

LETWIN MUGAVAZI

Chitungwiza

ZimArt's Artist-in-Residence, 2011

Letwin Mugavazi was born in 1972 in Guruve, Zimbabwe. The Mugavazi family is prominent in the sculpting fraternity of the Guruve region, but Letwin is the first woman in the family to carve stone. "I began my artistic career by running the family's Gavazi Gallery," Letwin explains. "It was through understanding and appreciating the work of other artists that I began to be interested in sculpting."



In 1990 Letwin decided she wanted to learn to create her own art and she turned to her older brother, Francis Mugavazi, who had mentored many of the region's sculptors, including the late, great Brighton Sango. Letwin credits her brother and Obert Nyamupapira, who she later married, as being her most important mentors. Her apprenticeship was unusual in that she started not by finishing the work of her mentors' but by creating her own sculptures from the outset, under their guidance.

"I was interested, from the beginning, in exploring the status and role of women in Zimbabwean society in my sculptures. I chose a figurative approach because it is, for me, the purest way of telling their stories."

Three years after starting to carve Letwin was invited to be a resident artist at the Chapungu Gallery in Harare. In 1996 and 1997 she was chosen to participate in group exhibitions hosted by UNESCO and the National Art Gallery of Zimbabwe.

Following her local success Letwin developed an international market for her work. In 1999 Zuva Gallery, in the U.S., represented her as a featured artist. In the past decade her distinctive sculptures have been exhibited in galleries and exhibitions in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, U.S., U.K., and Canada. Letwin has also led many stone sculpting workshops in the U.S. and Germany.

In 2004 Letwin received an Award of Merit in the Young Woman Sculptor competition organized by the African Millennium Foundation and hosted by the Alliance Française in Harare.

Letwin currently sculpts at her home studio in Chitungwiza, 30 kilometers from Harare. She is married to Obert Nyamupapira and they have two daughters.

Letwin has created a body of work for her residency in Canada with ZimArt which tells the story of the African woman. Traditional grandmothers will stand beside her "sassy ladies" – urban, modern women. The power, beauty, dignity and the vulnerability of women are all explored in their vital and diverse roles in society, the family and Zimbabwean culture.

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