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# ZimSculpt takes root at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

By Michael J. Solender

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Sculptor Patrick Sephani traveled more than 8,000 miles from his home in Harare, Zimbabwe, to spend three months practicing his craft and sharing his love for making Shona sculpture at [Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden](#).

Sephani, 34, along with fellow craftsman Passmore Mupindikoko, 38, are accompanying [ZimSculpt](#), an exhibition of large African Shona stone sculptures, as it takes root. ZimSculpt has enthralled visitors at more than 40 gardens in Great Britain, the Middle East, Canada and the U.S during the past decade as it toured the globe.

“Creating a sculpture is like birthing a baby,” Sephani said as he polished pieces on display for sale at the exhibition’s open-air marketplace. “You want to see it grow and also see where it ends up. One of the most satisfying aspects of traveling is experiencing how other people connect with it. I’m amazed to see that work that has meaning to me, moves others.”

The collection of more than 100 works, some from world-recognized artists, is on display at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden in Belmont through September. Traditional Zimbabwe Shona Sculpture is some of the most highly regarded and collected African artwork in the world.

The exhibition was conceived, curated and brought to the Charlotte area by Shona sculpture art dealer and Zimbabwe resident Joseph Croisette. Visitors to the garden can meet with Sephani and Mupindikoko and observe them as they create sculptures during their stay.

“We have installed in the garden some of the finest

## • ZimSculpt

*ZimSculpt, Zimbabwean Shona Sculpture Exhibition.*

Through Sept. 28. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily, Thursdays 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, 6500 S. New Hope Road, Belmont. “Summer Nights” ZimSculpt evening tours 7 p.m. Thursdays through Aug. 28.

**Admission:** Adults \$12; ages 60+ \$11; ages 4-12 \$6.

**Details:** 704-825-4490; [www.dsb.org](http://www.dsb.org).

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pieces of Shona sculpture representing four generations of artisans extending back to the earliest days of Tengenenge,” said Croisette, referring to the Zimbabwean artists’ village established in 1960 at the site of a former tobacco farm. “In addition to work on display in the garden, there are an additional 300 pieces on display and offered for sale in our marketplace.”

## Telling stories

Croisette will be on site for the duration of the exhibition and lead evening tours on consecutive Thursdays during August at the garden’s Summer Nights series. He travels with hundreds of pieces representing the work of more than 200 Shona artists. Visitors will find pieces available for as little as \$7 and up to several thousand dollars.

The Shona people are the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe, a mountainous landlocked country in southern Africa, bordered by South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique.

Shona sculpture often tells the story of the natural world in Africa. Eagles, elephants and tiny reptiles are favored subjects. Pieces also depict everyday life and often characterize family and friends. “Study Time” is a life-size figure of a seated young woman carefully reviewing notes in a textbook. “Joy of Twins” is a detailed bust of a proud mother surrounded by two swaddled babies clutching her breast.

Some of the younger Shona artists take their work in a more abstract direction, and also on display are giant, twisting geometric shapes that seem to move as visitors walk around them.

## Connecting

Each piece is carved from varieties of serpentine, a hard rock composed of different minerals. Variations such as opal stone and spring stone mined in Zimbabwe produce finished pieces that glisten in hues of black, brown, green and white. Most works are cut from a single block of stone, some more than 7 feet tall and weighing several thousand pounds.

Installed throughout the garden, the pieces appear to have been designed for their temporary homes. Visitors will find pieces nestled in tall grasses, perched along



garden walls, alongside fountains and flanking walkways.

“This work belongs in a garden because it’s alive,” said Croisette. “It’s also important to bring the artists and have them here so people can connect with them and see the skill and artistry that goes into these creations. What’s most important to me is that people come and experience this; there is nothing else like it.”



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