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“Sculptor of the Spirits”



When you think of the different culture levels that have been at work in Lucas Sithole's life, you marvel that in his 45 years he has attained such international and local attention for his sculpture.

Born in Springs, he was about six when he went to live with his grandmother – one of the traditional habits that played such a part in his early life. His mother was Swazi, his father (now in his nineties) was Zulu. His grandmother, who hardly ever had left her native Swaziland, literally “chose” the grandchild she wanted to live with her.

Lucas makes big eyes when he tells how strict his grandmother was: yet, in her way, she had much to do with the artist he became. There were stories about river spirits and creatures of the night.

“I could see them!” Lucas said. “Many of her stories were told to frighten us children, to teach us, to prevent us from doing stupid things. But they fired my imagination almost unbearably.”

To this day, those myths and fables play a part in his immensely original sculpture. As important as the stories was the fact that his grandmother was famous in Swaziland for the clay utensils she made. The little boy was fascinated by her work.

Sometimes he was allowed to help the old lady decorate her pots. And once (he was 12), she found him decorating a hut. He expected her to be furious but, after quietly looking at his effort, she firmly said it was lovely and no-one must tamper with it ...

Time passed: the years tending cattle and sheep were over and, in his ‘teens, he went to school. A pocket knife someone gave him set him off carving wood. “Clay broke too easily,” he said.

The traditional ways became crossed with the rather superior atmosphere of the highbrow art world, about to “enjoy” its most snootily intellectual phase, when Lucas apprehensively took some of his carvings to the Adler Fielding Gallery.

“I wouldn't have ventured there, except for the nagging of one of my friends”, Lucas admitted. But Lawrence Adler was so delighted with the pieces that he bought two. He suggested Lucas hold a small show of his work, and from then on, Sithole has climbed higher and higher up the art ladder.

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