

SELBY MVUSI, b. 1929.

Selby Mvusi is an African artist who was born in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, in 1929. He studied art at the Mdaleni Art Centre under Alfred Ewan and has been assisted by other Natal artists.

Mvusi also gained recognition only through white patronage as his own social group has no sculptural tradition and little or no demand for sculpture. As with Maurice his artistic standards have been largely set by the white people who have assisted him, yet Mvusi does not accept the whole European approach to art at its face value. This is strongly indicated by his sculpture "The Family"

BM Arnot 1961
The Evolution of sculpture
in SA
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which was exhibited at the first Quadrennial in 1956.

Whereas Maurice's forms and themes can be traced back to white influence, this is not so with "The Family"; there are here elements which are unique in the history of South African sculpture. A distinctly African character pervades in the strong, slashed, uncompromising forms; and the essentials which are emphasized to the exclusion of unexpressive form or detail. Yet these are not the conventions of West African carvings - executed as totems, fertility symbols and suchlike. They are the product of an African, or Bantu, South African who, without his own tradition, has had to derive subjective conventions such as those which represent eyes, brows and ears.

Furthermore, with tribal society fast disintegrating and no totemistic religion to carve for, his choice of theme is particularly significant. In African society the tribe or community has always been of more importance than a particular family unit, but social conditions in South Africa have changed this among urbanized blacks. Urbanized Africans are not recognized by law as permanent communities and they have consequently to travel between the towns and locations or tribal communities; many of those permanently in urban areas are not allowed to live in family units, with a resultant shift of stress from loyalty to the original community to loyalty to the split up family unit. Mvusi's sculpture is new in its derivation and social comment, and individual in its use of abstractions. It is one of the first valid sculptural expressions of a hitherto sculpturally inactive people. It is important as sculptural progress in South Africa because it is the result of co-operation between white and black artists. Mvusi's sculptural interest was

initiated and guided by whites but his expression remains essentially that of an african conditioned by S.A. Society