

Men of Clay Get Little Outlet for Their Talents

CAT

By a Staff Reporter

“WITH EARTH'S FIRST CLAY they did the last man's knead, and then of the last Harvest sow'd the Seed . . .” quoted a Johannesburg sculptor as I watched him “thumping his wet clay.”

THE STAR, JOHANNESBURG, TRANSVAAL, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1949

To him, whether working in clay, stone or wood, his bondage to his chosen art was as inevitable and as instinctive as that of the first man who found that a clay pot had creative possibilities.

“Most sculptors have painted at times,” he said, “I have even exhibited pictures. But when I have painted I have felt flat—two dimensional.” Lack of sculpture in Johannesburg makes it a flat, two-dimensional city.

“Lack of the beauty with which one is brought up in European cities, even makes Johannesburg people look flat—without anything behind their faces.”

It was because there was so little outlet for their work that many potential sculptors turned either to painting or to teaching.

South Africa, he said, was a country in which atmosphere and space (important factors in the framing of sculpture) made it an ideal environment for the oldest of the arts. In Europe, responsible bodies set aside a certain percentage of the cost of a prospective public, or semi-public, building for mural and sculptural decorations.

Sculptors Subsidised

In Holland, in addition, he understood that a scheme exists by which every artist of some standing receives a weekly salary from the Government in exchange for a picture or piece of sculpture covering that amount—or, if the work is a more expensive one, he is given as much in advance as will cover the cost of the work.

Ignorance about the work, time and expense entailed in a piece of sculpture is widespread in this country. He himself had been offered commissions at a price ludicrously less than would cover a few months' time and labour, and had been expected to fulfil them in a few days. He had refused such offers.

South Africa had many beautiful woods—mahogany, kiaat, chamfuti, mvule—suitable for sculpture; but expensive and difficult to obtain in the right size. Marble and stone in this country generally lacked the “tightness” of the Italian equivalents; but there were sandstones of various colours, soapstones, granite and others—if blocks could be obtained undamaged from quarries.

Casting Costly

Sculptors were hampered where bronzes are concerned, he said, by the difficulty of getting them cast and the enormous cost of doing so. Plaster is the sculptor's last friend, being the cheapest material and most easily obtainable; but it is also the “deadest” of materials and the least durable.

So, since medical men have discovered that modelling has a tonic effect on the nerves and sometimes send sensitive and highly strung patients to sculptors as pupils, a sculptor who might be helping to beautify the Union's cities must satisfy himself with the progress of dubious pupils to bright-eyed, ardent modellers in clay.

He felt that architects might do more than they have done in this country to employ sculptors.

like
But
You
skiff
hair
back
of sci
he ha
shells
from