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Gallery

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June 1995

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Cover: Helen Lieros, *Cataclysm*, 1994, 112 x 86cm, mixed media.
Photo by Dani Deudney

Left: Zephania Tshuma, *No Way To Go*, 1986, 75 x 10 x 10cm,
painted wood

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Artnotes

In his last interview, Job Kekana said, "When you travel between people it makes your knowledge stronger," and, despite all the criticism levelled at the Johannesburg Biennale, it did offer opportunities to 'travel between people'. Problems occurred in the gaps in communication — the viewer's inability to understand the message or the artist's inability to convey it successfully? Much of the work on show was installation with explanatory text accompanying it to help the viewer cross those gaps, which in some cases were more like chasms. For example, the exhibition *Volatile Colonies* included, amongst others, a corner of a room filled with cardboard boxes, planks, a painting obscured by plastic wrapping propped against a wall, paint brushes, glue, nails, tins (this a work by the renowned Karakov). Other pieces on this show were a blank video machine in a room of its own with wires on the floor, and, a glob of melted plastic on a marble table.

Capelan's *Stepping Out of the White Cube* (*A Little Song for Johannesburg*) consisted of two rooms, walls hung with seemingly random clocks, cotton scarves, scribbled messages; on the floor, blocks of wood, builders' rubble, brooms, buckets, cement bags. While I was looking, a workman came in and propped up a step-ladder. When I asked, Is it part of the installation? he replied, I don't know I just borrowed it. So what about the buckets and brooms? According to Capelan's writing on the wall, content in art can arise from: representation, verbal statement, medium, material, scale, duration, context, art historical reference, iconography, formal properties, attitudinal gestures and biological response. That about covers anything. I left feeling that a long esoteric explanation would be needed and might still fail to arouse a response, intellectual or otherwise.

The French exhibited 'sculptures' by Bertrand Lavier: a dirty fridge door; an orange plastic traffic cone; a wire magazine holder and an aluminium milkcan, each one a separate work. When Duchamp exhibited his urinal it was a challenge, but that was 50 years ago! If Lavier had a new message I certainly missed it.

Untitled by Marcos Benjamin from Brazil consisted of a wheel of wood, curved and stuck together leaning against a wall, and three riveted metal double cones, one covered in old canvas, one of rusted iron, one of aluminium. It was simple, quiet, with pleasing shapes, textures and colours, but its content, out of context, was unfathomable.



Barbara Murray



One work that appealed to me was a sculpture from Cuba made out of open books tied together with sisal to form a simple, eloquent boat. The books' open pages revealed Cuban literature, science, geography, poetry, painting, politics, history. Here the metaphor worked subtly and evocatively to convey the cultural journey towards identity.

Much of the work from Africa was conventional by comparison and the Zimbabwean curator's choice was sadly static and low key. However amongst the best was one wonderful surprise from Africa, a work by Angolan Antonio Olé entitled *Margem de Zona Limité*: the sound of lapping water and rough men's voices talking quietly in Portuguese; a space constructed of rusted and patinated corrugated iron, wooden doors, metal gates; in the centre, a metal boat



Barbara Murray

Andries Botha, *Dromedaris Donder!* ... *En Ander Dom Ding*, 1994, approx. 4 x 4 x 2m, rubber, wattle and metals

broken in two; one half filled with bricks and a TV set showing a video of water flowing beneath a prow; the other half filled with official papers; a crow perched on each end; a fishing net. The atmosphere was extraordinary, invoking a multitude of impressions and thoughts.

One of the few 'beautiful' experiences was *Broom Dream* from Réunion: a dark room, floor covered with thick sand, a broom leaning against the wall just visible in the shaft of light from the doorway; enter into black; at the far end, in the sand, a pink sandstone; a small circle of light from above revealing indentations, skull-like, soft edges, shadows. It was lovely, evocative, resonant.

The South African work exposed a preoccupation with violence: cut-off body parts, knives, human hair, menacing kitchen implements, blood, thorns and accompanying titles such as *It Won't Hurt*. For me, one of the most successful works was *Dromedaris Donder! ... En Ander Dom Ding* by Andries Botha; a huge sculpture, approximately 12ft high and as long, encompassing superb craftsmanship and cohesive conception; a powerful mixture of strength, foolishness and aggression.

Art is an entrance into a world of sensation and experience; an opportunity to explore and question new possibilities. The conceptual First World art made the expressive Third World art look naive and simplistic, while the Third World art made First World art look arid and intellectualised. Critics said the Biennale did not analyse and redefine South African identity, but each individual needs to make this attempt, and the Biennale certainly provided a plethora of visually astonishing material around which such redefinition develops.

The Editor

Marcos Benjamin, *Untitled*, 1995, approx. 3 x 3 x 3m, wood, metal and cloth

Enezia Nyazorwe,
A Story About Termites,
1991, 60 x 90cm,
PVA on board



Dani Deudney

Refusing to succumb to trends in hegemonic Western art, Pip Curling introduces her selection of work that will represent Zimbabwe in Grahamstown this year

Art about Zimbabwe

One often hears, from the proponents of avant-gardism, a wail that Zimbabwean art is 'safe' and that Zimbabwean artists should strive to be 'more experimental'. What is this lemming-like instinct for self-destruction? A quick flip through some art magazines, accompanied by a sequence of desperate intellectual gymnastics to come to terms with the surfeit of blood and snot, can leave all but the most committed post-modernist sickened, fatigued and bewildered.

The exhibition, entitled 'Art About Zimbabwe', which will represent this country at the Standard Bank Festival in Grahamstown from 6 - 16 July 1995, might be perceived by some as 'safe' and 'nice'. It is an exhibition with a clear narrative content, intentionally unfettered by contemporary Western aesthetic precepts. It aims to be entertaining as well as informative. As a whole it speaks about a place, its people and its history. Accordingly works have been selected for their accessibility to a wider cross-section of the viewing public. The exhibition is a celebration of the vision and aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe. Images include those of the banal events of everyday life as well as humour, tragedy and violence.

There are forty works on the exhibition, each by a different artist. Diversity of subject matter is reflected as is a variety of media. The title has a double meaning in that the art tells about the country and it comes from different geographical areas. A thread is drawn from the representational paintings of the schoolboys under the tutelage of Canon Ned Paterson at Cyrene Mission in the 1950s to the continuing prevalence of figurative watercolour painting in Matabeleland.

Tapfuma Gutsa, *Nehanda's Defiance*,
1981, 84 x 25cm, ebony



Dani Deudney



**Marvellous Mangena,
Mtshongoyo Dancers,**
1991, 43 x 79cm,
oil on board



**Givas Mashiri, Mufakose
Shopping Centre,** 1995,
60 x 77cm, oil on canvas
on board



**Phillimon Chipiro,
African Home,** 1986,
82 x 88cm, oil on canvas

Early examples of work by the artists of the National Gallery Workshop School demonstrate the vigour of that genre which is particular to the northern half of the country. Women's art-making is represented by their traditional materials of clay and textiles; their subjects are those particular to themselves. Innovative use of found materials abounds in sculpture made from wire, tins and rags. Works such as Zephania Tshuma's *No Way To Go*, Morris Tendai's *The Trouble With Money* and the Tashinga Group's *Violence Against Women* testify to pertinent social issues.

Zimbabwe stone sculptors' work is acknowledged but is situated within the broader framework. Artists such as Thomas Mukarombwa and Nicholas Mukomberanwa, who have achieved international recognition share the stage with unknown urban painters and anonymous rural sculptors.

Marvellous Mangena has achieved notable success with his heightened naturalism. *Mtshongoyo Dancers* marries the past with the present as the traditional ceremonial dance is performed in a modern football stadium.

Givas Mashiri is a self-taught painter and sculptor who lives in Mufakose, a high density suburb of Harare. He owns and runs a tuck-shop which is also his studio. His painting *Mufakose Shopping Centre* is a romanticised view of a place familiar to him. The details of the shops, the people, the dustbins and the bushes are all given the same uncompromising attention.

Atalia Nyoni was one of the first tapestry weavers to be trained at Cold Comfort Farm outside Harare. This tapestry *Beer To Fetch Rain At The Matopos* tells of the events she remembers as a child when beer was brewed and the people danced to call the rain. There is a large cave in the Matopos Hills near Bulawayo that is a sacred place and home of the Great Spirit.

Enezia Nyazorwe was a member of the Weya Training Centre art project near Macheke. Her painting *A Story About Termites* is in the decorative colourful Weya style of flat images in a crowded shallow space. It tells a fantasy story of villagers who try to gather termites to eat but are fooled by clever dancing dogs.

Joram Mariga was one of the earliest stone sculptors to be encouraged by Frank McEwen, the first director of the National Gallery in Harare. His small sculpture *Uncle Holding Baby* shows the uncle holding the baby awkwardly upside-down behind his back. It is said to be the way to drive out the nightmares of a small child.

Nehanda's Defiance, an early work by Tapfuma Gutsa, concerns Mbuya Nehanda who is revered in Zimbabwe as being the leader of the first war of liberation. She defied the settler authorities, calling on the people to rebel.

No Way To Go (see illustration on Contents page) is by Zephania Tshuma who lives in Matabeleland. His work is well known for its pithy social comment.

This exhibition is a challenge to Africa to assert its own values. As the Dadaists and their followers challenged the nature of 'art', so too can their concept of art be challenged by a return to figuration, narrative and the traditional ways and means of painting and sculpture. There is something infinitely precious to be lost by genuflecting to the worst gods of contemporary art. We could lose our sense of identity and our willingness to communicate with each other in terms we can all understand.



Dani Deudney

Joram Mariga,
Uncle Holding Baby, 1957,
29 x 20cm, green serpentine



Dani Deudney

Atalia Nyoni, *Beer to Fetch Rain at the Matopos*, 1995,
90 x 80cm, tapestry

I have **a Gallery in Africa**

By special request of the editor,
and dedicated to Helen Lieros,
Derek Huggins, founder, creator
and director of Gallery Delta,
writes about the origins of one
of the dynamic art centres
on this continent

Recently, on the 17th April 1995, we celebrated 20 years of Gallery Delta. We marked the event with an exhibition of paintings, graphics, sculpture, textiles and ceramics, with one work each by about 35 artists, all of whom we have shown and promoted during the two decades, many of whom are today's most prominent contemporary artists in Zimbabwe, and who collectively represent a much larger body of artists who have come and shown and gone over the years. It was seen to be, piece by piece, work by work, a fine exhibition and I remarked on the opening night that while in every decade there emerge outstanding artists and works of art, we would have been hard-pressed to have mounted such a broad, diverse and quality show 20 years ago; and the reason we are able to do so now is because the creative and artistic pool into which we can cast our hook has greater depth, more professionals and professionalism than ever before. This exhibition was, so far as we have been

able to ascertain from our records, *about the three hundredth exhibition we have mounted and promoted.* I am often

asked, by the experts and the curious alike who visit and admire the gallery and the art it contains: How did this happen? How did you begin? Where do you come from? Who are you? Most often surprise is expressed at my explanations... if they are able to elicit them...

The short reply is to simply say that I married an artist. But really, if I am to be honest, there is no simple answer because there is history in all men's lives and in this game of chance we play in life there are the circumstances in which we find ourselves at a given time; there are opportunities or lack of them; there are the politics and the personalities; there is history unravelling; there is the art, the artists and the work they produce; there is the personal involvement and commitment; I can only tell it as a story in my own way: the way I have known it to be; and the truth of a long and patient struggle that has become the way and the purpose of my life.

Salisbury, Rhodesia, in 1967, when Helen Lieros and I came here from Gwelo, was a different place in a different time, and that applies as much to its artistic and cultural state as to everything else. It was to us, however, 'the big city'. First Street was still open to two-way traffic. There still stood the old Palace Theatre with its

strategic corner split and sawdust long bar frequented by extraordinary characters. On Second Street, Old Meikles was fronted by twin lions, then through the door to the Causerie bar. And despite its slow pace, there were the political tensions which we had to suffer daily: UDI, the split from Britain and economic sanctions were in their second year; the African nationalist movements were gaining strength; incidents of sabotage were becoming more frequent and the coming of an armed conflict began to appear inevitable. Against this backdrop, however, we were young and anonymous, and in that, still hopeful of making our lives in the city and making a contribution: Helen Lieros was an artist and teacher, and I, a detective in the CID. Helen had been commissioned to paint four large murals in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral and my fate was to walk the gloomy corridors of Police Central.

Despite the uncertain security situation and our unknown fates that politicians at home and around the world were deciding, the sun still shone and the flamboyants still bloomed magnificently. Soon we were to become familiar with the art happenings, such as they were then, and to get to know the artists and personalities of the time. There was the Rhodes (now the National) Gallery, that fine modern building which graced old King's Crescent with the palms outside and the wonderful gardens behind, and which was the realisation of the plans and dreams of a few wise men who included Brian O'Connell, Pat Lewis and Athol Evans amongst others, who had encouraged Sir Stephen and Lady Courtauld to help create it in the late 50s. The first director of the Rhodes Gallery was Frank McEwen who had come out of the British Council fold and from Paris where he had been acquainted with the greats such as Picasso and Matisse. He had founded, in a very short time, the Central African Workshop School and 'Shona' sculpture, and championed both from under the Rhodes Gallery roof. Henry Thompson, the painter, had talked enthusiastically and with nostalgia, over coffee, about McEwen and his feats in those early years. But to us, in the late 60s, and new to town, the Rhodes Gallery seemed to present an impenetrable ivory tower of which the black-bearded, black-attired Frank McEwen was king; and the threshold of which one crossed only with trepidation. Most often the Courtauld Collection of British and European paintings would be found displayed, and the Permanent Collection or the National Annual Exhibition... the one chance in the year for local artists to have work hung on those walls. Most of the 'Shona' sculpture was exported as exhibitions to Europe and America.

McEwen, out of a Western art background, was an authority in a cultural backwater; he was an expert among non-experts and he set high standards. The Annual Exhibition, during his tenure, was a prestigious event; it was then an honour to have work accepted, much more so than with the successor Heritage Exhibition of the present day. In addition to his promotion of 'Shona' sculpture, McEwen encouraged and collected a number of painters for the Permanent Collection — offhand they were Robert Paul, Thomas Mukarobgwa, Trevor Wood, Kingsley Sambo, Tom Maybank, Charles Fernandes, Robert Hunter-Craig, Tony Wales-Smith, Peter Birch, Marshall Baron (notably all males) and perhaps included Josephine O'Farrell and Anne Lowenstein, who were all older generation and painters of merit. McEwen showed work by some of these painters at the ICA Gallery in London early in the 60s, but by the end of the decade there seemed no way through for them... the West was clearly only interested in the 'Shona' sculpture. Who could be expected to support paintings either by colonial settler whites from a sanctioned country in Africa or by blacks who were painting in a contemporary rather than an ethnic manner, no matter how good they might be? (This attitude still persists today.) And so by the end of the 60s, many painters were disillusioned and discouraged. Peter Birch opened an art school. Maybank drifted to Johannesburg and took up brick-laying. Tony Wales-Smith concentrated on his architecture. Hunter-Craig emigrated to Majorca and, later, Trevor Wood to England. Charles Fernandes dropped out of the scene. Thomas Mukarobgwa abandoned his painting for the more popular stone sculpture. The only 60s painters of merit to gamely persist in their artistic quests were Marshall Baron until his untimely demise in 1974, Kingsley Sambo always struggling financially and getting drunk in desperation until his sudden death in the late 70s — shot, I heard, by guerrillas — and Robert Paul until his death in 1980. Perhaps not so strangely, these are the three painters of the 60s whose work is today most cherished and stands the test of time.

But I have digressed, and to return to the state of the art: there was the Rhodes Gallery, the apex, but there was little art organisational structure beneath the top of this pyramid. There were small voluntary art organisations and societies but there were no art schools or other exhibition galleries to talk about. McEwen had power and he exercised his power — his love and joy was the 'Shona' sculpture and he seemed to delight in chastising amateur white painters, justifiably sometimes, deriding them for their jacaranda and msasa landscapes. There was the odd cause for glee amongst this amateur element when, for example, McEwen raved about an abstract painting and then the artist (I think it was Neil Park), disclosed to the press that he had turned the canvas on a potter's wheel and poured the paint on — then McEwen and modern art were derided by the conservative whites.

In the early 70s, the country headed into the guerrilla war, known either as an anti-terrorist campaign or the War of Liberation, depending what colour or what side one was on or forced to be on... But of course, life went on and so did art. The black sculptors under the watchful eye of Frank McEwen at Vukutu and the Rhodes Gallery were still busy; so too were those at Tengenenge where the erst-while tobacco farmer, Tom Blomefield, had established a sculpture community in 1965, which McEwen, probably much to his chagrin, could not control absolutely. But for the painters, black and white, there was no protective umbrella. McEwen offered only the Annual. The city was without alternative exhibition spaces. Oh, there was in existence then the Cape Galleries selling jacaranda and msasa landscapes. Richard Rennie opened a framing concern and displayed popular paintings too. Roy Guthrie opened a small gallery which he called African Art Promotions, which was managed by the Chilean Arturo Lorrondo who had a good eye, and collected and exhibited works by Kingsley Sambo, and mostly sculpture by Nicholas Mukomberanwa, the Mteki brothers, Joseph Ndandarika and a few others. Tom Blomefield took a room at Meikles Hotel for his Tengenenge sculpture and later moved to a house in Park Street opposite African Art Promotions. But none of these places were

spaces suitable or available for painting exhibitions of any size. So bad was this lack of exhibition space that Helen Lieros, in 1968, went to The Antique Shop in a very old building at the corner of Third Street and Baker Avenue to hang her first exhibition in the city; and the next time, in 1971, again to The Antique Shop which had moved to Africa House in Stanley Avenue; the only other alternative was the top floor of the general store, HM Barbour's, which she used on another occasion in the early 70s. Other painters likewise sought out other temporary spaces. There was no hope of entry to the Rhodes Gallery. In about 1972, Eden Simon, a farmer, made a brave effort, assisted by Leslie McKenzie and Liza Bakewell, and opened a three or four roomed space called Tara Arts on the first floor of Berkely Buildings, where Joseph Muli, the Kenyan carver and Peter Gladman, the landscape painter shared a studio. It was a nice space. This solved the problem for a year or two but unfortunately the venture was beset with financial problems; there were no backers and it closed quietly. It was back to the beginning and the country was at war.

It seemed apparent to the younger unrecognised artists including painters and sculptors who were not 'Shona' sculptors, that it was a dead end. And let me stress that most of the artists who were being ignored were the whites who were actually in the majority as painters, most of the blacks having taken exclusively to sculpture; and this in a country on which criticism was poured for inhibiting the development of black art. There was a great deal of frustration caused by the lack of interest shown by McEwen, the Rhodes Gallery and the press. But there was no antagonism amongst the painters and the sculptors, black and white, who got along well, with mutual admiration for each other because there was no personal competition — they were artistic parallels — but the painters needed more exposure than they were getting.

At the end of 1972, Helen Lieros and I were instrumental in organising a group which became known as 'Circle'. The founder members comprised, as far as I can recall,

Arthur Azevedo,
Babette Fitzgerald,
Pauline Battigelli,
Lesley Honeyman,
Anne Lindsell-Stewart,
Trevor Wood, Marian
Arnold, Janine
Mackenzie, Mercia
Desmond, Helen Lieros
and myself. Later Joe
Muli, Bernard
Takawira, Henry
Thompson and a few
others were to join.

The intent was to create a voice to challenge the state of the art of the country, and the press.

Most often we met at our flat in Burlington House in Fife Avenue where we had some say amongst ourselves, let off steam and pondered what to do and how to make a promotion. It was all very amateur but there was a lot of energy and our meetings were enjoyable. In early 1974, when the country was in the grip of sanctions and armed conflict, Circle was so bold, under the chairmanship of Ian Honeyman, as to organise a major exhibition of its members' work at an exhibition hall at the Salisbury Showgrounds. This event prompted sharp criticism from Peter Birch, a painter of the 60s and an ex-boxer, who put on his gloves again and took Circle to task, in the pages of the *Sunday Mail*, for their presumptuousness. Notwithstanding this however, or perhaps because of it — any publicity can be useful — the exhibition, surprisingly, drew a lot of people, some 5000, and it was successful. It would be interesting to look at that work again, if it



**Artists meeting at
Gallery Delta c. 1975**

were possible, 20 years later... it may not have been as good as I remember... but it was a start. Sylvia Beck, administrator of the Rhodes Gallery, came to look and purchased work for the Permanent Collection. We had made a small impact and to some degree justified our contention that there was ART being made other than amateur painting and 'Shona' sculpture. But what else could be done? One isolated exhibition was not going to change the world. What more was there to do?

I have tried in the foregoing to set the art scene as it was then, as it seemed to me. And now something about myself, if I am to be absolutely honest, and which I seek to be despite all. Concurrent with the period I have been endeavouring to describe, and perhaps symptomatic of the immensely difficult times — the war, sanctions, the politics, which I felt acutely — I underwent deep personal unhappiness in my own state of being, with who I was in all my complexities and inhibitions, about my work and my life, its seeming purposelessness, and I knew endless anxiety and despair. I considered ending it all. Let me try to explain. When I married an artist I discovered how immensely absorbing the artistic quest is and an empathy with the artists and their difficulties grew gently and steadily over the years. Good God, I was married to one whose creative ability, will and dedication I believed in. Less than that would have meant a parting of the ways. In my work, I was in despair at encountering constantly what I saw and felt to be the destructive side of life... people in trouble, in difficulties; the complainants and the accused, black and white; lives in jeopardy or broken... the policeman's lot. I was with the Homicide Squad and in addition to the daily round in the city, there were the patrols to the bush where one carried one's rifle and played at war. Consequently, I envied the artists their creativity and work which was to me, in the scale of vocations, somewhere near the top if still beneath the spiritual one. Mine seemed to be much further down the scale. But one carried on, keeping up the front, while the inner man was in dilemma and despair. There was nobody to turn to. I resisted for a long time the call of a small intuitive voice but in the end, in late 1974, after years of searching and summoning courage, humbled myself and called on God to forgive me, to help me and guide me. My cry was heard and I discovered the existence of God. My burden was lifted and discovering hope and faith I walked in a new, open and perceptive way and prepared for the promptings and the opportunity to change my life. When a man has called upon God for help and he has been helped that man can no longer deny God. And that is why I write these words.

There were two options that I had had in mind for a long time: one was to write — a hankering from the early 20s when I knew we were all living day to day history in a watershed time and all that was needed was to write it down — or alternatively to somehow involve myself in the arts *or to open a gallery*. And therein lies the story.

And so it was, one day in November 1974, walking along Manica Road, on an impulse I went along the passage of Strachan's Buildings to the courtyard within. It was the first time that I had been there and I instantly liked its charm and quaintness. I looked over a stable door and spoke to a person inside who was packing his belongings. He said in response to my enquiry that the rooms were available for rent. *Within an hour or two*

I had secured the space and I returned to my office and tendered my resignation that afternoon. I was to leave my job within two months and to open a gallery soon thereafter. Outwardly, it was as easy as that, but, having obtained the space and made the decision to abandon security, the doubts were soon to come crowding in like a swarm of flies around my head. How could a tiny gallery that was to promote contemporary painting in the down-town streets of Salisbury in the middle of a war make sufficient income to

pay its way let alone sustain a family? But the die was cast, the decision made and, with a small gratuity to use as capital, *I set about preparing the space for use as a gallery.*

It was an exciting time but a scary one also. The first artist I ever approached and asked to show with me, other than my wife, was Arthur Azevedo, a close and dear friend to this day and who still shows with us. Things were changing rapidly and I learned to do things intuitively and fearlessly — if it feels right, do it. I applied for a job because I needed one to sustain the gallery before I ever opened it such was the financial prognosis for a private gallery in those times... but my reckoning was to do it because I needed change. And in doing so, to make an early start, to be operational and experienced for political change when it came, because after all, despite fears to the contrary, it might be all right in the end and we whites might be permitted and want to stay. Surprisingly I got the post I applied for as Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts

Foundation of Rhodesia. *So we opened Gallery Delta on the 17th of April 1975* and I commenced employment with

the Arts Foundation on the 1st of May... I did not have one job in the arts, but two! Both needed to be built up and developed. I ran the Foundation by day and looked to the gallery by night and weekends. And so it went on until I left the Foundation in 1988 to make way for a new director and resorted to the gallery full-time in an effort to make it pay a modest wage.

In my schemings for a gallery, I deliberated long for a suitable name and I sought, with my philhelene affinities, the Greek connection rather than the African, and for something that was geometric for the logo. Thus the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet — *thelta* — appealed. The letter is formed by a triangle which is a perfect shape, three parts forming one, like the Trinity. *The*

word 'delta' — the river

running through it and pouring outwards with connotations of movement and fertility — seemed appropriate also.

So we had a gallery at last, such as it was to begin with, comprising three small interleading rooms each measuring no more than 13 x 13 feet, in which we could mount an exhibition of 20 to 30 paintings and a few sculptures. The rooms were situated along one side of the inner courtyard which somebody had nostalgically dubbed Little Chelsea, probably because of the English bay window, with concentric blown circles in the glass, which set it off. It was a good place to keep people captive for an hour or two and they were forced, by its small size, to be communicative.

After a year or two, the four rooms on 'The Other Side' became available. Taking them over doubled our space and gave us more control of the courtyard. And we had a couple of rooms for storage on the first floor which was accessible by stairs and the cat-walk balcony. The other rooms around the balcony were occupied by small businesses — silk-screeners, tailors and cobblers — who collectively set up a constant din of voices, music, banging and hammering; the tread and pedal of the Singer sewing machines caused so much vibration through our ceilings that our lamps always blew before their scheduled life-times. And a multitude of scraps — paper and flock — would find its way and gather on the shanty tin



roof, in the gutters and down to the courtyard. But it was active and colourful and it became the home of the gallery for 16 years.

We opened with a show of graphics. Amongst the works were some by Philippe Grosclaude and Therese Houyoux of Geneva and it is poignant for us that the latter will visit Zimbabwe for the first time in July this year to conduct a one-person show. Such is the strength of artists' friendships. But why graphics involving foreign artists for the first show? Simply, we had a collection which was different and had standard, and because we wanted to promote the graphic as a legitimate artistic method... which is indicative of how backward we were 20 years ago, for while there were engravings by Rembrandt in the Rhodes Gallery, the buying public which comprised a tiny percentage of the white population, did not know the graphic nor its processes, imagining they were off the photo-litho press at the nearest commercial printers. And in our first year of operations we persisted with several graphic exhibitions, including a collection of contemporary Japanese graphics, to encourage artists at home to examine and practise these methods.

Having only a tiny space in an obscure, hidden venue, and intending to promote the best of contemporary art, there was no question of stocking a shop with a few souvenirs and curios and expecting visitors to flock in. There was a need to make Gallery Delta as vibrant and varied as possible... to get known quickly and to build an

interest. *Thus in the first year, from April to December, we mounted 12 exhibitions, which rather set the pattern for the*

future — a show every three or four weeks throughout the year, about 15 on average, but the number has been known to rise to as many as 20 events.

I can well remember the first exhibition, where specific works hung and who bought them. Fried Lutz and the late George Seirlis who became ardent supporters and collectors were there that night. I was very nervous and felt guilty that I had prevailed on all our friends and acquaintances to be there and imagined that they must have come out of sympathy. This was a feeling I had for a long time but which gradually turned into an acceptance that people really were interested and enjoyed attending to look at and collect art, and for the pleasure of meeting people. Our critics and sceptics said we were mad and would not last for six months. And so many times they were very nearly right! We were starting at the least popular end of the market, and at, as private galleries go, a nominal commission. We set the figure of 25% to be as kind to the artists as possible, but which is about half of that charged in Europe and America and which we have stubbornly maintained despite the fact that we have never been subsidised like the Rhodes Gallery which also charges the same commission.

The day to day minding of the gallery was taken over by Helen's father, Paul Apostolos Lieros, whose oft response to the query May we come in and look? was, If you have your cheque book with you. He was to help us until 1980 when at age 80 he died, almost a year to the day after being mugged along the passage of Strachan's Buildings on a Saturday afternoon. In the determined struggle he had overexerted his heart, and so we lost one of our own, or the gallery claimed one.

Gallery Delta had been established in an endeavour to provide a venue for the painters and the graphic, textile and ceramic artists, and those sculptors who were doing other than 'Shona' sculpture. And having made those decisions it was mainly white artists that we showed because they were the painters and artists in other mediums.

The black artists almost to a man had become carvers and sculptors of stone. It was in the stone that money and fame promised to be and was; and it was also a more readily available and less technical medium on which to work and which did not demand formal art training for which there were few facilities. And I think in retrospect that the success of the stone inhibited the development of painting by blacks, and for about thirty years.

When we came to consider who was left among the black painters of the 60s there were few of any merit. Thomas Mukarobgwa was into stone. Kingsley Sambo was still about and showing at African Art Promotions. Charles Fernandes I managed to find in the ghetto at Mbare where the inside of his tiny home was painted with murals and I managed to salvage an old canvas but of the artistic creativity of Charles there seemed little to resuscitate. Canon Ned Patterson of Cyrene of the 40s and 50s and subsequently Nyarutsetso at Mbare, had fostered talent but by 1974, of those prodigies, there was no trace. The Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre at Bulawayo was stuck in the tradition of the early 60s with slick amateur Western type representational renderings of the life in the townships and country. In the first year we showed wood carvings by Joseph Muli and paintings by John Hlatywayo but inevitably our emphasis was with paintings by whites. We watched for signs of resurgence amongst the blacks and tried to encourage where we were able. Apart from some excursions here and there, it was slow to come...

Editor's note: The sequel to this article describing developments at Gallery Delta and in the local art scene over the 20 years will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Gallery*.



(above) Job Kekana in his studio at St Faith's Mission, Rusape, in January 1995

(opposite) Job Kekana, *Young Girl*, 1990, wood

Why is it that we do not appreciate what we have until we have lost it?
Job Kekana died on 10 March 1995.
Here, Pip Curling shares her last meeting with him

A gift that was hiding: Job Kekana

Afromosia, Job Kekana's favourite wood, is rather like he was; fine grained, true and warm hearted. I last saw Job in early January on a bleak overcast day in his small studio at St Faith's Mission near Rusape. The little room was crowded with drawings, books and the tools of his craft. A wheelchair stood at the door. On the shelf behind the wheelchair was Job's diploma from the John Cass School of Art in England. Next to the diploma, two photographs, one of the young Job with Sr Pauline, the Anglican nun who first recognised his talent, and the other taken at the National Gallery some time in the 60s. In this photograph, a Rodin sculpture is on a plinth and a drawing done by Job of the sculpture is displayed on an easel. Job is in the company of other sculptors of the time. I recognised Sam Songo and Henry Munyaradzi.

As he reminisced about his life and work, Job kept coming back to his close and ambiguous association with Sr Pauline. He met her at the mission where she taught outside Pietersburg in the Transvaal. Although not an artist herself, Sr Pauline was the daughter of a carpenter and had a knowledge and appreciation of fine wood. She gave Job the materials and tools he needed and she guided his work. Job recalled that: *"Art in South Africa at that time was a white man's job. Africans must make sticks for stirring pots."*

It was because of this, Job claimed, that Sr Pauline exhibited his sculpture under her name as her own work. When the work sold she gave Job *"... a few pennies as a reward... But, she was taking something from me while she was giving me something. She gave me a gift that was hiding in myself... In life the ones who are clever live on those who are stupid."*

In 1944 Sr Pauline was transferred to St Faith's Mission. She arranged for Job to follow her. At that time black South Africans were not eligible for passports so Job came to Rhodesia on a travel document with a permit to work only at St Faith's. Nine years later, disgruntled with the feeling that Sr Pauline was exploiting him, Job left St Faith's to work independently in Rusape. He quickly fell foul of the immigration officials and had to return to the mission or face deportation. Then came a commission to carve the mace for the Rhodesian parliament and after that Job was awarded citizenship. *"The first thing I did was get a passport... I went to England and tried for a job sweeping floors in art schools... I went to see how people carved, how long it took others to make a carving. You need to measure yourself by other people."*

John Cass School gave Job a place as a full-time student. After completing a three year diploma he was offered a teaching post at the school, but Job chose to return to live and work at St Faith's. He did, however, visit Italy where he marvelled at Michelangelo's David. He said: *"When you travel between people it makes your knowledge stronger."*

Among his many commissions, Job remembered only a few. He fondly recalled a small bust of a mother and child bought by Ben Gingell and given to the people of Iona, Scotland, in memory of southern African soldiers who fought in the Second World War. His commitment to art overrode his own religious and political beliefs. He carved the coat of arms for the post-UDI Rhodesian government and he made religious works for the Catholic as well as the Anglican church. Job recalled that the priest at Monte Casino Catholic Mission, Macheke, *"... had everything from Rome removed and asked me to carve an African crucifix and a statue of the Virgin Mary. During the war the boys broke everything and they took Mary. After the war was over I made more."*

Job was particularly proud of some of his most recent work: the two busts of Nelson Mandela and the staff he carved for Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The latter was made in three parts from orange wood and jointed with copper. It symbolises the Holy Trinity. *"Everything you make must mean something."*

Harare residents can see a fine example of Job's work at the Anglican Cathedral. His is the large crucifix suspended over the altar. Disappointed that his work had never been acknowledged by the art community in his adopted country, Job donated two works to the National Gallery. One is titled *Sorcerer* and the other, *Abstract*. I asked Job how he felt about abstraction. He replied: *"Abstract art, I like it but it is a funny thing just to please some imagining of the mind. Art should be for teaching the children and reminding them of old traditions."*

I wondered why he had never gone back to South Africa. He said: *"It is better for me to stay here. I get a lot of work for South Africa because there they know you better when you are on the edge."*

I left Job working on two small standing naked female figures. One a pregnant woman and the other a mother breast-feeding her baby. These were commissioned by a British gynaecologist whose father had once been a teacher at St Faith's.

The church at St Faith's is one of the oldest in the country. Its crumbling red brick Romanesque structure nestles behind huge gum trees as old as itself. The interior is a bitter disappointment. A piece of monstrously ugly darkwood Victorian furniture behind the altar houses reproductions of sentimental nineteenth century holy scenes. The nave is dominated by a cement cast of what might be St George. A fishmoth-nibbled Victorian print hangs crookedly beside the north door. Dusty stations of the cross, carved by some of Job's pupils, lean drunkenly out of sight on the tops of aisle pillars. Nowhere is there evidence that, for fifty years, there lived and worked at this mission one of the finest sculptors of religious art in southern Africa.



and...

Elizabeth Rankin, professor of art history at Wits University who has done extensive research on wood sculptors of southern Africa, writes about his work

Living and working in the mission tradition: *in memoriam* Job Kekana

At mission schools in South Africa it was customary to offer woodwork as practical training for boys alongside their school lessons. But from the 1920s at the Grace Dieu Anglican Mission near Pietersburg, this took on a special significance. Through the initiative of Fr Edward Paterson and the dedication of the teacher in charge of the workshop, Sr Pauline CR, the carpentry school also encouraged carving skills. This school was to foster the talents of Job Kekana, born near Potgietersrus in 1916, whose time there, from 1933 to 1939, shaped the direction of his career and his carving — and was still evident in his work at the time of his death.

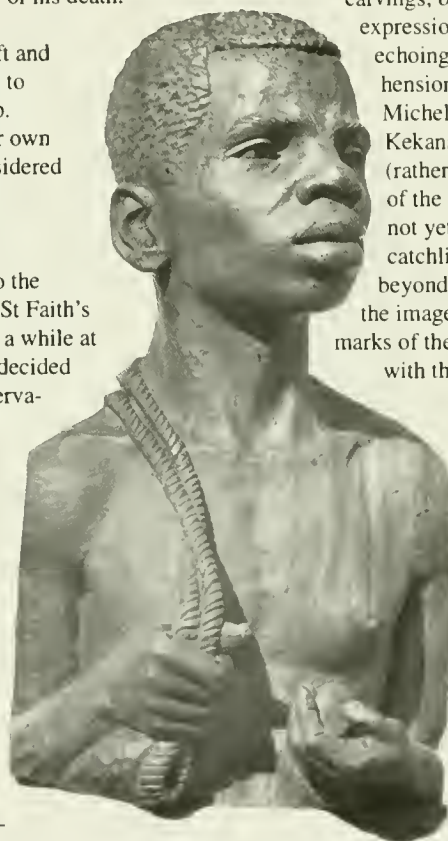
The focus of the carving school was on craft and manual skills, chiefly relief carving applied to church furniture made in the carpentry shop. Students were not expected to develop their own designs, as members of the order were considered better fitted to conceive religious imagery appropriately.

When around 1938 Sr Pauline was called to the mother house in Grahamstown and later to St Faith's in Rusape, Rhodesia, Kekana stayed on for a while at Grace Dieu to assist with training but then decided to try his fortune in Johannesburg. Job reservation at the time restricted his opportunities in carving for furniture manufacture and, without the resources of the mission, he had difficulty marketing his work. So in 1944, he took up Sr Pauline's suggestion that he join her at St Faith's. Kekana undertook important commissions during the 1940s including the panels for the pulpit in St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg. Such works continued to draw on established church traditions, so that they are not recognisable as African carvings in style or subject matter. When asked about this, Kekana explained that he understood Christ as a white person historically and so depicted him thus — unless specifically asked to do otherwise. For example, he gave African features to his Christ for St Mary and All Saints in Harare in 1986 at the request of the American priest who commissioned the crucifix. But often Kekana interpreted lesser religious figures in a more personal way, in terms of his own experience. Although dressed in dignified Gothic robes, his Madonnas frequently have tender African features, as do the babies they bear. A number of these found their way into British church collections after Kekana's successful exhibitions during his stay in England in the 1960s.

When he travelled overseas he was able to see important works by sculptors like Rodin and Michelangelo, and particularly admired the English carver, Grinling Gibbons. But for Kekana his most important experience abroad was the opportunity to attend classes at the John Cass College in London, particularly to draw and model

from life. Although Kekana chose to return to Africa in 1964 to set up a school for carvers in Rusape, his English experiences continued to inform his teaching and his work.

Life drawing was an important part of classes at his school, and his own carving benefited from these studies. For example, his half-length figure of David from the Old Testament was modelled on one of his own students, 14 year old David Tsungu. The head has a personal quality and a more convincing naturalism than earlier carvings, both in underlying structure and in the nuances of expression. *David Saviour* is a moving psychological study, echoing in his African features the same sense of apprehension yet steadfast purpose that informed Michelangelo's monumental image of the young hero. Kekana included the hands holding the sling and stone (rather small in scale, probably because of the limitations of the block of wood) to show the viewer that Goliath has not yet been slain. David's eyes, their focus defined by a catchlight left against the dark, carved-out pupils, gaze beyond us at his adversary. The sense of life that invests the image is echoed in the carving style, animated by the marks of the chisel which create a subtle texture, interacting with the light on the surface.



Kekana's work remained consistent in style and quality to the end of his long career, both in religious images and an increasing number of secular works. Occasionally he carved portraits, which display his powers of observation and able characterisation. Many of Kekana's carved heads represented 'African types' which, in the context of the African art market, may sound ominously like the ubiquitous clichéd images made for the tourist trade. However, Kekana avoided stereotypes and these carvings at their best are not only very fine technically, but invested with sensitive individuality, like the beauty and gentle charm of *Young Girl*, carved in 1990.

The value of Kekana's carvings has been overlooked because they displayed neither the lively, sometimes crude, stylisation of representation that is admired in contemporary rural art, nor the sophisticated experimentation of urban modernism. But his work should surely be evaluated in terms of the religious tradition within which he was working, and for which the accessibility of his art is so well suited. The sustained high quality of Kekana's carving and the integrity of his subject matter deserve a level of recognition that they have yet to receive either in his adoptive country or the country of his birth.

(above) Job Kekana,
David Saviour,
c. 1964, afromosia

Helen Lieros, *Helen's Horse* (detail),
1994, 86 x 61cm, ink and collage on paper



Helen Lieros

Born in Zimbabwe of Greek parents, Helen Lieros with her outspoken, effervescent personality is one of the most influential artists working in Zimbabwe. In this interview with Barbara Murray, she talks about her life and work

BM: You have three major influences in your life, the Greek, the African and the Swiss. How are they intermeshed in you and expressed in your work?

HL: I think basically the main emphasis in my life is to be able to find out who I am and what I am about. Geneva was really about exploration, to find out what art was. Because from Gweru, what was art? It was pretty little landscapes and so on, that was really suffocating as a little girl. So to go to Switzerland and to discover Braque, to meet him at his last exhibition, to realise what a weird guy this was. Why was he sticking things on? Being there, I was forced to paint like a Swiss. Like I put a red, I'll never forget, and the professor would make me cross-hatch grey over it to kill the red. And I would try to say, but sir in my country we've got red. We've got red trees, red earth. Or we've got a very strong blue. Why do I have to put a grey over this deep blue? And again you had to sort of go by the wayside because you knew that you had to work to get a good mark to get through so you could go on to the second year. I look back on my studies and I feel good in that I learned the roots, the basic roots, of drawing etc. which I have used right throughout my whole life but I had no identity. I was like another moo cow with a big stamp on it when I finished. But it was an exploration.

BM: And the Greek influence? You grew up in a very Greek household, speaking Greek...

HL: Yes, it was the first language that I learnt. And when I was studying in Switzerland, my parents never had money for me to be able to come home for my holidays so I went to Greece which gave me the opportunity to discover my roots. My whole being was on the old ancient Greece, the civilisation and all the magnificent art, the Cycladic, the Byzantine.

BM: And then you came back to Africa?

HL: Yes, then I came home and all of a sudden I realised that I came from a most beautiful country, that I had never really seen. Although I think it was inside me all the time... wanting to use the brighter colours... and I battled for 10 years trying to find who, what I am, to identify with the colour and spirit of Africa. When I was in Greece I had sketched the Greek peasants, the women, with their dooks, always dressed in black. And when I came home I saw the African peasants, the tsoro players, the newspaper sellers. The creative element and the myth came in. The texture, the land, the people, everything played a very important part in my life. Then the war

came, the sanctions, no materials, and for me I think that '74 was the time when I really started creating... as late as that... when I explored and I improvised and I got hooked on trying to make materials and work with the materials that I was alien to.

BM: When you set out to do a work, do you have a subject in mind, some event, some emotion?

HL: I don't think I know consciously. I think it is very much a subconscious process.

BM: Is it inspiration?

HL: I don't believe in inspiration. I think inspiration, if you want to use that word, only comes when you have worked and worked and worked. It is the accumulation of the work and the ideas, the problems that you have been facing. You are in search of that thing which occupies you. There are things you feel you've got to get out. And there's times when your mind is blank and then this is when you start exploring again. I find maybe my colours are becoming boring and I get all my bits and pieces and I feel that I need to find something else to work. It's a preliminary search into something new, something else... whatever is coming. I think that my biggest fear in my life is to be repetitive. I would rather stop painting entirely because I feel that you have to explore. I remember an old professor of mine saying if you have a standstill period rather go one step backward so that you can go forward. My step backward is to go back to drawing, back to just sketching and rethinking. I enjoy working with drawings. I find it's like people who sit down and write diaries. For me, my diary is all those sketches that I do. There's no words. It's the images that portray what I feel.

BM: And you sketch what's around you?

HL: No, it's what comes from my heart, my mind, and my soul. Things that disturb me; things that make me happy.

BM: So you don't look for outside subjects like nature or landscape?

HL: They all stand in my mind but very rarely do I work from nature. I might just do a contour line that has everything that I want. The organic, the texture is very strong in what I look at. I love the positive / negative shapes and the textural qualities.

BM: The texture has always been very strong in your work, even in your graphics... the acid eating, then the layers of paint, papers, the collage... when did you start doing collage?

HL: '74 / '75 was my collage. It stemmed from all the work which was unsuccessful which I kept in boxes. I started using my own pieces within a painting. Also at that time, it makes me laugh now when I think of it, our paper was in very very small sizes and I wanted to work large so therefore I went and stuck two pieces of paper together and then added collage so that it looked like a larger piece of work. But then I have a psychological hatred, again very personal, of using other people's images in my painting, like magazines or photographs, unless I have taken the photograph, unless I have gone through the process. It has always got to be part of me. I don't like taking from anybody else. Sometimes I'm biased if you want, but I feel it's not ethical and I think this is what is happening in art. This ethical part is being destroyed. There's no ethics in a lot of things that are happening today.

BM: A lot of people take pieces from around their environment and put it together and say this is a work of art.

HL: Yes, but we can take Schwitters for example. I just love his work. Every little piece was his trip by bus, taxi or whatever. And the way he put it together. So again that was like a personal

collection. And people may have a mania of collecting toothbrushes, so I mean, what a wonderful painting you can make of it — a piece of art from toothbrushes because it's part of you. Also there have been artists that have used other artists' work. Like Picasso, who literally copied Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, but what came out of that? What did Picasso do from that? It was something totally different. He'd used the composition, that I think is wonderful because at the same time he was paying tribute to a master. That I understand. But I'm saying I feel there is a deadline to anything you do. And my deadline is to use personal, preferably my own, pieces for collage.

BM: You mention Picasso going back and looking at Manet. Have there been any artists that have made a very strong impression on you, that have been influential, used as a jumping off point?

HL: One person who had a great influence over me in my youth was Kokoschka. I loved Kokoschka's feeling in his work and somehow I think I related him to Africa, though it had nothing to do with Africa. Another artist who had a very strong influence on my work when I first came back home was Daumier; the political things, the black and white, the people, and again maybe at that time I was very attached to the peasants, the people, and the society and the political possibilities. Daumier and Kokoschka were at that time the strongest influences in my work.

BM: It is interesting that you chose Kokoschka because his work has a strong sense of inner turmoil, and to me, much of your work is expressive of storms, violence, turmoil.

HL: Maybe that's the Greek part of me coming out. Probably the drama. I feel that the biggest thing in my life is to try and be an individual and try and identify who I really am. It is a battle in my life, in my work, this identity. Am I Greek? Am I African? And yet there is a link in the superstitions of the Greek and of the African. The relationship is very similar in many, many ways. And to be accepted as a Greek or as a white African... I feel this has been really my biggest fight. I go to Greece and I enjoy it but I don't think I'm part of that. And in Switzerland... I find a peace there. I find a tranquil quality that I've always enjoyed immensely, and maybe recapturing my youth. But because I'm very sort of aggressive or... I always feel I need the opposite to calm the situation and give it a good balance. But I think my work is based on this fight between who and what I am.

BM: Your work is not concerned with material reality, is it rather an imaginative psychological reconstruction?

HL: Possibly, yes. Human forms have always been a prominent feature in my work, whether symbolic or figurative, losing their everyday appearance and individuality and assuming a degree of anonymity and stylisation of shape. Their origins come from my love of the Byzantine stylisation and spirituality and even further back and beyond, the Cycladic, and linking forward to the African stylisation. The simplicity of form. I have analysed the anatomy, the character, and then it's a breakaway to minimalise and just to use the bare essentials of what is the human figure, what he represents. Symbolism. I think the symbolic quality has a large part in my work... the symbolism of what the human being is or what he represents, and what the painting is about.

BM: What have been the major themes in your work?

HL: I think it was the earth, the discovery of Africa, the stratas, the land formation was very strong. Mysticism, ritual, the strong symbolic force of form and shape, always with a human element, occur again and again. Man taking over in the space and becoming the patriarch, the ruler. That again, for me, had a lot to do with the war. So much killing. Brother killing brother. The whole turbulence. And the bird came into that. It was not the bird of peace, for

which we were all hoping, but it became like a war bird. Then after independence, it was the rise of the *jongwe*. Again the bird, the cock, the symbol of the party that had won. And there was peace.

Then everything was around my sister, her illness. There were two or three years when my work was based on the two sisters. It was very much against the doctors, a hatred, a bitterness that her life couldn't be saved. She, for me, was the most precious thing in my life. The two of us were very close. It became very expressionistic, although the media somehow, oil on paper, was quite soft, but the work was violent.

And then after that was the search for my identity which I think has carried on till now. Who am I? Images from Greek sculpture... torsos appeared, always enclosed in glass cases as if in a museum with prominent figures, African forms outside, *The Artist Viewed Through a Glass Case*.

BM: Which of your recent paintings do you feel are successful?

HL: One of the good paintings I find is my *Lobola*. There is a wedding, a woman, black and white.

BM: What were you thinking of when you painted *Lobola*?

HL: After my mother died that's the book closed. My parents' whole life history had been so beautiful and so tragic and traumatic. My father came to Africa because he was shipwrecked in Cape Town. He was one of the survivors and he was waiting for a boat to come and pick him up. He was in the merchant navy. And somebody said why don't you come up to Rhodesia and visit the country while you wait for your boat. And he came here and he just went crazy about this country. He was always searching to find a country where he wasn't an alien. My father travelled all over the world, so he was not a Greek, more a cosmopolitan in that sense. And that's how he came to Africa. So what I did, subconsciously, was like a diary. All the work that I've done through this whole year has been a diary. With the Greeks as with the Africans, you have a dowry and you get married. The dowry in Greek is *proika*. In Shona it's *lobola*. So that figure represents the bride, the woman who came. But it also represents Africa, the *lobola*, so there is an interlink throughout all the work, an intermingling. Just before my Mom died she wanted to go to Greece, for the Easter, and I saw again the symbolism of the goat and the fast. The goat to me is a very precious thing because in Gweru there was always the goat around. So there is the African goat and the Greek goat. All my work is interlinked

between Greece and Africa, where there is such a similarity, and it is virtually based on all that has happened. So it's a diary of my land that I was born in, that I love, and what I have inherited from my parents.

BM: Ritual, sacrifice, tradition, the goat, all play a large part in both African and Greek myth. What you identify with in the African culture are those same elements that appear in the Greek culture... a kind of universal symbolism?

HL: Exactly.

BM: Myth could be described as "the soul's need for placing itself in the vast scheme of things." Why do you emphasise myth when you talk about art?



Helen Lieros, *Icon*, 1994,
61 x 43cm, ink on paper

(opposite) Helen Lleros, *The Red String*, 1991, 118 x 128cm, mixed media

(below) Helen Lleros, *Heterogeneous* (detail of triptych), 1995, 102 x 92 x 36cm, glypto mixed media



HL: Because myth is something that is left behind somehow nowadays. The machine, science, technology, the rational and intellectual have taken over. But for the human, myth is very important. It has always intrigued me. Africa is for me a land in which the myth is so strong and yet we don't seem to look at it. It seems to be becoming irrelevant. And myth is the so-called 'exotic' element that the European is trying to find again... the spirits. In reality, it is the myth that counts so much. Aesop's fables and the symbolism, that intrigues me. In the ancient Greek theatre, it's the human spirit turned into drama.

BM: You recently went down to mount the Zimbabwe exhibition at the Joburg Biennale. How did the work from Europe, USA etc, on the Biennale strike you?

HL: I didn't see any paintings! There was technology, photo montages, photographs. There was really no painting, the manipulation of the paint, the power of putting those brush strokes on... there was none of that. So maybe painting is out, in a sense, out of fashion or whatever. Things that excited me were the Angolan artists, the Benin artists, the Hungarians with their sensitive work. Most of the work that I really responded to was sculpture or installation. There was no painting about which I could say, God that was fantastic! Like when you go to Europe and you go to an exhibition of maybe even an unknown artist, you go in there and it knocks you back, as a painting.

BM: Does that make you feel that you want to try other mediums?

HL: Ah, I'm a painter. I mean I've always tried other mediums. I've loved etching. I've worked with relief. I love paper. I've been recycling, making paper and I'm going back here, in a way, to the creation of my *Lucky Bean Tree* where I moulded the paper in relief forms and embossed it. This has been going on for ten years, in my studio. Before I was doing these moulds and I had never been able to put them together. Now I've gone back again, making more of these moulds, and I just hope that something will come out of this.

BM: In a general sense, I would say that much of the work on the Biennale wasn't very concerned with colour.

HL: No, there was very little colour.

BM: And that's an important element of your work.

HL: Oh, very! I mean colour is the light of life. I respond to colour so strongly. It has so much to do with my whole world, the reaction. I mean there could be a black painting but how much of that black is black and how many other colours do you use to make that black? It could be a blue black, red black, mauve black, green black, grey black. It's not just black. It's what you put into it to try and get that black. And I think my preoccupation with colour is far too strong to just push it on the side. When I came home to Africa it was the colours that influenced me more than anything. As I began to re-identify myself with the African environment so my painting became broader and my colour stronger, symbolic of the felt experience. Colour for me has become an emotional translation of visual material. I use pure saturated colours in rich harmonies of warm and cold hues related to the heat and light of Africa, trying to radiate their force and vibrance. And texture is integrated with colour. Who knows, maybe colour and painting might



come back. Most of the work, even in Germany when I went, was installation and again very colourless as well. But there were paintings. There were the masters. And I feel what is probably happening is that the masters did such wonderful work that we cannot even touch them. Because we will never be Picassos... there are no more Picassos... no more Matisse. So basically, psychologically, I think everybody is trying to find another dimension and colour is not important to them. Overseas mechanical things are important, the gadgets, the videos, the lasers, this kind of thing. I am not interested in the computers and the gadgets.

BM: So you have no desire to use a computer then?

HL: Never! But if I used a computer I would probably tear up what came out and use it as a collage so it would only be part.

BM: How important was your trip to Germany?

HL: It was very important. It gave me an insight into how we are here in Zimbabwe in comparison to what is happening elsewhere. I need to see art, exhibitions and interchange with artists to analyse myself and my work. We are isolated here. We achieve much by this isolation because outside influences, movements and trends do

not affect us so much and yet we have to see them to balance where we are. This stimulus helps us to go forward on our own path and challenges us to dare.

BM: One of your big involvements locally has been in teaching...

HL: Teaching is important in a sense that I kept up with times, with the young generation, with their thought, and helped them to express themselves. Some of my students come from very conservative backgrounds and you introduce them to things they hadn't seen or didn't know about, hadn't thought about. You bring out Soutine and Picasso, Kokoschka, and you open a new door into what people were trying to say. My involvement also has been with teachers from the rural areas who have been trying to find ways and means of being able to have an art club and also provoke thought with their students and again finding ways to improvise, saying let's work on newspaper, with mud, the making of brushes. I find it stimulating and I like young people, I find them very exciting. With the young generation of our black painters there is so much that is happening now, and I would rather spend my time in trying to help those who are producing something different. The different is what I'm looking for.

BM: What do you find particularly interesting in the current art scene here?

HL: I think it's very exciting. Don't forget that it's been stone, stone, stone, and now people are exploring colour and again the way they're moving from something that is very figurative, very realistic, and breaking it up and exploring the space and finding something more. Okay, you have a common factor that it is very much of a socio-subject, like coming from Zengeza to town and the folk that are ploughing the land. That is normal. But what happens to those... again the fragmentation, sometimes breaking it up and making it into maybe an abstract... or the symbolism that is coming out in the work. They are exploring the media, again the improvisation of what they can get and what comes out of it. That's what art is all about... the creativity that is coming out.

BM: Music has been very important in your life, how does it interlink with painting? How do you see the two art forms?

HL: For me they're so close that it is just unbelievable. With sound and harmony, orchestral, there is so much colour. The ups and downs, the drama, the peacefulness, the water. I feel that sound has so much to do in my life, in my subconscious world with colour. Music and painting, for me, are so interrelated. Even when I was little and I was playing the piano, I would see colours. My teacher would say... what, how are you playing? and I'd say, I see green... and that's a red note. No, she would say, that's a black note. And I would say, no that's a red note, because there was a harsh quality in that note. So my work is very much related to sound, always has been.

BM: I think of your paintings and music as having a greater involvement in the intuitive, subconscious kind of understanding and response to life. It isn't the ideas so much as the feelings that are involved in life that you are painting about.

HL: Yes, that's what I'm searching for. So sometimes even if my work is static, if I hear a sound or listen to a beautiful orchestral symphony, it speaks to me, it helps me.

BM: What about religion and the spiritual? You have done a lot of paintings of subjects like Easter, marriage...

HL: We were talking about old artists like El Greco who were iconographic, and I love icons, the static, the glow and the colours... I think they have played a big part in my painting. The Easter ceremony is very beautiful in the Greek church. It's not just the spiritual, it's the whole procession, the symbolism... I think it's the symbolism in religion, and the way it has been retained. Living here, there is a lot. I didn't find it so much when I went back to Greece with my mother. I felt that it had lost that spiritual... become very

commercial. So I'm not an over-religious person but I love the symbols, the candles, the rise... there is a warmth in there that sort of recharges all those batteries, spiritually, that have just disintegrated through the year. So for me, Easter is very special.

BM: When you're talking about religion, I feel you are seeing it as a celebration of life...

HL: Yes, for Easter, it is. If you see it, feel it... it is so special. It gives you an insight. We are living but we don't look within ourselves, and I think Easter is a time when you look within yourself and try to find out how you tick and what it is all about. Even the fast... It cleanses you out and makes you more alert, makes you think on a higher level, makes you more aware, and makes you search within yourself. Out of my Greek, that is one thing I have retained, and Easter is one time that I find very special. *Kristos anesti*, Christ has risen. It is rising, and you want to rise inside you. It's very beautiful.



Stoffer Geiling

Helen Lieros, *Sacrificial Goats*, 1994, 61 x 43cm, ink on paper

Letters



Mary Davies, *Giants and the Lone Woolf*, 1994, mixed media

Dear Editor

It was with amazement followed by frustration that I read your comments referring to the lack of a local school of art (*Gallery* no 2). Two art schools *already* exist in Zimbabwe. For some extraordinary reason this fact is largely ignored by the local art community. Your comments in relation to the following facts would be appreciated.

1. The Harare Polytechnic Art School opened in 1980. Its average intake is 20 students per year most of whom graduated in the early years with a London City & Guilds Diploma in Design for print and latterly, a National Diploma in either Fine Art or Design for Print.
2. In excess of 200 students have been trained by us. Many of them hold senior positions in advertising agencies, design studios and publishing houses. Many are self employed, some teaching in secondary schools. A large number have exhibited their work at Gallery Delta. Others have travelled abroad pursuing their careers successfully.
3. Our present lecturer in charge is an ex-student who runs the Department extremely efficiently. Other members of staff include well known local artists. We are fortunate to have two expatriate lecturers on our full-time staff as well as numerous part-time teachers ensuring a full well-balanced training.
4. At a recent exhibition at Gallery Delta several of the exhibiting artists were our students. This fact was ignored in the reviews.
5. At the recent Graphic Artists of Zimbabwe Association exhibition half of the artists were either our graduates or members of staff.

While we acknowledge that the Fine Art option has only been available for the past four years, it is difficult to understand why it is totally ignored. I fail to comprehend why, instead of offering encouragement and support to an institution with a proven track record, the art community continues to yearn for another Zimbabwe School of Art. It would be interesting to know how much

money has already been spent on 'feasibility studies' and such-like for this project which shows no signs of ever becoming a reality. It is frustrating for the staff and students at the Poly to observe this waste when we know that even a small portion of this money could have been used to improve our woefully inadequate facilities. We are fortunate to be adequately staffed with qualified, competent, enthusiastic and dedicated staff - what we need is recognition and support!

Dianne Deudney

Editor's comment:

'Diplomas' not degrees; 'woefully inadequate facilities'; 'local artists' as teachers; plus only one group of Fine Art diploma students whose work *has* been exhibited at Delta; these are some of the very reasons for the attempt, which began before the Poly offered the Fine Art option, to get funding for a fully recognised School of Art with degree status. Many of the Poly lecturers have had the benefit of training for a degree in Fine Art. Why should Zimbabwe's students be denied such an opportunity? There is certainly room for argument that the new School of Art could be developed from the Polytechnic Department. What is needed is a comprehensive plan for such a project - another feasibility study? Can the Poly offer one? Such studies are essential to persuade donors to support projects. Yes, a lot of money has been spent and we can only hope that it has not been wasted. However, it was extremely disturbing to read in *The Herald* recently that Professor Kahari, Director of the National Gallery, who is supposed to be leading the project, and who publicly declared (as did President Mugabe) at the 1994 Heritage opening, that he would ensure that this project went ahead within his tenure, now thinks the School should be set up in South Africa! They already have several universities and polys that offer good degree courses in Fine Art. We need one here. Were those heartening speeches just more empty rhetoric? Ironically, Professor Kahari has been invited to talk at a symposium in London later this year on the School! What will he say? Stephen Williams, former project manager/consultant SADC Region School of Art and Design Project, will reply, in *Gallery* no 5, to the above letter. Any other contributions to the debate would be welcome.

Dear Editor

I am an admirer of Pip Curling's ability to express herself, especially her article in *Review* in sorting out young African artists re realism. In reference to her interpretation of *Giants & the Lone Woolf* - I was very much affected when I read Malcolm Bradbury's book *10 Great Writers*. These ten helped usher in 'modernity' - more or less published between the World Wars. It was a break away from the Victorian era - the past. Such a collection of greats in one volume led me to have the ten photocopied. I wanted to pay homage.

To think all those great thoughts and ideas were constructed out of, using a common denominator - 26 letters of the alphabet (hence the alphabet at the bottom). The photocopies were neat-sized about 4 x 6. Cutting around the faces I got a key shape which I thought quite appropos - they were keys to a new approach to thinking. The negatives I chose to feel were the shapes of electric light bulbs - representing the readers as sentient beings receiving greatness (the dots inside the heads were 'hits').

Now these ten were all writers, not a politician nor a scientist in the lot (two playwrights) - Joyce, Kafka, TS Eliot, Conrad, Mann, Proust, Ibsen, Pirandello, Dostoevsky and Woolf. When the women artists thing came up, Woolf needed attention as it was nine to one, male to female. Needless to say I'm all in favour of interpretation but I also want to defend universal, eclectic thinking as opposed to feminist bias. I'm no scholar, just a deep appreciator of greatness. In awe,

Mary Davies

Reviews of recent work

Nicholas Mukomberanwa,
Woman



Nicholas Mukomberanwa, *My spirit and I*, National Gallery, March 1995

Nicholas Mukomberanwa is one of the few veteran Zimbabwean stone sculptors to have broken the ethnographic mould. This retrospective exhibition of 72 sculptures and drawings (1962-1995) however did not contain his best nor make apparent the individual stylistic and conceptual development of his work. In the 60s, Mukomberanwa addressed traditional African beliefs and socio-religious themes; his early style was detailed, rounded, with exaggerated features as in *Rain God* and *Chaminuka the Great*. This period was followed by a more expressionist outlook in the 70s, when his work announced pre-independence prophecies evident in *Breaking Free* and showed experimentation with abstract planes and stylisation. By the late 80s, post-independence disillusion preoccupied the artist, captured in *Street Beggar*, *Greed* and *Too Many*

Preachers. These later works are moralistic in tone and deal with issues of corruption, exploitation and the capitalist mentality. These pieces established the artist as social critic.

Mukomberanwa's work is narrative and immediate. Though presented with a modernist facade, the sculpture expresses African ideals and mannerisms. This is, for example, articulated in his rendering of anatomy and posture. Most of the figurative works are crouching, seated or kneeling in typical Shona fashion. His work over the years reveals a consistent search for a new way of expressing himself and a progressive reduction to minimalist statement. Technically, Mukomberanwa's control of three dimensional viewpoints and interplay of forms, coupled with an asymmetrical rhythm of curves and angles in his best work, reveals his use of both intuition and formal sculptural intelligence.

It is a pity that some private collectors refused to loan works to the National Gallery (though this speaks to the personal regard collectors have for Mukomberanwa's work and to the Gallery's unwillingness to provide insurance), and that the layout denied any understanding of the artist's development, as what could have been the most important retrospective ever mounted in the country, failed to do Mukomberanwa justice. TM

The dove's footprints

Marjorie Locke was well known to Zimbabweans for her commitment to the arts and crafts of this country. What we didn't know was that, in addition to running the old, and facilitating the development of the new, Bulawayo Art Gallery, in the face of seemingly endless and insurmountable obstacles, she was quietly carrying out an in-depth study of the traditional woven patterns found in the baskets, mats, beer strainers, penis sheaths and other household objects of the Ndebele people. In *The Dove's Footprints*, published posthumously by Baobab Books, her work has come to fruition. The name and a concise explanation of the origin and meaning of each basketry pattern is given, accompanied by illustrative close-up photographs. The simple direct text gives the materials (a list of botanical names is included), dyes, techniques and uses, as well as identifying which district each object comes from. A detailed introduction sets the cultural and historical background and space is given to a description of the coiling, twining, starting and finishing techniques employed. The book closes with a look at variations on traditional patterns, contemporary patterns and the effects of commercialisation. Line drawings indicating the form of the baskets would have been a useful addition. The layout has been beautifully done although the designer has been seduced by the softness of the dove rather than the more relevant crisp markings of its footprints. Our knowledge of the material culture of Zimbabwe is enlarged and enhanced by this immensely pleasurable book. This nation owes another debt of gratitude to Marjorie Locke. BM

The Dove's Footprints by Marjorie Locke,
Harare: Baobab Books, 1995, Z\$110.

Raku workshops, Rosselli Gallery, Masvingo, March 1995

Four raku glazing workshops run by Gerrit Meyburg of Gwaai Potteries were recently held at the Rosselli Gallery. Raku is a very direct quick method of glazing, creating random markings and textural effects. The pot is taken out of the kiln red-hot whereupon the glaze 'crazes' or cracks on exposure to the air. While still hot the pot is smoked in leaves, grass or sawdust causing various stains and markings. These

A new venue: Pierre Gallery, March 1995

Eagerly anticipated as a new artspace, the Gallery Pierre threw open its doors to the public at the end of March. Former Alliance Francaise and Le Forum curator, Olivier Sultan, has created his own

Africa 95 begins in August and runs until December throughout Britain. Keston Beaton may attend a workshop and exhibit at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and possibly other Zimbabwean work by Berry Bickle and Keston will be at the Delfina Studio Trust in London. Exhibitions include:

a n d forthcoming exhibitions and events

effects are preserved by plunging the pot into cold water. The resulting colours are rich; blues and greens oxidising to reds. Ceramics in Zimbabwe have been suffering from a lack of inspiration. Let's hope this initiative will spur the potters on. For visitors to Masvingo, the Rosselli Gallery, recently re-opened under the enthusiastic new management of John and Nicky Rosselli, is at 39 Hughes Street. NR

Visual arts by BAT students, National Gallery, May 1995

Students, particularly in our conformist and conservative society, need to be encouraged to express themselves freely, to explore, be bold. They also need to be pushed into thinking about their subjects and engaging with the ambiguities of life. Work on this exhibition is disappointing in its scale and treatment. The predominance of small monochromatic prints may testify to the learning of techniques but in the end the artist uses whatever materials she/he can get to carry her/his personal, evocative vision. One student who is developing a strong personal style and statement is Harry Mutasa. His paintings display a pleasure in colour and movement, and his metal sculptures capture the physical tensions of bodies with humour and panache. The range of his subject matter indicates an awareness of the multiplicity of creative possibilities. Another young artist of promise is Givemore Huvasa whose small etchings were sensitively done. The improving standard of the graphics holds possibilities for the future. BM

exhibition venue at the corner of Churchill and Normandy Avenues in Alexandra Park, Harare. The gallery is a converted residence, graced with a pool and a landscaped garden, temporarily home until the end of July to the first exhibition of — for want of a title — Sultan's Favourites. The *Northern News* put it succinctly when they said of the exhibition: "All of his old favourites of wood and stone are there: Gutsa, Jack, Munyaradzi, Tshuma and others," and indeed the show represents much of the talent that Sultan has highlighted, and in some cases nurtured in former exhibitions, now all brought together under one roof. The work is displayed throughout the house and in the garden beyond.

I am particularly fond of Fanizani Akuda's mischievously smiling figures in stone. His faces seem to combine characteristics of oriental and Shona features, in humorous surrender to all of life's vicissitudes. Zephania Tshuma's work, often vaguely obscene and sometimes very amusing — jutting red penises and figures with heads stuck up their bums — are also here in profusion. Rashid Jogee's masterly painting, justly named *So That We May Know Each Other*, spans one entire wall. His wildly stroked paint, vigorously applied layer upon layer, seems to blow all ways at once and creates a dynamic tension amongst the more serene works that surround it. I've never much gone in for the darling of the stone sculpture aficionados, Henry Munyaradzi, but his ubiquitous, blank, circular-eyed signature faces, adorning all manner and shape of stone, are here amply in evidence. Lazarus Takawira's sculptures remind me of birds about to ascend in flight. These sleek and streamlined creatures are perhaps the most stylised of all the works on display paying little heed to the stone from which they are delicately carved. Aside from Jogee, amongst the painters, Celine Gilbert's darkly expressionist paean to the last call, *The Pub*, most impressed me, as did Jill Bond's delightfully sensual *Sleepless Nights*.

Sultan plans to hold regular one-person shows on a monthly basis and hopes that this new venture will generate fresh criticism and closer dialogue between artists and the public. DJ

Contemporary Metalwork in Africa (Crafts Council); The Art of African Textiles (Barbican); Africa: The Art of a Continent (Royal Academy of Arts); many other galleries will also be having African exhibitions (details from the Editor). Margaret Garlake will be *Gallery's* eye in London, and Tony Mhonda will be in Yorkshire, giving us their impressions of Africa 95 and its impact in Britain.

Therese Houyoux from Geneva will be exhibiting paintings and graphics at Gallery Delta from Tuesday 25 July. Houyoux works with the human form, exploring through process changes in imagery.

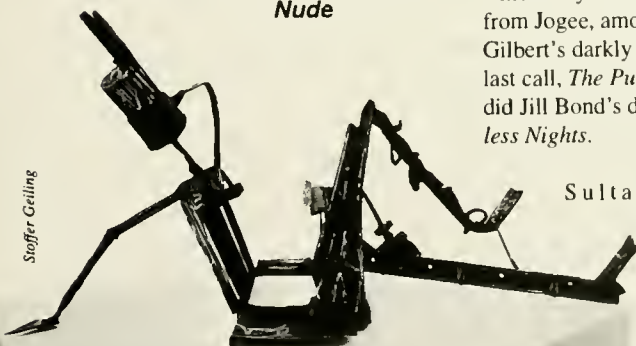
Amakhosi Theatre from Bulawayo will be holding their Inxusa festival at Gallery Delta in August. Cont Mhlanga's group is justly renowned for their energetic expressive drama. Don't miss this chance to see some of Zimbabwe's best — watch the press for details.

Helen Lieros will exhibit paintings and graphics at Gallery Delta in late June/early July. The works are part of her Inheritance series and will feature new developments using paper mouldings.

Women artists of Zimbabwe will be the focus of the Longman exhibition at the National Gallery from early August to mid-September. Also exhibited during this period, will be work by **Harare Polytechnic students**. A chance to gauge the potential of the Poly as Zimbabwe's 'School of Art'?

Martin van der Spuy will exhibit paintings at the Pierre Gallery in July. At the same venue in August, a one-man show by **Joseph Muzondo** will feature stone and metal sculpture, and in September, **Brighton Sango's** stone sculpture will be on show. Pierre Gallery is running a **competition** with Alliance Francaise on the theme of 'Sport and Movement' and prizes will be awarded.

Harry Mutasa, *Sunbathing Nude*



Stoffer Gelling

