

Amazing African statues at the Ring House Gallery

University Collects:
Modern Makonde Sculpture
Ring House Gallery
Run ends Feb. 14

review by Cathy Dougan

Startling! The figure with the long, boney arms is holding its large head in its hand. But another look reveals that the long arm is actually an elongated neck. Even more startling...

This figure is actually part of the Modern Makonde Sculpture Exhibition at the Ring House Gallery. Made of fine ebony wood, these sculptures reflect social, spiritual and artistic influences of the Makonde people of Tanzania. There are very few clues to provide the meanings of these works. Most are named "Untitled Shetani Figures"; the artists are also unknown. This leaves the viewer with an urging desire to discover the creators of these exquisite works and ask them to explain the meanings of their art. Since this curiosity cannot be satisfied, imagination takes over and the admirer is free to interpret and enjoy these figures in any way.

The sculptures, each unique, evoke many moods: amusement, amazement and bewilderment...

One quiet and peaceful image is of an old man carrying a hoe-like object. He has a potbelly and a half-smile. The ebony wood makes his skin gleam and one can imagine that it would be pleasing to stroke the cool, smooth wood.

Most of the other sculptures comprise of

half-human, half-beast figures. These possess elongated limbs and bodies with enlarged heads. Scrambling on each other, they seem to be trying to find the most ingenious and astounding poses to impress a photographer. Their twisted bodies and limbs defy nature. A long, slender arm becomes the leg of another. A neck stretches so far it resembles an arm. A tongue hanging from a teasing face is half the length of the owner's equally peculiar body. There is a head without an ear; yet there seems to be an earlobe stretching to the ground. Another body seems to be crushed under the weight of the others standing upon it. Each image is a skillful and imaginative way of representing body forms. All these images work together so that they are beautiful, comical and frightening. Some sculptures resemble children frolicking; others look like beasts trying to support each other up.

Amazingly, the elongated boy forms form slender and elegant lines. The skills of the artists are seen in each work. One can detect the protruding rib bones on a body and the fine details on a face which give it its character.

My favourite sculpture, "Shetani Figures" by Sabu, is one that can be identified easily. It is of a brown color instead of the black of the others. Four skeleton-like forms stand on top of one another. The one in the middle has a long tail and is gnawing the stick-like arm of the beast below it. An enlarged head is turned halfway around its body, its eerie face stares out into space. These sub-human forms seem to belong to the darkest dreams,



Modern Makonde sculptures: bizarre interpretations of human form.

Photo Dave Young

yet they are also beautiful and elegant at the same time.

These art works are very hard to describe to one that has not seen the exhibition. One has to view them to appreciate their unique-

ness. The unknown artists have incorporated into their culture and personal experience into their works. Marvelling at their skills, one can't help but admire the talent that prevails, far away from Tanzania.

Playwright Graves talks

interview by Elaine Ostry

Once upon a time, Warren Graves had what he describes as a "perfectly legitimate life. I had a real job."

Certainly his present work as a freelance playwright and actor is a far cry from his previous positions as a clerk assistant in the Legislature and secretary to Grant MacEwan.

Graves' interest in the theatre grew too strong to ignore, so he started to work for ACCESS Radio. When that organization became too much of a bureaucracy, "I had no choice but go freelance, which is a very scary thing."

"I am just about getting used to that life, where you never know what you're going to do next," says Graves. He describes freelance work as "responding to targets of opportunity."

Graves' career change is reaping its benefits. He has worked at The Citadel for the whole season, and his own play, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, will be put on later this month on the MacLab Stage. It will also play at the

National Arts Centre in Ottawa. "After 23 years," says Graves with a chuckle, "I'm an overnight success."

Graves' present role is McLeavy in Joe Orton's *Loot*. "I'm the one who gets totally confused," he says, "I'm the only innocent one (of the play), but I'm the one who gets in trouble."

Loot is a "black comedy. It's very much a play about hypocrisy, and people keeping up appearances." To prepare for this play, Graves and his fellow actors started to clip out news items "as a kind of background about amorality in society." These items were about Marcos, the Balkans, murders, "and extraordinary things about dead people." Graves shakes his head. "We got tired of clipping them out," he says. "This amorality is so prevalent now, and it's so depressing."

Loot shows you hypocrisy, abuse of power, amorality, and "you're supposed to laugh." This black comedy requires meticulous technique. "If you want the right style, you'll make the audience laugh," Graves comments, "but if you don't hit the right style, you'll offend them."

Graves compliments Orton's style, describing *Loot* as having "a very strong cutting edge." The clue to a good playwright, according to Graves, is "when you can hear rhythms in the writing, the music of it."

A good playwright, however, does not overwhelm his play with his own personality. Says Graves: "When the playwright dominates the play, taking one point of view and splitting it among five different people and pretending it's a play... that's no good."

Graves has his personal techniques for writing a play. One of them is arguing with himself. "If you transfer that to paper, you've got a play," Graves laughs. "I'm not really a playwright — I'm a schizophrenic!"

Another technique Graves terms "theatre in my head" is useful. This is when he reads his play to a group of friends, without the embellishments of actors, scenery, or props, and see if the listeners can visualize the action.

This test is very important to Graves, who claims that "people are losing the ability to sit and listen to words... everybody's interior life is disappearing. Someday I'd like to take a group of adults and make them sit down for five minutes and do nothing." According to Graves, most people won't be able to do this.

Graves is obviously concerned that children will follow this lazy route to entertainment. "When you say 'Once upon a time,' they hand you over their brains — that's frightening," Graves says. He resents when playwrights abuse this responsibility by being "patronizing" to children. "I think small children are existentialists," he comments. Graves does write for children as well as adults. His works include adaptations of *The Beauty and the Beast* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

You may have seen Graves last summer at the Fringe, in his play *Amazing Gracie*. Graves has lived in Edmonton since 1965, and has seen the city and its theatre community grow. The Fringe is one example of this growth; but according to Graves, "It is becoming more and more regulated." He cites the regulations of the unions, the police, the firemen and beer companies as examples, claiming that "eventually they will strangle it."

Graves describes a playwright as a "servant" — providing actors with good roles, and directors and producers with something to do. "One is sure that Graves will continue to serve the theatre community through its various changes."

"We expected to sell about 60,000 copies of the first edition (1987) and we sold 65,000. We hope that this one does at least as well," she says. The *Almanac* is sold only in Canada.

Yates believes that the 1988 copy is better than the first because "it is laid out better and it is easier to use." New additions to the 1988 version include the entire Meech Lake Accord, information on A.I.D.S., refugees, and nuclear energy, as well as a listing of all of Canada's colleges.

The best markets for the book have so far been Toronto and the larger cities in Alberta and B.C.; but surprisingly, the *Almanac* has not caught on at universities. However, if even just a few influential people get a hold of the book and spread the word that students may benefit from having one, she expects the sales to skyrocket.

Aside from a wealth of information on Canada and detailed charts, tables, maps (some coloured); and data relating to the rest of the world which would help students, the book offers refrigerator door facts on calories and food groups which would please any parent. Also featured are award winners in categories from Rock Videos to Nobel and a very thorough section on sports. All of which leads Yates to say that the *Almanac* "is a great book for setting bells." And, no doubt, for shutting some people up.

1988 Canadian World Almanac and Book of Facts

review/interview by Don Tremblay

You're sitting at a table reading a two-bit detective novel for the second time because you couldn't follow the plot the first time, and the group of people sitting next to you (who have been discussing mythical imagery in literature today) begin to tease you because you move your lips when you read. So you turn to them and say, "Do you think Brookner's *Hotel du Lac* deserved to win the '84 Brooker Prize or would you have given it to Anita Desai for her stunning novel *In Custody*?" Everyone at the table gapes at you in astonishment, and the one who is trying to look like James Joyce says: "My dear, I thought *Flaubert's Parrot* should have won. But how do you know about the Brooker Prize for literature?" You reply, "I just do, okay" and go back to reading, about Donald Lam and Bertha Cool — thanking your mom for buying you the 1988 *Canadian World Almanac and Book of Facts*.

Susan Yates, the Publishing Director of the Canadian World Almanac, says that this second edition of the national bestseller is an "everyday reference" which is "incredibly useful for students because it is inexpensive and very handy." Facts, figures, and informa-

tion about subjects as topical as the Winter Olympics in Calgary, as trivial as Original Names of Selected Entertainers, and as informative as the Child Abuse Alert List abound throughout the 720 page book.

Using governmental and other reliable sources, Yates and a team of researchers, freelance writers, a senior contributor, and an editor have compiled "a yearbook of facts which will be updated annually." They also obtained information from the World Almanac, with whom they are affiliated to a certain extent. "We use what we want," says Yates. Most of the information they borrow from the World Almanac concerns countries other than Canada. Canadian data, which comprises about 50 percent of the book, is obtained through the other sources.

Yates says that although they did not initially know the amount of Canadian content that the book would consist of, everyone working on it agreed that the emphasis would be on Canada. "Three percent of the World Almanac was on Canada," she says, shaking her head, "and since ours came out, there is even less."

Such a measly percentage of Canadian

All the Canadian facts

information in an almanac which is basically American leads Yates to believe that some of our neighbors to the south have "incredibly narrow vision" when it comes to Canada and Canadians. However, she adds, some Canadians do not know much about Canada either.

Indeed, Yates herself claims to have learned or re-learned a great deal of the country's history while compiling the almanac. Canada's beginnings and its emergence as an independent country is documented in the book. Memorable dates are listed, the system of government is explained and biographies of all of the Prime Ministers are offered.

Statistics relating to voter turn-out, federal and provincial election results provide one with a thorough analysis of the political history of Canada. Demographic statistics, points of interest and information regarding Canada's geological make-up combine to form a complete description of this country's past, present, and an outlook on its future.

With continued good sales and a little bit of luck, Yates believes that the Canadian World Almanac will be a part of this future.