

'Reward is art itself'



A head by Sithole.

LUCAS Sithole's advice to budding artists is to forget about the money they might earn.

"If you are going to create something, you must not think of what you are going to earn," he says.

"I never think of that when I am working. I think of the figure and how I am going to fashion it.

"A person must put all his love, concentration and effort into what he is doing - he must persevere.

"And, of course, study and training is important."

Sithole has never been overseas although his work has.

"I would love to go to America and France and see historic places and art galleries," he says.

The road to fame started with his grandmother's nose

WHEN sculptor Lucas Sithole first began making objects in clay, he infuriated his first subject.

It was his grandmother, Tsayi Numvumi, with whom he lived from the age of six months in Swaziland.

She thought he had made her nose too big.

She made clay pots for the Swazi king and his chiefs and her deft work inspired him. When she wasn't looking he would quietly take some of her clay and fashion likenesses of people, animals and birds.

That started an artistic career

which was to result in his work being shown at exhibitions throughout SA and in many famous galleries overseas.

Today his work - now on show at Gallery 21, Victory House, Harrison Street, Johannesburg - is highly sought after.

Sithole was born in Springs 54 years ago. His dad was a Zion Church lay priest and his mum a washerwoman.

After he completed Std 6, he received a Springs Rotary Club bursary for occupational training at Vlaktefontein Technical College. He wanted to study art but there

wasn't an art instructor, so for three years he learnt the trades of carpentry and building.

He loved working with wood - so he began carving. He even made his own tools from nails and scrap iron.

He explored painting too. He beat the shortage of paint brushes during World War II - by fashioning his own, carving wooden handles and using dog's hair.

But he couldn't make a living. So he went to work at a soap factory, cooking soap for just over R5 a week - and he hated it.

His love was art. He spent his spare time carving fig-

ures from wood or stone.

One day he decided to learn more - and spent a year at Cecil Skotnes' Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg.

Skotnes, then already a leading artist, liked Sithole.

"He often invited me to his home," says Sithole. "He taught me a lot about woodcuts, drawing, painting - and modelling in clay."

Sithole exhibited his first sculptures at the Queens Gallery in 1960 and sold a head in indigenous wood for 40 guineas (about R84). In 1980 the work was valued at 30 times that amount.

Since then he has held many one-man exhibitions in Johannesburg and his work has been shown in England, Switzerland and Italy.

He has moved to Kwa-Zulu near Pongola, where his studio is the open bush. "I like to work away from people but close to the animals and the birds," he says.

He chose Pongola because of the indigenous woods there. His figures are sinuous, almost snake-like, in a style particularly his own.

Sithole is satisfied with his life. "I'm far from rich - but I've made a steady living and enjoy what I do."