

Statuettes echo Bushman legacy

10/6/90

City Press



Sculptor Paul Seleke with one of his terracotta statuettes.

KATLEHONG-based artist Paul Sekete's sculptures may echo Bushman figures, but he seems set to move into his own "bronze age".

More than 19 of the sculptor's terracotta statuettes, being exhibited at Johannesburg's Gallery 21 under the title *The Return From Exile* will be cast in bronze after being sold.

The statuettes, which stand about 50cm high, are fragile and can easily break, explains gallery owner Fernand Haenggi. Casting them in bronze will ensure they endure.

Sekete is a self-taught artist and his development reflects the ironies of being a black artist.

Born in 1957 in Ficksburg in the Free State, he grew up in an area where there are abundant examples of Bushman paintings. Not surprisingly, he says his earliest influences in art came from those he came across as a boy. "It was a major stimulant," he says, "but I soon forgot

it." Other early influences came from the "craft culture" of the woven mats and pottery his grandmother and other family members made.

He forgot even those influences and, as if meant as a mocking symbol of his own neglect, it was a visit to a circus that next revived fading memory of the art of the Bushman. "After that I was drawing animals on the blackboard at school," he says.

While Sekete today expresses sorrow at blacks' neglect of their heritage, his own elongated figurines with their bird-like faces are still suggestive – although not very strongly – of some of the strange myths and perceptions the Bushmen brought to their art.

That slight resemblance perhaps can be read as a sign that all is not yet lost and perhaps one day the long years of neglect will be made up for.