

**WORK OF ART: *MANGA ORMOLU VER. 5.0-Q* BY
BRENDAN LEE SATISH TANG**

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Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-Q, 2015, Underglaze and glaze on white earthenware, wood, 24 x 11 x 11 inches

An Imperial Chinese blue-and-white vase births a sci-fi robot while prettily perching on an ornate display stand? *Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-Q* evokes wonderment. The long, slender neck curves like a swan, widening at the top into a bulbous head, finishing in a thin lip. The body spreads out into a pear shape, then stretches, wrinkles and sags, as an alien mechanical form crowns from below.

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Artist Brendan Lee Satish Tang handles clay with ease and skill, using wheel-throwing and hand-building to construct persuasive, surreal objects. *Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-Q* is one of an extended series of Chinese functional ceramic manga robot grafts that he has created over the last 15 years and named like software. As Tang became interested in the way technology (including social media) is based on other technology, which is constantly being revised, he issued the 5.0 upgrade, highlighting the capacity to transition.

The shape of the vase — known to collectors as a garlic-mouth vase — was popular at the Qing Dynasty court to display a single flowering or fruiting branch. The cobalt blue-painted decoration on Tang's vessel includes classic Chinese motifs such as the stylized "cloud and thunder" meander at the top and bottom of the neck that symbolizes life-giving rain. An original Qing vase with a design very similar to Tang's was estimated to sell at auction in Hong Kong this past year for more than a half-million dollars.

Social, economic and political histories that play out through fashion and consumerism are incorporated in Tang's work with humour that carries an afterburn. Look closely at *Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-Q* and you'll notice the crackle pattern in the transparent glaze over the vase (but not the robot). It's a nod and a wink Tang makes to the Western appetite for traditional ware to look distressed, although the Chinese originals remain exquisitely clear.

Displaying fine Chinese porcelain and mantel clocks on elaborate gilt mounts, known as ormolu, became fashionable in England and France in the 17th and 18th centuries. "Chinamania," the craze for blue and white porcelain among the Victorian middle class, is considered by some to mark the beginning of Western consumer culture.

Tang was born in Ireland to Trinidadian parents of Chinese and Indian ancestry, moved to Canada, became a naturalized Canadian citizen and spent his young adult years in Nanaimo, B.C. After earning a diploma from Malaspina University College, a bachelor of fine arts degree from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and a master of fine arts from Southern Illinois University, he attracted attention in the art world for smart, culturally mashed-up, precision crafted, vestigial vessels. Influenced in his early career by flamboyant American ceramist Howard Kottler and Francophone Richard Milette, he currently teaches at Emily Carr University in Vancouver and exhibits his work nationally and internationally. This summer, he plans to participate in the Medalta International Artists in Residence program in Medicine Hat.

Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-Q will be shown during the last stop of the popular touring exhibition *Ready Player 2* — a double header with Ligwilda'xw Kwakwaka'wakw interdisciplinary artist Sonny Assu. Both B.C.-based Gen-X-ers, their perspectives on youth culture will have you reaching for the bowl of Cheezies.

<https://www.avenuecalgary.com/city-life/work-of-art/manga-ormolu-ver-5-0-q-by-brendan-lee-satish-tang/>