

# Shanghai loves Kumari's chillies

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Entwined in a dance position, a pair of towering 6m-high chillies took centre stage at the Shanghai Art Fair this year.

It is a work titled Happy Tango by Malaysian-born Singapore artist Kumari Nahappan, 58, who was named the Shanghai Art Fair's Artist Of The Year at the five-day event that ended yesterday.

The mother of four, whose oldest child is in his 30s, is known for her chilli sculptures, which have featured prominently here in places such as Ion Orchard and the National Museum.

Her husband Ishwar Nahappan moved to Singapore from Kuala Lumpur in 1989 for business reasons, which led to the family following suit. She was an interior designer before she became a full-time

artist at the age of 37.

The organisers of the art fair asked her to submit a proposal about eight months ago and she was picked for the title by a selection committee.

Happy Tango was commissioned by the Shanghai-based Purple Roof Art Gallery.

Her prize was having her work placed just outside the entrance to Shanghai-MART, where the art fair was held. "I didn't actually understand when they told me that it meant everyone who passes by and drives by can see it," she said.

A crowd of 40,000 was targeted for the event which started in 1996 and is organised by the Chinese government for the public. This year, 155 galleries from 12 countries took part.

It was her first time exhibiting at the



**Kumari Nahappan with her chilli sculpture at the entrance to Shanghai-MART.**  
PHOTO: STUDIO K

art fair and getting two huge chillies to Shanghai was not easy.

She said: "I had cast the sculptures in Thailand and the art gallery made arrangements to have them shipped because they were so huge.

"But because of the Mid-Autumn Festival, things got delayed. It got clearance by the Customs on Sept 11 and arrived the next evening. We had to set it all up very quickly."

Difficulties aside, Nahappan and her

art work were treated like celebrities during the sculpture's unveiling.

"People were taking photographs of Happy Tango and there were some who asked for my autograph," she said.

Her dancing chillies, on the other hand, will be staying on. The sculpture will be moved to Jing An Sculpture Park in Shanghai where it will become a permanent fixture.

Having spent some time in the city in the past week, she was impressed by what she saw.

She said: "One night, I went down to a park and there were people dancing there. It was an expression of their culture and Shanghai. It's a very high-energy city."

It is one of the reasons she felt Happy Tango was well received.

She added: "People seem to be able to relate to it. I feel it's partly because Shanghai is as vibrant as my chillies."