Naoshima is famous for its art and architecture. The artist of the piece in this photograph, Sou Fujimoto, designed it as a place where people could relax while visiting the beach. The town consists of 27 islands, and Fujimoto-san developed this concept as the 28th island (even though it is built on the land). The space is enveloped in white stainless steel mesh. From the outside it resembles a giant stone, floating like an island on the sand. The inside provides places to sit and listen to the sounds of the wind as well as the sounds and smells of the port. Entering this structure could take one back in time to the wonders of Disney's *Treasure Island*.

Kafka

It is to the vibrant centre of Prague that we turn for our next piece, by the Czech sculptor David Černý. This unusual sculpture depicts the head of Franz Kafka, standing an impressive 45 metres high and built entirely from highly polished stainless steel. The unusual aspect of the sculpture is that it has 42 independently revolving layers which turn in random directions, as an apparent reference to the personality disorders that affected Kafka throughout his life, as if he were a character from Disney's *Now You See Him, Now You Don't*.

Lotus flower pots

This award-winning design by Lucia Salgado Padilla presents the biggest



David Černý's sculpture depicting the head of Franz Kafka

challenge for an article such as this. The structure is manufactured from a plain sheet of 304 stainless steel which can easily be affixed to interior walls or anchored to exterior surfaces. The beauty of the design, however, is that the piece is radically transformed by the artistic positioning of plant pots which are welded to the sheet in customised designs, giving a beautiful as well as useful display area for plants, without risk of corrosion, yielding an effect that may have been part of the scenery for *The Jungle Book*.

Aeolus

This magnificent piece was completed in 2016 by the artist Luke Jerram and may be viewed at Canary Wharf in London. In Greek mythology, Aeolus was the Keeper of the Winds. With this amazing sculpture, Mr. Jerram has created a large Aeolian harp, using stainless steel, fitted with strings and tubes and mounted on a central arch. The strings reflect the music of the winds, as they did in Greek mythology, and the unstrung tubes hum along in apparent unison. Art imitating nature. Just like in Disney's *Melody Time*.



Lotus flower pots, designed by Lucia Salgado Padilla



Aeolus by Luke Jerram. Photo by Andy Spain



Frank Gehry's Olympic Fish

Frank Gehry's Olympic Fish in Barcelona

For the wow factor, one simply has to turn to Frank Gehry. As a centrepiece for the Olympic Games in 1992, Gehry created a monstrous gold fish, 56 metres long by 35 metres high, and placed it between two towers on the sea front – the Mapfre Tower and the Hotel Arts. It looks as though it is poised to leap back into the sea. The fish was created from strips of gilded stainless steel and

it stands on a metal base. The effect of the sunlight reflecting off the 'skin' of the fish creates the image of scales. And if you wanted a Disney film to link to this one, it could only be *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea!*

The message for this writer is that if one can recapture the magical beauty of one's childhood imagination, and if one wanders the city streets with eyes wide open, there is no end to the wonders which will open up for you.



Naoshima Pavilion, designed by Sou Fujimoto. Photo by Jin Fukuda

The International Stainless Steel Forum (ISSF) is a non-profit research and development organisation based in Brussels, Belgium, which represents the interests of stainless steel producers around the world and also of those associations whose primary goal is to develop the markets for stainless steel. The work of the ISSF is undertaken largely through five specialist committees: Market Development; Health, Safety and the Environment; Long Product Market Development; Raw Materials; and Economics and Statistics. The ISSF currently has 65 members and represents approximately 85% of the world's production of stainless steel.