Perspectives
IU-South Bend Sculptor Inspired by Ugandan and Kenyan Stay

Uganda was once, in the words of Winston Churchill, “the Pearl of Africa.” Its education, civil service, medical, and transportation systems were a model for the continent. After independence, the reign of terror under Idi Amin and Milton Obote which lasted for nearly thirty years came close to destroying this beautiful country. A tribute to the tenacity of the Ugandan people is their long and difficult struggle to regain something of what they lost. By traveling to Uganda to assist in revitalizing the art program at Makerere University, I feel fortunate to have been a small part of that struggle. And while I did a lot of teaching during my stay, I suspect that I was the one who received the greater education.

Last year, with the assistance of a grant from the United States Information Agency, I spent six weeks in Kampala teaching bronze casting in the sculpture department of Makerere University. While I could see that the department had once been equipped with the best of everything, after thirty years of rampaging and looting soldiers, there was little workable equipment left. Today, faculty and students in the university’s art department rely on energy and enthusiasm. Through combining their eagerness with my expertise, we were able to cast nearly fifty small bronze sculptures during my six-week stay.

While there, I made several portraits of students and faculty members. One bronze sculpture I completed during my stay, Nabulime Lillian, is a portrait of a member of the sculpture faculty who was a great help to me during my work there. This bronze was first cast in Uganda and then re-cast upon my return to the States.

In addition to teaching, this trip provided an opportunity to photograph local people as models for future sculptural portraits. Following my work in Uganda, my wife joined me, and we spent several days in Kenya. While there, I was able to photograph several residents of the Masai manyattas, or villages. As it would have been nearly impossible to work on-site in a Masai village, photographs taken from many angles enabled me to recall what I had seen and to work at ease after my return home. Two of these bronze sculptural portraits were recently exhibited at the South Bend Regional Museum of Art and at Southwest Michigan College.

The sculpture Masai Bride (left) depicts one of the people I photographed, a young girl of scarcely thirteen—shy, pretty, and alert, noticing everything. She was dressed in finery for the benefit of tourists, I suppose. Another sculpture on exhibition, Masai Mother, portrays an older Masai woman with a strong personality, a wife and mother who was very suspicious of me and my camera gear. Though this woman lives a relatively ancient way of life, I feel her portrait expresses a universal human dignity which collapses all barriers of space and differing ways of life.

Tuck Langland (MFA in Sculpture, University of Minnesota) has been a member of IU-South Bend’s Arts faculty since 1971, having taught in Kentucky and for 4 years in England. Currently, he is working on additional sculptures inspired by his experiences in Uganda and Kenya.