

M A FARQUHARSON

**SOFTLY-SPOKEN** South African sculptor Lucas Sithole often creates or recreates his works after dreaming about them.

He usually starts work by making a sketch of his idea, and he then begins looking for the material in which to carve them: either stone or wood.

At this stage of the process, he is usually inspired by people or animals, although "sometimes I do find a piece [of wood] tells me what to do".

However, once he has decided on his sculpture, "I always try to fight against what the wood tells me to do".

This doesn't prevent him from occasionally following the grain of the wood, although the discovery of a flaw — such as a cavity gnawed out by ants, can often mean an alteration.

Sometimes, after completing a work, Sithole puts the sculpture in his bedroom at night, and then dreams about his creation.

As a result, the sculptor often alters the piece completely.

He gives an example of starting a sculpture with the intention of making a head. Thanks to a dream of a person fighting with an animal, the sculptor feels obliged to alter his concept completely, "and I change it into a bird".

Sithole admits however, to burning his works when he is dissatisfied with them.

The sculptor never gets his wood from dealers: he travels a lot, searching mainly in dry river beds for seasoned pieces out of which to create his works.

"It used to be easy," but with the demand

for firewood rocketing in rural areas, and with permits required for the possession of several types of wood, things have changed.

He points to a large piece entitled "Not Running For Nothing" and says it would have kept a fire going for a whole night.

Although Sithole is a well-known local artist, he still produces work for exhibitions at the request of art galleries.

He says he often spends sleepless nights producing items for exhibitions, and as his works are like his children, he is sometimes loath to give them up.

He compares his feelings with that of a father who is prepared to return his daughter's lobola to her prospective in-laws because he cannot bear having his child leave him.

One of Sithole's sculptures in the present exhibition is called "U Balekelani?" (What are you running away for?), and shows a baboon wearing a traditional Zulu kilt or iBeshu. The work tells the story of the baboon whose wife and children were killed by a leopard.

The baboon, learning a Zulu warrior had managed to kill one of these creatures, borrowed the iBeshu from the man and put it on.

On finding the leopard, he stood on his back legs and stamped his feet, daring the carnivore to a duel.

The leopard was so shocked by the sight, he turned tail and fled.

Sithole depicts the baboon at this moment of triumph, shouting after the fleeing carnivore: "What are you running away for?!"

Another pair of sculptures shows a pair of tall, thin egret-like creatures discussing the whereabouts of their children and whether or not it is time to go home.

One piece is entitled: "I'll find them", and the other: "It's about time we go home".

The sculptor tries his best not to involve money in his work, and leaves all of that to the art galleries to arrange.

"If you are doing anything you have to put your love into it." Once compensation starts to be discussed, "money is going to outweigh that love".

On being asked whether he felt he had a duty towards putting something back into the South African art scene, Sithole said "I like to, but it's only the time."

However, he says, he is South African and it is only thanks to the contribution of local art-lovers that he has been able to follow his chosen career.

● An exhibition of Sithole's works will be on at the South African Association of Arts (Northern Transvaal) until November 9

*'If you are doing anything you have to put your love into it'*



Picture: RICHARD NEZAR

Face to face: Lucas Sithole with a work he has entitled "O Lord, give me the power and grace to bring up our children"

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