

THE STONE SCULPTURE OF ZIMBABWE

A Special Lecture by

Ophelia D. Gona, Ph.D.

Wednesday, March 30, 2005

12 p.m. – 1 p.m.

UMDNJ-George F. Smith Library of the Health Sciences
Exhibition Gallery, C-Level

Although it has its roots in ancient traditions, the stone sculpture of contemporary Zimbabwe began to emerge in the 1960s. Since that time, this art form has achieved renown in Europe, America, and Australia, and is now beginning to be in demand in Asia. Breaking free from the accepted images of ancient, tribal African art, this powerfully human art form – portrays its messages figuratively and is carved with immeasurable skill. The pieces produced by highly skilled artists may be representations of humans, birds, beasts and spirits or purely abstract pieces.

In the past there was a tendency to consider the work of Zimbabwean stone sculptors as a single cultural group and to refer to their work as Shona Sculpture. While many of these talented sculptors are indeed Shona, a large number are from many other tribes, countries and places (including Germany, Asia, Australia, and even America). Among the stones used to produce the exquisite pieces are the rare and highly prized verdite, the much more easily worked soapstone and the far more common granite. However, overwhelmingly the stone of choice for most artists is serpentine, a beautiful stone found in an amazing range of colors, patterns and hardness. When polished, pieces made of serpentine attain an exquisite luster that gives a feeling of great depth and richness and produce works of art that are much desired.

In 1990, Dr. Ophelia Gona (NJMS, retired) and her husband, Dr. Amos G Gona, NJMS-Department of Cell Biology and Molecular Medicine, spent six-months on sabbatical in the Department of Anatomy at the University of Zimbabwe. There, they became acquainted with the beautiful stone sculpture of the country. As the result of a chance encounter, they met Andrew Farai Nheuka, a Zimbabwean sculptor. Intrigued by his work, the couple commissioned the young artist to complete a number of pieces for them. Sixteen of these sculptures were donated to UMDNJ in 2004, and five are on display in the G.F. Smith Library.

RSVP to: Susan Tran, Administrative Coordinator, University Libraries at 2-4353 or email: transs@umdnj.edu