

**He considers his artistic talent to be God-given and believes that people should be able to see his soul reflected in his sculptures. This is Lucas Sithole, one of South Africa's foremost Black sculptors.**

**During October some of his most recent works were exhibited in Gallery 21 in Johannesburg. INFORMA took advantage of this occasion to share a few thoughts with this outstanding artist.**

His artistic talent revealed itself at a very early age. While in his grand-mother's care in Swaziland he used to fashion models and statues from clay she used for clay pots for kings and tribal chiefs.

Lucas received no formal artistic training. After completing his school career at the St Louis Catholic School, he enrolled for a course in sculpture at a vocational training college. On his arrival it was established that there was no art lecturer and he was compelled to enrol for a course in construction and carpentry. It was in the carpenters' workshop that he first became aware of the artistic possibilities concealed in wood.

He was, however, still required to overcome one additional obstacle before he could dedicate himself to sculpture. He could find no employment as a carpenter and was obliged to go and work in a soap factory. The money earned here was utilised to build up his sculpture equipment piece by piece.

Sculpture is not his first love. His mother's white tablecloths served as canvases for his first watercolour and oil paintings. Later on he concentrated on watercolour as a medium and sold a few of his watercolour paintings.

He made paint brushes he used from his dog's hair because he could not afford those sold in shops.

In his search for a piece of wood or stone for a new creation, Lucas has unexpectedly stumbled on a source of inspiration. A witchdoctor, now his friend, taught him more about snakes.



Dreams and stories told in his childhood often serve as a source of inspiration for this talented artist.

His studio at home is the place where he creates. All his completed or half completed works are stored and worked on here to ensure that his wife does not mistake them for firewood.

A remarkable characteristic of particularly Lucas' early work is the repeated theme of long, slim, almost snake-like shapes. His more recent works reflect his love for animals compassionately immortalised in stone and wood.

It is difficult to choose a favourite. Lucas says, "... they are like your children – each one has a special place in your heart".

Undoubtedly the most striking work on the exhibition was "When you'll be crowned king", an eagle and small buck chiselled out of wood.

Lucas' fame cannot be attributed merely to the sculptures standing in the Art Museum and UNISA in Pretoria. Although he has never been overseas himself, Fernand Haenggi has by means of Gallery 21 and its Foundation exhibited Lucas' work at a variety of overseas art galleries.

One of his sons is determined to follow in his father's artistic footsteps by applying himself to graphic art. Lucas Sithole has a special message for young artists: "Forget about money and convince yourself that what you do, you do solely for your own gratification".

Each of his sculptures has that unique quality which is the Sithole "trade mark".

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