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Wang Keping and his work at the Aidekman Art Gallery at Tufts University.

FUSING YIN AND YANG AT TUFTS

By Patti Hartigan
GLOBE STAFF

For the past few weeks, sculptor Wang Keping has been searching for polar opposites in the recesses of two 10-foot-tall trees. The fruits of his labor will be unveiled on Tuesday at the Aidekman Art Gallery at Tufts University at a fete to celebrate his sculpture, "Yin and Yang."

The monumental sculpture was commissioned by the Alumni and Friends of Liz Toupin, who was the first Asian-American dean in the continental United States. Toupin, a second-generation Korean-American, retired last year after 25 years as associate dean of undergraduate education at the Medford university.

"I identify with his spunk," Toupin said of the artist. "It takes a lot of spunk to survive as a dean from the turbulent '60s to now."

Born in Beijing in 1949, Wang was part of a courageous group of nonconformist artists who staged a demonstration in 1979 during the

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Peking Spring. The artists were fighting for the right to have their work exhibited in public. They called themselves Star, Star (Xing-Xing). At the time, Wang explained: "We chose the name because we were the only glimmer in an endless night and also because the stars, which look so small when seen from afar, may prove to be gigantic planets."

The members of Star, Star won their battle: They were authorized to hold an exhibition the following year at the Fine Arts Museum in Beijing.

Since then, Wang has established himself as a satiric artist with a flair for humor and irony. He now lives in Paris and has been in residence at Tufts since April 10, carving the sculpture that graces the entry of the Aidekman Gallery.

The artist has said that he does not impose structure on his materials, but rather releases the life forms inherent in wood. He discovers human figures in the natural texture of wood, and his work is whimsical and utterly unafraid of the natural splendor of sexuality.

Why yin and yang? He aims to bring together opposites in the wood he sculpts. "Whether ancient or current, foreign or native, primitive or contemporary, opposite or complementary, human or beast, male or female and yin or yang, the two become one," he said in a statement.

And that's just fine with Toupin, who is honored that Tufts is celebrating her career with this art. "He chose the wood very carefully," she said, hinting that "Yin and Yang" — the Chinese symbol of the male and female forces — just might be anatomically correct.