

**L**awrence Argent is known for his giant public installations — a red rabbit leaping through an airport and a blue bear peeping into a convention center.

In his first project in China, the Australian sculptor has installed a giant panda in a shopping mall.

The 15-meter-high artwork, *I Am Here*, hangs on the top floor of the newly opened Chengdu International Finance Square. Viewed from afar, the giant panda appears to be climbing the building.

"It (the panda) is an icon of China in many ways," Argent says.

The animal is indeed a symbol of China, especially Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province.

Argent came up with the idea of the climbing panda in June, when a company asked him if he was interested in working on a panda art project in Chengdu.

"I wasn't too sure about that in the beginning, because I do many different projects and they are not necessarily directed by a specific proposal like that. So that idea narrowed it down for me. And then I didn't want to create an object, or a thing that was Disney-esque, because that's easy for me," the artist says.

However, when he reflected on the subject, he changed his mind.

"With this directive of the panda, I started to think of the panda I had to make and I started to think of the building — how does somebody experience it? This is a 750,000-square-meter place," he says.

The artist says the panda has to interact with the building, so that the architecture, the sculpture and people become one.

"The project is not about that panda being in the building or an object outside the building. It's about something that is integrated," Argent says, standing on the seventh floor of IFS. The giant panda's nose is just a few meters away.

Shopper Jiang Shuchen's experience proves Argent's theory. Jiang was taking her child for a stroll nearby, and when the child saw the giant panda, he became excited, asking his mother to take him in to look at the panda's face on the seventh floor.

Bringing the child inside, Jiang couldn't help but spend as much as 7,000 yuan (\$1,140), as the journey upstairs takes them through several luxury boutiques.

"The art piece is interesting in a way. And it attracts people to come in and spend money," Jiang says with a grin.

Chengdu IFS general operation manager Christina Hau says her team chose Argent because his installations are well integrated with public spaces.

"The panda installment is closely connected with the opening of IFS Chengdu. We posed a question to Lawrence: how do you make all things come together? Our building is gigantic, and we wanted something unique," Hau says.

Argent says the installment must have a connection with human behavior.

But how can Argent make the panda visible so that it is attractive and fulfills its purpose — encouraging consumers to enter the mall? He knew the seventh floor had a different aspect where he could make something that was partially hidden. "You want people to come in and get entertained through the building," Argent explains.

People move through the space, and that is what the artist calls "the interaction between people and public projects".

Argent says he also tries to convey a double meaning — he not only aims to provoke thoughts about our own existence through his work, he also wants people to reflect on the growing prosperity of the city.

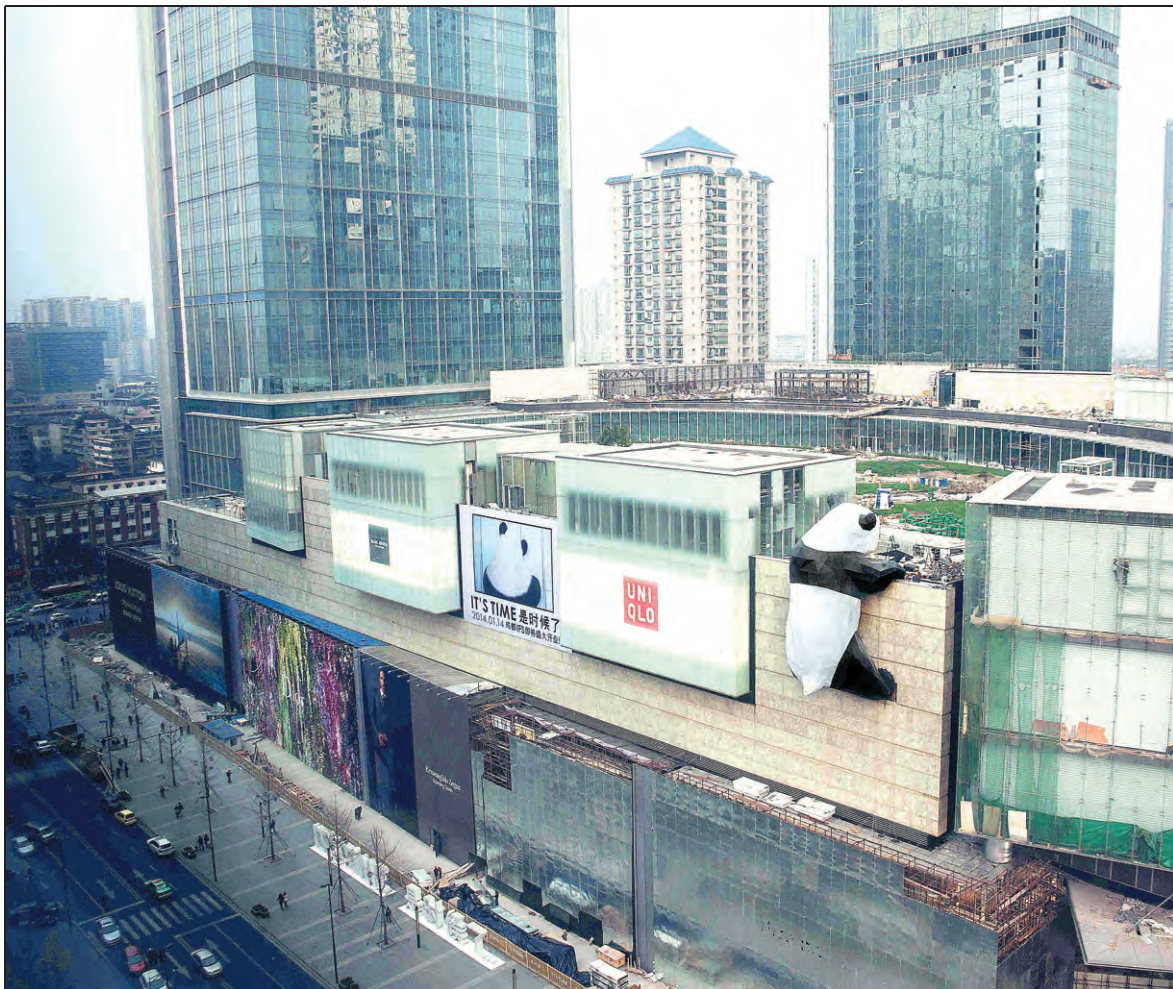
The giant panda sculpture reminds people that we should not neglect the care of giant pandas amid rapid commercial development, the artist says.

Based in Denver, Colorado, Argent is a household name in the United States with his massive public art installations *I See What You Mean* and *Leap*.

*I See What You Mean* is a giant blue bear peeping into a convention center in Denver.

"I wanted to create a relationship between us and nature, as well as the idea that people think of what art is. The consensus is that Colorado is not very progressive in art, so I wanted to play with the idea of that assumption," Argent says.

"My work is all about what we



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A giant panda scaling the facade of the Chengdu International Finance Square is a super-sized piece of public art by Lawrence Argent.

## Giant panda scales Chengdu mall

His bold public art installations have made him a household name in the United States, and now Australian sculptor Lawrence Argent has brought his playful approach to China. **Gan Tian** reports.

think we know. Undermining that 'what we know' into a new possibility is my goal. How many times do we assume something and that assumption is incorrect? So the difficulty of my art pieces is about bringing that complexity to life," Argent says.

*Leap* is a giant red rabbit in Sacramento Airport, California. According to Argent, the rabbit is not about the animal, but a vehicle for self-reflection. He explains the rabbit has a meaning for everyone, from childhood stories to live animals. When people go to an airport, they are full of energy and nervousness. The artist wanted to defuse their nervousness with this giant rabbit.

"And the rabbit is jumping into a suitcase, which represents a person. These are your items and possessions. This is a metaphor for the baggage you carry through your life, what happened to you to bring you to the point of who you are now."

Art critic Feng Huang says public art becomes a success when it stimulates people in this public area to reflect and think.

"It is more than a decoration. It becomes meaningful when it appears only in this area," Feng says.

The panda in Chengdu IFS is the first project that Argent has done in China. It is also one of the largest outdoor installations ever in Chengdu. Feng says it is a successful one.

"The panda becomes meaningful. The artist has made its bottom face the public — it is defiant toward the traditional image of a panda," Feng says.

Argent says: "I'm not interested in creating an object of decoration. That's not what I do. My task is to create something that fits the surrounding or the area. If it were to be removed, you would miss it."

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Visitors can get a close look at the giant panda on the top floor of Chengdu International Finance Square.



Lawrence Argent is known for his massive public art installations.



*Leap*, in Sacramento Airport, California, is one of Argent's signature works.

## When shop sells 'art derivatives'

By **GAN TIAN**  
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First-time visitors to Uupp may wonder if it is an art gallery or a home-decor store. Paintings and sculptures are on display, together with lamps, mirrors, tables, chairs, glasses, cups, books, towels and sunglasses.

Located near Beijing's 798 Art Zone, this shop is a new platform, which brings art into people's daily life, says owner Xu Ning.

"I call it a 'shop for art derivatives,'" Xu says.

Xu was previously the editor-in-chief of the art magazine Harper's Bazaar Art in China. The retail idea came in 2013. After editing art stories for many years, Xu decided he should do something more "realistic" in the art world.

As he had good connections in China's art circles, Xu persuaded many of his artist friends to sell their works in Uupp.

Artist Jiang Chuan has created several giant paintings of young women in the forests with wildlife. His paintings, generally priced at 100,000 yuan (\$16,270) each, give a quiet and natural atmosphere to Uupp.

Works by Zhou Chunya and Qin Weihong are also available in the store.

Zhou has a series of paintings named *Green Dog*. The painter has developed some porcelain decorations based on his paintings, which are sold in Uupp. Qin's sculpture, *Carnivore*, is a small figurine of a girl with two bunny ears, holding a piece of meat in her hands.

"These works are from artists, but they also function as a beautiful decoration at home. Art brings beauty, but it should go deeper into people's lives. I think by making the art into products, consumers will know more about art and feel they are closer to the beauty," Xu says.

Among the most popular products are some porcelain teacups. They are in the shapes of lions, bears, foxes and owls. But each teacup's cover is a crown. When it is placed on the tray, it looks like the animal is wearing a crown.

Xu says he has a small team, all of whom are professionals. They are searching in various parts of the world, to bring back some lifestyle products with an artistic touch.

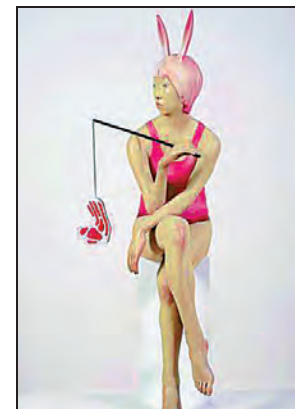
"For example, these teacups are from a Canadian brand named Imm Living," Xu says. "There are many such design brands which can inspire us."

At present, there are 300 kinds of products sold in Uupp and works from 30 artists. However, Xu wants to make Uupp an art platform with diversified forms of business, not only selling products.

Now his employee Henry Zhao is in charge of providing "art solutions" to clients.

"For example, if a hotel wants to decorate with some artworks, we can offer an all-around service, including picking the suitable artists and artworks according to the interior design, refreshing and restoring the artworks, and changing them seasonally," Zhao says.

With Zhao already bringing business from restaurants and hotels in Tianjin and Shanghai, Xu believes this "art service" will grow, especially in China where modern art is booming.



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*Carnivore*, a sculpture by Qin Weihong, is one of the artworks sold in Uupp.



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LAWRENCE ARGENT  
ARTIST