

# The Nature Of | Abstraction

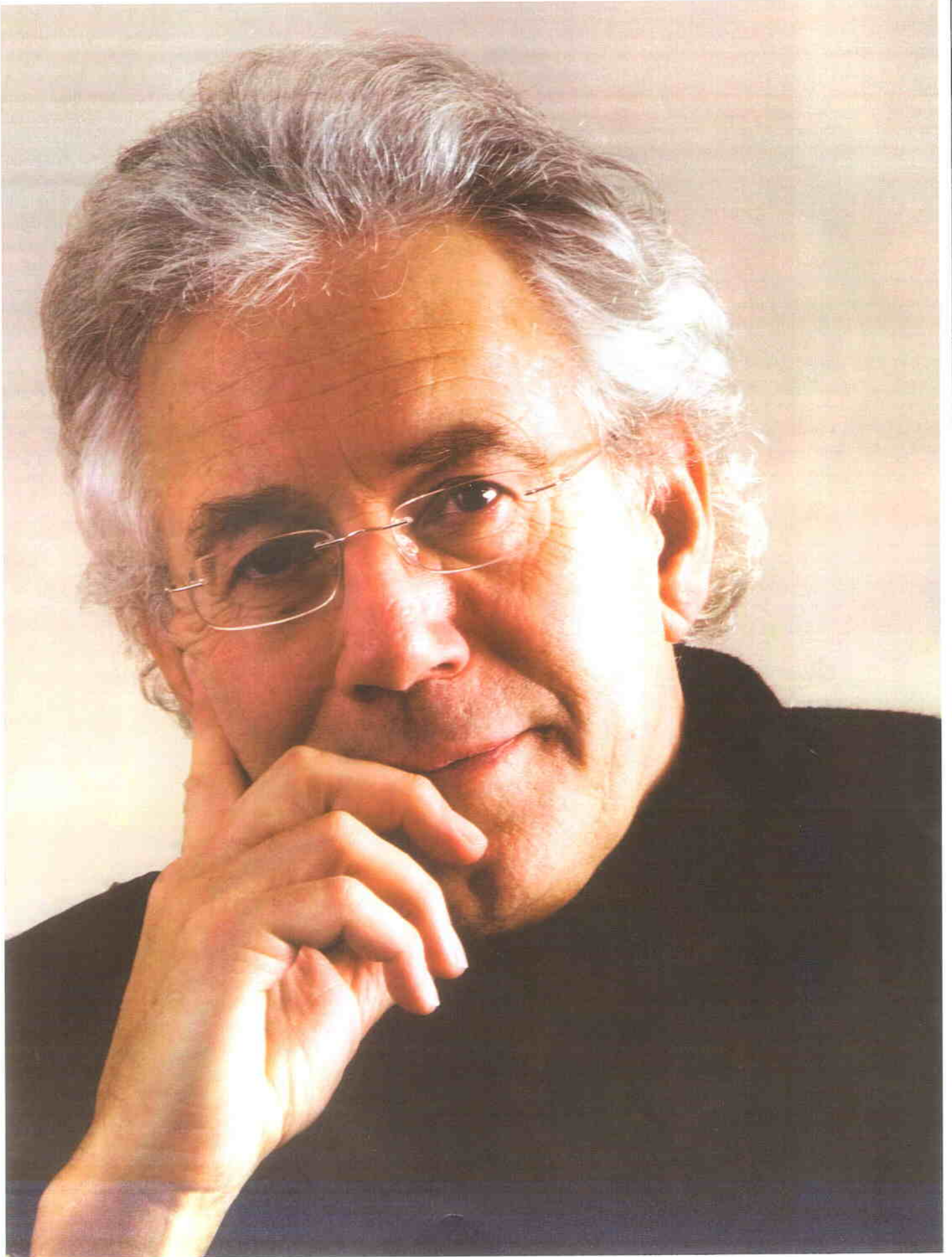
British artist and sculptor Lincoln Seligman is one of the latest additions to Swire Hotels' eclectic art collection. Paul Simon and Prince Michael of Kent are among the admirers of his Asian-inspired paintings, while his large-scale sculptures and murals already appear in a number of prominent locations in Hong Kong. The glass façade of EAST is the latest home to his lively work. |

**U**p to the age of 30 British artist Lincoln Seligman worked out of the City of London as a shipping lawyer, spending much of his time working in Hong Kong. "I never saw myself being an artist," explains the well-spoken Seligman. "It wasn't considered a proper job by middle-class parents and I was an obedient little boy, which is why I did law," he jokes.

Having graduated from Oxford University, Seligman spent seven years pursuing a professional career before his creative leanings finally got the better of him and he turned to art. With a folder full of sketches, drawings, and plans for his latest sculpture under his arm, it is in this guise that he seems completely at home when we meet at EAST, the destination of his latest piece of art. And it's clear that Seligman's years as a lawyer are far behind him, a fact which he confirms when he admits that his initial artistic commission was in fact 30 years ago, in 1980, in the very city to which he has returned and where a large proportion of his sculpture continues to reside today.

Just a stone's throw from the site of EAST, two large murals feature in the atria of Taikoo Place's Dorset House, created by Seligman, while his trademark hanging sculptures can be seen across Hong Kong, from Cathay Pacific's Headquarters to Festival Walk and Elements shopping malls. "The sort of things I do combine well with the new architecture," he explains, almost seemingly justifying his prominence within the modern buildings of Hong Kong. "There's a lot of glass and light, and structures are minimal, or rather minimalist, and usually quite rectilinear, so curving forms look quite lively and work rather well," says Seligman, pointing out one of the consistent characteristics of much of his work.

At the same time, it is size that is of particular note when considering Seligman's oeuvre, something that many of his sculptural pieces have in common. "Usually, by definition, my work is quite big. I've never been afraid of doing very large things and I'm happy with my own sense of scale and am not frightened by enormous spaces. In fact, I regard it as my obligation to fill them!" he laughs. Often his sculptures hang atmospherically and are made up of large, curvy and elegant forms, arranged into some kind of continuum. Abstract in composition, they tend to convey movement and their bright colours add to the liveliness and animated nature of his pieces, traits which he has sought to continue in his piece for EAST.



The façade of EAST is comprised mainly of glass and Seligman's sculpture features in an elongated window space, running horizontally along the length of the hotel. Made of twisted and curved pieces, he has created abstract structures which resemble a series of fish flying into a pool of water. On the left hand end of the sculpture, the fish-like pieces begin their flight across the window, from where they flit and float towards the blue pool that awaits their arrival at the other side of the space.

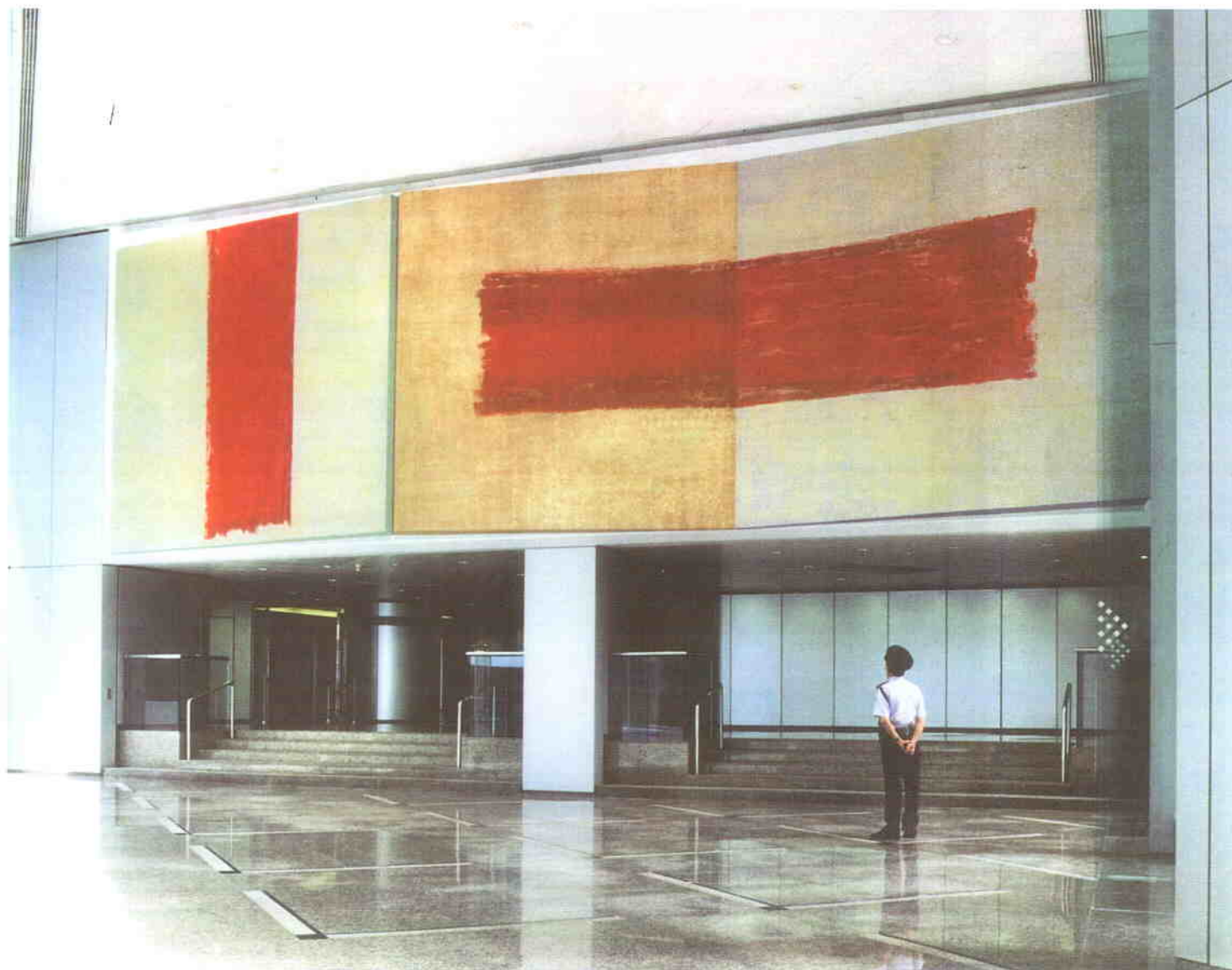
The sculpture is made up of eight pieces. Not straying far from Seligman's other sculptural works, each piece is large, measuring around two and a half metres long and, interestingly, is made like a surfboard with a fibreglass skin. Each component has then been suspended from the ceiling. And though each piece resembles a fragment of underwater life, Seligman is quick to point out that this was not entirely his intention. "They are abstractions of a fish idea, rather than actual fish," he explains. "Fish are alive and they move, but they are close to an abstract shape before you even start. Curving

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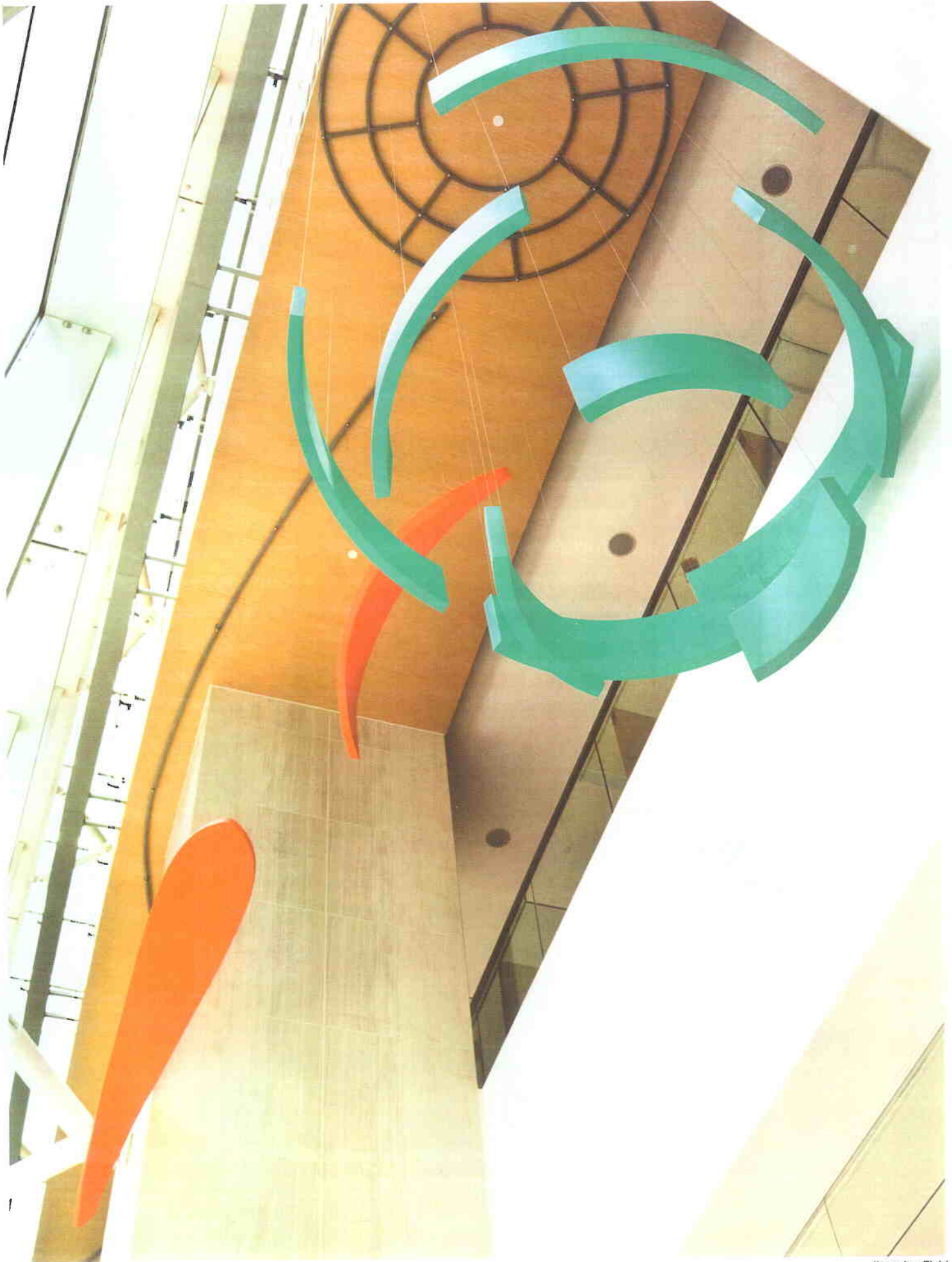
and moving, they have an in-built sense of momentum. We wanted something that would move across the glass façade of the building and would be lively."

The fish are reminiscent of Seligman's work in Festival Walk, his orange glass and steel shapes there alluding to fish swimming between thick strands of green seaweed, all of which hang, mobile-like, above the mall's atrium. In Kowloon Station as visitors ascend to the Elements shopping mall, it is under another sculpture by Seligman whose component pieces are again made up of abstract shapes which, similar to the curved shapes at EAST, easily convey movement to their viewer and, like all of his works, are eye-catching and light hearted in their aesthetic.

It's not all about large-scale sculptures and vast murals for Seligman though. There's also another side to his art. With most of his sculptural work commissioned by corporate clients with a particular site in mind when he is not creating such pieces, Seligman loves to paint, working



'Suspension & Subjectivity 2'



'Leaping Fish'

I'm lucky in that I can split my artistic personality to be able to do everything I want to do.



'Suspension & Subjectivity 1'

on smaller-scale pieces for his own exhibitions which he shows just once every two years. "My paintings are mainly connected with India and Asia. I love the colours and I love to travel to these places," explains Seligman, whose paintings often feature scenes from his travels, be it a Maharaja driving through the streets of India in an open-top car, turban billowing in the wind, or the architectural lines of an Indian palace or temple.

2007 saw the most recent installment of one of Seligman's popular solo exhibitions, held at the prestigious Royal Academy. The show was wildly successful and, sponsored by Standard Chartered, a large proportion of the proceeds from the paintings sold was given to the Standard Chartered eye charity, Seeing is Believing. In just one week the works raised US\$750,000 for the charity.

"I'm lucky in that I can split my artistic personality to be able to do everything I want to do," says the artist of his success in various artistic fields. "Usually artists are pressured by a dealer or gallery to concentrate on just one narrow facet. I'm lucky to keep doing my painting which is figurative and realistic, but also to keep my abstract sculpture going. It's a balance that works for me."

Yet even in his painting, Seligman at times leans towards the abstract, enjoying finding abstract shapes in the tangible as he has done for his

sculpture for EAST, creating a series of structures which evoke the form and movement of fish. One of his favourite images when it comes to painting is that of a man in a turban, captured from behind. "The turban is almost an abstract form," he says. "It's a portrait with no face, just shapes," he says, placing emphasis on the construction of the image, rather than the subject itself. Many of his paintings feature his recognisable turban motif, and it has become one that has proved popular amongst his many admirers.

Continuing to pursue both sides of his art, Seligman's next solo exhibition of his painting is planned for November, the infrequency of their occurrence making them highly anticipated, while there is no doubt that his large-scale sculptural commissions, so ideally suited to today's architecture, will continue. Seligman is a prime example of an artist expert in two differing fields of art, each vastly different in their execution, yet both expertly carried out and widely acclaimed.

*Lincoln Seligman shows at the Belgravia Gallery, 45 Albermarle Street, Mayfair, London W1 4JL from 23rd November to 2nd December.*  
[www.lincolnseligman.co.uk](http://www.lincolnseligman.co.uk)



'Fish and Reeds'