

GCWENSA, BERNARD MUNTUWENKOSI

Born: 1918, in Pomeroy, Natal

Died: August 1985, Hlabisa, Natal.

Gcwensa attended the Collies School in Msinga from 1932 to 1935. He received no training in art. His career as sculptor for various mission communities began when, as a young man, his carved walking sticks were admired by a visiting Servite priest. The priest, Edwin Kinch, stationed at Hlabisa, commissioned Gcwensa to carve a Madonna. From c1953 until his death in 1985, and apart from periods spent at the Hammarsdale Seminary (c1973) and the Benedictine Abbey, Inkamana (c1975-78), Gcwensa worked at the Roman Catholic Servite community at Hlabisa, during which time he produced many ecclesiastical pieces. Dina Cormick estimates that there are possibly twelve Roman Catholic Churches in Kwa-Zulu and Natal bearing Gcwensa Madonnas, Crucifixes or Stations of the Cross. Gcwensa used only wood as his carving medium; this was due partly to the fact that wood was available in local forests, or was provided by the church officials, and partly to a life-long asthma condition that prevented him from carving in stone.

Commissions:

These include church commissions for the Hlabisa Servite Community (1954 -c1985), the Inkamana Abbey (1965, c1975), the Hammarsdale Seminary (1973) and the Catholic Church at Hammanskraal (1970-71).

Awards:

1961 Republic Art Festival, Bloemfontein, second prize, sculpture.

Exhibitions:

- 1961 Republic Art Festival, Bloemfontein.
- 1962 Aspects of Africa Exhibition, Maseru.
- 1963 Group exhibition, Boston.
- 1964 Group exhibition, Schlesinger Foundation, Cape Town.
- 1965 Inter-faith Bantu Art exhibition, DAM.
- c 1970 Catholic Bookshop Exhibition, Durban.
- 1974, 75, 76, 77, 86 Mariannhill Art Exhibition, Mariannhill Mission.
- 1978 Group exhibition, Ravan Press, Durban.
- 1986 African Arts and Crafts exhibition, Mariannhill Mission.
- 1988 Neglected Tradition.

References:

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[Information supplied by Dina Cormick]



Cat. 54

Crucifix

Acquired c 1955

Burmese teak

58 x 16 x 10

Collection: Mr R A L Cordouan