



PERLAGIA MUTYAVAVIRI

Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe

Perlagia Mutyavaviri was born in Harare in 1977. She started sculpting at the age of 24. "My inspiration came from Fanizani Akuda and Sylvester Mubayi, who also provided me with my first tools and raw stones," she explains. After just six months of immersing herself in the vibrant stone carving culture which flourishes in Chitungwiza, Perlagia sold her first sculpture to an American collector. Shortly thereafter she started working with George Mubayi, an accomplished sculptor with an international reputation who likes to push the boundaries of the Shona art movement. "George was very inspiring," she says. "He gave me courage. He taught me to work on hard stones. There were no easy tasks for me, so that made me a hard worker."

Perlagia is one of most promising artists to immerge from the small but growing group of Zimbabwean women carvers. Sculpting, which is all done by hand, is physically strenuous and was initially to preserve of male artists. Women traditionally have expressed their artistic talent in a myriad of ways such as batik painting, weaving, lace making, fabric design and embroidery. In the past two decades, however, women have been taking to stone. Mentored, often by the most respected and established male sculptors, woman are now gaining international exposure and critical acclaim for their work.

Perlagia explains that she finds her inspiration from people's character, behaviour and feelings. She works primarily in abstract forms. "The shape and form of abstracts broadens my mind," she states, "I can bring any idea I think of out of the stone. I can tell any story." The elegance and movement in her pieces are testimony to her creative and technical skill.

When reflecting on the role of art in Zimbabwean society, Perlagia comments. "I believe that art is seeing things in your own way, showing the unimaginable the untouchable. There are no limits in art. That's what makes it so interesting. I think more Zimbabwean women should take up sculpting. There is much they can say through this art. We can be the role models for tomorrow's African women."

In 2002 Perlagia won a competition for promising new Zimbabwean sculptors sponsored by the German government. She travelled to Germany to accept the award and to represent her colleagues at an exhibition of their collective work. Her work has sold to private collectors and galleries in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and US. She was the Artist-in-Residence in 2004 for Rice Lake V.

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