

## Bonanza, Johannesburg (Mashadi Mashabela) - February, 1979

### The work of Lucas Sithole

LUCAS SITHOLE, 47, is a creative artist whose sculptural work reflects his sensitivity. He lives in Kwa-Thema, Springs, where he was born. He has seven children and supports a household of 12.

From his early youth, Lucas had an urge for creative expression and used to spend time with his grandmother decorating her farm house with clay. At a young age, he had an interest in drawing and making clay animals and pots.

A very sensitive child, he remembers being greatly moved during a particular visit to his grandmother's farm when he saw a dying warthog. Many years later, in 1964, he portrayed the animal, calling it the "dying warthog".

After leaving school, Lucas had a two-year bursary to study at the Occupational Training Centre in Middelburg. He had already decided that there was nothing else he would like to do except art.

But the artist who was supposed to come and teach that year did not come, so he worked for cabinet makers at the centre. He found that sculpturing was more meaningful to him than painting which is what he had come to learn since it was the best subject at school.

The following year he studied at Polly Street under the artist Cecil Skotnes. And his work was shown for the first time at Queens Gallery in Johannesburg. He has exhibited with artists like Louis Maqhubela and the late Ephraim Ngatane.

He also held a joint exhibition with the late Andrew Motjuoadi in London. Although his works have been exhibited in London, New York and Venice, Lucas has not been overseas himself.

In 1962, he was chosen with three other sculptors who were selected for the same exhibition. In 1964, his work was included in the national exhibition of "South African Painters, Past and Present".

Lucas was now getting recognised and collectors sought his work. And for the first time in 1966 he held a one-man show at the

Adler Fielding Galleries. Since then he has had several others in the years 1967, 1970 and 1972, all of them at Gallery 101.

In 1973 and 1974 he held shows at Gallery International in Cape Town and in 1974 in Durban. He received world-wide recognition in 1968 when his works were featured *in the South African entry* at the Venice Biennale.

Nevertheless Lucas remained unaffected by his fame. His wife and family play an important part in his life.

In the last few years, he has turned to sculpturing people instead of animals. Among these is the famous "Mother and child" sculpture. Another one which is called the "Praying woman" represents a woman praying for rain. This one like many of his human forms has a long body and is carved with protruding eyes and bulging eyeballs.

Although he says that in a lot of ways the form of the sculpture is dictated by the shape of the wood used, the long and exaggerated bodies project a lot of movement and feeling.

He has also based some of the work on his wife's friend who is tall and thin. He found the shape of the figure satisfying, so he developed it. Whatever Lucas created, whether in stone, picture or wood, a lot of inborn craftsmanship, pure African originality and sensitivity went into his work.

In "Dancing the worries away" he shows a female dancer carved in ebony, also long and thin in posture. The "Old man" which is carved in tamboti wood and the dancer are a thorough example of the African quality in his work.

So it is not surprising that today Lucas Sithole is considered one of the best artists of our time.

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