

**S.A. PANORAMA**  
**PRETORIA**

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*Prof. E.J. de Jager*

**ART SCENE: LUCAS SITHOLE**

**On first viewing Lucas Sithole's sculptures, particularly the figurative human pieces, one is impressed by the universal humanity the work expresses while at the same time capturing the pulse of Africa. Sithole succeeds in bringing together two worlds which reflect the general humanity characterizing all cultures.....**

His subjects are his fellow-man and wild creatures rendered in simplified semi-abstract and extraordinary shapes from which emanates a striking vitality. Yet his work is extremely sensitive and the human figures in particular, are markedly warm and sympathetic. His sculptures are strongly indigenous in form and concept and there is little evidence of Western European influence. His art is in total harmony with a traditional Africa as well as a cultural Africa.

Although this is an important source of analytical topics, Sithole does not confine himself to traditional Africa. His work also symbolizes contemporary Africa.

**His art is based on strong social realism and understanding of the dilemma of modern man which the artist depicts with tenderness and fellow-feeling. It is this contemporary dimension which makes his art indigenous as well as relevant to our times.**

There is no doubt that Sithole primarily draws on mysticism for the creation of his human figures. These sculptures contain penetrating significance of the meaning of ritual in Africa and are in fact ritualistic expressions and images drawn from the sacred aura which surrounds African ritual.

The viewer is constantly aware that it is the visual that counts and that Sithole actually wants us to see more than just the external

form. This requires an introspective search to observe that expression is given to qualities and feelings which are more than a mere total of the sum of constituent parts. In his sculpture Sithole achieves a configuration, an integration, which results in spiritual "sensualism" and satisfaction. Another quality of African ritual which Sithole portrays successfully is its sacral aspect. His sculptures are of a religious nature, with man as the centrifugal force strongly in the foreground.

When seen collectively these figurative sculptures become a visual account of qualities and moods inherent in African ritual. Physical attitude used as a symbolic expression of emotion and feeling, characteristic of African ritual, forms the basis of Sithole's sculpture.

**Those values of Sithole's art which are not obvious are thus visually revealed, namely that the essence and true being of man is disclosed through his emotions - love, sorrow, hate, fear, joy, wonder - all inherent ingredients and qualities of African ritual which ultimately assume universally human connotations.**

**These sculptures are not isolated; they are not spectres from the past, but are pulsating realities of to-day. By means of his sculptures Sithole achieves an integration and synthesis of the new, past and present, at the base of which lies the similarity of human existence at all times and at all places.**

Sithole's human figures have the simplicity and strength of early Gothic art. In fact he creates a type of African Gothic. The vertical is strongly emphasized and is executed sympathetically. It evinces a noble serenity and transcendent quality and contains a rhythm of

simple outlines and shapes with a slim and strongly elongated upward spiral.

Although Sithole's favourite materials for sculpture include hard woods, stone and liquid steel, his human figures are mostly carved from wood. Thus medium and technique lend themselves ideally to the personal and intimate manner in which he executes his art, revealing his concern with the creative process. His polishing of the surface is ample evidence of this.

**Seen in the correct light the sculptures reflect a subtle and highly effective play of light and shadow, greatly contributing to the mood of the piece. The use of light and shadow defines and strengthens the sacral and mystic aura which surrounds the sculpture giving it strong iconographic connotations.**

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*His publications include:  
"Contemporary African Art in South Africa" (Struik), 1973;  
"Images of Man" (Contemporary S.A. Black Art and Artists) (Fort Hare University Press), 1992*