

THE ARGUS
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AFRICAN myth and legend is drawn upon by Lucas Sithole for his sculptures. But in his interpretation they capture a sense of the eternal and fundamentally unchanging nature of mankind.

His present exhibition is dominated by gracefully elongated female studies. This pose appeals to Sithole, partly because it is based on an African myth and partly because he feels that the supplication inherent in these heavenward-reaching figures expresses a longing for peace.

“As a child I remember my grandmother telling me of she-snakes who lived in a deep lake. But the he-snakes lived in heaven. And from time to time, the she-snakes would rise from the waters and ascend to be with their male partners.”

Though Sithole is a Zulu, much of the legend and myth which influences his work comes from his Swazi grandmother with whom he spent much of his childhood. Many of his elongated women - and his other sculptures - illustrate a specific emotional concept or a story.

One of these, “Sacrifice for Peace”, depicts a young and beautiful girl who, to save her family from persecution and threatened ruination, agrees to marry the village bully and tyrant. It is profoundly moving.

Then there is the resigned sadness of a childless woman, the protective love shown in the work entitled “Don’t come too near, my child is afraid of strangers”, and the exuberance of a figure simply named “Ngijabulile”.

Another fine work which Sithole regards one of his best

pieces is entitled “I wish I was a Queen”. He says:

“She suffers because of all the wrongs of the world, and she knows she could end all the troubles - if only she was a Queen”.

Here Lucas Sithole portrays strength of character and intellect in almost super-human form.

A particularly interesting piece is called “Two Faces”. This was sculptured from a dead section of a tree which he found in Zululand and which was described by the local chief as the witchdoctor’s tree. The witchdoctor had to be asked if the dead section could be cut, and he had to be present. When the job was completed the witchdoctor strode forward and to Sithole’s astonishment, he removed several eggs from the hollow inside. They were the eggs of a snake which the local people believed only the witchdoctor could placate.

The sculpture made from this wood was nearly stillborn. For when Sithole started working on it, he found a rotten section in the wood and abandoned work. But one day he had a dream, in which he saw a finished piece portraying female contrary-ness. On the one side the face is happy, and the face carved on the other side is discontented. But the problem was that in the dream, the

wood had a strange texture, almost that of stone.

To achieve this, Sithole designed special tools which a blacksmith friend then made for him. As was the case with this piece, most of his other sculptures are also fashioned from dead trees and branches which he seeks in remote parts of the country.

Now recognized as the country’s foremost African sculptor, Sithole is steadily enhancing his international reputation.

He wants to be known as an African sculptor rather than an African sculptor whose ancestry happens to be African. He says: “My art is African. I am an African whose imagination is definitely influenced by the beliefs of my people which I absorbed as a child. But when it comes to the emotions experienced by all humanity, then we are not at all different from each other”.

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