

TRIUMPH OF WILL

His art
sees all

Artist Victor Tan became blind at the age of 25. But it didn't stop him from expressing volumes through his works

By **ARTHUR SIM**

WHILE artist and sculptor Victor Tan was still a student at Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts in the mid-1990s, he chanced upon some writings on Buddha. They led him to experiment with meditation as a way of finding a super-consciousness.

"It was my path to self-discovery," says the slightly-built 32-year-old.

Finding himself was a bit more difficult for him because not only was he trying to come to terms with his artistic expression, he also had to come to terms with having gone blind.

He had always been interested in art, but he wanted to be able to help out his family financially.

So he first studied architectural technology at the Singapore Polytechnic in 1992 with hopes of becoming an architectural draftsman when he

graduated. But he never did.

In 1994, while still at the polytechnic, he was suddenly struck with optical neuritis. It was a condition that left him blind at the age of 25.

It also led him back to art.

Initially, he had signed up for a course in ceramics at Lasalle-SIA in 1995, after he had heard about other blind artists. There, he was encouraged to take up life drawing classes to study the human form as well by his tutors.

"I thought it was a bit strange that they would want me to draw with paper and pencil," he says, referring to his visual impairment.

"But they didn't stop me from experimenting either."

In his experiments, he tried to address his dilemma of not being able to see his drawings by using more tactile materials like thread and sand.

It was only when he discovered he could "draw" with



Pictures by **THOMAS WHITE**

Meditation inspires Tan to create pieces like this.

stainless steel wires that he felt he had found his media.

With wire, he could "draw a line", feel it, then "draw" the next line, in relation to the last.

"I need this feedback," he says. The wire sketches were initially mere outlines that evolved slowly to take on more three-dimensional forms. In spite of this, the artist still thinks of his creations as drawings.

"Paper is the space and line is the wire," he says.

This realm between the two and the three-dimensional is where his work exists.

Similarly, having lost his vision, he, too, exists between dimensions.

In the series of wire drawings called *Dances In The Wind*, he explains that each was inspired by the sensation of wind passing over him in his studio in Telok Kurau, lulling him softly into a meditative state.

In fact, meditation has now become so important to him that he says it is the connection between his life and his art.

For him, it is not a way of

escaping reality. Rather, it helps give him a heightened awareness of his senses, especially touch.

"Being aware of the body's movements is a kind of meditative state," he says, explaining another series of wire drawings called *Awareness Of Being*.

These wire drawings are more corporeal and dense. Each is also a more direct translation of what he considers different meditative states.

But it is the "looser" work, of which *Dances In The Wind* is an example, that hints at Tan having reached a kind of nirvana or enlightenment, the goal of his meditations.

The wire lines of these "looser" work are less defined.

Tan explains: "The looser work shows there is still potential to move on — there is still life in each line."

◆ *Between 2 And 3*, an exhibition of Victor Tan's wire drawings, is on now till Oct 7 at The Gallery Evason Hotel, 76 Robertson Quay. Opening hours: 10.30 am-8 pm daily.



Blind but not beaten, Victor Tan creates his wire sculptures purely from his sense of touch.