Shaping a fine figure

By Cheah Ui-Hoon

WITH an upraised arm and a foot placed forward, the wiry human figure constrained within a helix-shaped structure, is a simple yet meaningful illustration of the upwardly-mobile man of the Millennium.

It is sculptor Victor Tan's third public work, gracing the courtyard of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) in Empress Place. *Millennium*, commissioned by ExxonMobil, was formally presented yesterday at the museum's dedication ceremony, which also coincided with the museum's 5th anniversary celebrations.

Though not the biggest sculpture that Tan, 32, has done to date — he has worked on figures that are five times bigger than lifesize — the 1.8m *Millennium* is certainly one of his more prominently-placed works — at the spanking new ACM Empress Place.

For this sculpture, Tan imported the 316 stainless steel wire specially from Osaka and London. "This is very specialised wire for marine or industrial use, it's not available here so I had to import it," explains Tan.

While his sculpture might look like a mangle of twirls and swirls within the form, it's actually quite organised — around the basic shapes of cylinders, spheres and cones artists use when drafting human figures. Tan's sculptures are visual interpretations of those drafting tools.

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Victor Tan: *'With this sculpture, this is the first time I've shaped something else abstract like the DNA helix'*

"With this sculpture, this is the first time I've shaped something else abstract like the DNA helix," says Tan. Asked if this was a move towards sculpting other forms beside the human figure, Tan said this was unlikely. "I've still many ideas about the human figure that I'd like to try out."

It's challenging to do life-sized figures, for instance, and that's when Tan gets to clamber all over his sculpture to manipulate it into shape. "It's an energising process," he says.

And the energy that he's managed to sculpt into his figure is now adding a sense of youthful dynamics to the historic Empress Place.