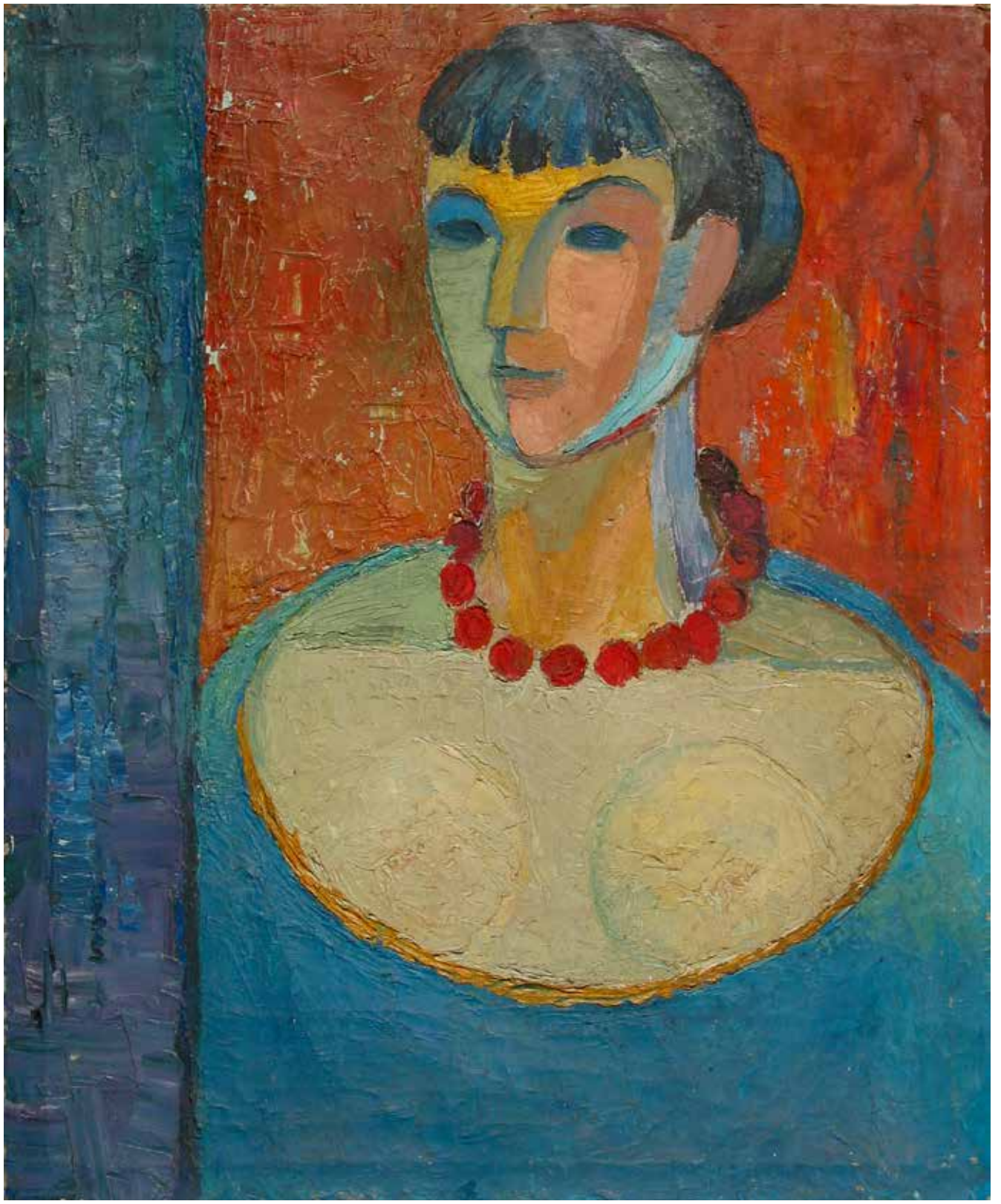
David Chudy
(1916 -1967)



Paintings and Sculpture

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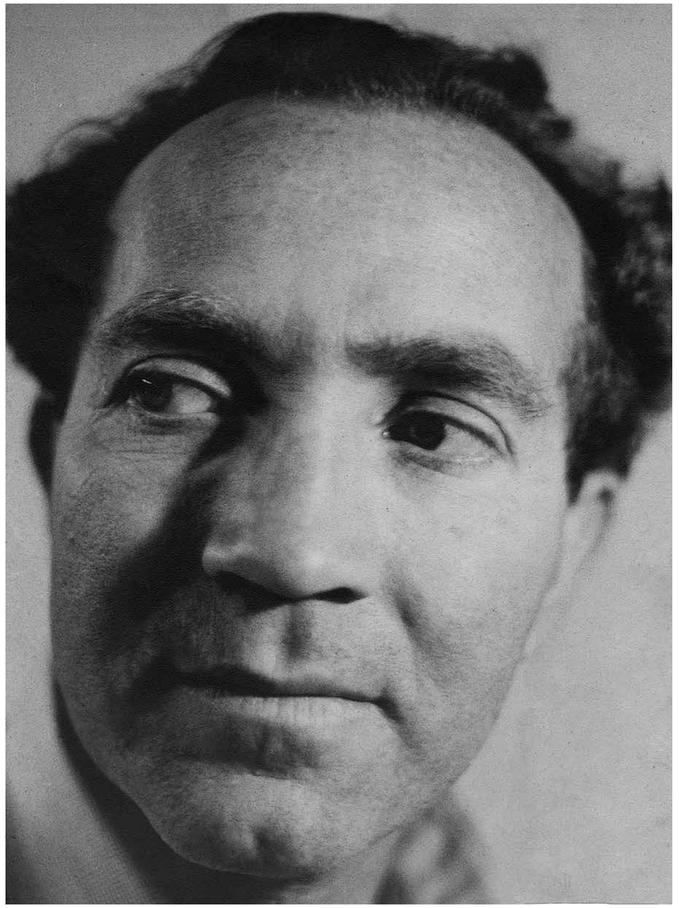


David Chudy

Paintings and Sculpture

www.davidchudy.com

Northern Rhodesia - painting destroyed or lost

Contents

Stand in front of the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences in Harare, in the crystal clear Africa light. It reveals the intricacy of five monumental terrazzo animal sculptures, constructed sixty years ago when the museum was completed. These are prominent examples of work by a highly individual artist and truly remarkable man, David Chudy.

A refugee from Nazi tyranny in Europe, he would spend the rest of all too short a life in Africa and play an important role in the cultural life of his adopted country, now known as Zimbabwe.

This is his untold story, giving context to his work in art and science. And in the telling, a flavor of 'Africa past', its awakening, and journey through post-colonial tumult into the modern world.

David Chudy sculptures outside the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (formerly Queen Victoria Museum)

Oil on canvas - circa 1960

Introduction

The story of David Chudy's art needs to be told, not least, because he did not get to tell much of it himself.

Of course he speaks to us directly through his art. But so often, for an easy understanding of an artist's contribution and their place in art history we rely on echoes and re-telling of the artist's career - as well as their ascent up the ladder of social notability.

David Chudy was an off-the-grid artist. So, we are denied a prefabricated assessment of his art through the eyes of others. That said, some of his art is highly public, some even in the sense of being city landmarks[1], but those are unsigned and were never subject to formal fine art assessment. When extant, an artist's dialog with his critics is often revealing.

Why did he not pursue recognition or a public artistic career? For people who knew him, this failure (if indeed it is a failure) did not stem from a desire to avoid the limelight or accountability. Not that he appeared to be disinterested in what other people thought of his work, it was just not what was driving him. David Chudy's other accomplishments probably justify the label of 'renaissance man' and therein, a common sense conclusion might be that he was simply too busy doing other things.

One might wish to dig deeper into his background and childhood for more profound reasons for this approach, but information about his early life in Europe is sparse to nonexistent. We know David Chudy left Poland for Africa, arriving just before World War II. It is from sub-tropical backwaters of Northern Rhodesia, near Congo where we start to get an idea of the man.

The part of Africa he arrived in had no artistic or cultural institutions he could play to, even if he harbored aspirations to be an artist, in the European sense. As a twenty-two-year-old he could hardly be thought of as having overwhelming career impetus upon arrival. And even if he did, the standard Western artist lifestyle, apart from being wholly inappropriate in the rudimentary conditions, would tarnish very fast in the tropical sun.

Against a backdrop of what was then the angry onset of war in Europe - and his family's vulnerability and eventual demise in the face of it - a stark reality about acceptance and equanimity presented itself. Although a world away, beyond ghettos and battlefields, the indigenous African people here were on a front line of sorts too. They were on the threshold of being catapulted into an uncharted technological future. Like it or not, the simple rural tribes person was having to calibrate his or her vision to accommodate stunning change. In the context of this, why then should David Chudy, a fellow flesh and blood human accept a fraternal kinship? Rather than just don a beret, ignore his immediate environment and behave as if he were destined to be a fashionable artist in Paris, his destiny seems to have been to welcome personal intellectual or artistic leaps of similar significance to his African brethren.

While he produced art his entire life, he also threw himself into being an entrepreneur in the marble and terrazzo business, he supplemented his very limited education and became a scientist doing self-funded research into sonar (via bat echolocation). This was evolving to include 'dolphin speech' before his early death in 1967, aged 51. He never questioned his motives in producing art. Despite his involvement in other areas, it was always core to his being.

Had his life not been cut short at his creative prime, perhaps he would have taken time later to invent or create a public social artistic persona. But, like his early life, of which so much is unknown (and probably un-reconstructable now), we simply cannot say.

We often say that art speaks for itself. Perhaps so. If his art is still speaking there are none but ourselves around now, to figure that out.

1 Public art - integrated into architecture in what is now Harare, now Zimbabwe where his lived from 1947

A Creative Journey

David Chudy believed that painting and sculpture is essentially an individual process. The purest expression is the product of a single mind, executed 'without compromise' in relatively safe abstraction (and relative isolation) from the things which molded and influenced it.

The fact that he ended up in tropical Africa, alone in artistic terms and without an interested audience did not seem to have worried him or dampened his creative drive. David Chudy, the man was not a loner. He liked to be liked as much as anyone. He was not arrogant, antisocial, secretive or any of the things that might set a man apart from the mainstream. On the contrary, many remember him as an easy-going person who enjoyed company and discussion across a wide range of social groupings. Even so he did not exhibit the slightest need to have his art win any prizes popularity stakes.

He did not seek to promote his name or his work in the context of the art world, neither at home nor further afield. With one exception in 1960 he did not exhibit his work or seek representation with galleries. Although latterly, enjoying the respect of his immediate peers and enjoying sufficient financial resources to exhibit his work, entirely on his own terms, the subject of 'being known' never arose.

A factor in this may have been that his work was never ready for public consumption. Such work, which to outsiders was complete appeared to be incomplete in his eyes. Evidently he had a continuing dialog with many of his paintings – often resuming or completing an image years later. He sometimes painted over a work he had lived with for decades. Most people would have left an old painting alone if for no other reason than that it had endured a while. But not he. Perhaps he felt his work had not reached a point where it was relevant to involve an audience. His creative rules evolved during his lifetime and he was not beholden to anyone if and when they did.

In terms of categories, his early artistic influences are easy to spot. He seemingly did not try to disguise them. He evidently did not pursue originality at all cost, but even so he does not end up a standard category fit. Of course every artist starts out mimicking existing styles, till they find their wind. As a result of his relative isolation from existing art scenes - and his distinctive life experiences, his trajectory diverged from his origins and those of his European peers.

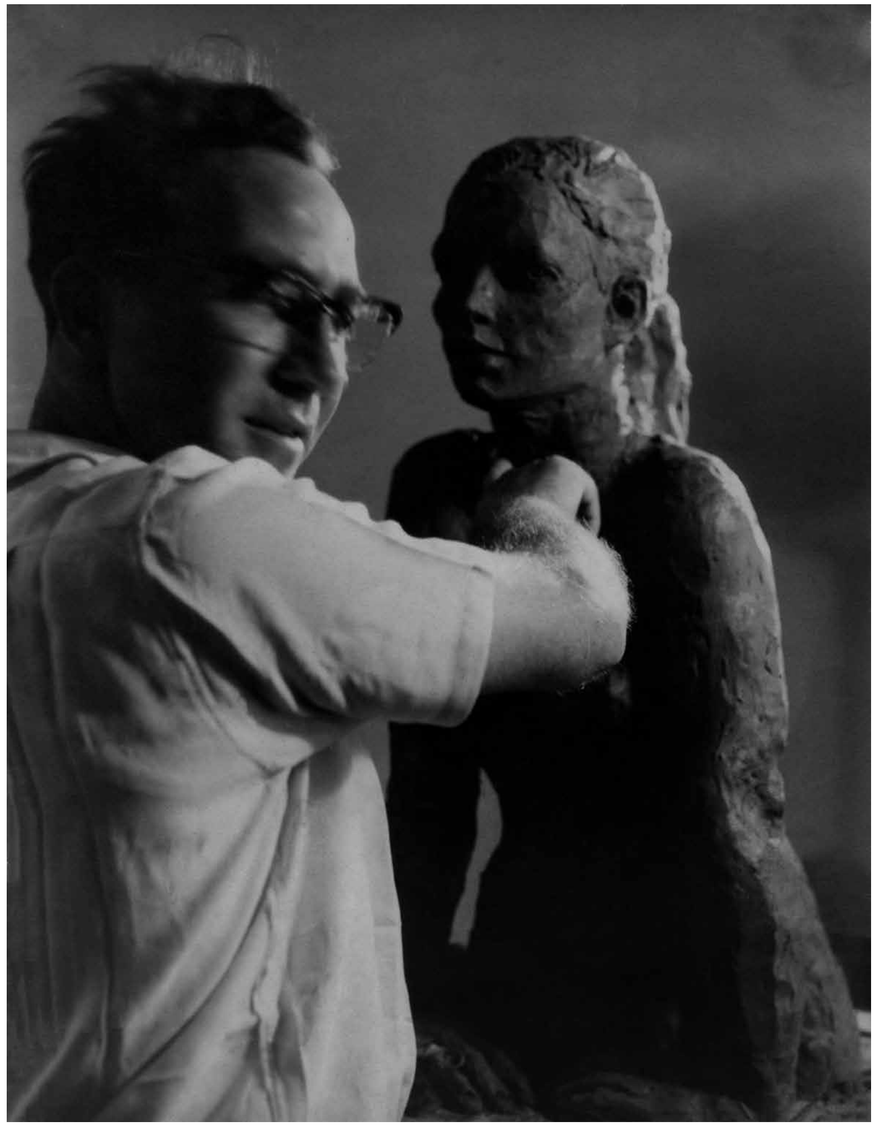
And when examining his short life and his headlong dive into science at a later age, much of the interest has to be where he was heading and where his art would go. It should not be assumed that it would be a linear progression, but looking at how his work changed over time one might get a sense of direction.

Starting with the earliest work in Africa, what one sees is an unremarkable style imported from the old country. No sketches or art exists from his earlier life in Europe. There is no suggestion that he had any kind of art education. Seemingly he had very little education of any kind. And based on miniscule available evidence, there was absolutely no family interest in art either. Most of the other things he did later in life were self-taught and one might assume this applies to painting and drawing.

As with many European artists who ended up in tropical Africa, the European color palette diffused with exposure to the bright, tropical African light. And adapting to local realities changed the subject matter. The dryness of the high veld and strong sunsets in contrast to the idealized greenness of Europe led many newly arrived artists to strong reds and browns in their work. Contrary to the initial sense that Africa was 'colorless' many discovered the absolute opposite over time. The bright clear light eventually opening up colors of great variance and intensity.

In David's case, adapting both to the color of Africa and its lifestyle was fairly fast. On a social

Clay sculpture - circa 1960



Clay sculpture - circa 1960

level his attitude was different to many of his fellow European colonials. They sought to escape local realities by adopting a 'country club mentality' and only describing their connection to Africa with mascots and the odd curio. Apart from a token leopard skin draped over the couch, the look and feel of their colonial lives were sentimental reflections of the old country. For David Chudy there was simply no culture to going back to. As a Jew from Poland there was nothing and no one there anymore. He was left with three brothers, who had left earlier. No others in the immediate family survived the war and the holocaust.

David Chudy's baptism to Africa was not just marked by the adoption of a new painterly style. It was being exposed to and surviving the very basic living conditions in the Copper Belt of Northern Rhodesia (close to Belgian Congo) which changed his core.

The racial divide and nascent anti cultural attitudes in that backwater were stark barriers to feeling wholeheartedly African (whatever one's concept of that - it was not a thought of as a thing in those days). At the same time there were many things which incomers and the indigenous people of the region could come together on. Common needs were to survive in the vast, unforgiving African bush. It was all basic stuff - having to dig out vehicles stuck in sand in remote, untraveled roads was routine, as were roadside repairs, malaria, keeping an eye out for cobras in the living quarters or dogs being taken by leopards. David Chudy was extremely creative mechanically as well as very good at fixing things. This gained him a reputation and permitted him to cross all kinds of barriers - and make friends easily.

His marriage to Ellen Rothschild,[1] a fellow refugee (from Germany) and their relocating[2] to Salisbury, the capital of Southern Rhodesia and initiated another much more lasting phase in his African experience. This was characterized by building a successful terrazzo/marble business and establishing a creative space from which to move his art forward.

1 1940 marriage - Ellen Rothschild & David Chudy
2 1947 permit to move to Southern Rhodesia.

Even as things developed in the business, in 1957 he left his wife to keep it running while he took time off to expand his artistic horizons, with a three-month long trip to Europe. There he connected with artists and seemingly wanted to get a sense of the European artistic environment he had left behind years earlier. Evidently he hoped the experience would inspire him to do new work while he was away from home.

He met artists in Spain. He visited Henry Moore at his large estate writing: "*I went to visit Henry Moore. It was quite an experience to see his work and sit out in the large lawns and grounds and also to see his last works in progress at his two studios*".

Although he comments: "*I have gained enough to keep me busy for at least another two years*", he also says; "*apart from visiting a lot of artists I did not do much work of any value*". No work from this trip survived. Perhaps he gave some work away. One gets the sense that he has now transitioned to be a 'third world man' and was keen to get home and work.

Meanwhile their business prospered and was a springboard for further international travels (overland trans-Africa and similarly the Far East from India to Japan and along the Sumatran train. He did not shy away from producing good work on this latter trip, but eventually his curiosity led him to expand his interests into science. He self-funded research into bat echolocation and the innovation of a number of prototype products such as aids for the blind and burglar alarms. The conclusions from that suggested new approaches to dolphin sonar and speech, and he was exploring pursuing that at the time of his death in 1967.

In as much as art may be thought of as a 'sound track to life', David Chudy's next phase, working on animal research and electronics, had only just begun to change the tone and tune of his own work significantly, when he died at the age of 51.

Painting and sculpture produced in the final phase of his career solidified his former evolution of style and composition. It also showed he was entering a new loose phase in which whatever else, strict representation would play a lesser role.

Origins

As the story goes, David Chudy was the youngest in a large family. He grew up in the Free City of Danzig (now Gdansk), then a semi-autonomous, German majority, Baltic Port.

I say 'story', since it is mostly hearsay - and from people who are long gone. The origins of family are unclear. Neither he, nor his three surviving older brothers, shared more than odd snippets of their past, with their families.

A few recently unearthed letters, a passport and a Polish exit permit from 1937, are the only physical items which remained in David Chudy's possession that link him to Poland in any tangible way. The coded letters from 1939, on the eve of the German invasion of Poland suggest he was especially close to one family member. They show desperation to find funds and visas for both him and his mother, to leave the country and to join David Chudy in Africa. There is never a reference to his father.

The letters, mostly from brother 'Max', were written from Zychlin a small town ninety kilometers west of Warsaw. The town, established by a 'Hasidic miracle worker', Shmuel Abba, was 90% Jewish.

Of the two rare surviving images that feature David Chudy prior to his arrival in Africa, the one of him aged 14 was taken in Zychlin. In 1942 the Jews from Zychlin were deported to the Warsaw Ghetto and then to death camps. None of the letters date from after the invasion of Poland by the Germans in 1939.

Piecing things together is the best one can do, to build any kind of image of his origins. There is no clear idea how many siblings he had. As with everything there is precious little evidence, to cross-reference in any meaningful way. The few photos which exist feature unknown people who may or may not have been family.

And there is are further difficulties in tracing relatives. For example, two of David Chudy's brothers went by the second name of Hude. There were two legitimate spellings of the family: 'Chudy' (which means skinny in Polish) and Hude which is derived from the phonetic spelling used in the Russian alphabet First names had up to four forms, also: German, Polish, Russian and Yiddish equivalents.

Chudy/Hude confectionery in Danzig -sweet wrapper.

Of the few documentary threads was this handed-down sweet wrapper and 'reference' letter to relative, Philipp Landau, both which describe Hude & Co. confectioners and sweet manufacturers on Langgartenstr 58, Danzig and a former preference for the 'Hude' spelling of the family name.

Subsequently a letter surfaced indicating the cessation of trading of Hude & Co. around December 1925. This was for unknown reasons. The building that was Langgartens-tr 58 is no longer in existence, nor are there many 'living memories' of the place. First the Jews and the Poles were purged and after the war it was the turn of the Germans.

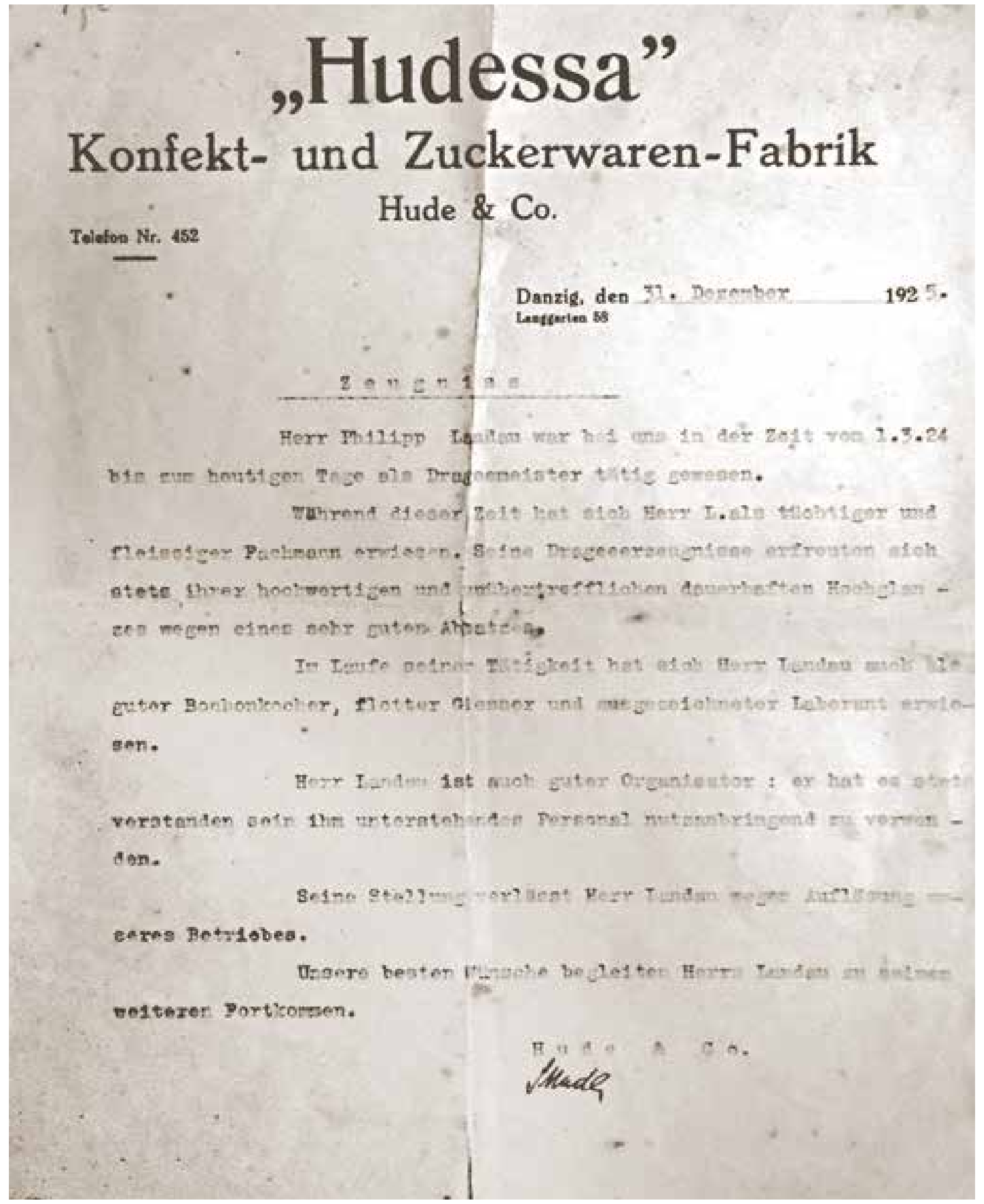
Based solely on photographic evidence, David Chudy visited London with his brother in 1935. The photo on page 16, taken outside Buckingham Palace can be accurately dated, because press platforms for George V Jubilee are visible in the background. He was 19 at the time.

There is nothing to suggest the reason for the visit to London although it is logical to assume his brothers may have been seeking visas for South Africa where they went shortly thereafter. The ability to travel and

The earliest known photo of David Chudy (our left) with what may be his closest brother Max. Taken in Zychlin in Poland

London, Buckingham Palace, King George V Silver Jubilee 1935. Photo dated according to scaffolding around the monument in the background which was uniquely surrounded by scaffolding for the press. David Chudy (left) and older brother Bernard.

a tourist visit to London in those days suggests a threshold of affluence. It also suggests inspiration to reach out and taste the larger world. David Chudy seemingly was not granted entry to South Africa then, if that was indeed what he went there to achieve.



„Hudessa"
Konfekt- und Zuckerwaren-Fabrik
Hude & Co.

Telefon Nr. 452

Danzig, den 31. Dezember 1925.
Langgarten 58

Zeugnis

Herr Philipp Landau war bei uns in der Zeit vom 1.3.24 bis zum heutigen Tage als Drageemeister tätig gewesen.

Während dieser Zeit hat sich Herr L. als tüchtiger und fleissiger Fachmann erwiesen. Seine Drageeerzeugnisse erfreuten sich stets ihres hochwertigen und unübertrefflichen dauerhaften Hochglanzes wegen eines sehr guten Absatzes.

Im Laufe seiner Tätigkeit hat sich Herr Landau auch als guter Bonbonkocher, flotter Giesser und ausgezeichneter Laborant erwiesen.

Herr Landau ist auch guter Organisator : er hat es stets verstanden sein ihm unterstehendes Personal nutzbringend zu verwenden.

Seine Stellung verlässt Herr Landau wegen Auflösung unseres Betriebes.

Unsere besten Wünsche begleiten Herrn Landau zu seinem weiteren Fortkommen.

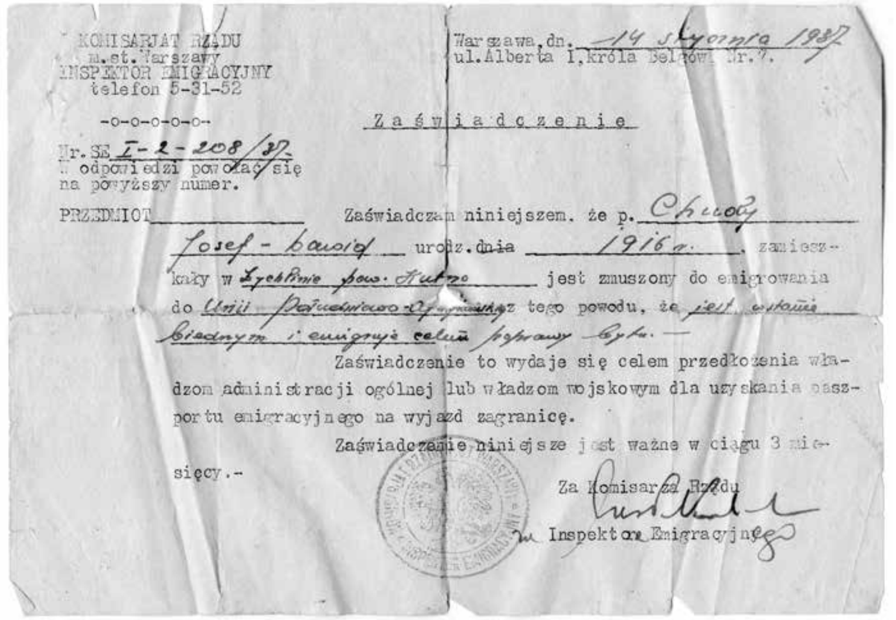
Hude & Co.

Hude & Co.'s cessation of trading in 1925 mentioned in this, a reference letter for Philipp Landau.

And it may be possible to infer that he was worldly enough to then have had a grasp of English, if for no other reason than that the letters from Max refer to this as necessary prerequisite, for getting a visa to go to Northern Rhodesia.

Max, it seems did not speak English well enough. He and his mother never left Poland. Nor, seemingly did any of the other relatives or friends who are mentioned in the letters, all who perished in the hands of the Nazis.

The second of only 2 photos featuring David Chudy in Poland. David Chudy (right), presumably: his sister (name unknown), brother Max and an unknown child.



KOMISARJAT RZĄDU
m.st. Warszawy
INSPEKTOR EMIGRACYJNY
telefon 5-31-52
-o-o-o-o-o-

Warszawa, dn. 14 stycznia 1937
ul. Alberta I, króla Belgów Nr. 7.

Nr. SE I-2-208/37.
W odpowiedzi powołać się na powyższy numer.

Zaświadczenie

PRZEDMIOT

Zaświadczam niniejszem, że p. Chudy Josef-David urodz. dnia 1916 r. zamieszkały w Lyckowie pow. Kutno jest zmuszony do emigrowania do Unii Południowo-Afrykańskiej z tego powodu, że jest w stanie biednym i emigruje celem poprawy bytu.—

Zaświadczenie to wydaje się celem przedłożenia władzom administracji ogólnej lub władzom wojskowym dla uzyskania paszportu emigracyjnego na wyjazd zagranicę.

Zaświadczenie niniejsze jest ważne w ciągu 3 miesięcy.-

Za Komisarza Rządu
Inspektora Emigracyjnego

David Chudy's permit to leave Poland - 1937

Northern Rhodesia 1938 - 1947

The reasons for David Chudy's journey to Africa may have been obvious in the context of the dark clouds of war welling in Europe, but we do not actually see them articulated by him. His, brothers who had relocated to South Africa a couple of years earlier were unable to obtain a visa for David Chudy to remain in the country after arriving in 1937/8. But after a few months staying with them in Johannesburg, he was able to head to Northern Rhodesia, where he arrived in 1938, aged 22. He found refuge in the Copperbelt close to Congo and started a new life. By all accounts he adapted extremely fast.

Capitalizing on a two month crash course which his brother had given him in plumbing, he got work. Within a year he was driving a 1932 Plymouth.

He also ended up playing bagpipes in a Scottish self-defense regiment in Mufulira - in a band consisting entirely of eastern European Jews. With a backdrop of World War II, there was a feeling of common purpose among expatriates. He might have felt part of a community, but this was an extremely out of the way place, barely served with popular culture of any description and definitely lacking interest in art (even on a decorative level). Nonetheless, he began to paint in earnest.

A year later he met Ellen Rothschild whom he later married. Ellen had arrived in Africa in September 1940. She was an eighteen-year old German refugee from Bad Homburg, a small, fashionable, spa town near Frankfurt, notable for its castle, the residence of the Kaiser. She joined her brother Fritz, cousin Helmut and father Emile. All the men had been released from Sachsenhausen concentration camp in extraordinary circumstances[1]. The four of them found refuge in the mining community of Chingola in the Copper Belt.

1 Ellen Rothschild's mother Bella, had gone to extraordinary lengths to petition members of the Gestapo to get them released from the camp, after visas to Northern Rhodesia were approved. But her own visa, which was latterly forthcoming, was undeliverable after postal disruption upon the outbreak of war. She would later die in Buchenwald concentration camp.

Quoting from her documentation, Ellen paints a vivid picture of David Chudy as a young man, as well as the life and times:

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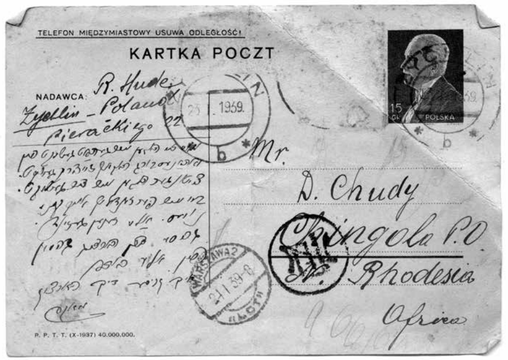
"That day I met a short, well-scrubbed young man in carefully ironed grey slacks (later on I learnt that the servants ironed these with wet brown paper until the crease was like a knife edge),

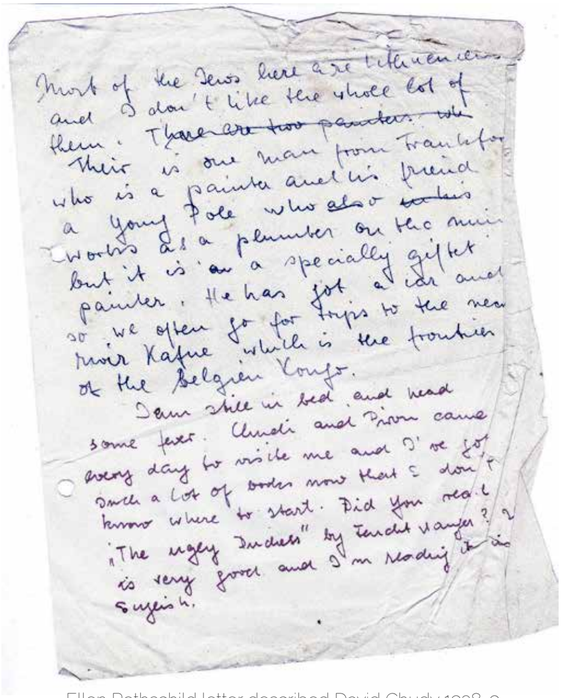


Africa early days. Abbreviated address sufficed for delivery

a white open neck shirt, large grey soft (almost calf like) eyes and wavy light brown hair. He was called Chudy, although his first name was David and everybody else was called by their first names. Chudy (not Mister) was about 23 years old, was a Polish Jew and worked on the mine. He was the 'resident' plumber. I later found out that he learnt the trade, helping his equally untrained (but successful and self-taught) brother Martin, in Johannesburg for about two months. He then went to Northern Rhodesia and got a job with a builder with the name of Smith, a red-faced individual with a very pretty wife and a private plane (he had a child who when he grew up worked in the Income Tax department in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, and incidentally caught Aaron - David's elder brother - for a few hundred pounds after he applied for a tax rebate and who soon after that left the Tax Department to become, if not a good, but a very popular writer named Wilbur Smith). David did all the plumbing installation in the houses Smith built for the Nchanga mine employees.

When the houses were built, David was out of a job and then applied to the mine to be employed as maintenance plumber.

Unknown Registration/photo ID (English/German)



Ellen Rothschild letter described David Chudy 1938-9

Early self portrait.- painting lost

Ellen Rothschild (Chudy) circa 1940

Avro Anson (or 652) on the runway in somewhere in Southern Rhodesia, possibly Victoria Falls.

Center group, left to right: Fritz Rothschild, Ellen Chudy, unknonwn friend, or pilot and David. Chudy - circa 1940

He had the great advantage that he knew where most of the pipes were, having laid them himself. On the other hand, there wasn't much work, all the houses being relatively new. I suspect the wives of the miners asked for the young plumber to be sent because they were bored with their existence. They had servants to clean and cook, garden boys to weed and dig and water, they were mostly fairly simple women who didn't read but spent a lot of their days having tea with neighbors or played tennis, made their own clothes. Anyway, this young man who already had a receding hairline then, was a very good natured, generous chap who earned good money, had a second hand green Plymouth and who often restrained Fritz and Helmut[2] from fighting with my father. He seemed a very nice person except that he was a trifle cocky but I rather liked him. He was very interested in Art, and so was I. We all went to the cinema together (one film per week I think - two performances). And we went to the Kafue River and into the bush on weekends".

Later Ellen wrote:

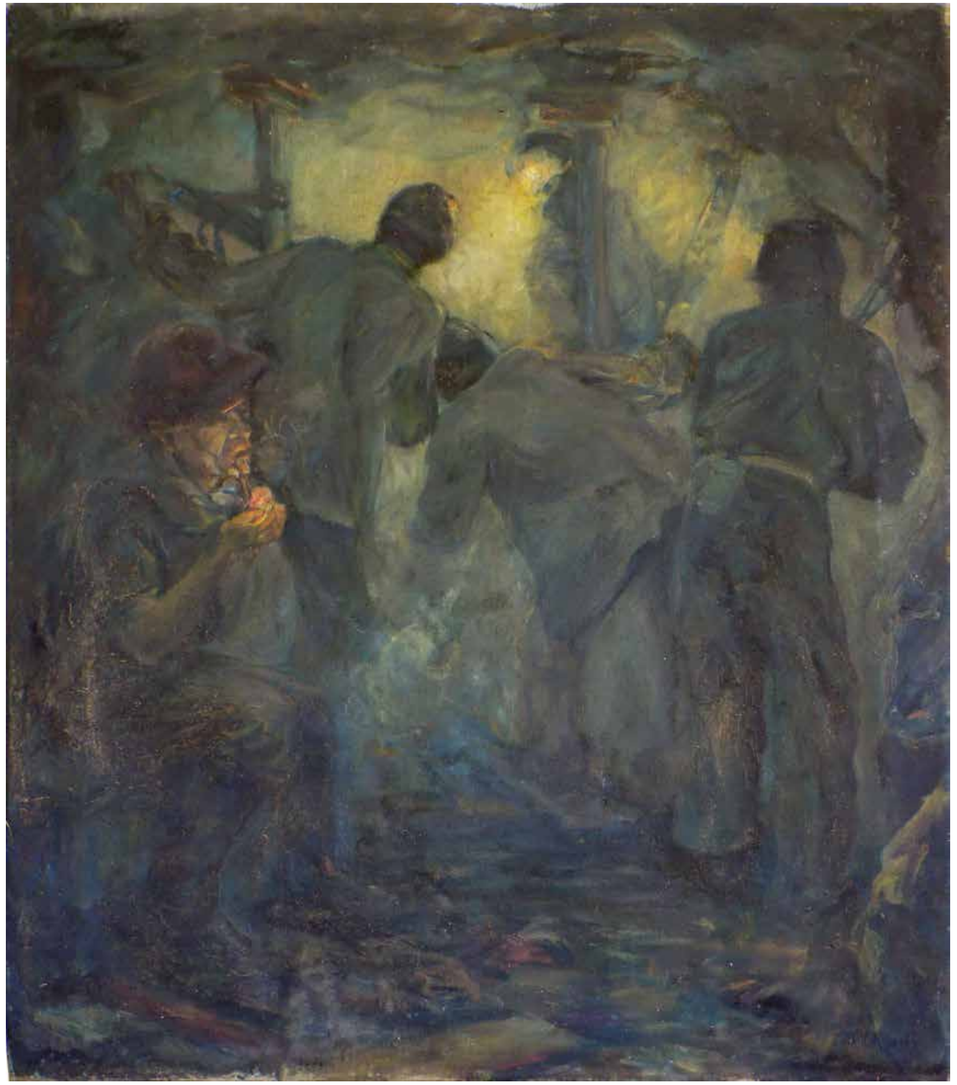
He is the first man who makes me glad: who doesn't take the happiness with him when he leaves the room. He leaves me enough of the certainty of his love, to make me go on feeling happy. He cares for me for myself. Not because there is no one else, or he would have loved me when I first came and thought myself in love with him. He can't and won't be unkind to anyone and I could kill him untold times because I have moments when I wish to hurt those that have done me unkindness'. He doesn't dislike anyone. Is it lack of character, lack of a sense of honor or is he really so good natured that he takes anything without getting ruffled? I love him so much when he comes in his dirty work clothes, a little unshaven and tousled hair that has a shimmer of gold in it. Open neck shirt that shows the hairs on his chest that reach up to his neck. When he grabs me roughly and kisses me that I feel it takes my breath away and my ribs creak ominously".

And:

David, who, I think I mentioned before, was determined never to get married. He had read certain philosophies, especially one Weiniger who considered women had no moral sense. Women loved their children irrespective of their worth as human beings etc., etc.

2 Fritz Rothschild - Ellen's brother. Helmut Rothschild her cousin - both, through the efforts of her mother were released from concentration camp after obtaining a Northern Rhodesia visa.

Ellen Chudy, Norther Rhodesia 1940 - photo David Chudy



Copper mines - Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) - executed deep underground at the face (painting destroyed)

Also, I think he felt that an artist ought not to tie himself to a family. It was also rather bourgeois and he too felt that he hadn't experienced enough love affairs. All the girls he had taken out were of very mediocre calibre and he dreamt of great experiences. I had accepted the fact that our affair would end one day and at times felt sure that it would be better if we parted because I was not at all sure that I would be happy with him. I think I also mentioned that he got furious when people asked him when he would marry Miss Rothschild and felt a kind of responsibility for me. So, one day he decided to go to Mufulira to get a job. He asked for a job underground so that he would be able to paint pictures of underground scenes, but because he knew that he would never be able to break off our relationship unless he moved away. So he got a job as a pipe fitter and duly moved to Mufulira. I accepted the inevitable and then, Chudy (I called him that till we got married) went to work on his bicycle every day and saved his petrol ration (the war was still on, and anyway rationing didn't just stop when it was over) which made it possible on an average, to visit Chingola twice a month.

Now I really felt happy and carefree because now the only reason he could come to visit me for was that he was indeed in love with me and that both my and his doubts disappeared. I spent a happy year looking forward to his visits, which were still beset with difficulties because of father and Fritz and people who wanted lifts and then visited us and stole precious hours. But our own relationship was so much freer. Then we decided to go on a holiday together and then one day David (the Bohemian) said, since quite obviously we would get married one day, why not then and to make the holiday our honeymoon. He even got me an engagement ring and at last my father accepted him without too many reservations.

Of course he still was only a Pollack and that wasn't what a good German Jewish father had planned for his illustrious daughter. But at least Chudy was going to make an honest woman of his daughter and the fact that he'd been to school in Danzig made it a little less shocking. Fritz, by then I realised, would have gladly settled for my living in sin with David, rather than leave him in Chingola and become a respectable married woman. I had to go to the 'Boma' (the police station cum Magistrates Court) to put up the Banns[3] - had to give notice to the accountant of Nchanga Trading Co. (which apparently I found very embarrassing and had *the girls in the shop in fits of giggles).*

3 'Banns' - a public announcement of proposed marriage.

Woman - Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia

Barotse women - Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia

David and Ellen Chudy set out on their road to Cape Town. Arterial highways in the day were not paved

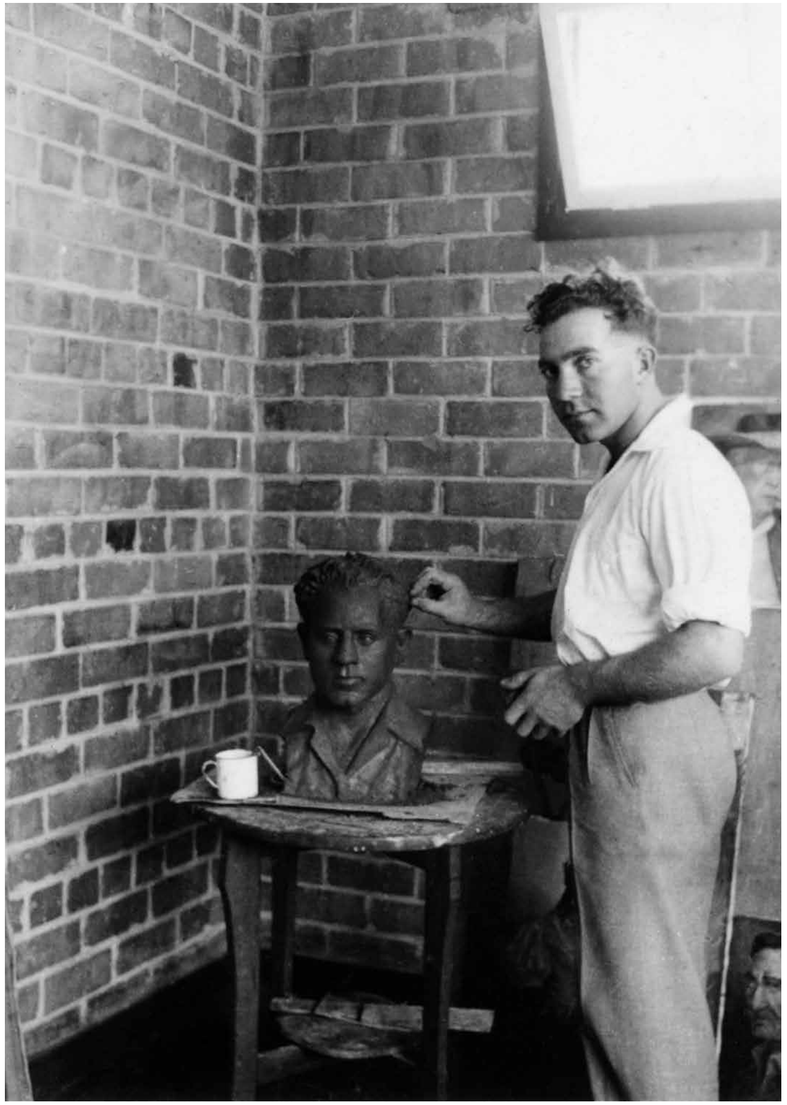
Hunters on the Kafue River - Photo David Chudy

Kafue River - big game hunters - photo David Chudy

Pencil sketch - miner - Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia

Miner - underground with lamp - photo evidence on ly

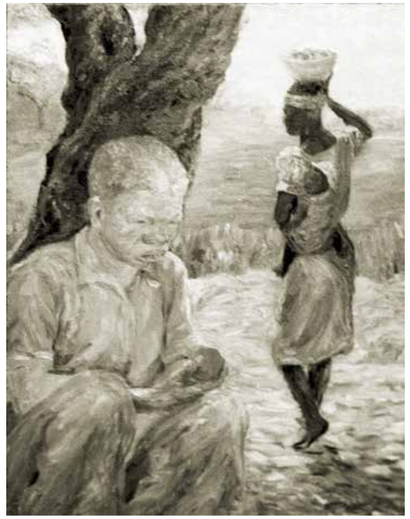
Lost painting and albino model



David Chudy early self portrait in clay - sculpture not extant

Pencil sketch - masked African dancers

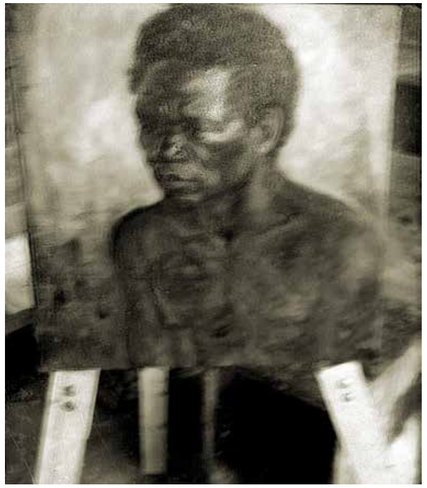
Pencil sketch - ceremonial African dancer



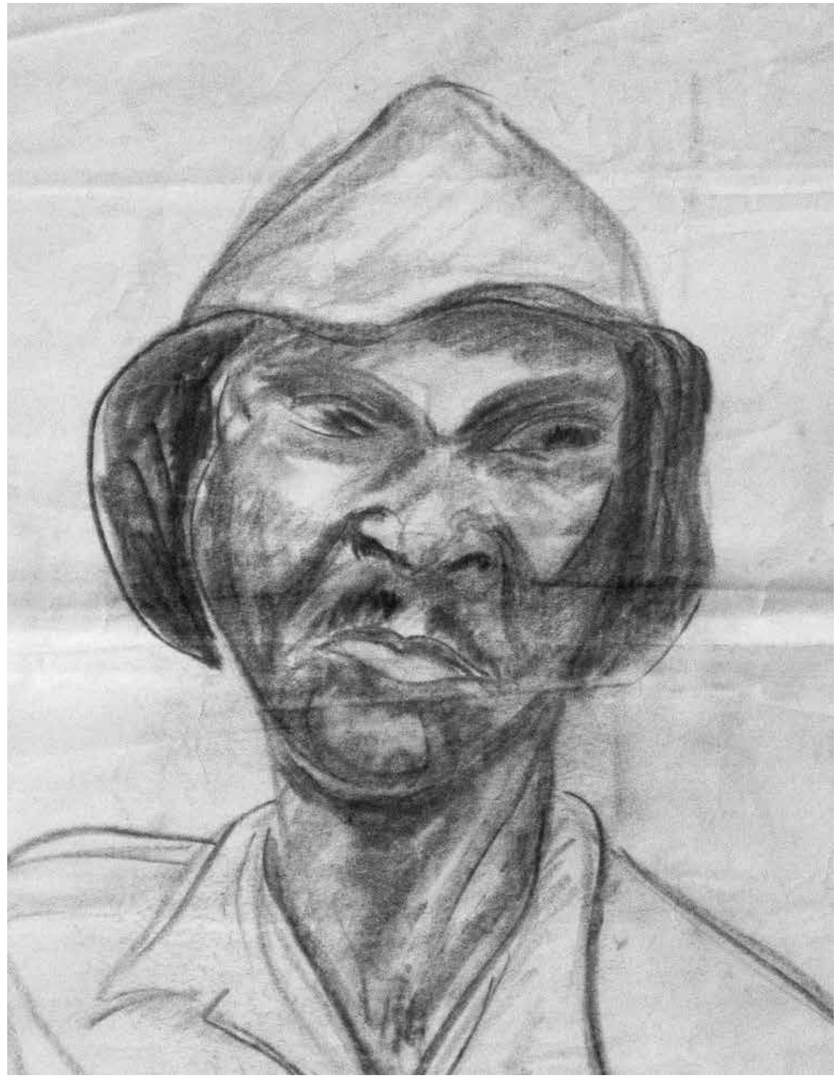
early painting - albino - photo evidence only

Early painting - photo evidence only

Pencil sketch - unknown subject



Unknown subject, photo evidence only



Charcoal sketch - unknown subject

Bathing Africans - oil on canvas

Barotse women - oil on canvas circa 1940

Painting a self portrait - painting: photo evidence only

David Chudy with unknown portrait - Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia

David Chudy with refugee friends - Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia

David Chudy painting withj brushes

Ellen Chudy in period costume, posing for portrait

Romantic portrait of Ellen Rothschild/Chudy

Early sculpture - photo evidence only

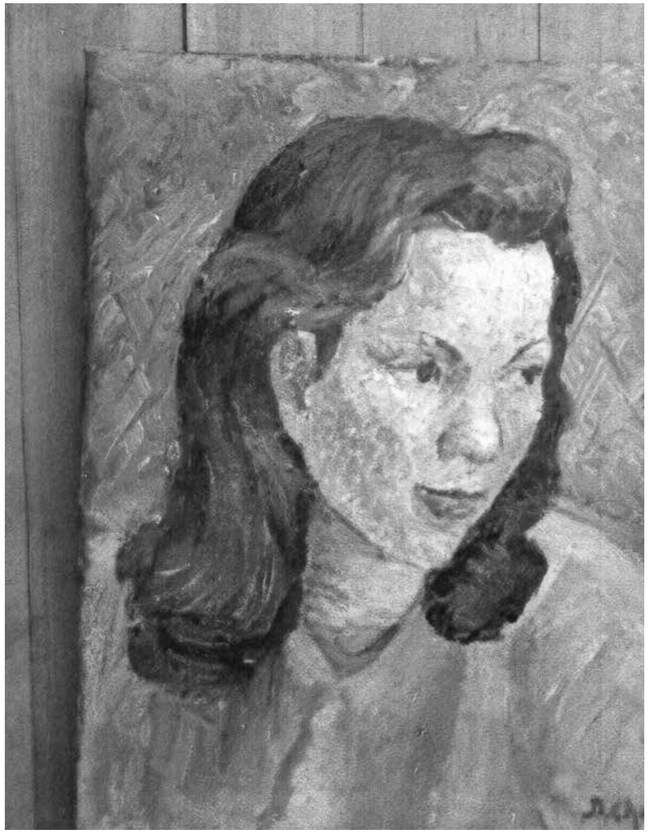
Early sculpture - photo evidence only

Portrait of unknown child - photo evidence only

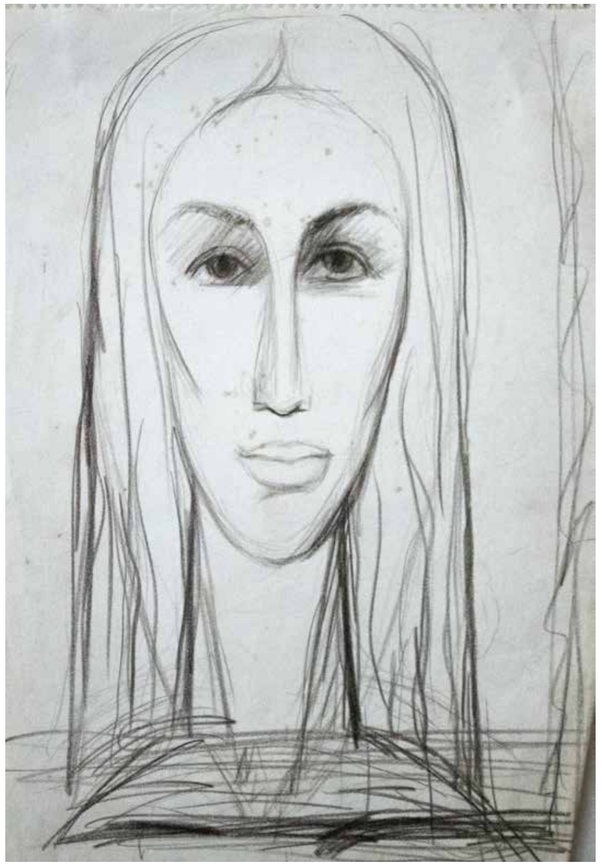
Early oil on Canvas - unknown subjects

Ellen Rothschild/Chudy posing in period costume - photo evidence only

Unknown subject - photo evidence only



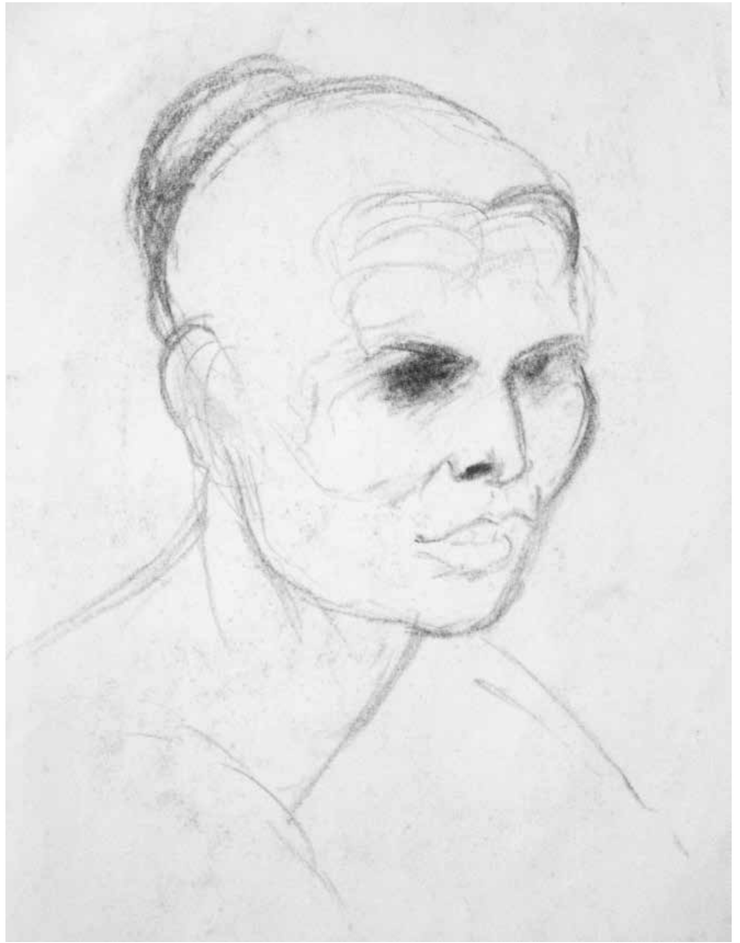
Unknown subject - photo evidence only - early use of palette knife



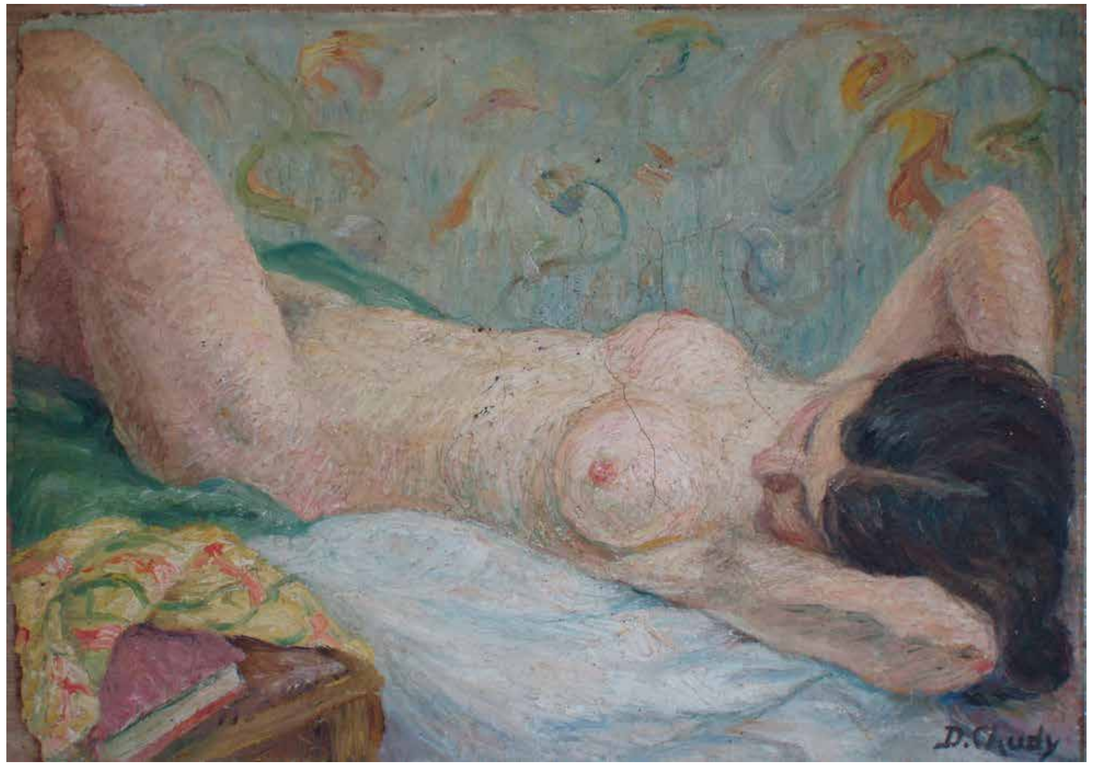
pencil study for portrat of unknown

Unknown subject - photo evidence only

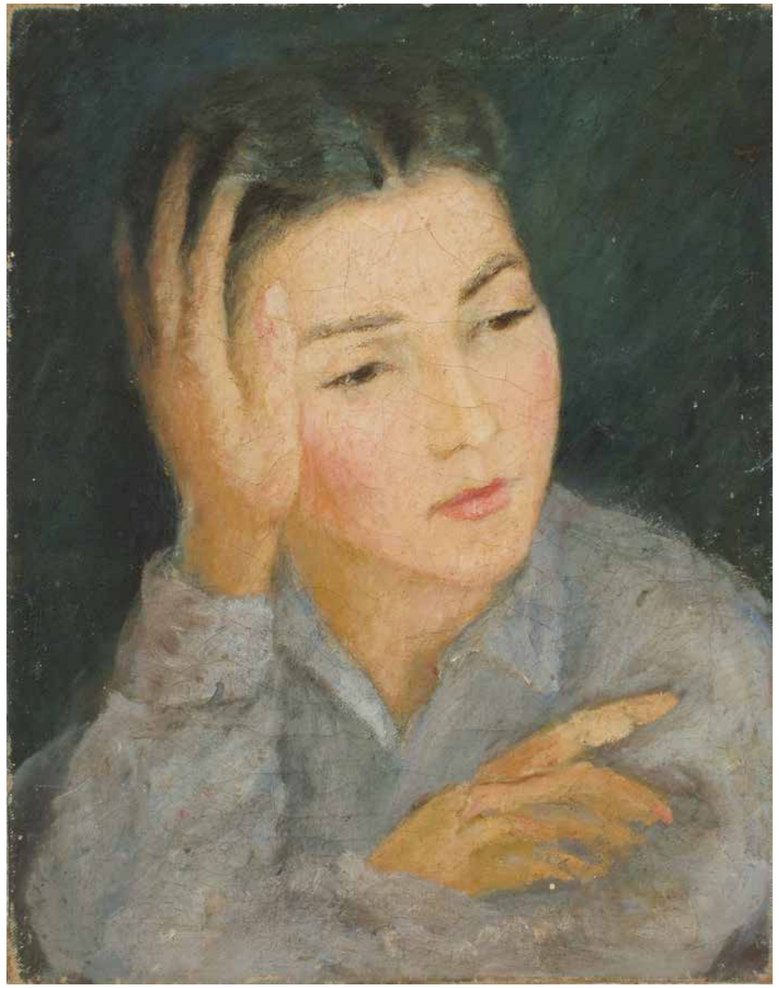
Painting of unknown subject - photo evidence only



charcoal sketch of unknown subject

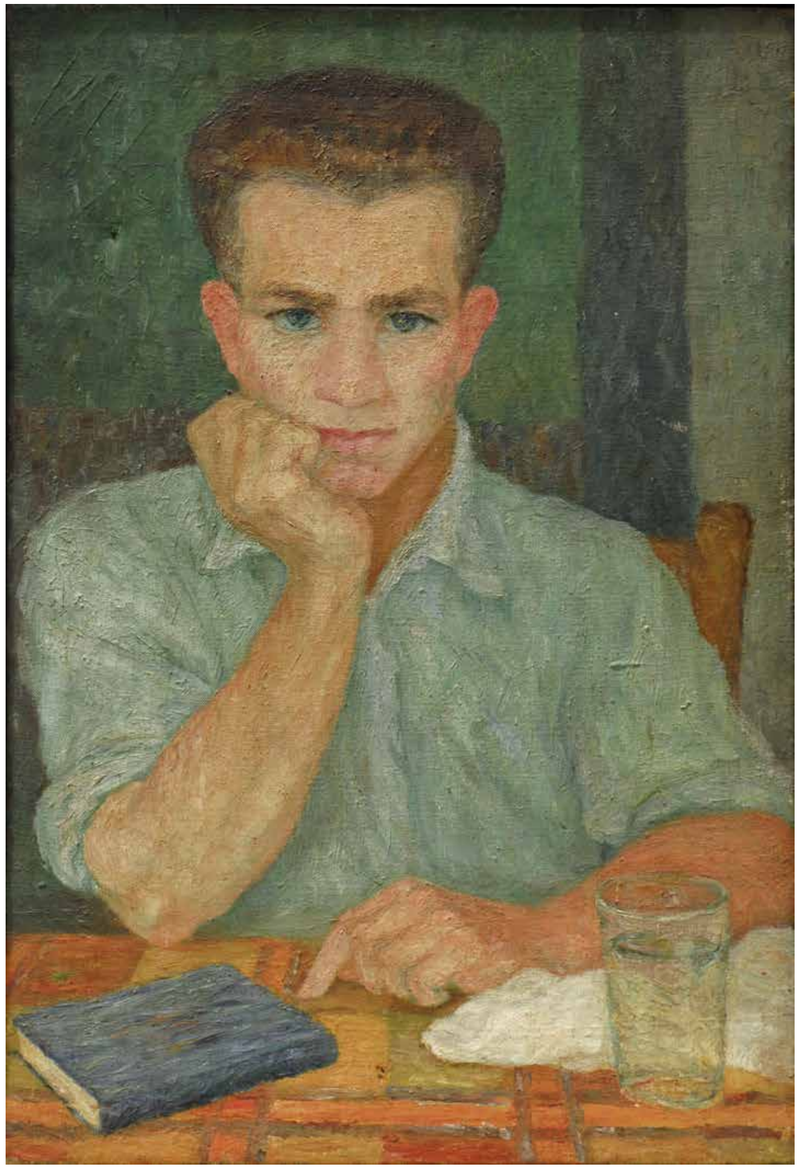


Oil on canvas - Ellen Chudy



Oil on canvas - unknown subject

David Chudy - oil on canvas - Ellen Chudy



David Chudy - early self portrait

The move to Southern Rhodesia, 1947

David and Ellen Chudy passed through Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, on their 3300 km. (2000 mile) honeymoon road trip to Cape Town. Ellen writes that they liked Salisbury and set their sights on living there. Salisbury was not a world city like Johannesburg or Cape Town, but it was a step up from the rudimentrary conditions in the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia.

Southern Rhodesia, was in fact a separate country at that time, so a move was not simply a matter of 'packing', as it would have been six years later in 1953, when it was federated with its namesake Northern Rhodesia, as well as Nyasaland.

From its inception, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland triggered a period of infectious can-do and optimism in the region. Southern Rhodesia had been unique in terms of the British Empire. It had been a self-governing British Crown Colony since 1923, with a more highly developed sense of identity and autonomy than its two new partners. This spilled over to the other two countries. There was a sense that the region was going places, with projects like the massive Kariba dam on the Zambezi River.

David and Ellen Chudy received a residence permit for Southern Rhodesia in April 1947, just two years after the allies declared victory in Europe. They moved to the capital Salisbury (now called Harare).

They regarded this move as a major step culturally, although for them initially, hostel living conditions were not significantly better than they had been in Northern Rhodesia.

Salisbury (now Harare) had lifted itself from the status of a pioneer town decades earlier. It was occupied by people of wealth and boasted tall office blocks as well as comfortable sports clubs. But it was still a post-World War II, colonial style town, short on services and clawing its way into international respectability.

Ellen Chudy wrote:
"All that was available was a room in Cranbourne Hostel (an old air force camp) and neither kitchen, bathroom nor loo. We shared ablution blocks for baths and lavatories with all the people around, who also lived in rooms that had been converted from old barracks that had been divided into rooms and sets of two rooms for families with children. At first we were horrified, but when we started to make friends, found it became, in some way, one of the happiest periods of our lives.

The room had two very primitive beds with chicken wire, where you usually have strings and thin grass mattresses, hard and lumpy. We had a rough small bedside cabinet, and, I think that was the sum total of our furniture. But we were young, and after years of stagnation in Northern Rhodesia, we were, for the first time, able to make friends amongst intelligent, liberal people".

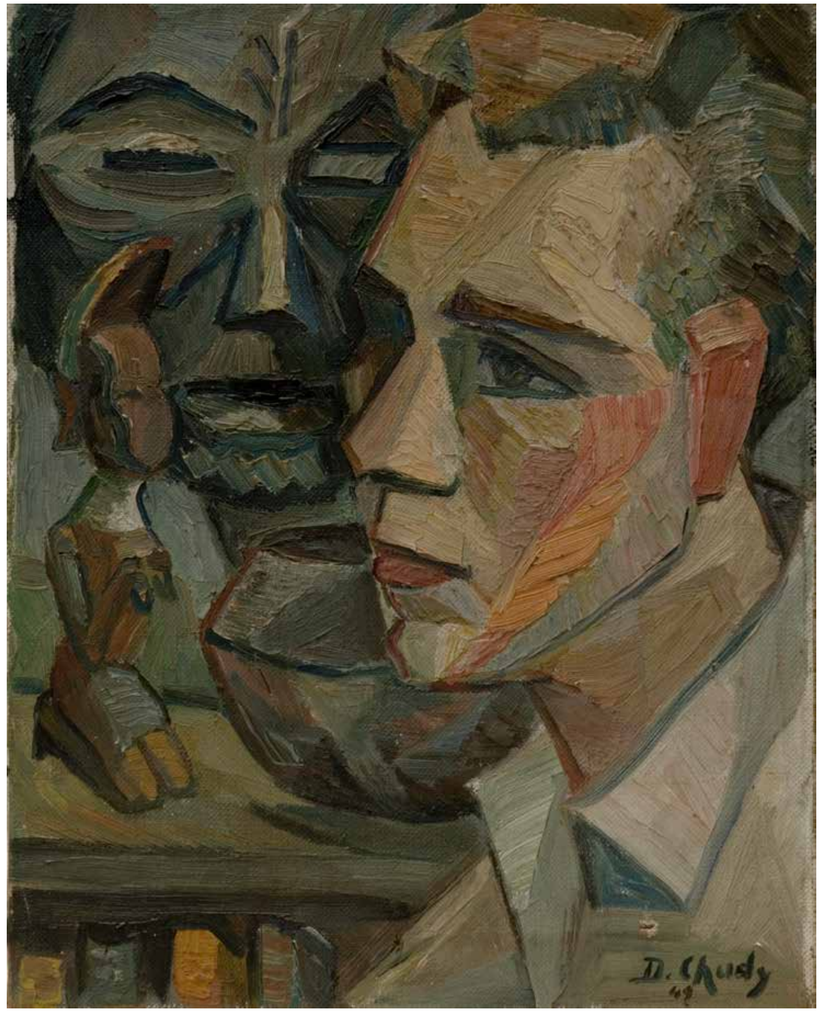
Initially the Chudy's found employment, but moved out of Cranbourne barracks soon after, establishing a fledgling terrazzo business. Now they were living and working from one location, an industrial area on the edge of town.

As the business expanded many of the employees chose to create their traditional thatched dwellings on the premises. Personal and tribal concerns were often inseparable from business, adding an extra dimension to the standard concept of a western business experience.

Initially manufacturing terrazzo sinks and tiles, business was brisk in this emerging colony, with major building contracts starting to come in. Then (the mid 50's) the government decided to construct a railroad right through the living room of their factory/dwelling. It issued a compulsory purchase order for the premises.

But it all turned out well, with the Chudy's being in the construction business. The compensation from the government went a long way with their connections. It permitted the construction of a landmark modern architect designed house in the then posh suburb of Highlands, as well as the erection of a new industrial property.

The company (Terrastone Ltd.) expanded to more than 300 employees, while tenders for major projects were won. Entire facades of large buildings (up to 20 stories) were completed. David Chudy's artistic talents were



Self portrait with indigenous masks and sculpture 1949

David Chudy and model - painting: lost of destroyed

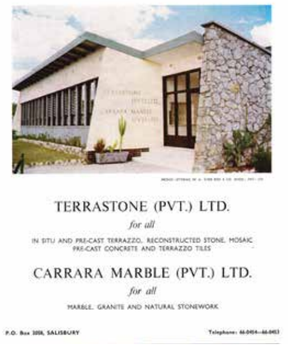
frequently a boon when bidding on public art and construction projects which often included sculpture or sculptural elements.

A friend remembers how David Chudy was mocked for attending a major construction project meeting in casual work clothes. The competition (trans-national construction companies) had traded their everyday tropical garb for suits. But their derision was short lived when David Chudy's company was awarded the contract - on the basis of the quality of their work.

Things had gone well materially, but David Chudy resisted a commitment to unending wealth acquisition. Despite the demands of his business, he devoted significant time and attention to his art (and latterly self-funded scientific research). He balanced what he saw as a 'satisfactorily' successful enterprise with creativity, a rich social and intellectual life and travel.

David Chudy was suited to the spacious suburban life he now enjoyed. He did not socialize at public events, but, this being Africa, no one ever waited to be invited to the leafy Chudy Highlands residence. Nor, 'was it done' to call ahead. People would just turn up at any time with other interesting people in tow. Sunday afternoons were a time to pull out furniture for tea, snacks and good conversation on the lawn of the new house.

Livingstone House - tallest building in Salisbury - entire exterior by Terrastone Ltd



Terrastone/Carrara Marble offices

The stylish home became a cultural oasis for people from a wide variety of cultural, national and racial backgrounds. Starting in the early 50's, close friends included Ned Patterson[1], Premalya and Neimal Singh[2], Leo Birzen[3], Peter Fernandes[4], Guy Clutton Brock[5] and Lawrence Vambe[6]. These were highly inclusive gatherings often with heated conversation - contradicting the standard Rhodesian diktat of the day - which included: 'in this house we do not discuss politics, sex or religion'. Presumably 'art' would have been included but this was far from the consciousness of most of the colonials at the time.

This was a country in which human habitation stretched well into prehistory. But in Western colonial terms it was 'young'. Despite that, the passage of only a few decades saw it slipping into stale colonial parochialism. Imported British colonial mores (e.g. from the Raj) formed a basis, but, before the dust had settled, a way of life now dubbed 'traditional', (to give it respectability) was whisked out of thin air. It would pay token homage to white South Africa, but it told itself it was superior. Similarly, it would define its exceptionalism in terms of 'sport', 'boerewors[7] and beer', 'homes with large lawns and pools serviced by domestic servants'. That, rather than a more noble sounding 'service to King and country'. Increasingly the former list grew to include 'reactionary or radically racist posturing', 'griping about the alleged ineptitude of the indigenous peoples' and angrily denouncing social evolution which was occurring in other parts of the developed world.

Not only did the gatherings at the Chudy residence include serious thinkers and those with an artistic bent, but ordinary

1 Edward "Ned" Paterson (1895–1974), founder of Cyrene Mission and credited as the first to offer artistic education in Southern Africa. Controversial in relation to the origins of 'Shona sculpture'.
2 Indian High Commissioner (and wife) to Rhodesia between 1953 and 1956.
3 Celebrated Latvian violinist and teacher 1902-1992.
4 African photographer with roots in Goa - a friend of 'Karsh of Ottawa'.
5 Guy Clutton-Brock founder of the multiracial Cold Comfort Farm - later expelled from the country during UDI as a subversive and upon his death declared a 'National Hero of Zimbabwe'.
6 Venerated Zimbabwean author and journalist 1917-2019.
7 South African sausage

people - some from remote farming areas, barely served by AM radio, let alone libraries - became 'part of the crew'. It was not uncommon, years later to hear comments how these inclusive gatherings precipitated awakenings, such as to how people in the outside world saw and thought about life.

In travel terms, there still were many unexplored areas within Rhodesia. For example, the mountainous Eastern Highlands, which reminded some European settlers of 'home', had not become a popular destination there at that time. These misty mountains became a favorite destination for David and Ellen Chudy.

Rhodesia, as it was, includes vast areas of natural sculptural structures in granite. Endless kopjes, spectacularly represented in Matobo National Park were usually populated with baboons and leopards. These outcrops included rock art, some dating back 7000 years and were a constant invitation to think sculpturally, if not to actually produce sculpture.

But African horizons are large and the bug to travel to ever more obscure and difficult places had been awakened. It was the early 50's - at a time when roads were frequently impassable and travel only - that: a grueling six month overland journey north, in a Land Rover took David,and Ellen Chudy, Mohommed Chalenga[8] and two friends through Belgian Congo to Uganda, Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Kenya and Nyasaland (now Malawi). Few people headed north then and even fewer by road.

It was an Africa that had barely started to comprehend the fundamental concept of tourists, let alone cater to their every need The loss of its visual creative soul to 'airport art' along with the packaged safari touch were still a universe away. The Chudy's four-wheel-drive journey exposed them to Pygmies in the forests and to plainsmen such as Masai, who then lived lives barely touched by modern technology.

Traditional culture in these equatorial regions integrated the masks and other graphic anthropomorphic representations to a greater extent than the people of the high veld of Southern Rhodesia, which he now called home. The Shona and Ndebele people, with their belief in a single god/creator, had endured with a culture and belief system built on rich and ancient verbal and intellectual traditions.

David Chudy's exposure to equatorial and semi equatorial art - both from this expedition that now attenuated the first eight years in Northern Rhodesia - informed his visual aesthetic. His home abounded with artistic objects obtained on the trip, including the mask and sculpture featured in the background of the 1949 self-portrait on page 35.

The move to Southern Rhodesia precipitated changes and his work began to lose some of its 'old world' European traces. But the question still applied in this new land: what was an appropriate wider artistic perspective and wherein lies legitimacy?

In the contemporary post-colonial world, we take for granted the search for an 'authentic African artistic voice'. and we accept that it is in part in response to the cultural dominance of Western culture and technology that swept the continent.

In the 50's there was precious little talk of this in Central Africa. But as it would be for any creative artist of any ethnicity, trying to make a statement, it was an issue for David Chudy. It was part of his search for an appropriate identity as an artist as a naturalized African.

It is not that he regarded 'being African' at the time as something trendy that had to be aspired to. More it was a thing akin to 'terroir' in vintner's terms, or Henry Moore's 'truth to material'. You speak with an authentic voice of your time and place and if you are somewhere you need to become one with it.

And it was not as if other expatriate colonials from Europe considered these things as mandatory. At that time, for a white man enjoying the privileges offered by colonial system, there was absolutely no local pressure to pay attention to anything culturally 'African'. Indeed, on the contrary, one might be admired if one ignored it completely.

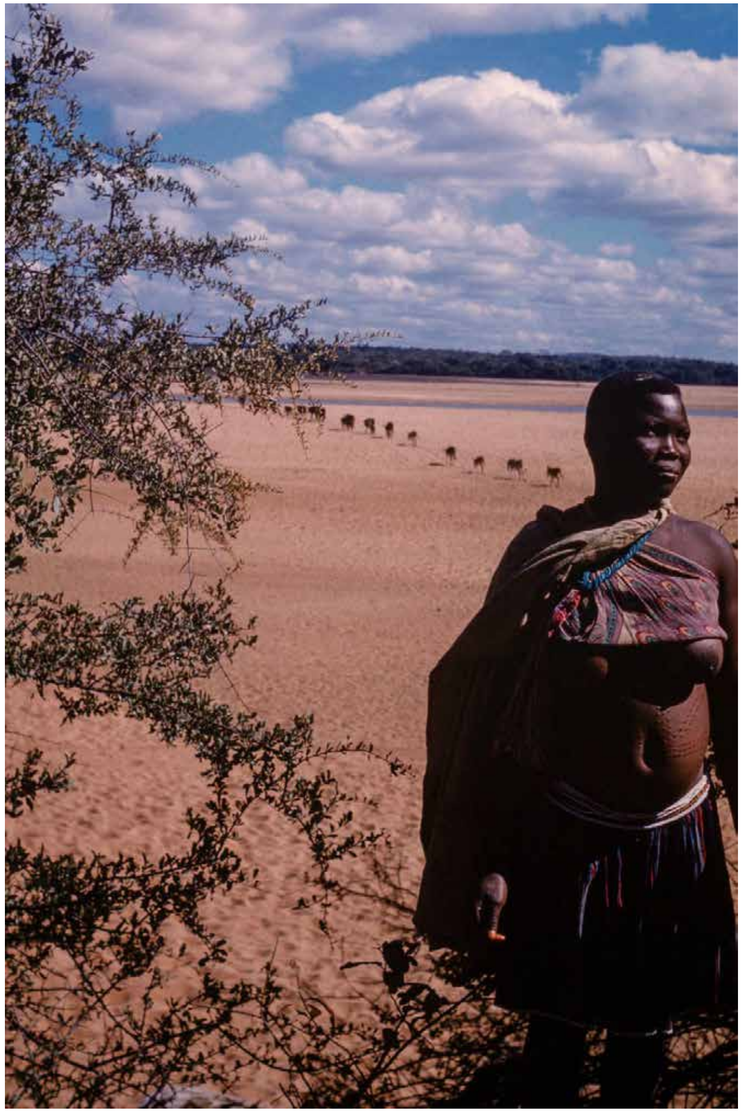
On one hand, David Chudy could easily have shrugged off his location and his local experiences and pretended 'he was just passing through' like the others. He could have played Western art, to a local or even remote Western audience, using standard, comfortable European or American references and that might have been okay.

But he found this equally as incongruous, just as if had he chosen to do the opposite and compete with indigenous Africans and produce work strictly in their style. Although, doing this might have been regarded as somewhat strange given color-bar, expedience itself was not frowned upon. If 'impressing people in foreign lands' was the object, it might have been regarded as an eminently admirable pursuit - a legitimate, if not desirable way to 'get noticed'.

The rule books had not yet been written on what it took to be an artist in that part of the world. Value systems in relation to art - just as they

8 Mohommed Chalenga - a Malawian and former soldier who saw action in the Kings African Rifles in Egypt and Ethiopia during WWII, was a cook and interpreter on this trip.

The 'Congo Trip' - meeting pygmies. Malawian domestic worker, Mohammed Chalenga (left), formerly served in the Kings African Rifles regiment in Ethiopia (WW2) came as guide and multilingual interpreter on the trip.



Woman herding cattle - Sabi River (Sabi Valley)- Photo: David Chudy

were in relation to race - were confused and in flux. Although, having said that, confusion was not local and parochial only in the colonies. Third world 'genuineness' was a convenient concept especially at that time. It was a concept which could be attached easily to 'historical' which included 'tribal artifacts'. Compartmentalizing the work of indigenous artists into such safe museum-style categories removed the sense of competition with them, as well as the possibility of being accused of plagiarism. Separating First World use of Third World tokens while redefining them, released Westerners at the time, from worrying about: their monopoly on 'modern creativity.

David Chudy's friend Ned Patterson was not thinking about 'high art' when he founded Cyrene Mission near Bulawayo as the first art school in Africa, in 1939. It promoted art, but mostly in a craft sense. It did this for no other reason than this was a practical aim in that time, in this undeveloped environment, where fine art was a very distant concept. Cyrene did not actually seek to exclude 'high art'. Its aims were broad, including laying foundations from which Indigenous self-defined artists might develop and enter the world of art, as defined in Western thinking. Cyrene's intervention was tentative, but it produced recognized artists such as the late Kingsley Sambo[9].

Nowadays we talk about cultural imperialism. But even at that time, Western art, in the post Cubism phase, had already claimed a whole range of Third World visual ciphers for its own (not just masks). And imagery inspired by Third World artists, but executed by Westerners was routinely admired (and 'currency') in sophisticated Western art circles.

Meanwhile, Frank McEwen, O.B.E. who had actually befriended Picasso and many other artistic luminaries came onto the local scene with a much more urgent and ambitious agenda than

9 Kinglsley Sambo,s often risque work is featured in numerous collections, He was regarded as a 'sell out' by black nationalists which may have led to his death by sabot age to his car in 1977.

Painting by student Macherenye dated 1942 at Cyrene Mission founded by Ned Patterson (powder paints 'on sugar paper')

Ned Patterson. It was with the founding of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) and with his Workshop School, which would permit him to create, midwife and mainline indigenous 'Shona artists' into the Western mainstream. One might say that part of his mission was a kind of mixed up restitution, as well as another layer of cultural imperialism, rolled into one. Marshall Mount in 'African Art: The Years Since 1920' says "Frank McEwen "feels African artists should remain free from the 'corrupting' influence of Western Schools and express instead their innate African qualities.", which, if accurate suggests a kind of a patronizing 'game reserve' mentality at work.

McEwen was reputedly uninterested in local white African artists. It was said that he regarded most of them as "sunset and jacaranda tree, Sunday painters". David Chudy was unperturbed by prejudices of this sort and regarded McEwen's mission to 'seed a new indigeonous African art', as quite distinct from his own. They were cordial, but in general, their social lives did not overlap.

David Chudy was not contriving a career with a marketing plan, but McEwen's concept of the 'Sunday painter' described a serious dilemma for any non-indigenous artist working there, given the uncomfortable cultural and racial climate of the day.

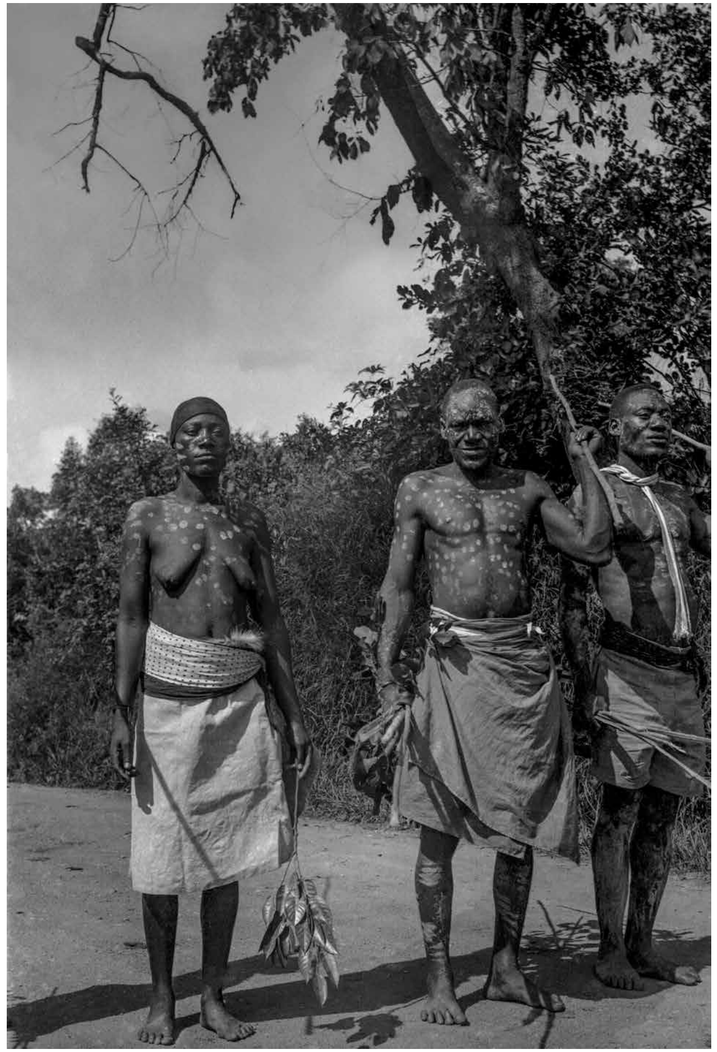
Given the new efforts of McEwen to promote 'Africa' as a brand overseas, had David Chudy been on a parallel marketing war path, he could have shaken off his European mantle and sought to present himself to a remote Western audience with a new eye-catching token .African look'. He could have been seen to be breaking the mold, in their eyes. He could have 'gone native stylistically'. Western buyers could have got their Third World 'hit', filtered through a familiar and comfortable western agent. Many other white artists would go this route later, but David Chudy passed on this option.

David Chudy's stance was that. Western art, in its breathless dash to do 'something radically different had borrowed visual tokens from the Third World from a safe distance, after seeing them in a museum (as Picasso had). But he was here in Africa and it was disconcerting to do the same when you are sharing the same land and rubbing shoulders with indigenous artists. From close in it was personal and obvious what tradition or 'potential', one might be trampling over. David Chudy, understood that indigenous artists - even were they branded as mere tribal crafts men at that time, were grappling with exactly the same challenges creatively as he was and these artists were a hair's breath away from being significant players in the art scene. This was fulfilled in the early 60's when, irrespective of any discord in evaluating Frank Mcewen's personal motivation, the protégés of the Workshop School began to earn respect on the back of their own talent and dedication.

Frank McEwen and Tom Bloomfield ran a gauntlet as colonials promoting indigenous art, especially in a region where no

Expedition vehicle for the six month equatorial journey through Congo to East Africa

Loading the vehile onto a cargo ship to cross lake Victoria (movie stop-frame)



David Chudy photo shot during the equatorial journey

tradition actually existed. There were massive contentious forces on either side of the intellectual fence - all deeply rooted in politics and culture of the region - which questioned both of their motives, missions and legacy. Stuff like: 'should anyone be messing with indigenous people's artistic core'? But in the end the question of their legitimacy never became to a head. Whatever they were doing, at least it was not 'competing stylistically with the artists they were promoting'. And for them, acting simply as semi-dispassionate agent/representatives, they could move out of the limelight at will. However patronizing and quasi colonial the early days had been, Africa's powerful immune system eventually healed these wounds, and now even the scars are disappearing from our common consciousness.

David Chudy's African experience was not simply parochial to Southern Rhodesia, having spent formative years further north in the Copper Belt. He had a natural respect for creativity from anyone, irrespective of race, tribe or creed. His instinct was not to provoke or exploit but rather to occupy a respectful middle ground spiritually and stylistically.

If there was one thing which came with the territory in those days, it was 'space' at all levels. And it was here in Africa where David Chudy and other African artists could diverge, not only from their contemporaries overseas, but from each other.

The art scene in the West was crowded, often desperate, and competition was intense. Art was increasingly didactic and incestuous, spilling out of its narrow visual or tactile brief into philosophy, political activism or social comment.

Meanwhile, artists in Africa had barely tapped their resources. The continent supplied simple unadulterated awe to anyone who bothered to open their eyes, and adventure in unlimited quantities. It was not necessary to resort to complex 'be noticed' messaging, or expansive cultural cross referencing, as part of the artistic journey. In fact, to do so, in the context of that era, would probably be a ridiculous and a folly. Whatever one chose to do as an artist one could get by just by being sincere and straightforward about it.

Ned Patterson talked of his time patrolling the Namibian desert on horseback in the military during World War I. Travelling in a group with fellow service men, he said "we never spoke a word to each other all day long". In that pristine desert, "anything any of us might have said would have sounded like shit".

For millennia humans survived on the margins in Africa. Homo sapiens had routinely been forced to give way to powerful or dangerous animals for most of the period. People were influential but not the totally dominant species as they had been in most of the West and Europe.

Rare color image of David chudy

A level of alienation and a sense that complete ownership of the land was out of reach was shared by indigenous people and colonial settlers alike. The incomers may have brought impressive tools to overcome nature but by then the battle had not yet been won. This was Africa." termites would still destroy your home and eat your books whether or not you came from Newcastle or Ouagadougou.

The indigenous people accommodated nature that resisted but flexed - and then made space for them. The colonial incomers came with truckloads of brute force and nature found ways to fight back. The result was sometimes impressive and heroic, but frequently ugly.

At the end of the day, whether you were white or black, the conclusion was that Africa was much bigger than you. However nasty the region's politics, it was a force which could bring people, whose roots were elsewhere, or localized in that part of the continent for thousands of years, into a common human space. In that sense, you become equals.

On might say Africa rejected you, and at the same time, if you did not overplay your cards it would give you a chance. No matter your background, that chance offered a deep sense of belonging. And if achieved, it must be treated as a privilege, an honor and not least, an achievement. It was not a benefit which would automatically accrue to simply anyone on the basis of 'just being there'.

David Chudy was very fortunate. Even though he was only part African - and obviously not by birthright - he did not have to run any special gauntlet: 'be heroically attacked by lions', or go to other torturous lengths to feel spiritually part of the African landscape. Being a 'man of the place' seemingly came naturally to him. In his lifetime he was commonly welcomed by all, including the indigenous people he knew, or worked with. His art reflected the ease of that transition. He enjoyed that simple sense of presence and belonging with never a need for complex cultural contextual cross reference or subtext in his personal life.

But although David Chudy's life fitted fairly comfortably into one chapter in the big book of Africa, it was a chapter which was to end abruptly. He only was to have participated in the first few lines of the next, before he died of a heart attack in 1967.

The first words of this chapter were the famous "Winds of Change", uttered by British Prime Minister Harold McMillain in Cape Town in 1960. It took a few years for what started as a breeze to 'fill the sails', but the next chapter would not be about the 'soul of Africa (although that is what everyone said it was).

The dialog and action would persist for decades and it would be all about material possession and resources. These were decades, when David Chudy would no longer be around to react to them. And all the while his art persisted, interacting with the present and reminding us of an earlier time.

David Chudy in the marble workshop of Terrastone Ltd.

The Chudy dwelling in Highlands, Harare (then Salisbury) contained a rich collection of art and artifacts from Equatorial Africa and the Far East

Evolving visual styles

No existing examples of David Chudy's art prior to 1947 are known.

The earliest work we know of was from Northern Rhodesia where he spent eight years between two small sub- tropical mining towns in the Copperbelt There is no way of knowing whether these paintings and sculpture were his first ever attempts. His work from that period develops technically, but stylistically things move slowly.

The paintings take on a broadly late, 19th century European lean - albeit, including indigenous Africans in some of the images. And they seem to have self-consciously resisted the influence of cutting edge modern art of the age. David Chudy's later work reveals that he was not a dyed-in-the-wool conservative or stubborn traditionalist. So this is curious to us now that he was not more excited about the most up -to-date experimentation in art right at the onset.

David Chudy had received no formal art training (and a very limited education in general). The Copper Belt was not going to make up for this. His reticence to race to join the avant-garde was probably two fold. Firstly, being an artist, no matter how conservative, his work would be, it would already be shocking enough in local terms. Secondly, with no one to please, he likely undertook a kind of self-mentored artistic apprenticeship. He would want to satisfy his own curiosity in technical terms, before coming to terms with personal expression.

Unlike today, with 'instant launch artistic careers', there would be a minimal 'hit' for not expressing originality right at the start line. A grounding in traditional art (meaning being able to paint in a photo realistic manner) was still considered a prerequisite, even by the most advanced educators of the day. It seems plausible that the young David Chudy, lacking a tutor at that time, had to prove 'that he could paint', for purely personal reasons.

The general public, even outside the world's sub-tropical cultural backwaters, had been on the defensive in relation to art since the earliest days of the industrial revolution. For a long time, the coping mechanism was to demand traditional drafting competence, from any artist they were asked to consider.

Here in Africa that persisted. Failure to convince the average viewer that the artist could create photo-realistic drawings on demand meant that the entire contribution of that artist would be disputed.

The common suggestion was somewhat petulant. Namely that the modern artist 'only did what they did' to disguise the fact that they were not real artists. The hypothesis was that because they could not 'paint properly', they therefore had no better option than to try to resort to 'fooling the public'.

Even in 'enlightened circles' in Southern Africa at that time, 'abstract' was considered highly controversial. Meanwhile even mildly stylized painterly treatments, applied to traditionally representational images, would tend to be rejected as 'snake oil' by the man in the street. Photo-style documentation was what people were convinced they wanted. It did not challenge the intellect while craftsmanship was always an easy thing to admire.

The most effective way to deflect criticism in this environment - from an artist's point of view - was to produce a few samples 'of the right stuff' (just for the record'). For example, Picasso - for those who had heard of him - had done just this. He was reluctantly given a pass in relation to some

Rural scene Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) - late 1940's

Southern Rhodesia - farm scene Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) - late 1940's

of his other 'wild experiments' as a result. Proving that one could 'draw muscles just like Michelangelo' was like a visa stamp, in an in-date passport to painterly success.

What actually motivated and drove David Chudy, in his early twenties - when he began working in Northern Rhodesia - can only be speculated on. But one can rule out 'rubbing shoulders with others in the context of an art scene'. There were no museums or galleries within hundreds if not thousands of miles to set the pace. In the Copper Belt, at that time, chances were, that many, if not most people would even really know what art was, let alone have a stand on modern art.

The remote Third World geographic location may not be defining in terms of basic artistic style, but it can be positively taken into account in terms of understanding David Chudy's inspiration as an artist. The social and political environment at that time would be formative of the entire person, not simply First World, parlor-preoccupations with 'subject matter, composition, concepts or color'.

World War II raged in the background for six of those eight years. In some senses it was very distant, but it still dominated life locally. Certainly there was no actual armed conflict in that precise part of Africa, but 'copper' (the product of the local mines) was strategically important for the Allies. That mitigated it being a totally isolated backwater in every possible sense.

David and Ellen Chudy were naturally thankful to have options - no matter how limited they may have been in the African bush. They had just escaped persecution on a personal level where they came from - and beyond that, certain annihilation.

Safe as they were now in Africa, they both lived day-to-day not knowing the fates of friends and family members who had been cut off by the war and Nazi occupation. Information was impossible to gather during hostilities, and ascertaining the fates of those left behind was still very difficult, even when peace in Europe returned. All this colored the tone of their lives.

When the war came to an end, it became evident: their world had changed, there was nothing for either of them to go back to.

There was never any question that it was time to let go of the old and start afresh. They embraced adventure, which Africa offered in abundance. There were safari-like trips to the bush, and ventures into Belgian Congo on beaten-up dirt tracks. They hit the 'bright lights' of Brazzaville and Kinshasa, with their exotic 'continental feel and stores which were not subject to the war time rationing, in operation in Northern Rhodesia.

But, the first substantial and lasting adventure was relocation to Southern Rhodesia in 1947. When David and Ellen Chudy arrived there, they were instantly rewarded. Contact with other displaced people proved intellectually stimulating and creatively inspiring. They found people whose interests tended more towards music, literature and philosophy. That, rather than painting and sculpture.

Painting and sculpture tended to be 'supplies dependent', at a time of post war austerity and this was a discouragement. David Chudy was undaunted by such logistics. And his art would begin to reflect these new levels of stimulation. Now he made a self-conscious effort to embrace a kind of 'modernity' in his work. This is visible in a batch of stylized paintings that followed.

At first the emphasis seemed to be to create an art reminiscent of antiquity where anonymous human figures serve as no more than placeholders and design motifs in the composition.

This Southern Rhodesia phase coincides with the growth of their new terrazzo and marble

construction business. The company addressed the look of buildings rather than the underlying structure. Symbolism was always respectable in architecture and architects of the day were keen to include decorative visual devices in their plans. Mostly impersonal, sanitized motifs were deemed a good fit, for the companies that would eventually occupy the buildings.

David Chudy had a feel for this kind of minimal design. At first he included it in his private art, but that was a passing phase. Later he might toy with the cut-down style once in a while, but, in general, he reserved that look and feel for public art assignments.

He returned to his main passion which was portraiture. And he liked to be face-to-face, where he could observe and interact with a real person. The private world of the artist and sitter is an intimate space, and he wanted that to show in his work.

But it was not simply a ritualistic emphasis on 'merging psyches' and 'auras' In sculpture the presence of a real human is crucial in gathering three dimensional sculptural data.

For a man who routinely worked with large marble and terrazzo forms, on an industrial level, he produced very few stone sculptures. His passion was clay. Whatever the medium, an artist without a studio will be limited to producing a certain kind of work. With a large factory premises, physical barriers were now no longer defining.

Although they had perfected lost wax bronze casting with local materials and he had built his own foundry at his factory site, it was still a time consuming and arduous process. Relatively few of his gross output of sculptures were cast in bronze.

Large clay positives can only be kept for so long before the material starts to dry and crack. A negative, plaster mold must be created for archival purposes. David Chudy stored many of his completed sculptures merely as first generation negative molds.

A sculpture cannot readily be determined 'in the negative'. Hence no one, even the artist, could enjoy their presence in that form. 'Out of sight, out of mind' - it seems strange that he was prepared to move on without being able to materially review his past work.

After his death numerous positive plaster copies were cast and we now enjoy a privileged overview that the artist never experienced himself.

David Chudy's work hits a groove stylistically in many senses in the then 'Southern Rhodesia' ,and style is subordinate to 'subject matter and execution' till the 60's. These were his last years, after returning from the Far East. That final period involved more abstraction - a return to symbolism.

David Chudy always worked with oils, but he retired his brushes in preference to palette knife in the move to Southern Rhodesia. He never went back. The tactile quality of the pallete knife brought a touch of micro-abstraction to his work even as there was overall form. The unpredictability in applying color sometimes brought him close to expressionism.

The basic materials and processes now remain constant for almost two decades, till his death. That meant: 'oil on canvas applied with a palette knife' and clay portraiture intended to be cast in bronze.

There were a few exceptions: 'David in the Pit'[1], a massively heavy, solid, chiseled sandstone sculpture is an outlier in terms of mass and scale, as well as material and process. Impressive though that work is - and approaching the scale of some of his public art - portraits now ruled in David Chudy's art. They were life size and sculpted in clay from now on.

1 David in the Pit sculpture - page 92

Baked Clay tile - possible biblical reference

David Chudy poses with a long lost portrait

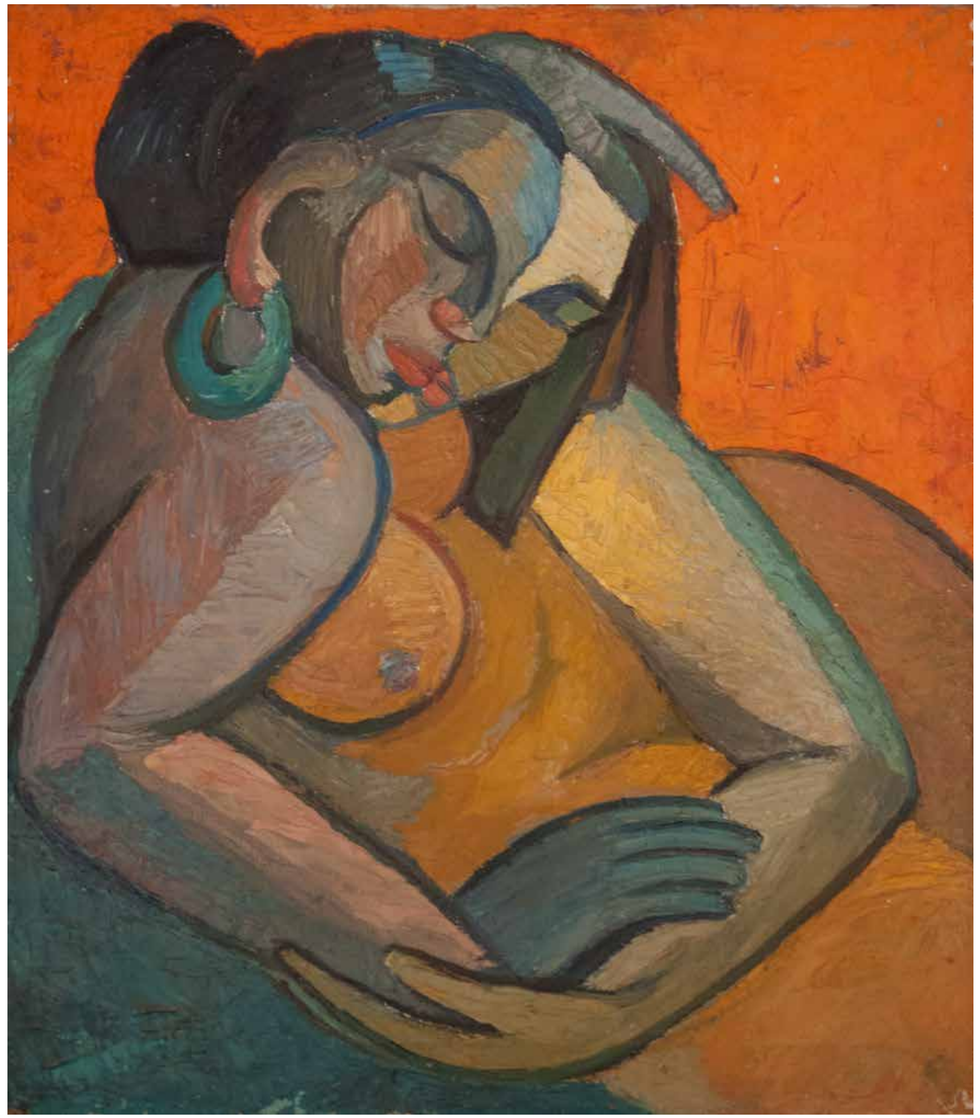
Florence Jenkinson - 1949

Unfinished painting - figures - 1949 - based on a newspaper clipping featuring a group of old women carrying infants

Nude - oven baked clay

Oil on canvas - early use of palette knife

Unknown subject - cast figure



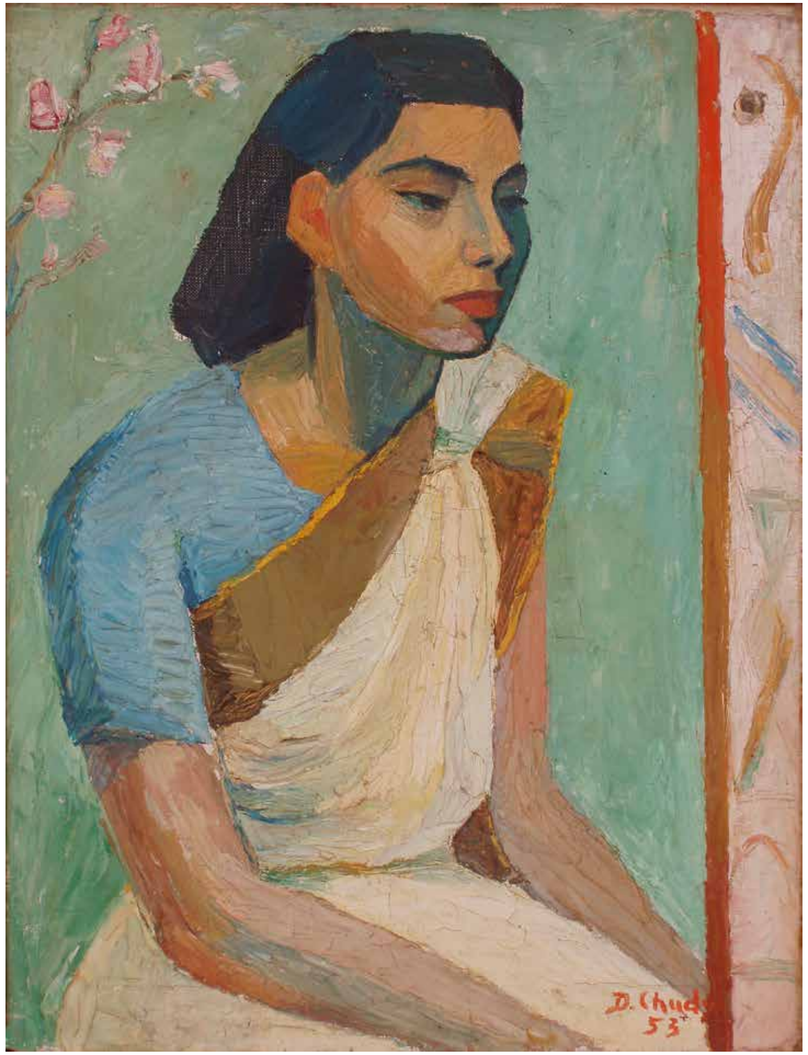
Female figure - palette oil on canvas

African figure -oven baked clay

Seated nude study- pencil on paper

Kneeling figure study - charcoal on paper

Palette oil on canvas - 1953



Portrait - Indian woman - palette on canvas- 1953

African woman - palette oil on canvas - 1950

Mother and child - 1949

Raw clay model of King Mwanawina Lewanika III of Barotseland. Known to colonial British as Paramount Chief Sir Mwanawina (Lewanika) III KBE (Knight of the British Empire) (1888- 1968).

Bust of King Mwanawina Lewanika III of Barotseland

King Mwanawina Lewanika III of Barotseland, the Litunga, ruled the Lozi people until his death in 1968. Barotseland, in the form of a British Protectorate at that time, had been an empire lasting a millennium, at times reaching the size of Texas. It included 33 different ethnic groups spread across Botswana, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia and Zambia.

Extremelty remote, as it was, at the turn of the last century, Mwanawina's predecessor, Lubosi Lewanika (1878-1916), was not in the least parochial. He visited London in 1902, where he was granted audience with the newly crowned King Edward IV and the Prince of Wales. Earlier, he had sent gifts (huge elephant tusks), along with a petition, to Queen Victoria. But he discovered later that they had never arrived. They had been appropriated by the directors of the British South Africa Company, who mounted them in their board room. Dealing with the British had been a mixed experience. There had been some token recognition at first, but disdain and betrayal had followed, probably in greater measure.

In 1964, during British colonial rule, Barotseland under Mwanawina was corralled by local politics as well as the British, but he voluntarily agreed that it be integrated into a greater Northern Rhodesia. The formal agreement, which was to reciprocate his mostly autonomous decision to participate, was abrogated by the Zambian government upon independence in 1970. Thereafter Barotseland was no longer a formal geopolitical entity in any significant form and it was effectively sidelined on the world stage. But, by virtue of its long history, it persists as a source of inspiration and remains a distinct and persevering cultural entity.

After David Chudy's death in 1967, the sculpture of the king existed for a while in anonymity, in storage in the form of a hollow cast. Shortly after, to honor his memory, it would be cast again as a positive, wherein it could be appreciated once again.

Nice as that was, until recently, there seemed to be no particularly pressing reason by anyone to question when the sculpture was made and the circumstances under which it was produced. For a casual bystander, the idea that David Chudy had spent 8 years in Northern Rhodesia (up to 1947), would be sufficient to assume that a straightforward 'back-story' to this engagement must exist. Initially this seemed to just be 'another undated sculpture in the collection', but digitization and viewing of an ancient 8mm film shot by David Chudy stimulated the imagination and prompted further research.

The low quality, silent color film featured African ceremonial dancing. Based on the distinctive clothing of the dancers, the action in the reel was clearly not set in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). However, a small clip within it tied one reel of footage to the Mwanawina sculpture. That clip showed a road within a compound with a large banner sign which read 'King Lewanika'.

Later on in the reel were shots from a small airplane overflying what appears to be the Zambezi River. And then, at the very end we find scenes clearly revealing the sub-alpine environment of the Eastern Highlands in Zimbabwe (nothing similar exists anywhere in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia). That all of this is on one uncut reel is fairly convincing evidence that that the work had been produced after 1947, when David Chudy had relocated to Southern Rhodesia. He had visited Salisbury once before 1947, but had not been to the Eastern Highlands.

The most significant finding from viewing this film was a feeling that this sculptural project had been of much greater importance than formerly thought. Considering the logistics alone, the prospect would have been either a 2,000km/ five-day car trip there and back, on very challenging roads, or - as is now assumed - a delicate clay original would have had to have been transported in a small commercial airplane back to base - or else cast into a positive on location (with all the cost and logistics that entailed).

The location where the sculpture was produced is remote, either at Sefula or the King's dry-season residence Lealui, in the far west of Zambia, close to Angola. It is unlikely that at the time there were high-volume scheduled commercial passenger flights to this out-of-the-way place.

Subsequently, the discovery of some still, film negatives mirrors some of the scenes of the 'moving image' reel, but interspersed with them are images of the King and some of his entourage admiring the sculpture. Some of these photos are featured here.

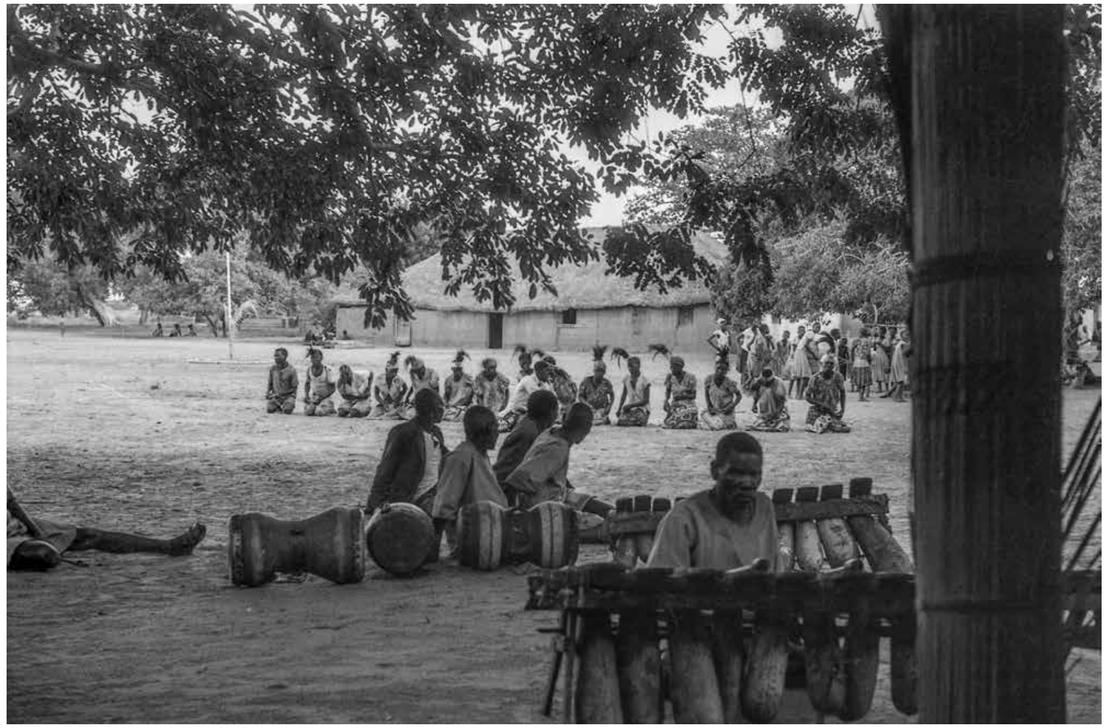
Common sense suggests that the production of this bust was paid commission work, rather than a free artistic project. However, no evidence has yet been found indicating who assigned the work and why they would have assigned it. It might be logical to speculate that this work would have to be dispatched to be cast in bronze overseas, because nothing like that was available in Southern/Central Africa. But again, no documentation supports this idea. David Chudy's first venture into lost wax bronze casting would have to wait till at least 1960.

Meanwhile, none of King Mwanawina Lewanika's descendants who have been approached have knowledge about this. Gratifyingly a few people in the photos were recognized, but they are no longer alive to share their experiences. The background to this historic sculpture session and its purpose remains a mystery.

King Mwanawina Lewanika III was bestowed with the title of the Knight Commander of the British Empire (KBE), c. 1st January, 1959. An amateur Sherlock Holmes might reason that were a bust were to be commissioned to commemorate occasion, for the benefit of the British themselves, a British sculptor would have been the logical first choice to do this - on British soil, while Mwanawina was in the UK receiving his honor. Speculation is a necessary evil in the absence of evidence, but it is also possible that David Chudy was assigned, on location in Africa to honor that event with a bust. That would be the more adventurous scenario. Were the sculpture assigned by the King himself, for his own benefit, it is hard to think it would not be known in the family.

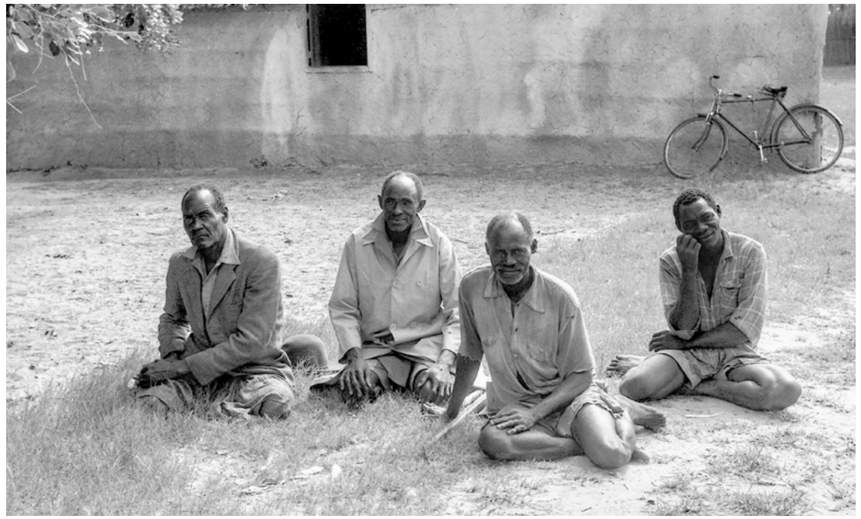
1959 certainly does seem a reasonable place to peg the work in the context of David Chudy's developing style. Whatever the story, it is still reasonable to suspect that this is not the only copy in existence. For all we know, a bronze might well be subject to dusting by janitorial staff, at this very moment, in a stuffy, paneled room, somewhere in UK.

The King poses next to his bust, still in clay form



Music and ceremonial dance, either at Sefula, or the King's dry season base at Leuli

Music and ceremonial dance either at Sefula or the King's dry season base at Leuli



Participants at the compound

Family members appreciate the clay bust of the King

Children crowd around the bust of the King

Lost Wax Bronze Casting (1960)

David Chudy started to produce sculpture in earnest, not only when he had the space and facilities to create it, but also room to store it afterwards. In 1960 he had a purpose built studio space as well as an industrial property to work with.

He worked primarily in clay. Clay is an unstable medium, which self-destructs as it dries out. It is necessary to make a mold very soon after the artistic work is done. The work is not complete, until it is cast in a durable material, most notably bronze. The lost wax process is the way this has been traditionally achieved, though this had never been accomplished in Africa, south of the equator (or anywhere in Africa except in antiquity).

Romolo Fiorini (1916-1993) came to Rhodesia from the UK in the early 50's, seeking employment. Romolo was the son of Italian immigrant to England, Giovani Fiorini, born 1876. Giovani started a bronze foundry in Battersea, London in 1909, which was taken over by his son Remu. Giovani Fiorini's foundry was responsible for casting the iconic sculpture of David Livingstone which still stands by the Zambezi at Victoria Falls. Remu was a lifelong friend of Henry Moore, and his foundry cast a lot of Moore's work. Other sculptors included Henri Gaudier Brzeska, Eduardo Paolozzi, David McFall, Anthony Caro, Alberto Giacometti and many others.

Romolo Fiorini had joined the Merchant navy before and served during World War II. But he had worked in the foundry earlier. Romolo knew how to do 'lost wax'. David Chudy gave him a job as corporate manager at his company, Terrastone, confident that they could both crack the process locally, so he could cast his own work at will.

It was necessary to improvise many of the standard materials and tools that were not available. Crushed up bathroom sinks were used for 'grog' for the casting core. Improvised heat-proof bricks were used around a large excavated hole in the ground. Paraffin oil was pumped in with compressed air, and it burned, shaking the ground much like a buried jet engine would (see photo below).

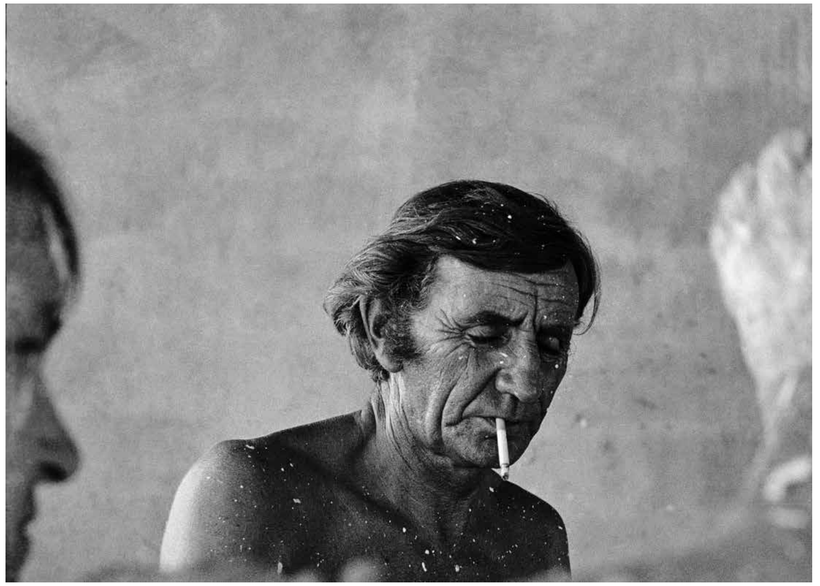
The biggest fear in pouring the molten bronze was that air gaps would be left in the cast, leaving some parts of the work unformed, ruining the entire cast. And in terms of safety: moisture or pressure backup could explode molten metal over people close to the process.

The photo series from the first lost wax process reveals some of the procedure, including special pipe-channels, which are added to ensure a full flow of metal as well as venting during the pour. At the end these need to be sawn off. Great anticipation and tension can be seen in the faces of those watching because a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed.

Reverberation and flames rise from sculpture furnace pit

Constructing the funnel form which directs molten bronze into the main mold.

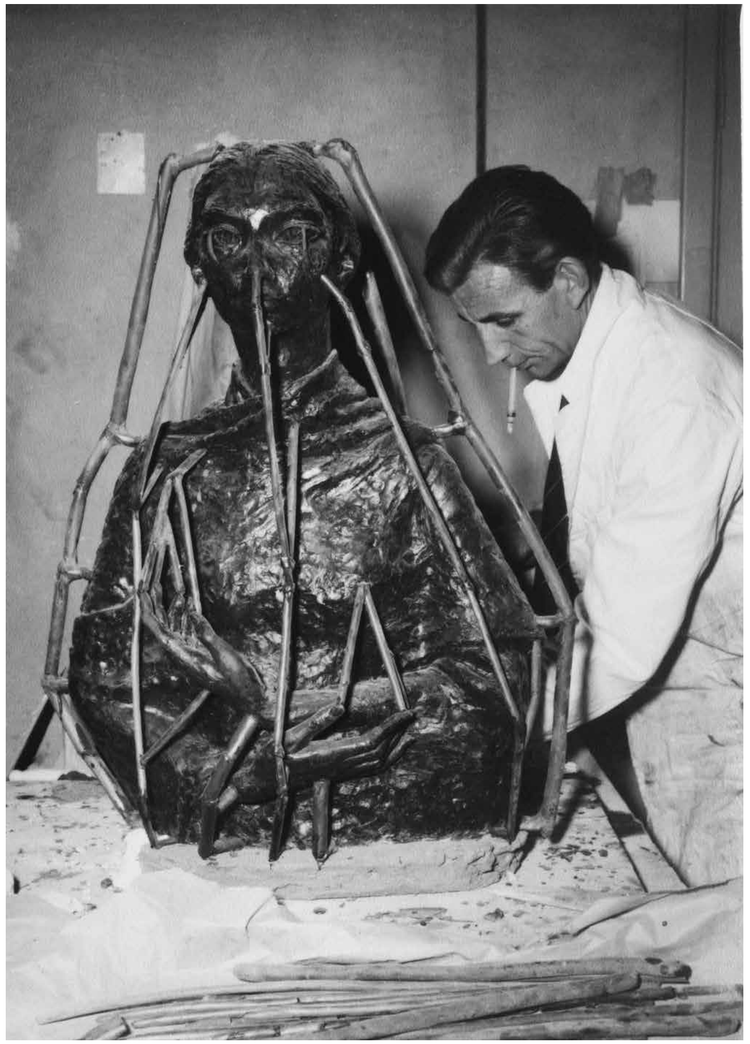
David Chudy - bronze of Romolo Fiorini. Romolo brought expertise of lost wax casting based on his experience at the family business Fiorini and Carney in London, a renowned sculpture foundry. Founded in 1909 which produced work for many world famous sculptors.



Romolo Fiorini throws plaster at the wax sculpture form in preparation for bronze casting

Molten bronze is poured into a mold

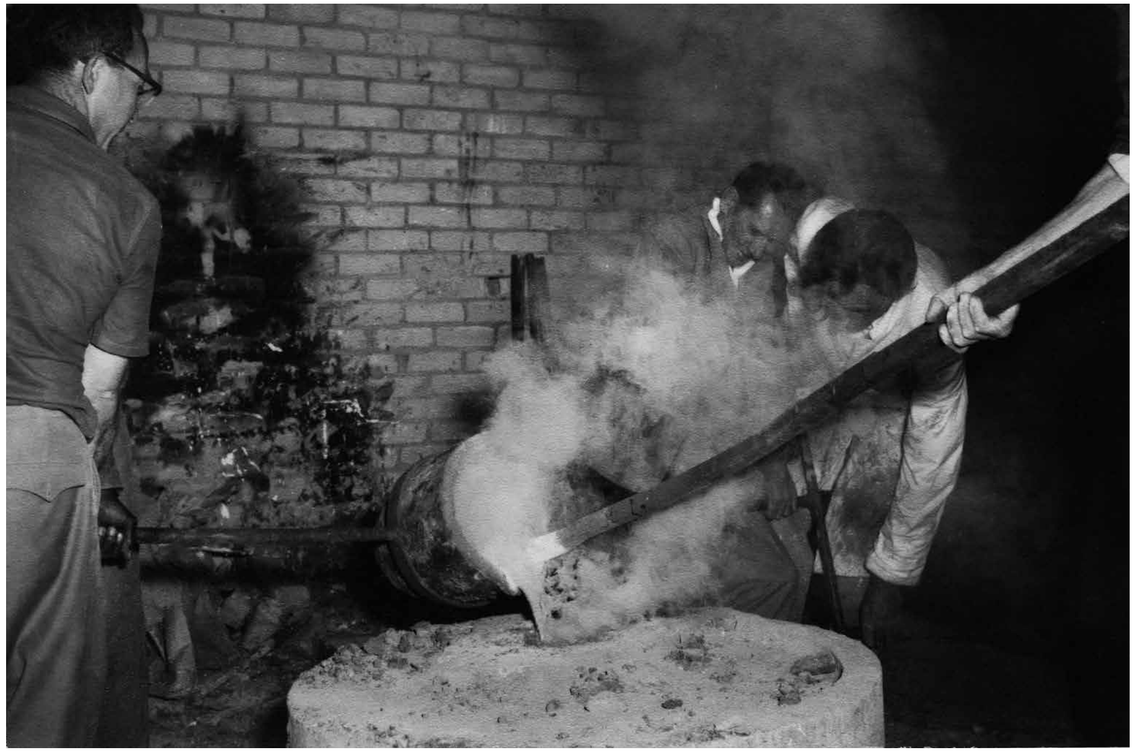
Romolo and the final wax positive of Premalya Singh. At this phase in the process the wax is not solid throughout the sculpture shell. It has a 'grog' core.



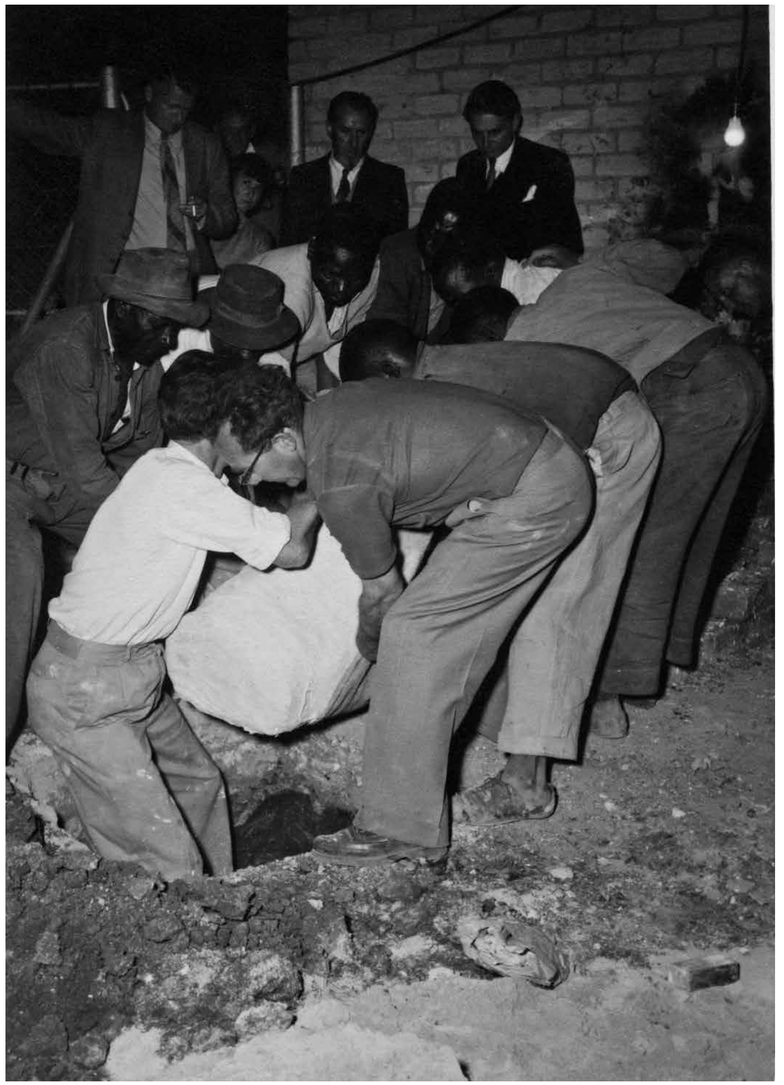
Wax channels are added to guide the molten bronze and avoid air gaps in the final cast

A new final outer mold is started

The wax model with a fireproof suspended core, all enclosed by the final outer mold will be baked in the oven till the wax vaporizes, leaving a void which will be filled with molten bronze.



Molten bronze is carefully poured from the crucible into the semi buried final plaster mold. The mold must be totally dry. Any moisture could turn to steam may not vent and this could cause gaps in the cast. In a worst case scenario high pressure steam which could cause molten bronze explode and injure those who are present and pouring.



The bronze has cooled and solidified and the entire mold is removed from the ground.

The final plaster mold is now smashed till the bronze core is revealed. It is still extremely hot

The cast is successful but all the pour channels are now sold bronze pipes which must be sawn off. The messy stubs must later be ground flush with the form of the sculpture and blended in with the surrounding material.

Eye of the storm - a decade of abundance

The first and the last time David Chudy appears to have exhibited in his career was in 1960. One of two sculptures in question was the bronze bust of Premalya Singh. It was shown at the National Gallery of Rhodesia. A 'one off' for David Chudy, but as mentioned previously, also a landmark event in technical terms. It is possible that he was motivated to show more by the technical achievement than seeking approval for this art, as otherwise he seemed content thereafter to leave his work in his own home studio.

The showing of that work passed without leaving ripples. There are no diary entries by Ellen Chudy and no one who survived him reported conversing with him concerning the pros and cons of 'exhibiting' versus not'. Visiting friends continued to be shown his work in the studio if they wanted to see it. But display was mostly for his own benefit (and mental processing). And not all of it was available: as stated earlier, many of the sculptures had only been stored as negative molds, which were unfit for any kind of display. So, those works that had not imprinted on his conscious memory were passed over.

But David Chudy was not an avid collector or hoarder of his own work. Paintings which did not please him were not generally kept around for posterity. They were ruthlessly painted over, thrown or given away.

He accepted a number of commissioned sculptural portraits during these years. is hard-won technical expertise in bronze casting should have motivated him to seek premium prices. However ,for individuals and friends, he charged 'at cost'. Seemingly he was comfortable earning good money from corporate entities, and he did not feel the need to charge individuals.

As much as he did not play to an audience in the early days in Northern Rhodesia, during this later period in Southern Rhodesia, his need to prove to an audience that he was a serious artist was even further diminished. In chest-thumping terms, the pure industrial scale of many of his business-based, sculptural or architectural undertakings should have spoken for itself. But even here, he did not feel any special need to 'broadcast prowess'. From this point on, David Chudy even ceased signing and dating his paintings.

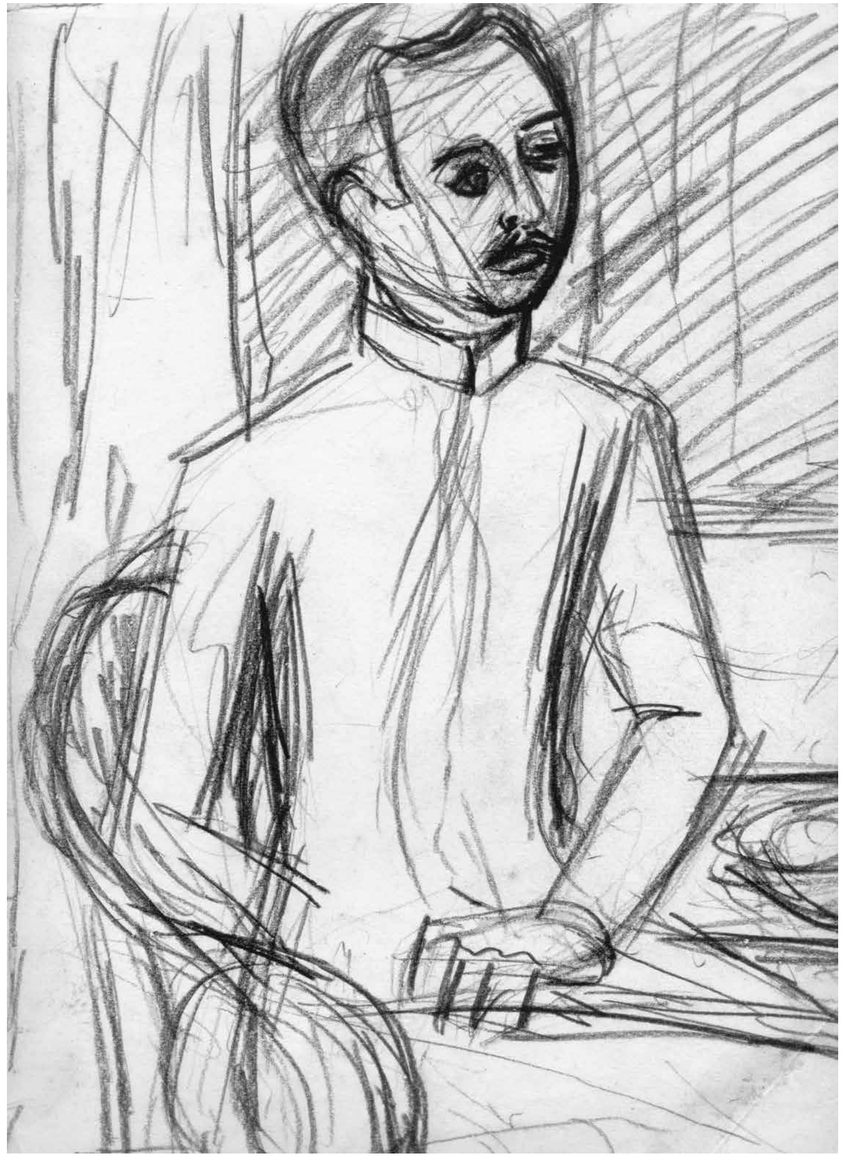
Evidently, audience endorsement of the quality or relevance of his art was not crucially motivational. If it had been, this decade would not have panned out to be his most productive period by far.

David Chudy was self-sustaining and unhindered as an artist. Quite simply, he was not 'working to please anyone but himself'. But naturally art does not come out of a vacuum. David Chudy's life in Africa, distanced from European art fashion, meant he had to be independent and self-sustaining. Seeking a path, working on another continent it is not surprising that the fleeting fashions of Europe and USA are not reflected in his later work. Nonetheless, his library was full of art books, covering antiquity, classical and modern periods, featuring European, American Asian and African content. He was not out of touch. He admired most of what he saw and was never disparaging about the creative efforts of the Western avant-garde or fellow African artists.

In some ways he enjoyed the best of both worlds. He was fortunate enough to be able to buffer what was happening in the mainstream, and yet he had time to try to formulate what seemed relevant in his small oasis in Central Africa.

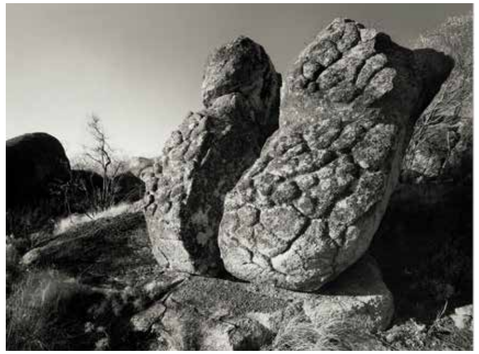
It is easy to see in hindsight and probably easier to see from the developing world, that artists in the front lines in the West were being pressured to deliver art as never before. It had to be bold and 'significant' within post war austerity in Europe, and it had to try to keep up with post war triumphalism in a prospering USA. And yet there were almost zero expectations for art in his corner of the world.

Post modernism in the West may have been a 'ped-



Nirmal Singh study for painting (not completed)

A Moore like 'Parents and Child' composition is also reminiscent and likely inspired by granite forms which abound in the landscape of Zimbabwe.



Granite rocks on granite kopjes in Matobo

al-to-the-floor' attempt, not to be left behind or rendered irrelevant by surging state of invention in technological and civic life. His response to this was not to actually 'compete with science' as an artist. He simply became a scientist himself - and let his art occupy a compatible place alongside it

Technology may have put art in a corner, where it was fighting for its life in the First World, but technology was still a novelty in Southern Rhodesia. And, in terms of artistic cross reference, there was precious little local art around to 'dialog' - as was 'de rigeur' elsewhere. Art in that part of the world was in its infancy: 'up for invention' rather than 'there for the taking' (or the tweaking).

Whereas the clarion call was for decisiveness and intensity in art to counter the perceived threat to the continued existence or art in the West, people in David Chudy's circle were not as desperate for a 'hit' of the strong stuff. He was not overwhelmed with a parallel urgency to 'transcend the concept of a painting as a piece of canvas with paint on it', or sculpture as a 'ball of clay turned into a likeness'.

Without doubt, the world had experienced a lot of trauma and 'fireworks' during the war, beside which painting and sculpture might have been thought of as pathetic and insignificant influencers. Artists in the West would hardly remain unresponsive to the perceived subordination of their medium and they mustered new levels of inventiveness designed to shock if nothing else.

Even set against the drama and scale of the African continent, in its backwaters, one can see a response to this also. A change in David Chudy's work is evident, particularly in his final years. In his case it drew him towards abstraction. While he saw why art had to ramp up its game beyond simply tracing a response to life, he would respond to the call to be proactively novel and inventive, at his own measured pace.

A significant part of the impact art has in a society hinges around the receptiveness and sophistication of its audience, rather than just 'what artists are producing'. In the 'white heat of competition' in the postmodern age, the art world in the developed West would go to great lengths to prove its virility,

even contemplating bypassing or humiliating its own audience. In the major centers of the West, art now could and absolutely should be absolutely anything the artist wanted it to be.

David Chudy had a measured view of the psychological impact his art had on his own psyche, and he was able to compare that with the satisfaction of 'being in business' for one. He was later able to compare this with working at the cutting edge of science as well.

He had a sense that there were limits to the raw impact of what traditional art or even hyper -modern, immersive 'happening' or 'participation' art could deliver. Whereas western art would try to shake itself out of its limitations- with any new weapons it could find lying around - he would not try to exceed the natural boundaries of a 'traditional gallery image' or sculpture. Rather he chose to be strictly limited by them.

The ideal post war modern art 'recipe' would consist of 'invention', 'self-expression', 'communication' 'message', 'smartness/cleverness', 'cultural/art cross references' and most importantly 'originality'. There was a suspicion among some that traditional gallery art had exhausted all possibilities, and nothing new could be created, which did not transcend everything which went before. David Chudy was an open minded individual and might not have argued against these hard fought for ingredients, per se, nor the restlessness, raw energy and invention, popularly cited as necessary to create cutting edge post war art. But he also did not perceive anything dated or limiting in traditional media and the way it was executed. He did not need endorsement, nor the support of an audience, so perhaps that was easy for him.

Not being in the business of actually marketing his own art, he was able to play to a 'virtual audience' of his choosing instead. For example, he could make his fans as sophisticated as he liked, were he keen to express something with extraordinary subtlety. That said, it seems that in his virtual conversation, he preferred to be talking to people who were surprisingly ordinary and unsophisticated in terms of art criticism. These, it seems were the people he had been rubbing shoulders with, the last decades. They were folk who might be naive in many ways, and certainly not 'trained' in high level art appreciation. One might even say they belonged to the class of art appreciators, who 'did not even know what they liked', but at least they were 'trying'.

In many senses David Chudy was a minimalist and a humanist. He preferred Beethoven quartets to the symphonies. He claimed that the quartets told us more about our emotions and were 'more modern' than experimental jazz or rock which was experimenting with electronics, capable of producing soundscapes undreamed of in the pre electronics/ industrial era. He favored Zen Buddhism over other spiritual thought frameworks, because, for him, answers consisted of understanding simple things. He liked Arthur Koestler's 'Act of Creation' because he saw described artistic illumination, simple jokes and scientific eureka's as all being part of the same process. That at a time when many, especially in Southern Africa had erected giant barriers between art and science.

Southern Rhodesia also was a place that had something which felt unique and special. Most people who went there were struck by this. There was something in the light, something in the air - a sense that this had been a special place for thousands of years. There was a comfort, a self-satisfaction, verging into arrogance that was easy to assimilate living there: a conviction, that there were special places in the world from where one could see things more clearly. These were places of significance, often alluded to as 'nodes in a structure or ley lines' and Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, was one of those places.

Many people cite the altitude and stimulating weather as a major contributing factor. Plus, in historical African terms, the high veldt, having been above the malaria line for millennia, gave an ease to people who had lived there. And this positivism was deeply engrained in their culture.

However true this hypothesis, and whether or not there is magic quality actually attributable to the local environment, promoting anything other than an 'illusory clarity of vision', self-

suggestion can still be a powerful motivator.

Artists are familiar with their muse but no one really knows where inspiration comes from. When it hits, irrespective from whence it came and how it arrived, it fuels the production of art (among other things). The feeling of inspiration, even in an artist who lacks direction in life, can imbue their work with significance and meaning. So it was at that in that place at that time.

History might contradict this and judge the period as negative, unjust and draining, which it certainly was in many social/political senses. But, there was also a sense that the raw positive energy of the high veld was a lot stronger than all this. David Chudy's creativity owed a lot to a positive sense of place which affected many in that transitional era.

While his temperament matched the place and the time, it helped him function in an inspirationally self-sustaining manner. At this stage of his life, it was fair to describe him as a confident satisfied man, at ease with himself. And his work passes that on to its audience.

Whether working on canvas or in sculpture most of the work consisted of portraits created in the presence of live human models. The people were those he would actually connect with, personally. The relationship-thing seemingly was more important to him than 'style', or evolving his style.

Sculptures done in this way were 'true to life' and resembled much of the work of Sir Jacob Epstein[1]. David Chudy admired. Epstein, but even had that not been the case, many similarities would still exist in much of the work, by virtue of both being realistic portrait renderings, produced with similar materials and common methods.

On the other hand, David Chudy's paintings were only semi-representational, a la Modigliani. Perhaps, when it came to paint on canvas he saw it as not so much a portrait representation, but more a record of an encounter with the sitter.

Many of his other art influences were fairly standard figures for the day, mostly seen in books, rarely viewed in the original in galleries. These included Modern artists: Amedeo Modigliani, Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matissse, Wassily Kandinski, Paul Klee, Paul Gaugin, Paul Nash, Oskar Kokoshka, Marc Chagall and Vincent Van Gogh. Classical artists included Francisco Goya, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Hieronymus Bosch and Leonardo De Vinci.

David Chudy was interested in Equatorial masks, painters of antiquity and cave paintings. He was a big admirer of contemporary cartoonists, with many books from common newspaper content, from Giles to Ronald Searle. The emerging 'Shona sculptors' in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe began to prove their worth after he died.

Apart from the bagpipes[2], he played violin fairly poorly but his musical taste extended from Beethoven to Bela Bartok, Paul Hindermith, Sergei Prokofiev, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Jean Sibelius, Antonín Dvorák, Felix Mendelssohn, Igor Stravinsky, Anton Webern, Gustav Mahler, Claude Debussy and Johannes Brahms. The Brahms Requiem was a favorite and was played at his funeral.

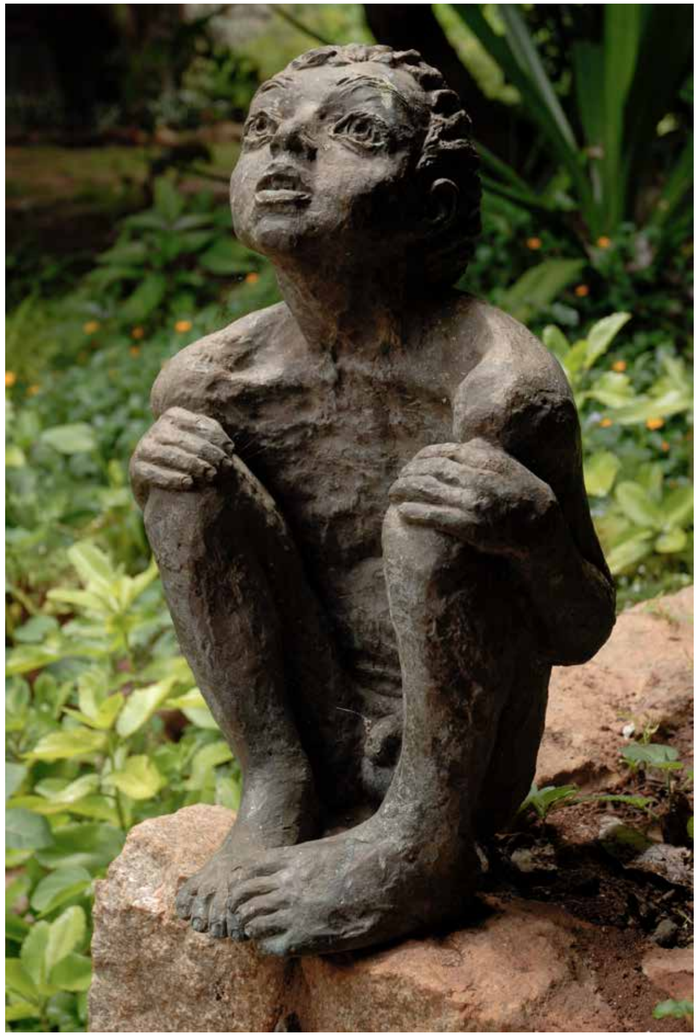
David Chudy was keen on the music of Louis Armstrong, but, untypically, he never learned to appreciate progressive jazz. He often listened to recordings of traditional African music, including African drumming. African drumming was an evocative sound from his days in the Northern Rhodesian bush.

The original dolls for the painting on the right

1 Sir Jacob Epstein (1880-1959) was an American-British sculptor who helped pioneer modern sculpture

2 David Chudy played the pipes during WWII, in the Northern Rhodesia Self Defense Force

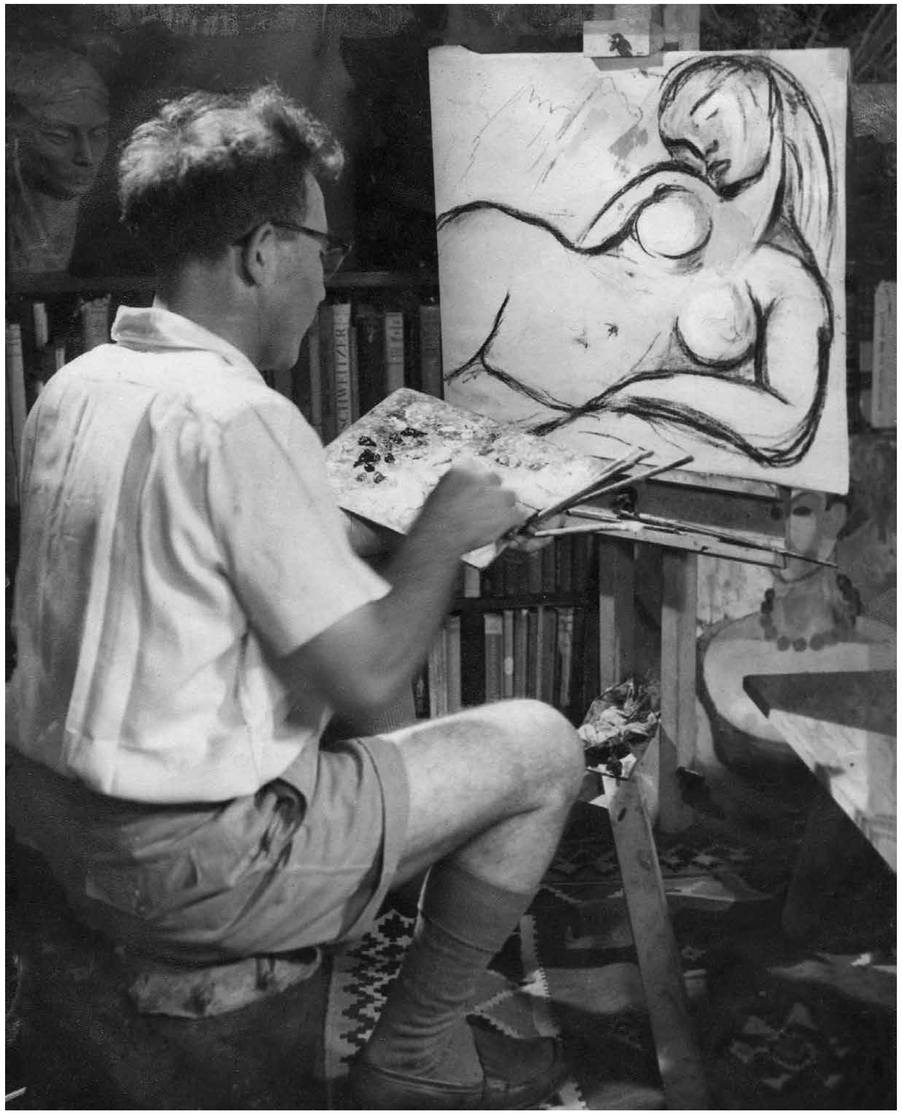
Dolls - oil on canvas



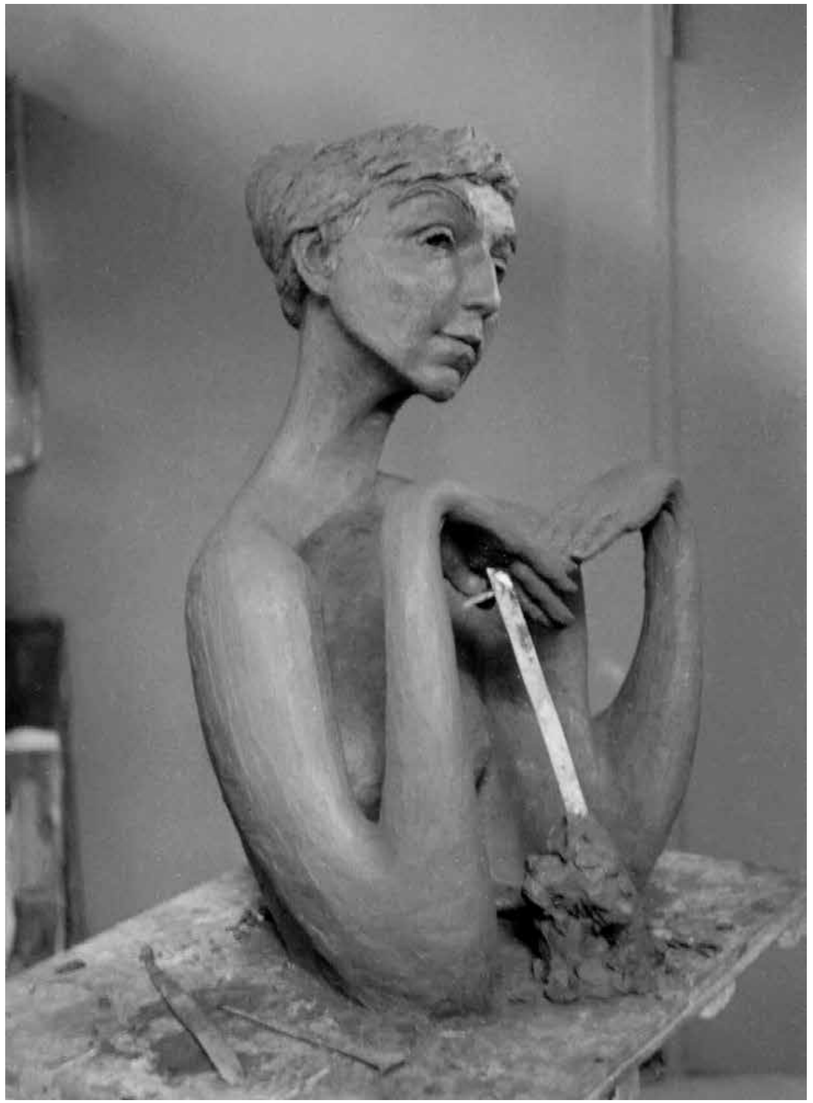
Sculpture of Philip Chudy - bronze

Sculpture of Philip Chudy - clay - work in progress

Deirdre Dean (neJenkinson) and sculptures

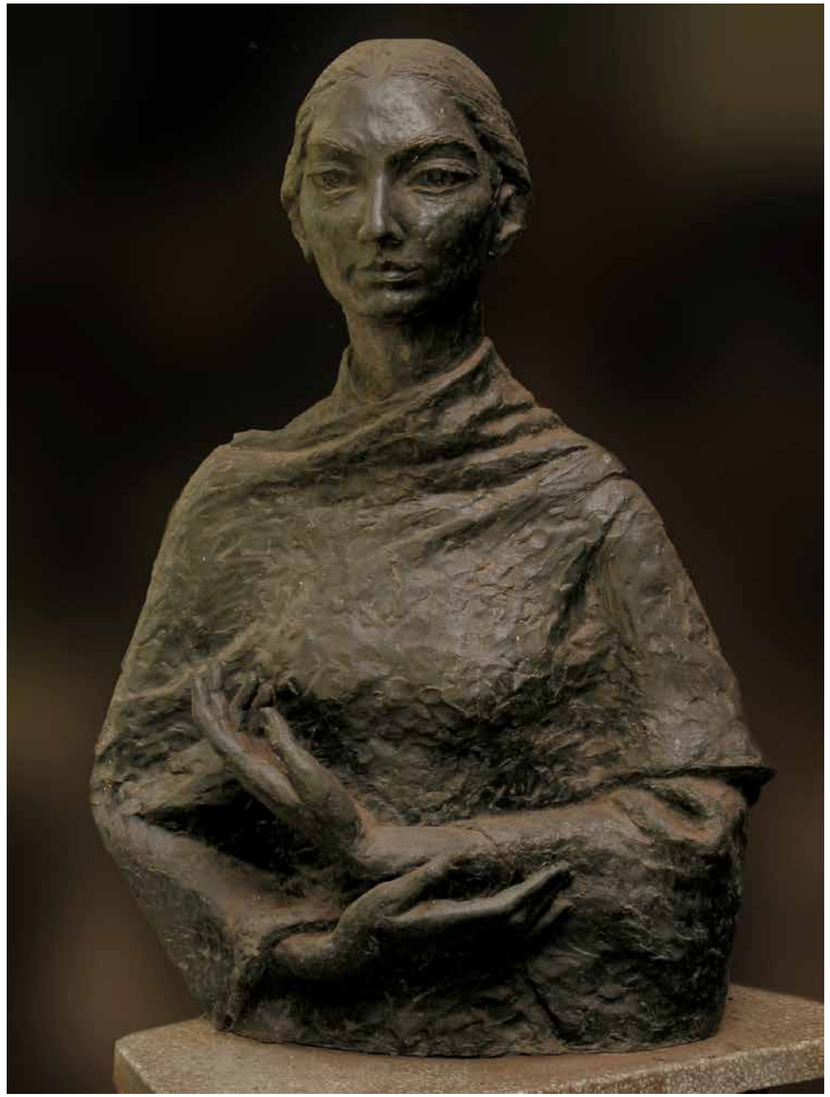


Circa 1960 Painting lost or destroyed



Clay oringinal - Ellen Chudy sculpture

Ellen Chudy - bronze

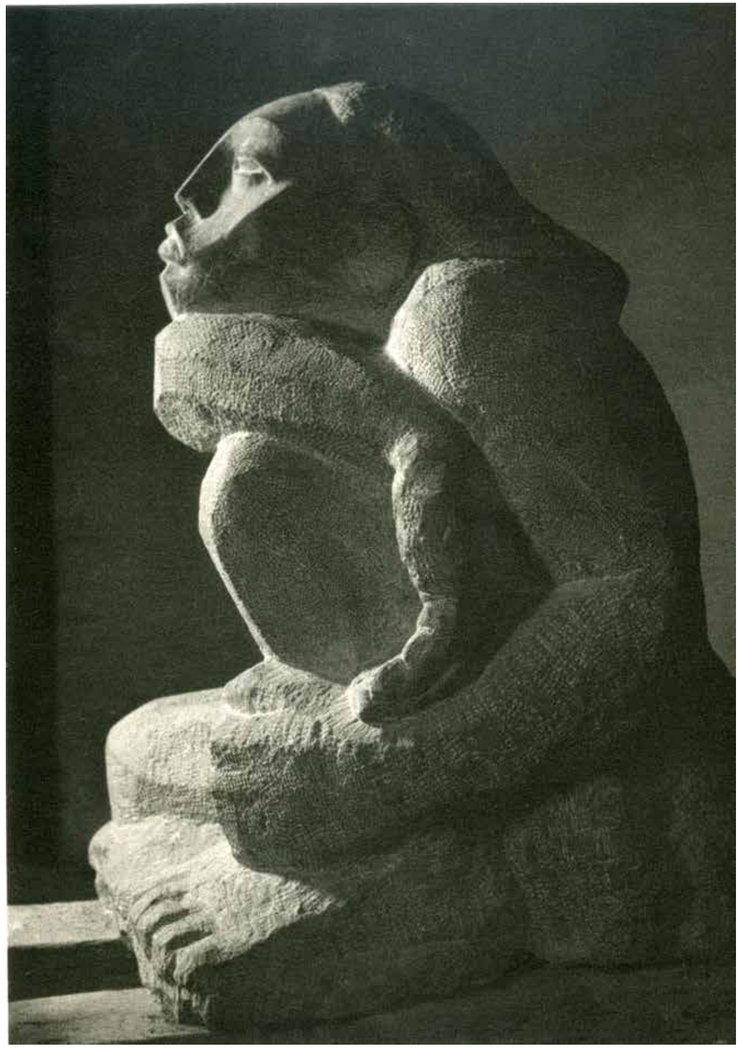


Premalya Singh - the first lost wax sculpture cast south of the African equator.

Premalya Singh in India

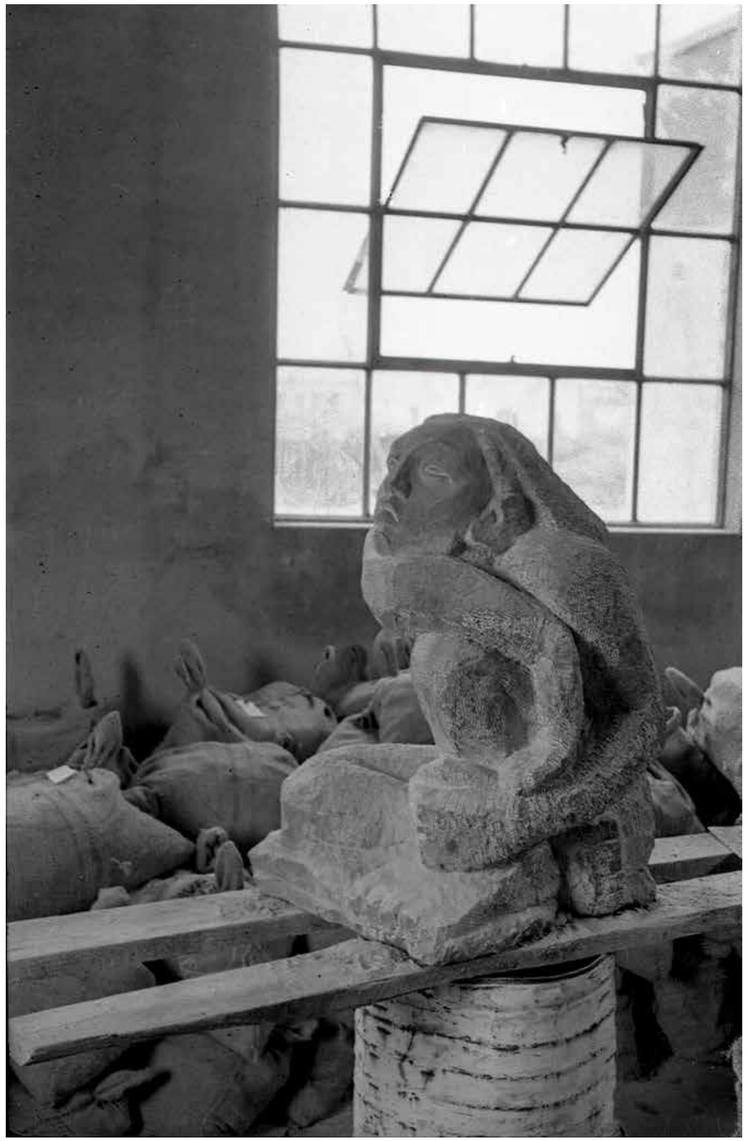
Original clay sculpture

David Chudy and model



'Jacob in the Pit' - red sandstone sculpture - approx 45" tall

Study for 'Jacob in the Pit' sculpture



'Jacob in the Pit' sculpture under construction at the 'factory'

A second study for 'Jacob in the Pit' sculpture

Dominique Strover

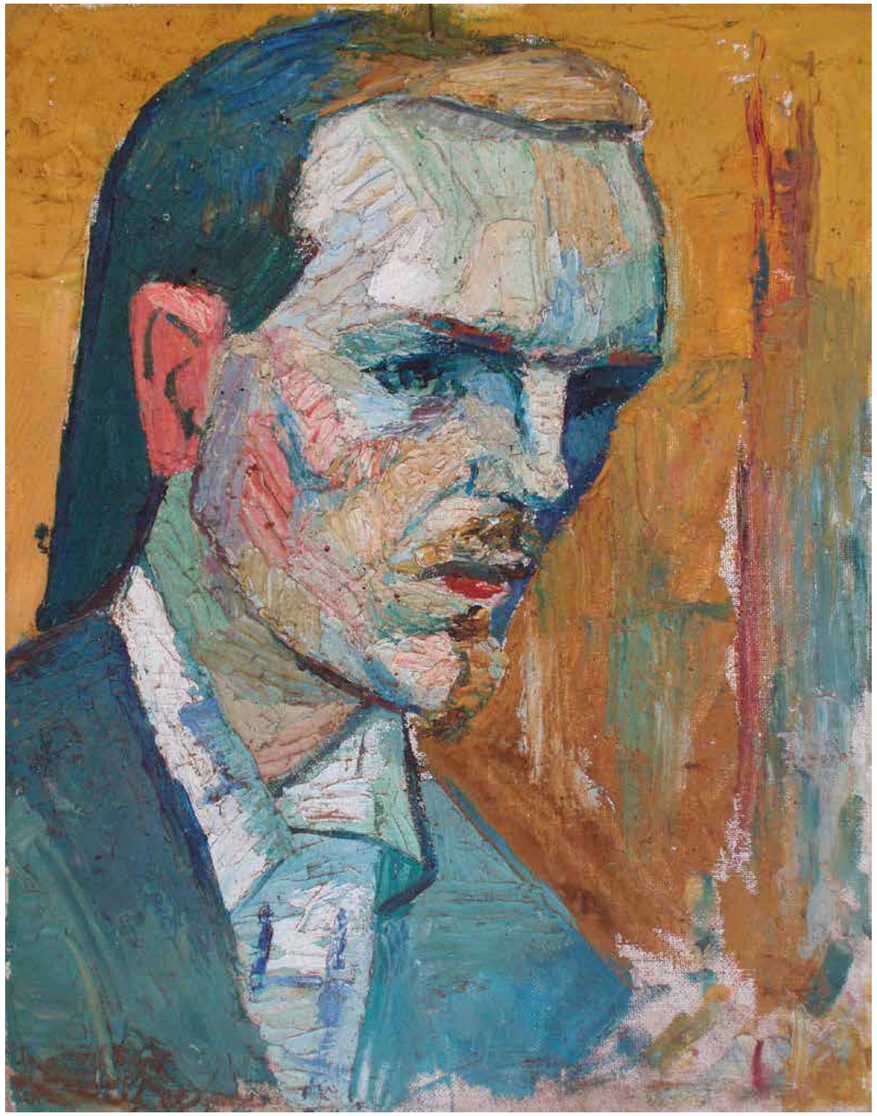
Roberta Jack (née Southey)

Ellen Chudy - original clay model

Ellen Chudy - original clay model

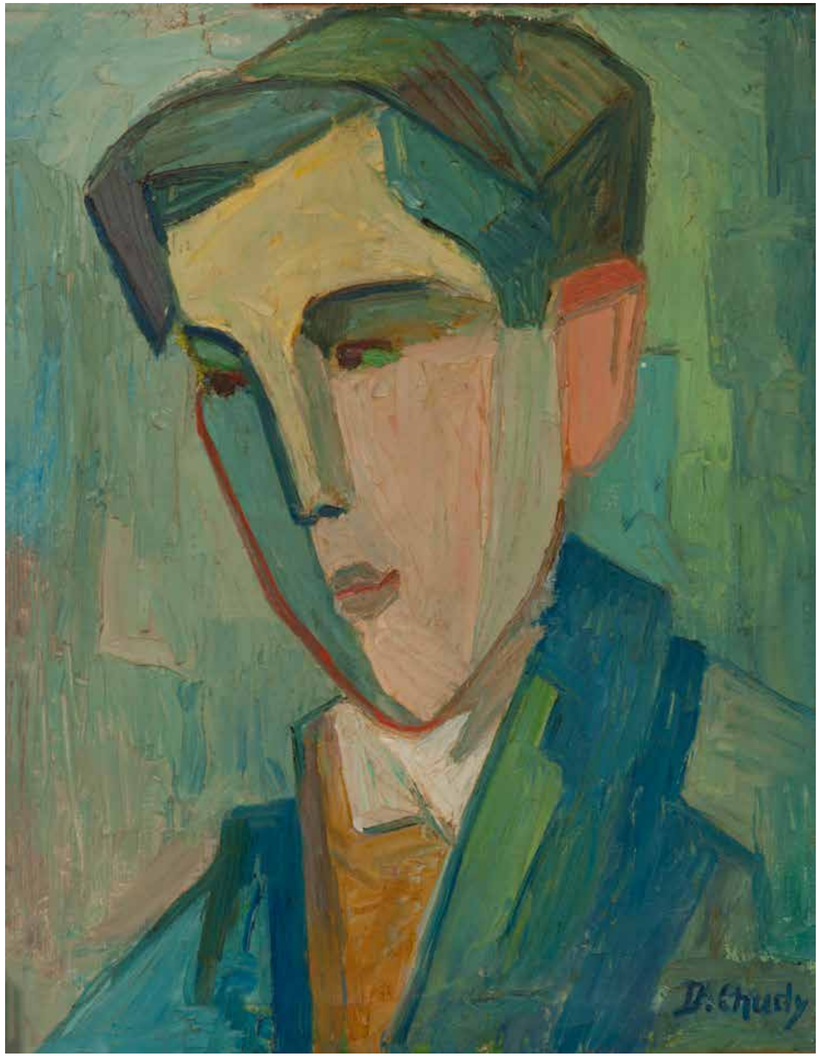
Plaster head cast

African women harvesting - oil on canvas

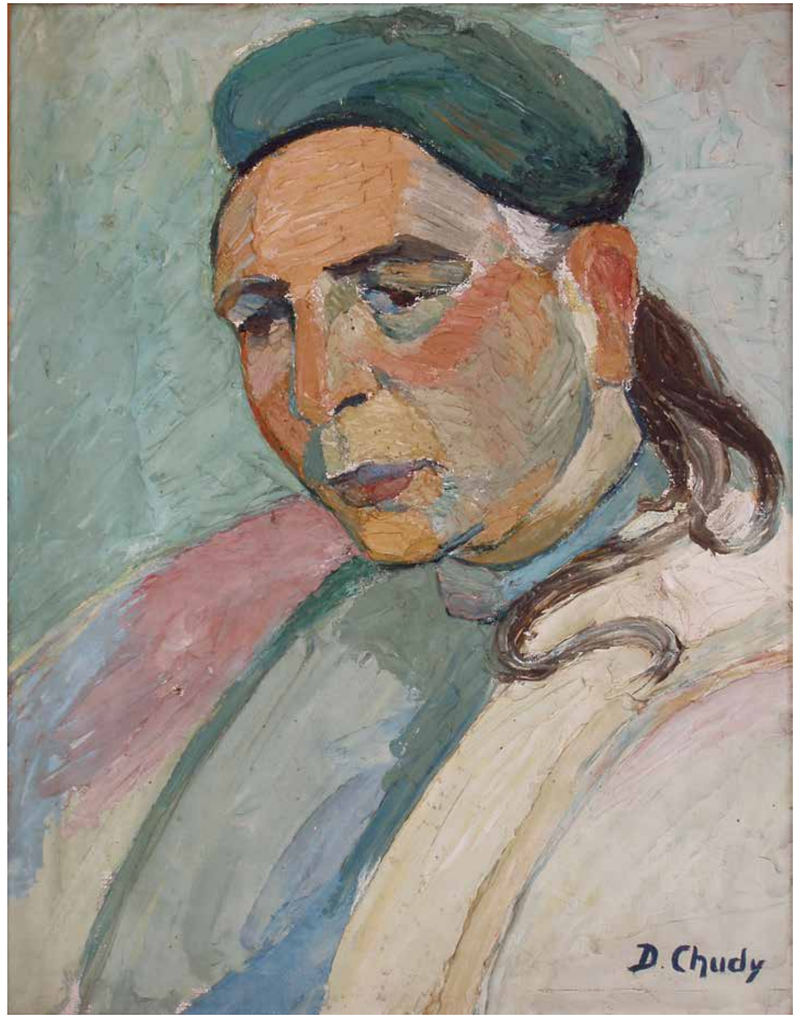


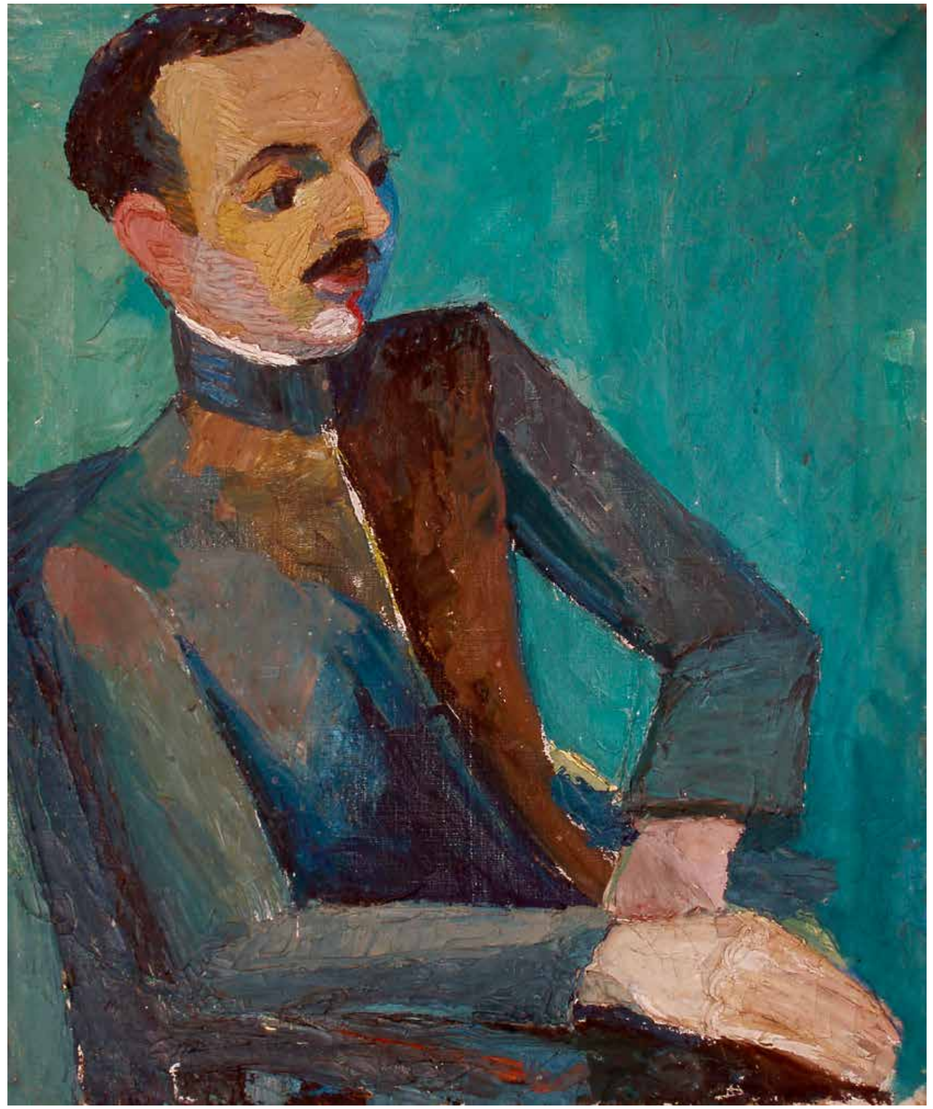
Portrait of unknown man - oil on canvas

Portrait of unknown man - oil on canvas

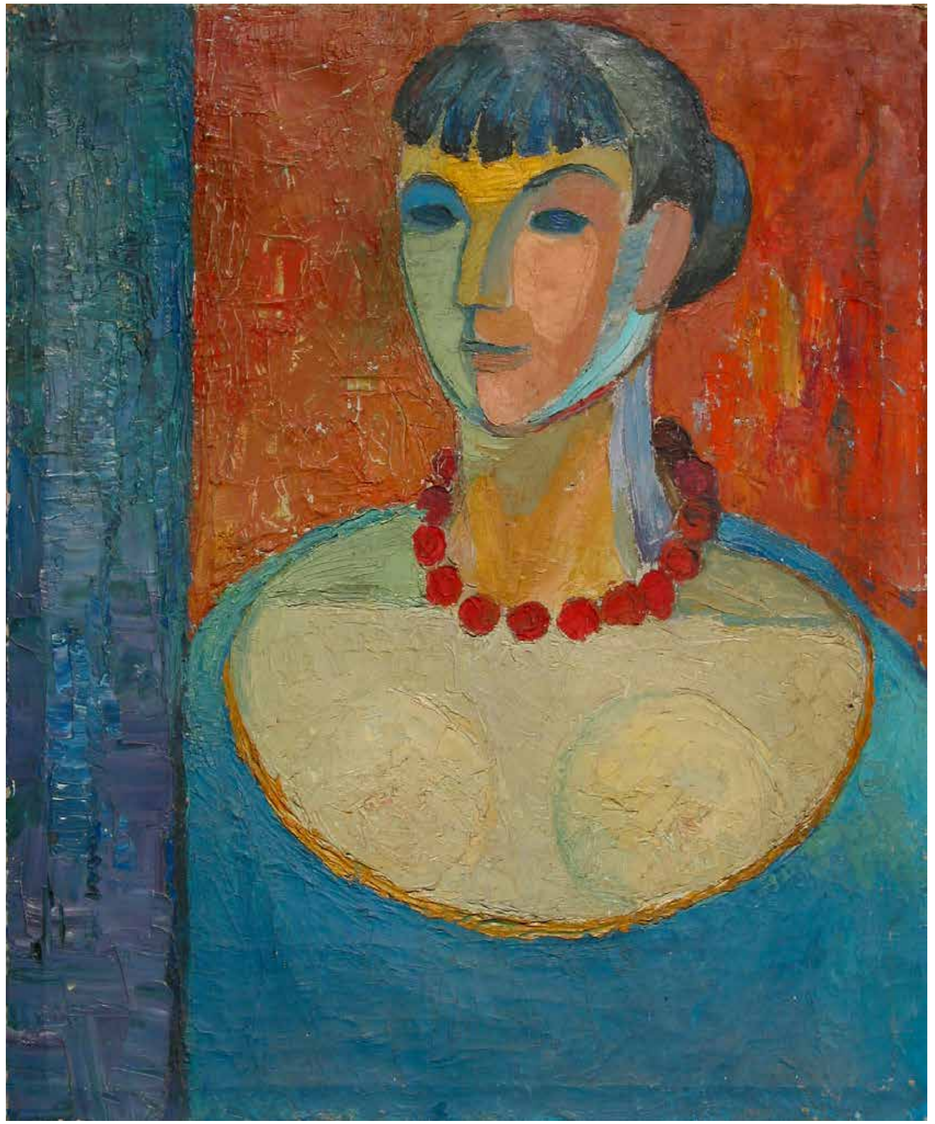


Rodney Rendell-Greene - oil on board



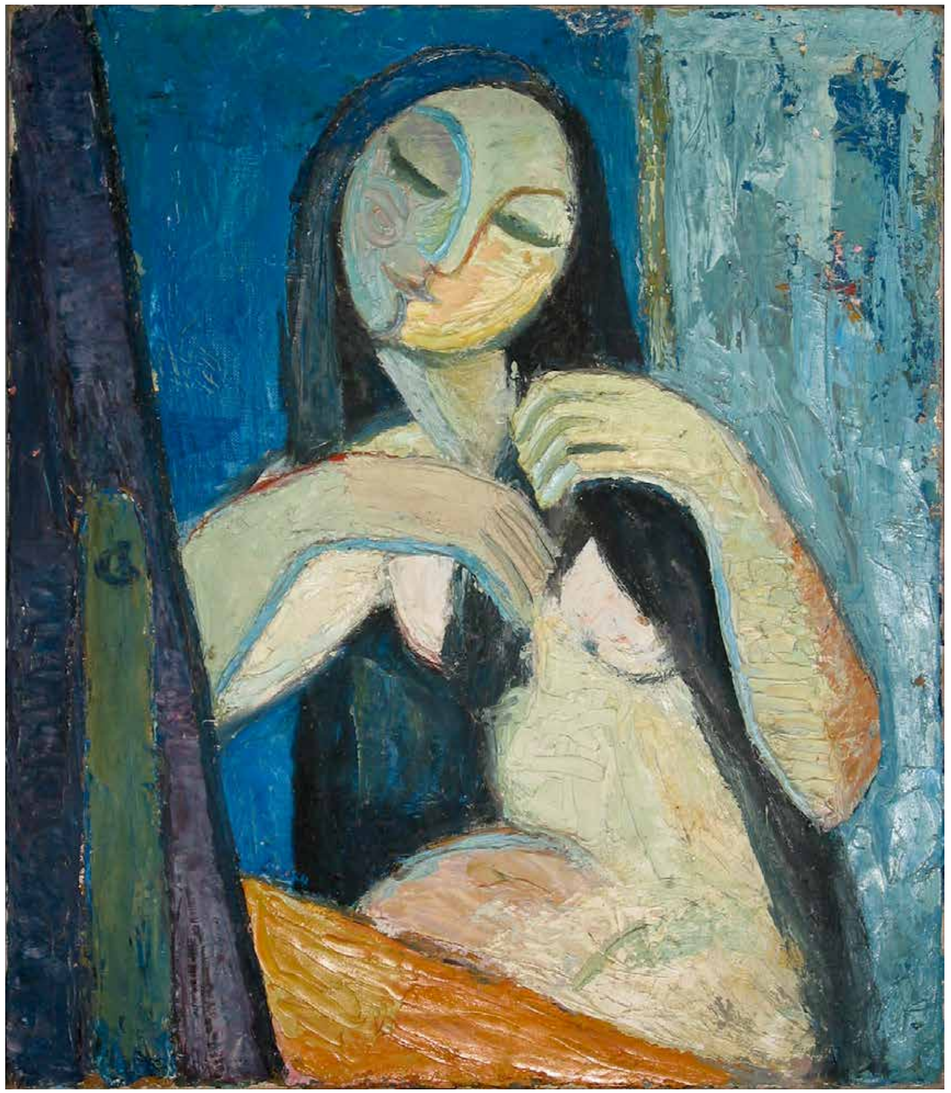


Nirmal Singh - Indian High Commissioner - oil on canvas

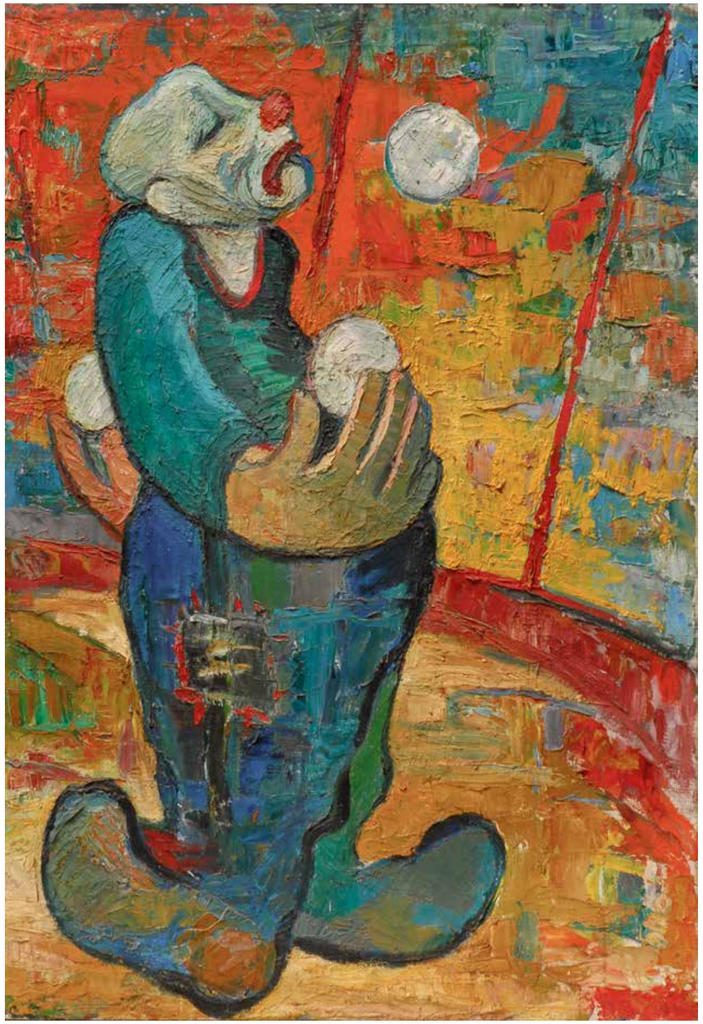


Ellen Chudy - oil on canvas

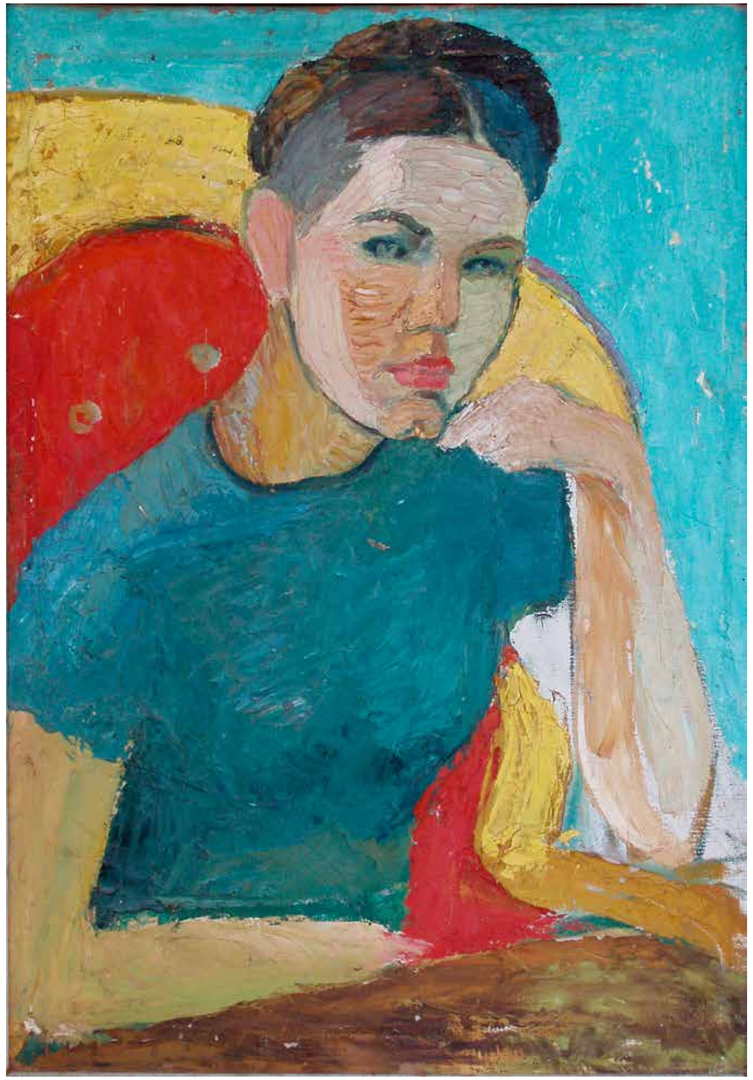
This photo of an earlier iteration of the painting likely no longer exists. It precedes the version on the right



Ellen Chudy - oil on canvas



Circus clown - oil on canvas

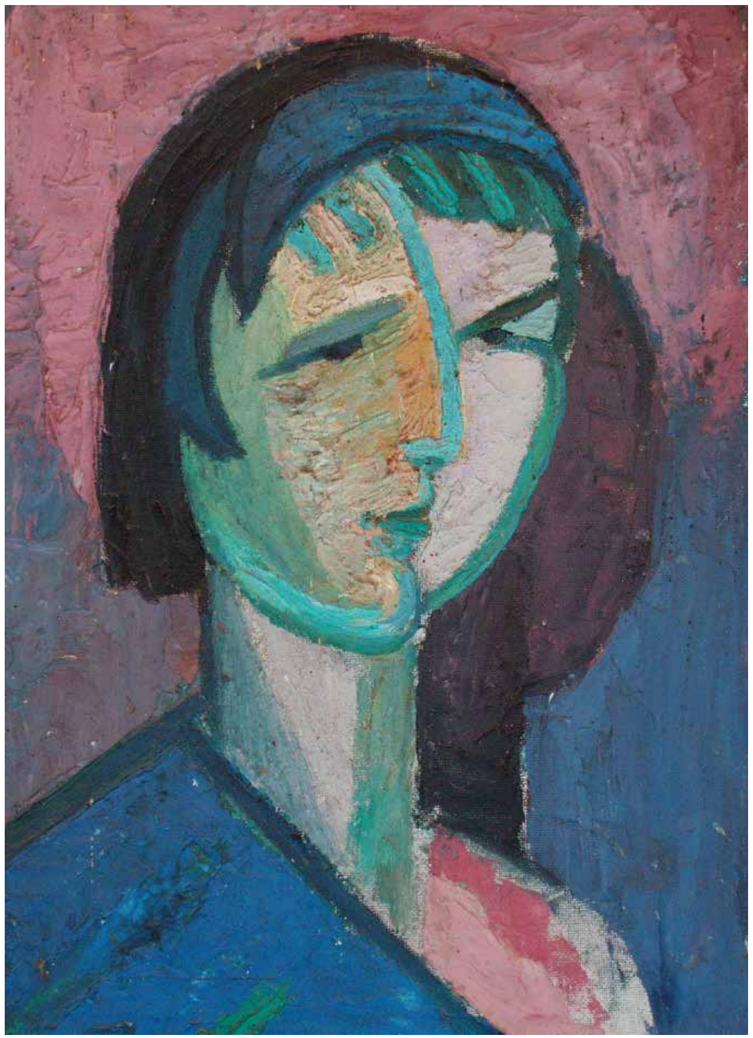


May Cubitt - oil on canvas

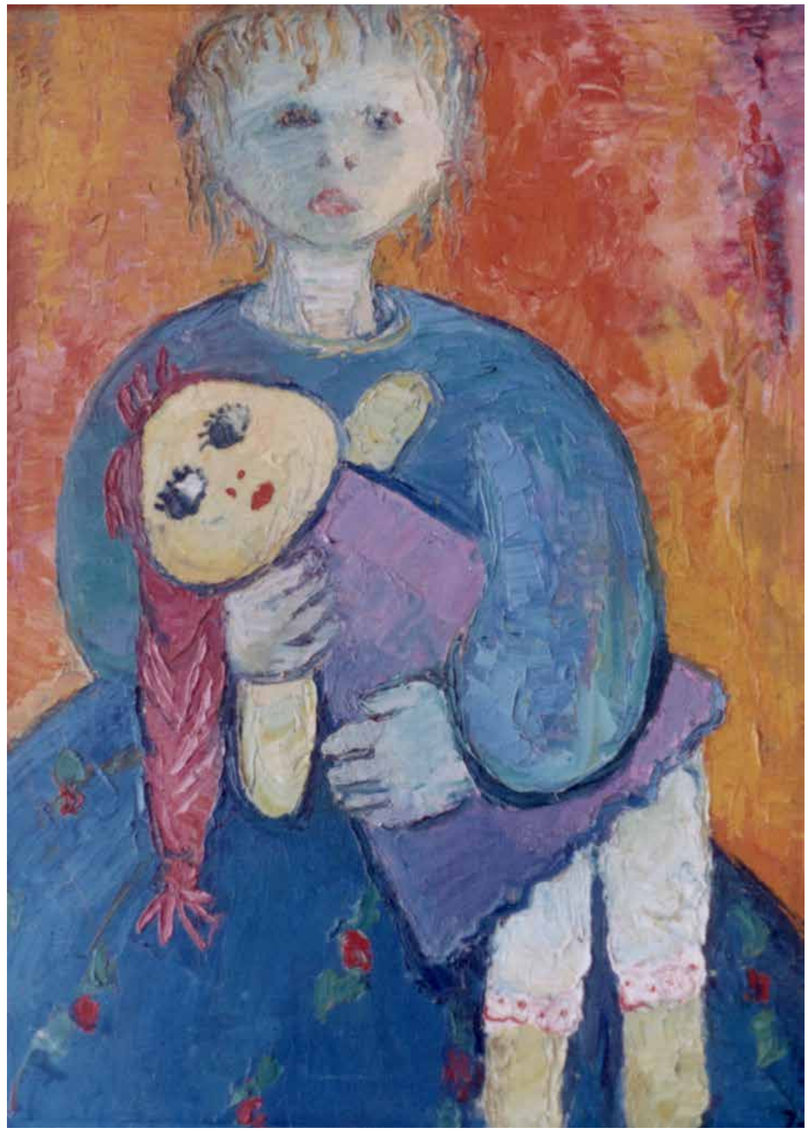
David Chudy and model

Oil on canvas

Eve and the Snake - oil on canvas



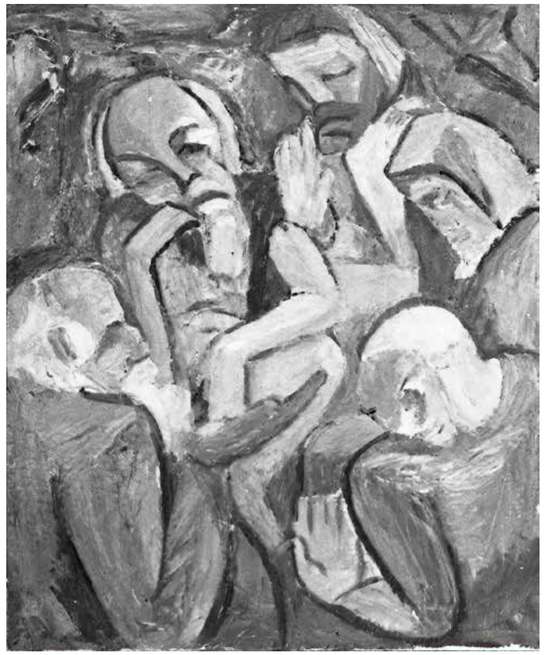
Unknown - oil on canvas



Naomi Chudy - oil on canvas (painting lost or destroyed only known through photograph)

Naomi Chudy - oil on canvas - 1959

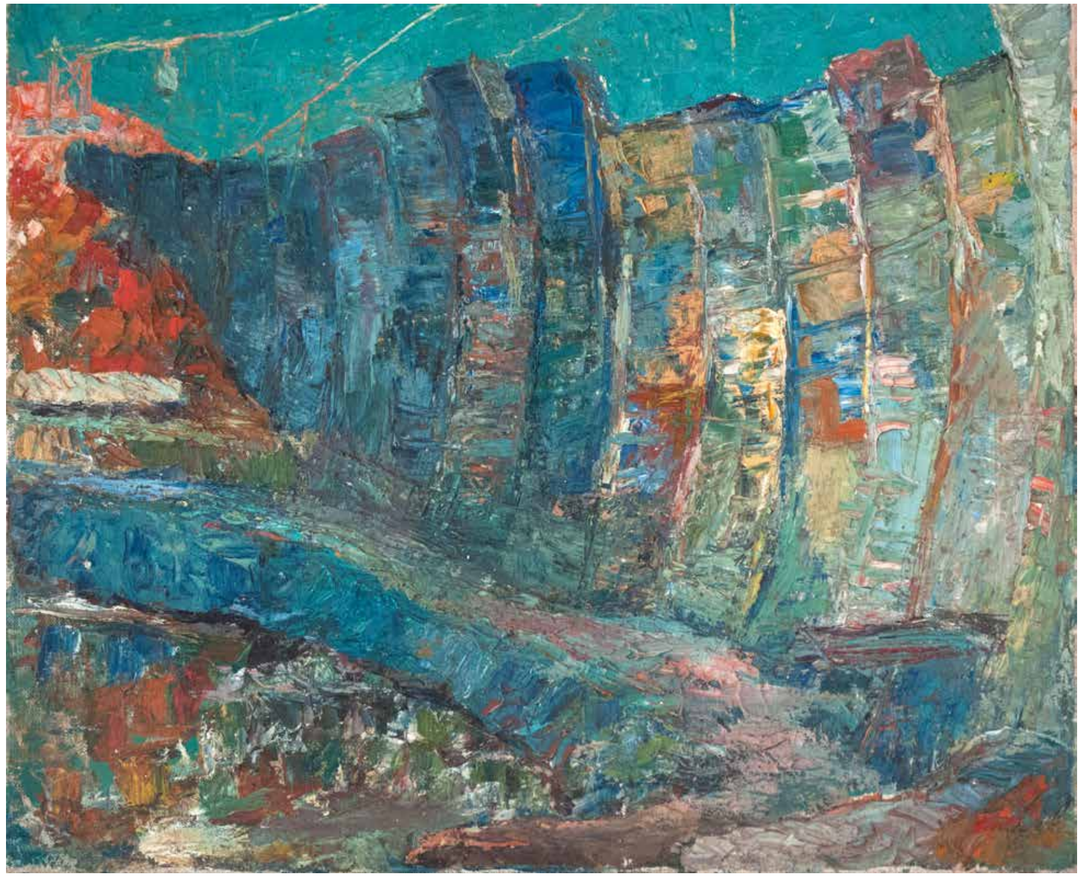
Early iterationns of 'Wise Men' - monochrome photo evidence



Early iterationns of 'Wise Men' - monochrome photo evidence

Wise Men - oil on canvas

Kariba Dam construction (late 1950's), the world's largest dam by volume



Oil on canvas - construction of Kariba Dam on the Zambezi.- Circa 1956

Oil on canvas - construction of Kariba Dam on the Zambezi - circa 1956

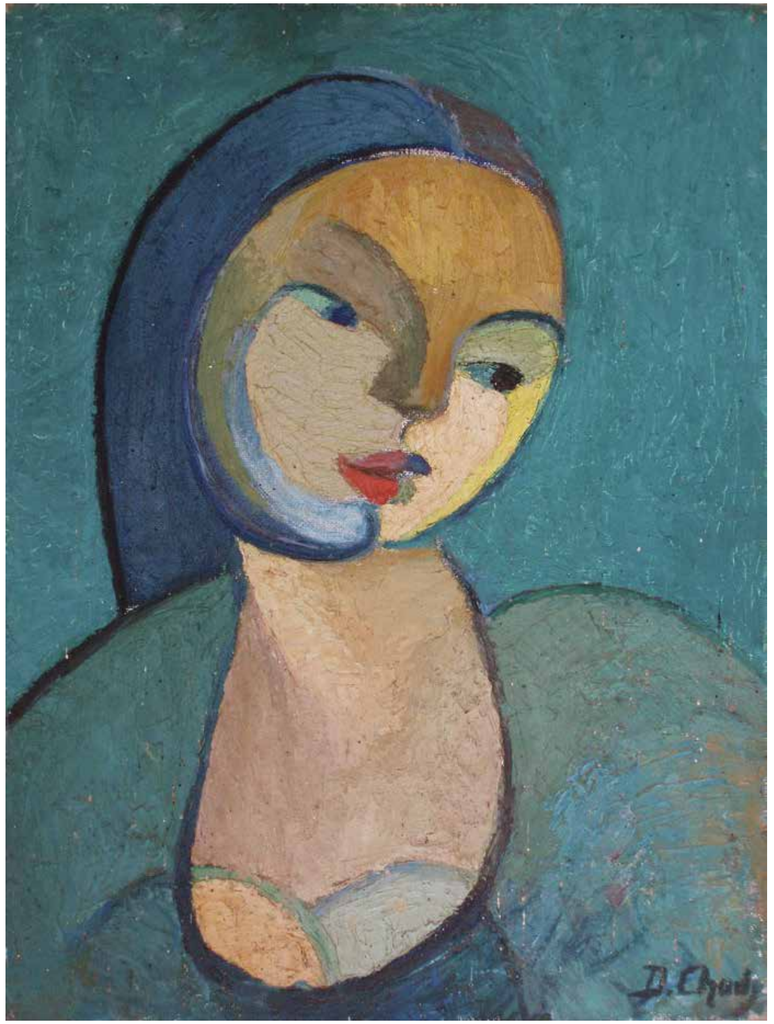
Aerial view of Kariba Dam construction (late 1950's), the world's largest dam by volume - circa 1956.

Granite sculpture-like rocks at Domboshava

Pastel - rock formations

Unfinished group of old women with babies - inspired by a newspaper photo

Unknown - oil on canvas



Unknown - oil on board

Man playing patience - study for painting

Man with chicken - study for never made painting

Ellen Chudy - sketch - 1960

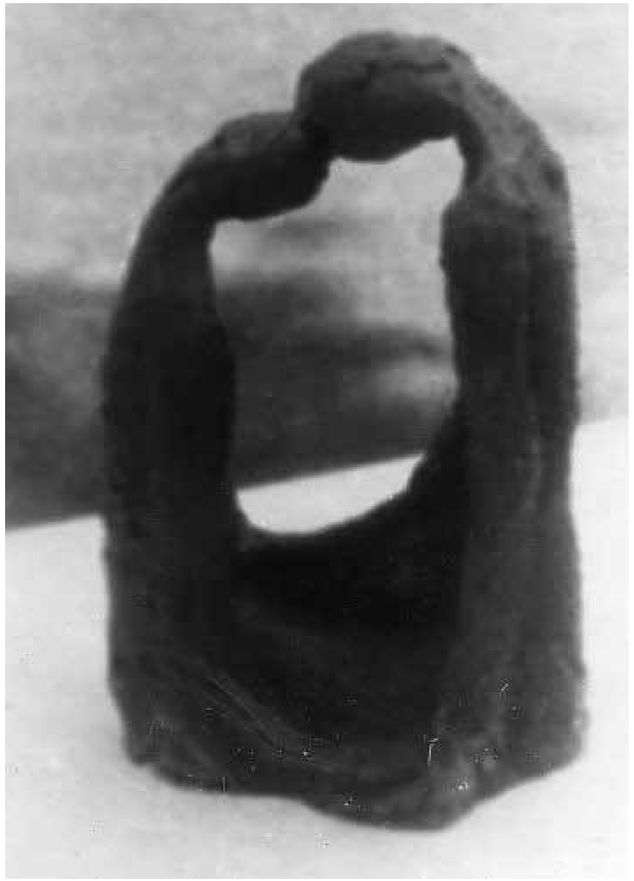
Embrace - cast sculpture

Embrace - sketch - never painted

Premalya Singh

Muriel Rendell-Greene

Abstract - plaster



Baked clay - photo evidence onlyt

Torso - baked clay

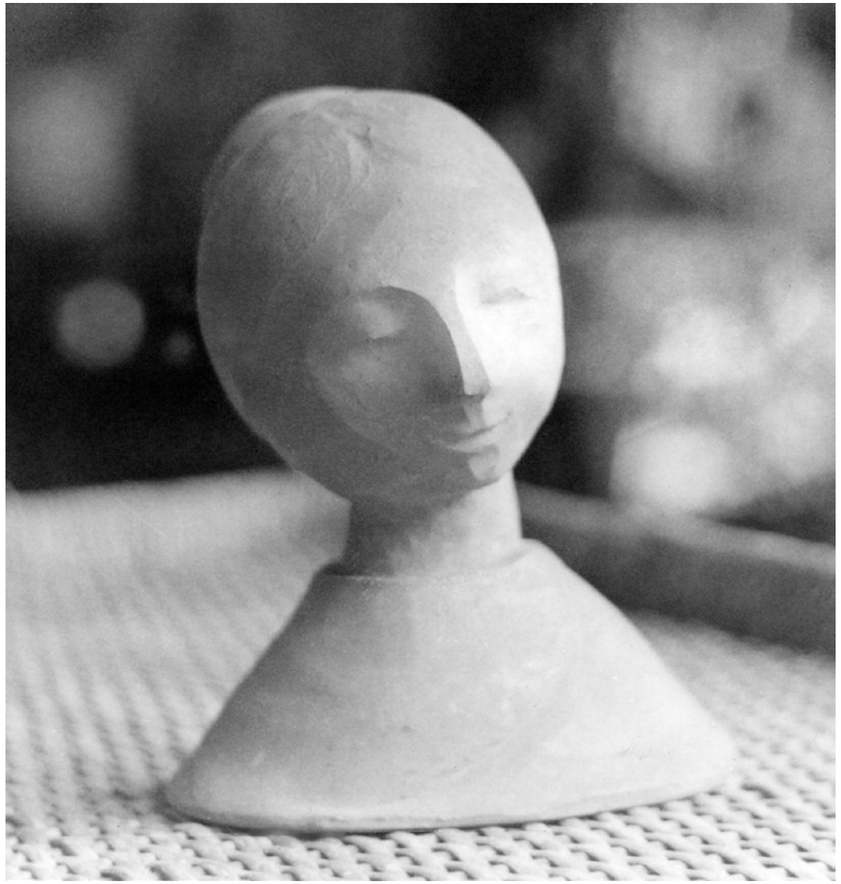
Torso - baked clay

Seated figure - baked clay

Premalya Singh - baked clay

Baked clay

Purnima Singh



Ellen Chudy - baked clay

David Chudy producing clay bust of Naomi Chudy

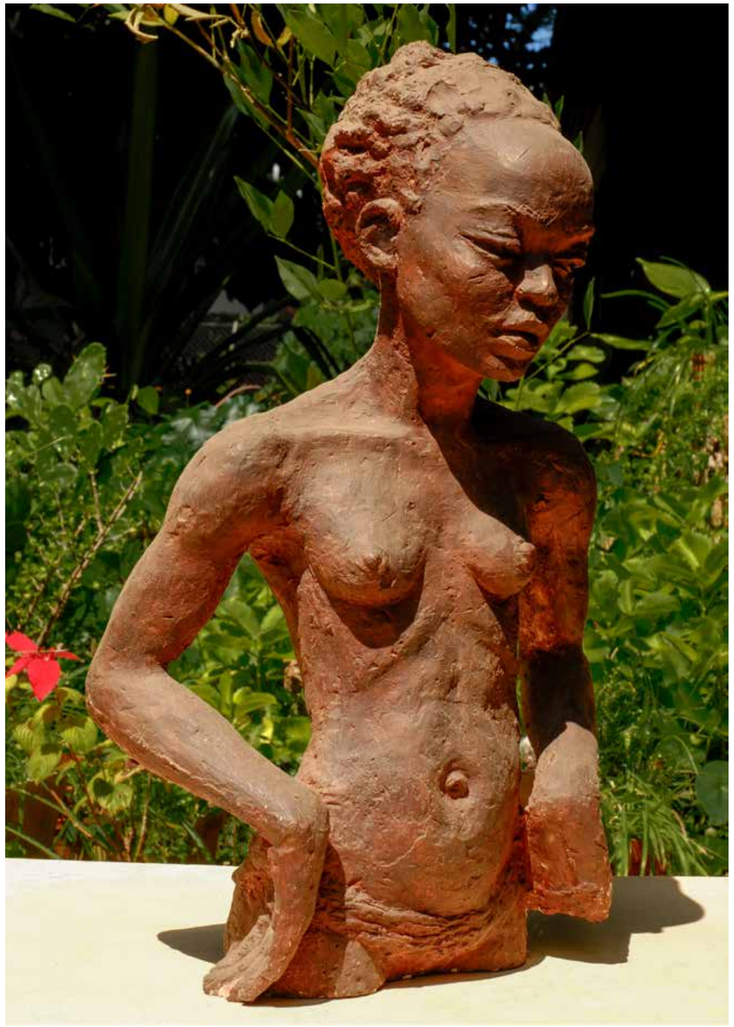
Naomi Chudy - original clay model

Undernourished child - baked clay

Undernourished child - baked clay

Betty St Clair Clay CBE (née Baden-Powell; 16 April 1917 – 24 April 2004) was the younger daughter of Robert Baden-Powell

Finished bronze of Betty St Clair Clay



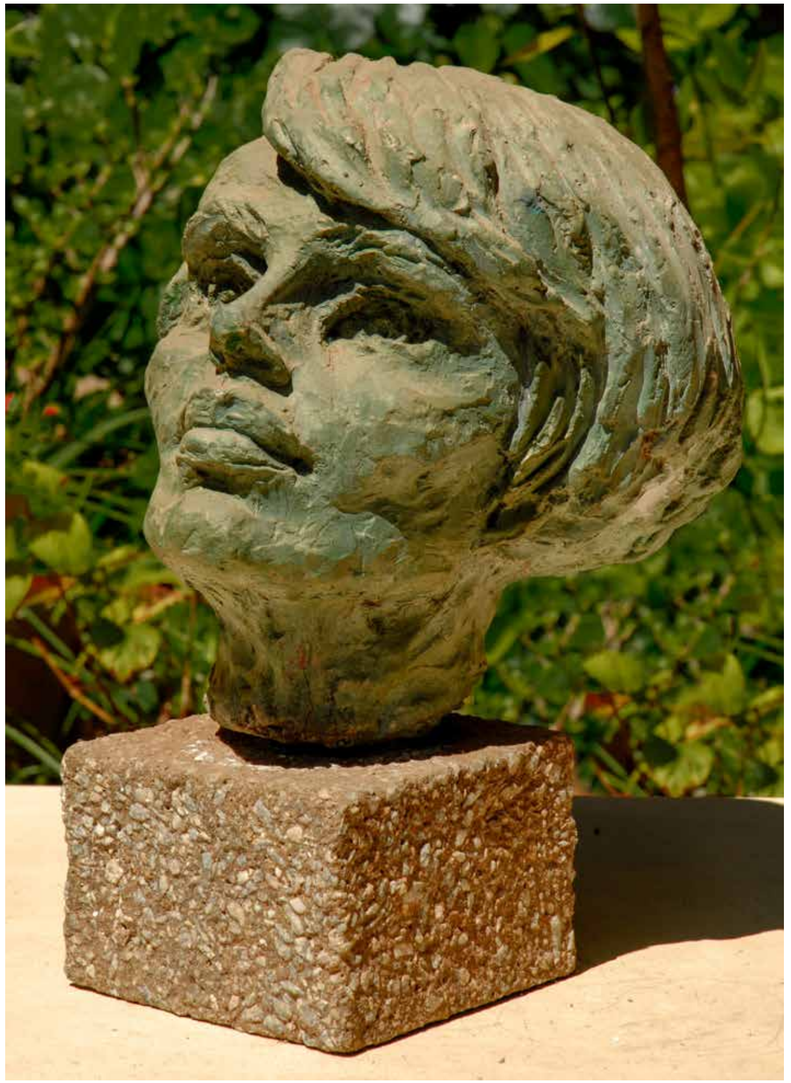
Plaster

Guy Clutton Brock - political dissident - founder of multiracial Cold Comfort Farm

Pregnant woman

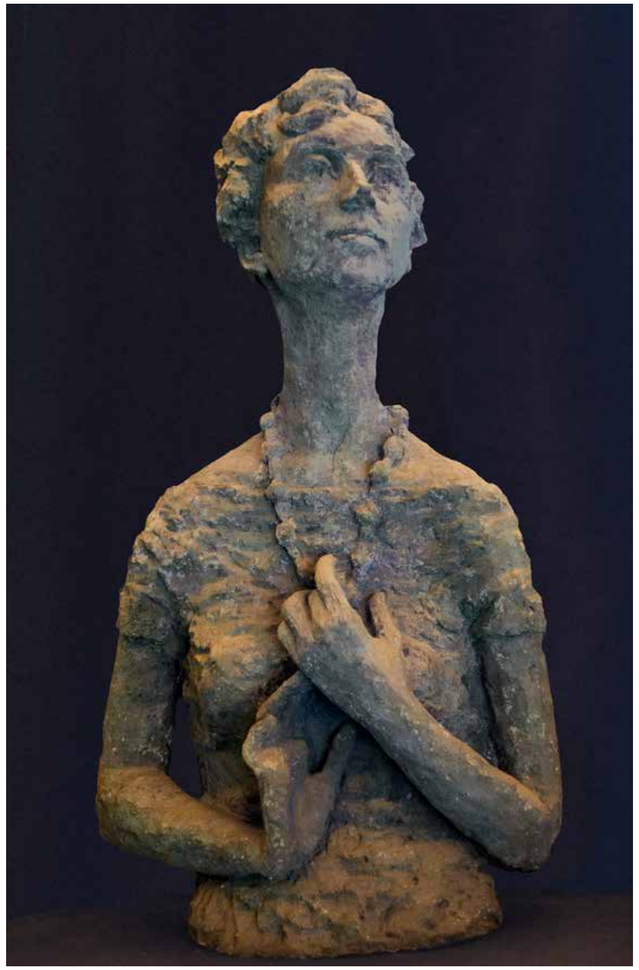
Clay oriiginal - Pregnant woman

Mrs. Adams



Mrs. Barlow

Florence Mbofana



Anne Tomson

Far East and Final Years

Six years before the Summer of Love in San Francisco, David and Ellen Chudy began a yearlong overland journey to the Far East.

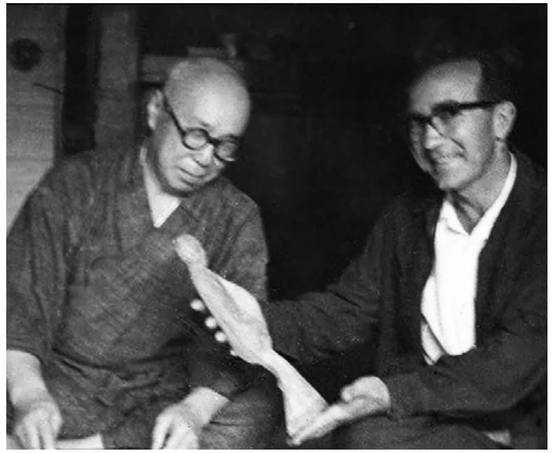
It was 1961, the year John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th president of the United States and Yuri Gagarin became the first human to fly in space. J.F.K. committed the U.S. to 'landing a man on the Moon', while Freedom Riders took buses into the South, challenging segregation. Also in that year, East Germany began to build the Berlin Wall, the first transistor TV was announced as J.F.K oversaw the early build-up of a U.S. military presence in Vietnam, while the Chudy's began a nail-biting transit of that already war torn country.

Their journey commenced in East Africa and included India Kashmir Bangladesh Myanmar (Burma) Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. They shipped their vehicle to Japan and finally to Java and Bali.

An interest in eastern art, and thought, ranging from mysticism to Zen Buddhism was core to planning this intrepid journey. An enduring friendship with Nrimal and Premalya Singh was a gateway to Indian tradition and world views.

They took possession of the brand new VW Kombi - an actual 'works' converted' camper, the first to be imported into Africa. Their journey was pioneering for the time. The hippie trail was not yet a thing, and at that time and

On the threshold - leaving home for the year long Far East trip



Venerated Japanese potter Shoji Hamada and David Chudy in Japan

Westerners did not travel this way - at least, not in the countries they visited.

Their boldness was born of experience in remote parts of Africa and the 'early days' in Northern Rhodesia. In those times it was routine to set out on a journey and have to return because of mud or sand making the only road to the destination, impassable. 'Bush mechanics' was second nature to David Chudy. It was not out of character to disassemble an engine or repair his car at the roadside in the wilderness.

Roughing it' on long journeys was the only option in the early days. Hotels and even official stop over areas were rare. The African ethos: 'it does not get defined as a real adventure, if another tourist has ever set foot there', was a motivating factor, catapulting them into the unknown with anticipation.

Asia, of course is not the equivalent of Africa - where vast unpopulated spaces dominate. The journey took them through the gamut of environments from snows near the Nepal border through chaotic teeming cities, parched deserts and humid jungles.

Traditional dwellings - Bali - oil on canvas

Having independent transportation and sustenance, they were able to travel to intractable backwaters, where they more often than not, they were invited to stay with locals. Hospitality was not only extended by prominent people within their communities, but ordinary people with humble offerings too.

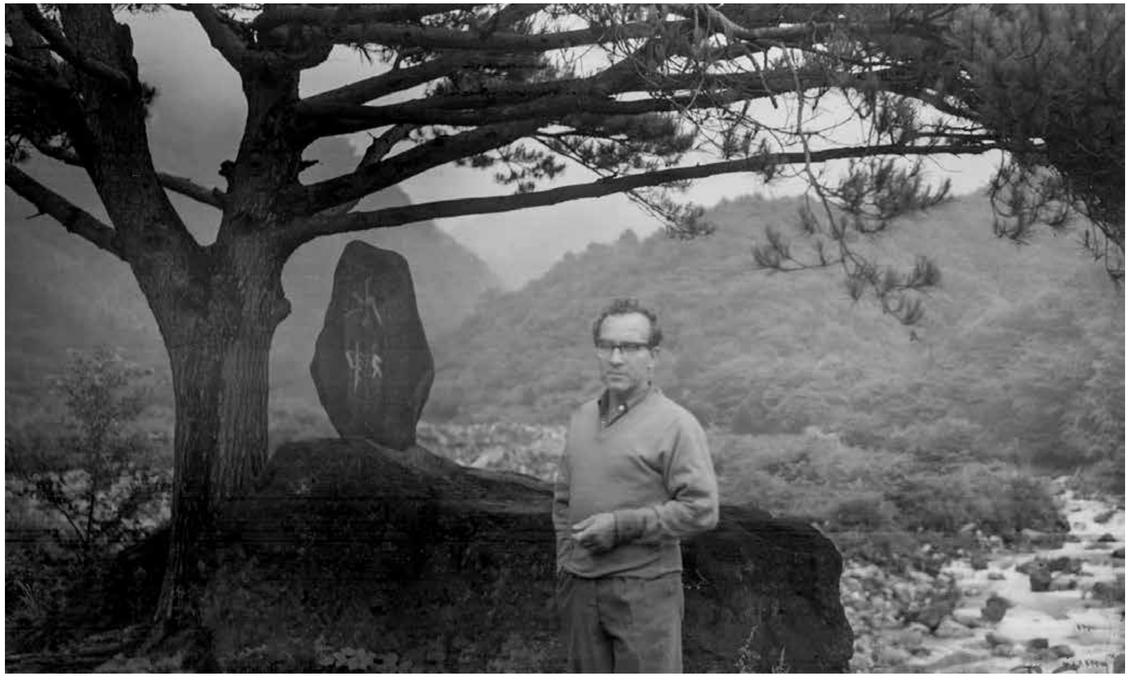
This was an era apart from our time of mass travel and serviced tourism. David and Ellen Chudy were afforded an intimate view of the people and cultures they passed, and being third world people themselves, they were flexible enough to respond appropriately.

David Chudy created art along the way on this trip. Numerous pieces - sizable oil paintings in Java and four life sized clay portrait sculptures.

The production of any art is remarkable given the context of the compactness of their means of transport. Also, oil paintings take a long time to dry and are unwieldy in a cramped vehicle interior. The pure bulk of the sculptures he made had to be significant as well. Additionally, they returned with numerous sizable art pieces they had collected along the way.

Angkor Wat was one special destination as it was to be inaccessible to foreigners during the decades of the Cambodian Civil War and the Khmer Rouge.

Their arrival in Japan was considered newsworthy and featured in newspapers. But, not by virtue of their personal qualities as intrepid travelers. No one had ever brought a vehicle to Japan 'temporarily', i.e. for the purposes of a visit! The Japanese system was not flexible enough to cope and the compromise struck with customs, required David and Ellen to obtain and display a new vehicle plate, for every prefecture they drove though.



David Chudy at a shrine during his extensive driving road tour of Japan

On the strength of their connection with famed potter William Staite Murray[1], they visited the venerated Japanese potter Soji Hamada. Hamada who is described as a 'national Japanese treasure' had studied with and worked alongside Bernard Leach[2].

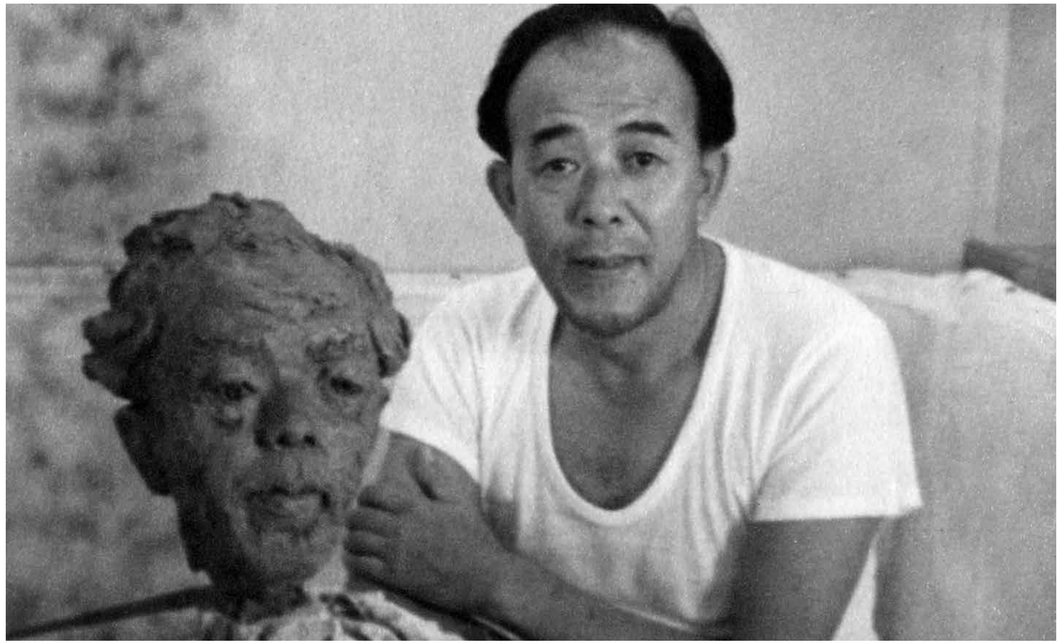
As had been the case in the countries they visited, they rarely came across Westerners and those meet were colorful expats, or at least characters, worthy of having a place of honor, in a novel.

David Chudy suffered a heart attack on the return journey, while driving home from the port of Beira in Mozambique. A decision to let go of his construction business, coincided with a more recent decision to devote himself full time to art and technical/scientific research projects.

1 William Staite Murray (1881–1962), was an English fine artist potter - appointed Trustee of National Arts Council in Rhodesia.

2 Bernard Howell Leach CH CBE (1887 – 6 May 1979), was a British studio potter and art teacher, regarded as the "Father of British studio pottery"

Transistors were still relatively new high-tech devices which permitted innovators to think of radically new products. Fifteen years before the digital revolution kicked off with the first personal computer (25 years before the IBM PC), he began with the development of a non-digital optical scanner which might convert letters on conventional printed text, to be translated into specific sounds. The plan was that a blind person could read regular printed text. This gave way to a sonar blind aid, which would permit blind people to sense their environments in detail much in the manner of bat's sonar. This research extended what was known about bats' use of sonar and it became a two pronged project - pure research into the natural world as well as the attempt to make a product to bring mobility to the blind. And this rapidly split in two as well - when he patented what may be the first sonic burglar alarm system. This was picked up by Phillips who mass produced these for a few years before David Chudy's death in 1967. The bat research also resulted in a split itself, shortly before his passing. It was in the sense that it seemed promising, that lessons on how bats actually



Model unknown - sculpture lost or destroyed

experience sight (in terms of sonar), might also relate to the way dolphins see. It could even point to how they communicate which hypothetically would be a kind of a 3D X-ray picture based language. Fifty years later it is hard to decide whether his hypotheses were endorsed, or disproved as a result of more in depth third party research. Most research in this area would have been top secret, done by the military but, on the face of it, researchers seem not to have pursued parallel inquiries.

Whatever the evaluation of his scientific work, it was a mere four years from conception of the echo-location project to authoring a scientific paper. During those four years, David Chudy produced fewer paintings and sculpture, but the style and aesthetic was changing significantly. His creative self-confidence expanded, endorsed as it was, by his other achievements.

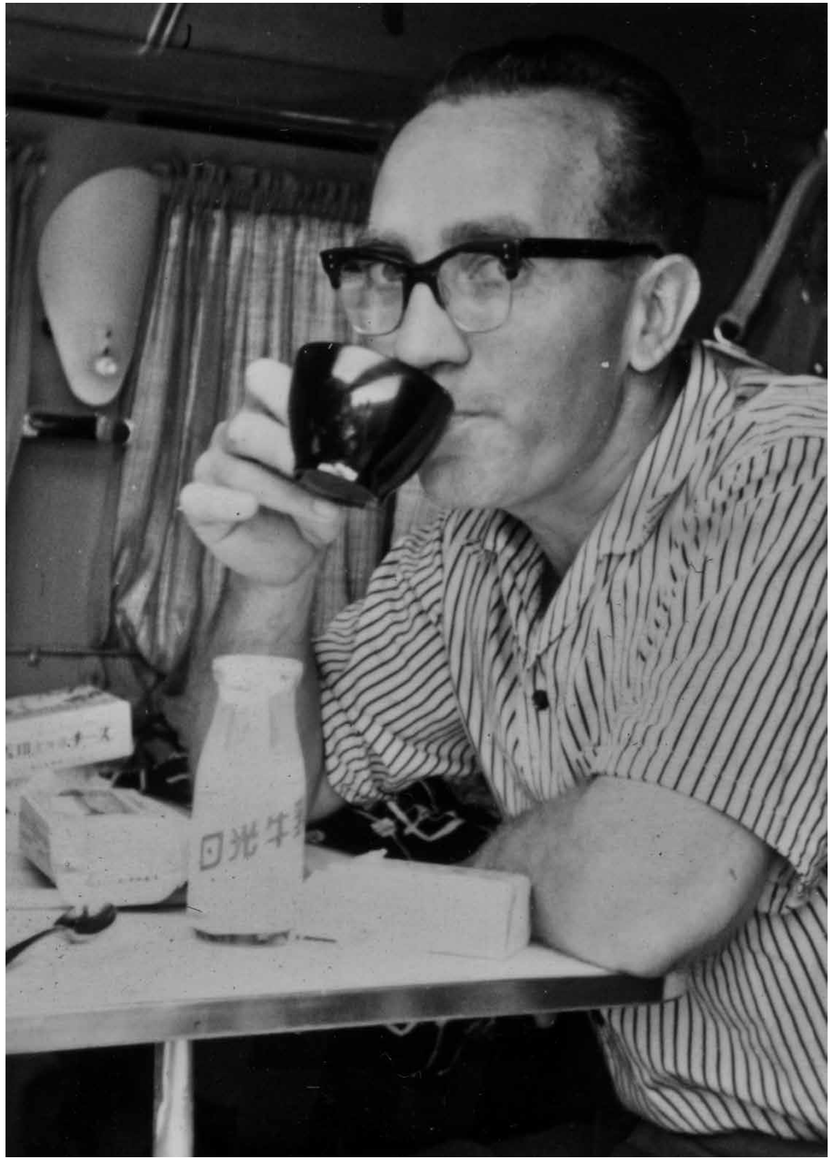
At the same time many other things were going on - namely the 60's revolution. At that time, creativity was recognized as a fundamental human quality which took its place alongside other attributes, which had ranked significantly higher in previous eras. These were things such as 'selflessness', 'service', 'trustworthiness', 'obedience' or even unquestioning compliance'. As mentioned earlier, David Chudy was impressed by Arthur Koestler's ideas in 'Act of Creation'. This shocked people at the time because humor and creativity (scientific and otherwise) were described by Koestler as fundamentally the same thing, but on a sliding scale, David Chudy also made provocative statements in the company of friends, asserting that 'science was an art and art was a science'.

That kind of thinking was shocking to some at the time, but it is mainstream now.

The lines in his art became looser now and the overall feel drifted slightly more towards texture and light, in a hybrid of impressionism, abstract expressionism - combined with the kind of bold African lines, evidenced in Picasso's surrealist period.

Fifty-two years after David Chudy's death one can look around and question how many 'modern' artists hung on to a routine of working with live subjects. Given the massive explosion and diversity of styles and treatments adopted by artists worldwide, it is surprising to what extent this 'once standard formula' fell out of the mainstream. Even in the realm of photo-realism, eyeball realists seem to have become a minority - most working from photos. Francis Bacon who was said to have bad-mouthed photography reputedly 'rarely worked from life'.

photo - David Chudy - Japanese couple - sculpture of woman is featured on pages 192/193



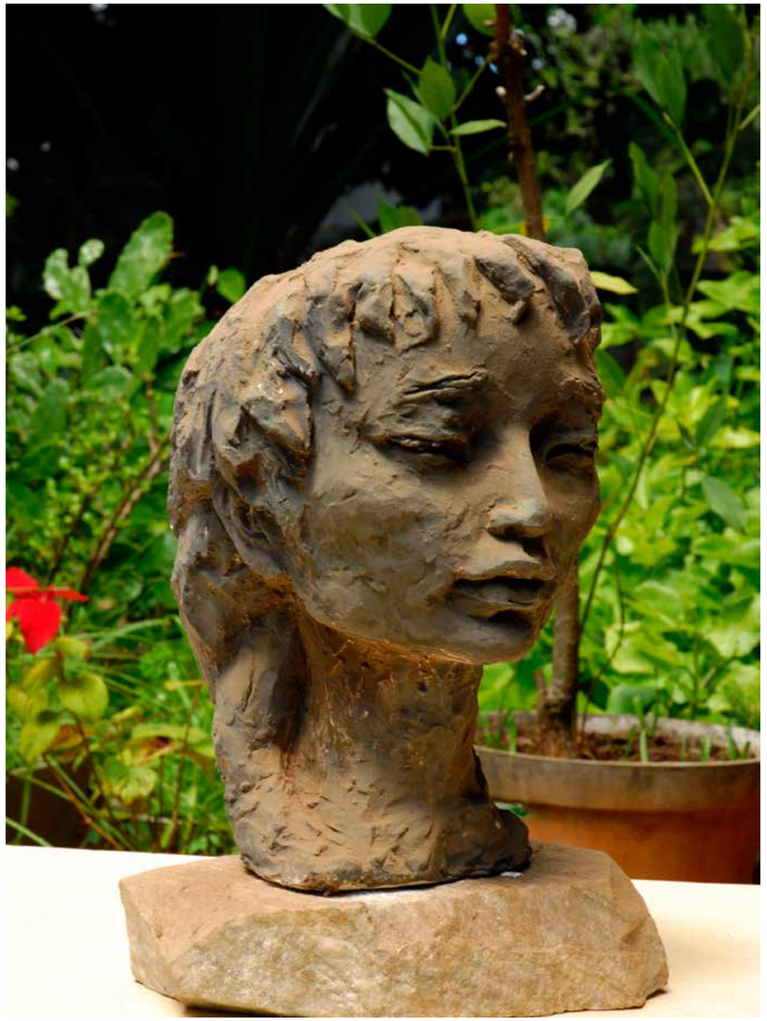
Touring Japan in the VW Combi camper

Far East trip - Japan

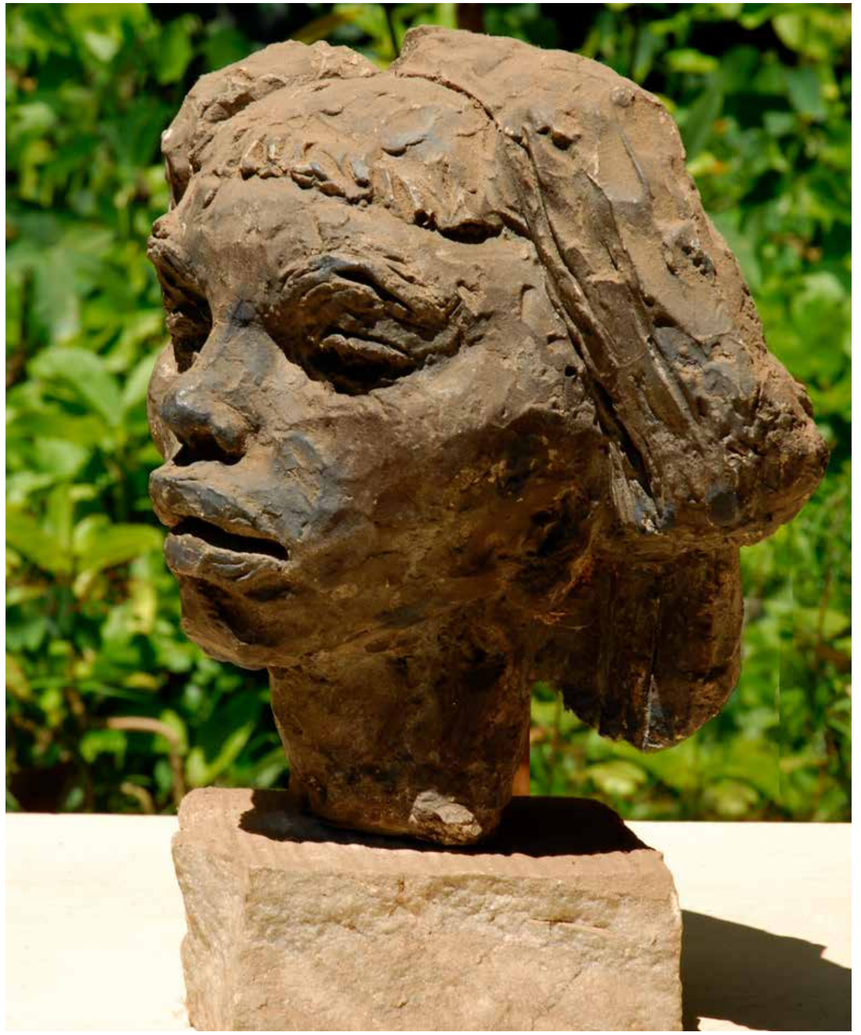
Model and sculpture -location unknown

Far East trip - location unknown

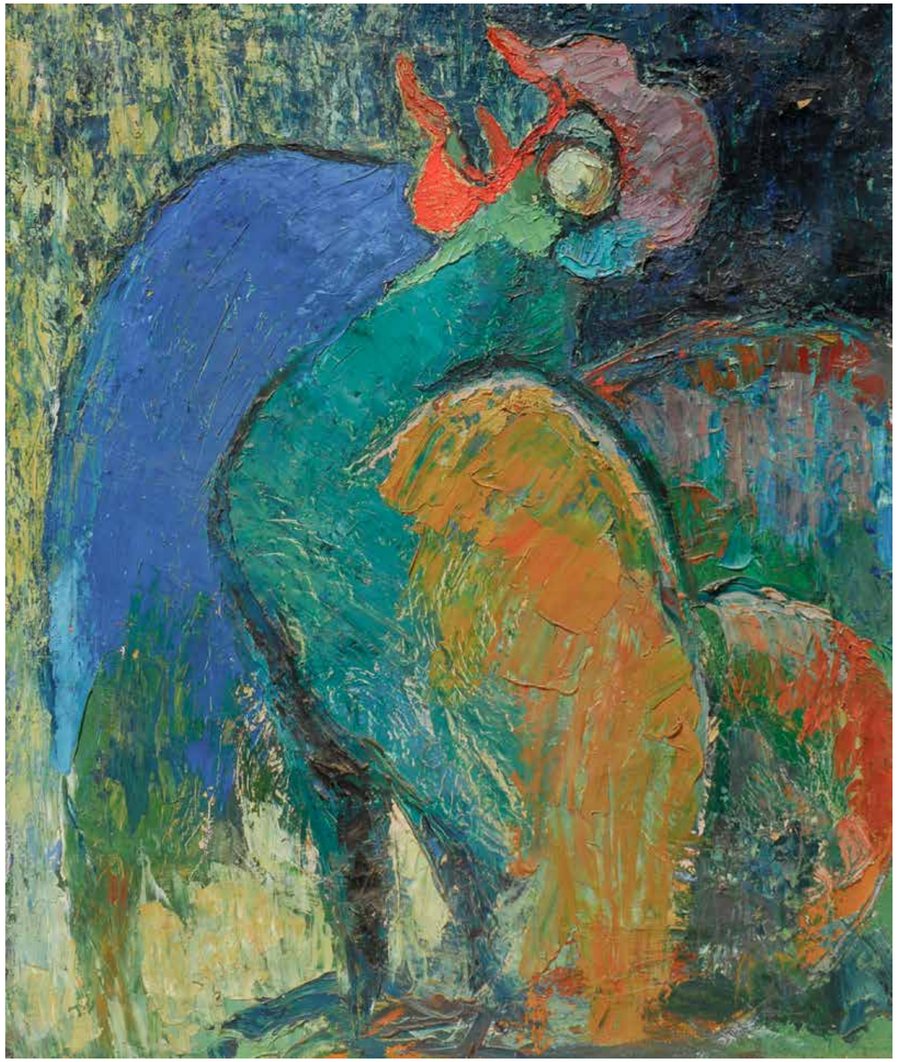
Far East trip - Japan



Far East trip - precise location unknown

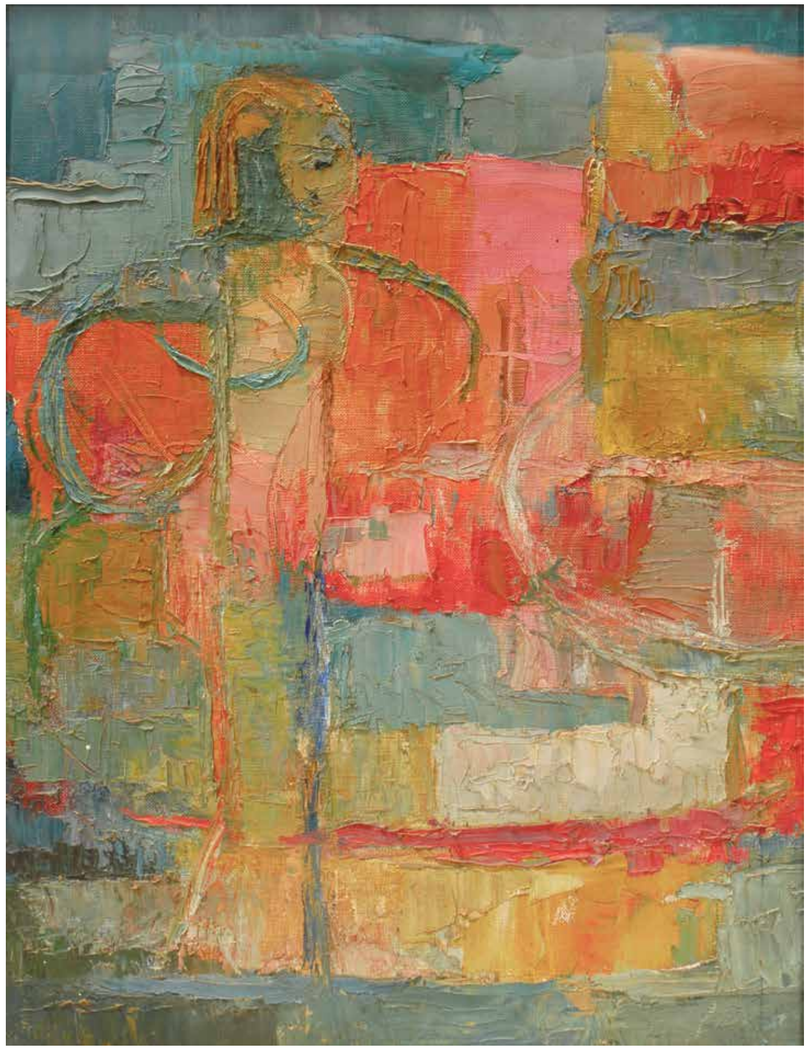


Far East trip - precise location unknown

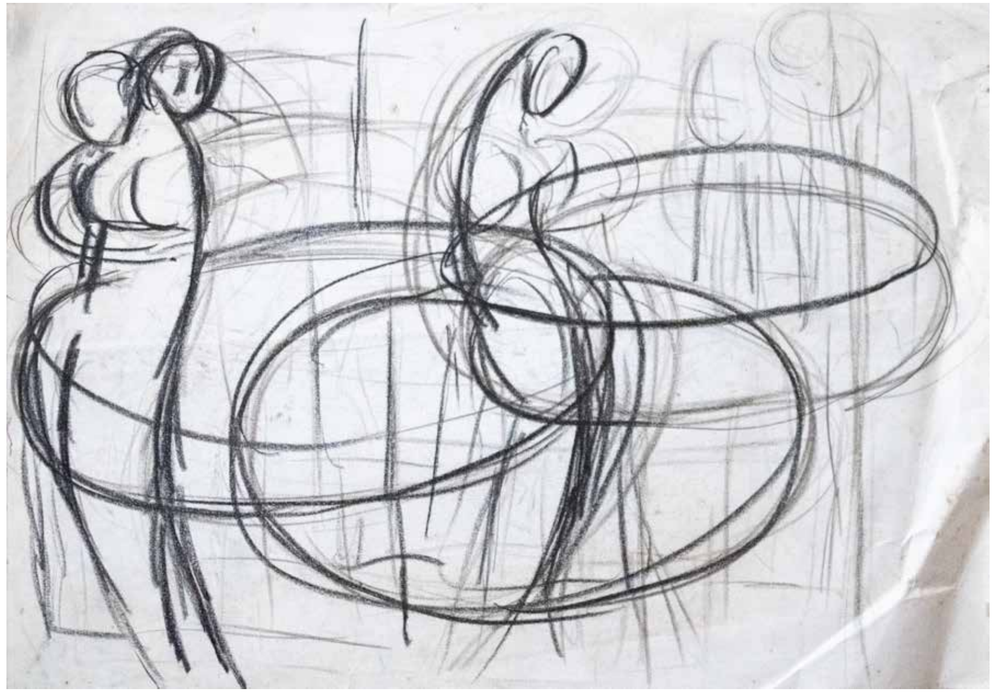


Far East trip - Indonesia - oil on canvas

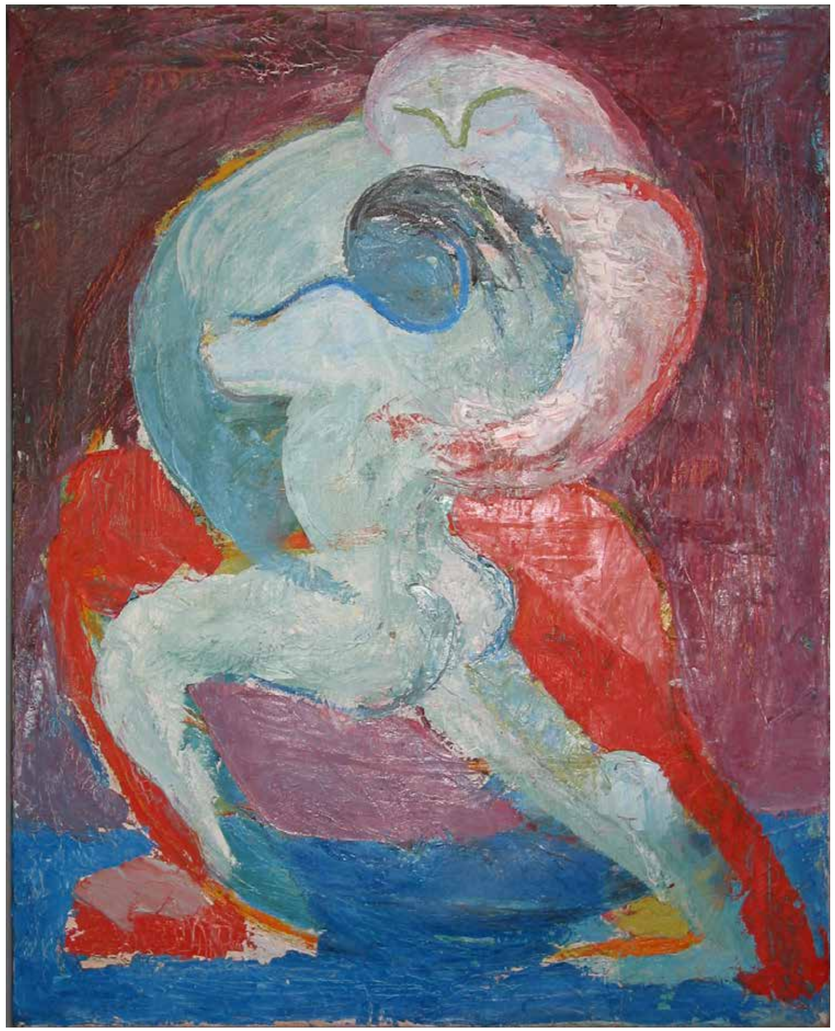
Cock Fight - Indonesia - oil on canvas



Last years - Hula Hoops - oil on canvas

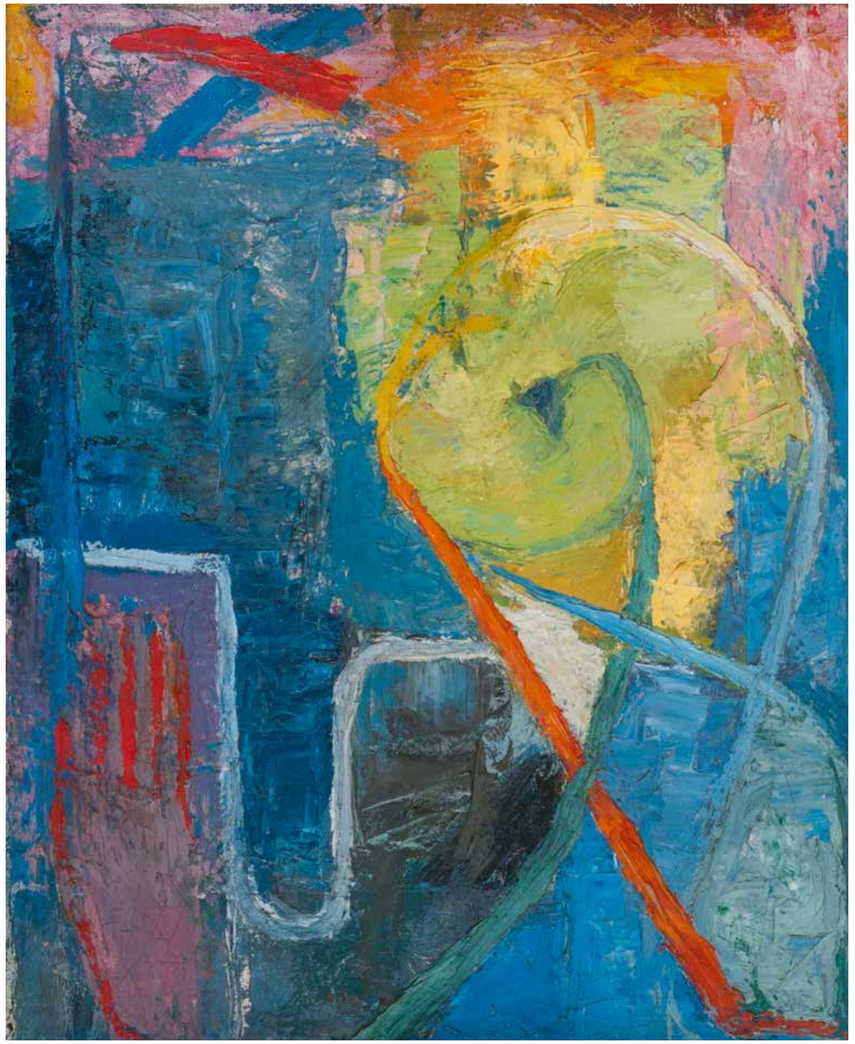


Sketch for Hula Hoop painting



Last years - Jacob Struggling with the Angel - unfinished - paint on canvas

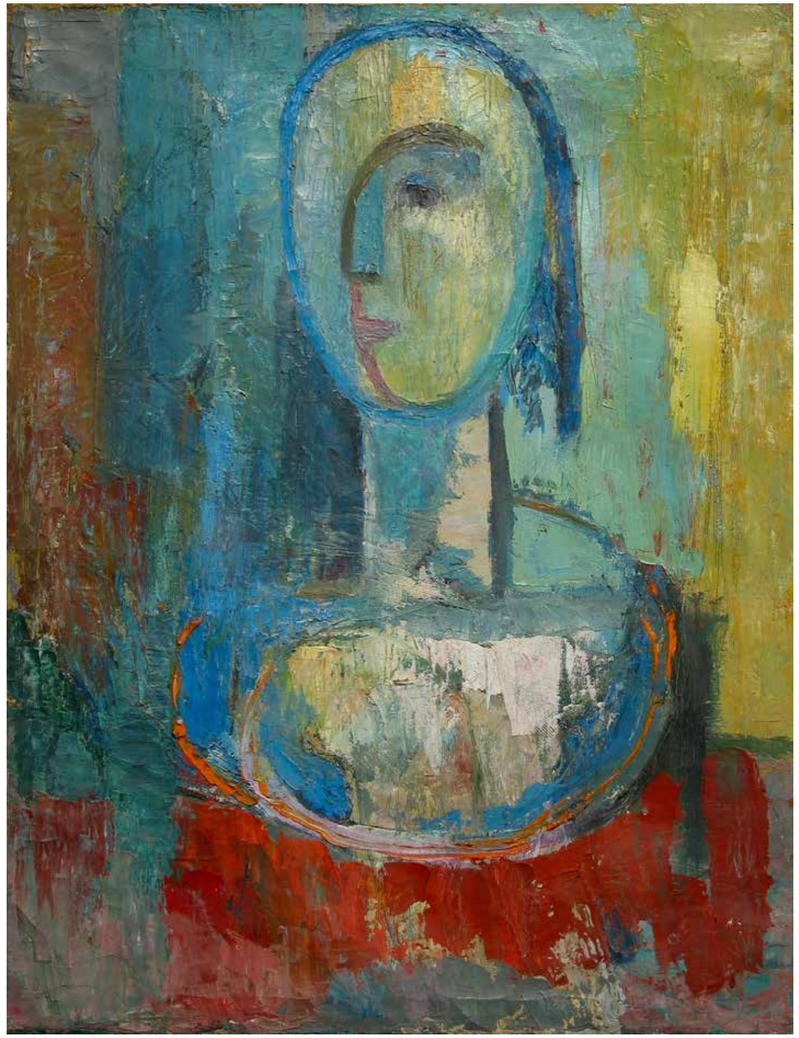
Final years- Socrates - the last sculpture heralding new levels of abstraction never to be fulfilled



Last years - Boy flying radio controlled airplane - oil on canvas

Last years - Potter - oil on canvas

Oil on board



Last years - Ellen Chudy - oil on canvas

Public Art

David Chudy's public art works consisted of sculpture or bas-relief/friezes, mostly displayed in an architectural context.

The best known is a significant landmark in Harare: five large animals that front the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (formerly the Queen Victoria Museum).

A bronze wall-mounted sculpture at the Woolworth Building in Bulawayo, the country's second city, is also a locally well-known work.

A number of stylized sculptures were commissioned and constructed, for display in churches. Friezes, shields. and trophy-like objects were also created for corporations or government. An 3D eagle was designed for the Royal Rhodesian Air Force.

The earliest known commission was a frieze for the Harare General Hospital in the early 50's. The work, which was created in a naive style reflecting David Chudy's early work, from Northern Rhodesia in the 40's, featured cameos of African village scenes. The hospital at that time reflected racial divisions of the age. It;s clientele were exclusively black.

David Chudy's approach to his public art works differed significantly from that which he applied to his own art. They were created and executed to satisfy a strict design brief. This brief had to be approved at various stages by an assigning party, who was normally an architect. David Chudy's own work was created to satisfy his own curiosity.

David Chudy did not consider these pubic assignments to be experimental in any profound psychological sense, whereas his own work was nothing but. What others thought about his own art seems to have been immaterial to him, but it was a matter of professional pride to deliver a quality product for his clients.

Early 50's - sketch for Harare General Hospital frieze

The design and execution for public work was necessarily more controlled and finished than his own. The larger works were created with artisanal assistance at his own factory, whereas every brush stroke or sculptured shape in any of his own work was the direct product of his own hand.

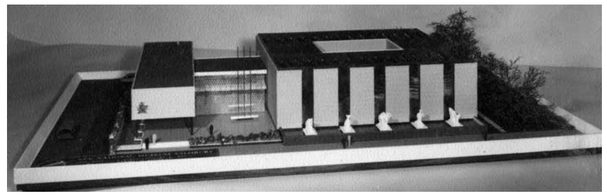
The style of the public work is tighter. Although organic texture and controlled mess were key to his own art, most of the public art had a modern manufactured look with clean sweeping geometric lines, on which textures were smoothed away somewhat in the manner of automotive body panels. There is one common feature between the commercial and personal work, which is David Chudy's attachment to Bézier style curves.

Other sculptural assignments involved the design and mass production of exterior tiles, as with the sable antelope motif, which faces a significant part of the exterior of the Salisbury (Harare) club.

His Woolworth 'family sculpture' appears to have been delivered as a plaster model to be cast in bronze in Europe. An illustrated newspaper cutting, featuring one of the following images, describes him as 'putting the finishing touches to his work' and the work is clearly plaster. This assignment preceded the establishment of David Chudy's own local African foundry.

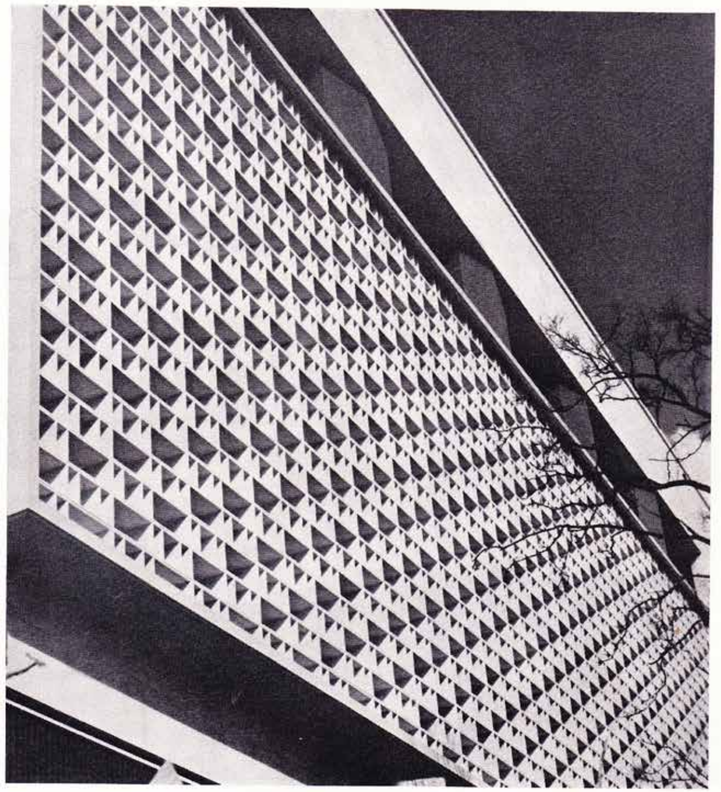
The construction of the animals outside the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences was done by David Chudy's company, Terrastone Ltd., as were most of the exterior facings on the entire building. The sculptures were necessarily hollow, with a steel core and concrete and brushed terrazzo exterior. They were constructed initially as miniature (approximately 1.5 meter) sculptures for client approval, before up-scaling by measurement and eye. Molds were made from full scale clay sculpted models.

Early 50's - sketch for Harare General Hospital frieze



Model of Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (formerly Queen Victoria Museum)

A frieze in the waiting rooms of the old wing of the Harare General Hospital from the early 50's. David Chudy's earliest known public art assignment. It is not clear whether this frieze was designed with color in mind. The current paint work does not show sixty plus years of wear.



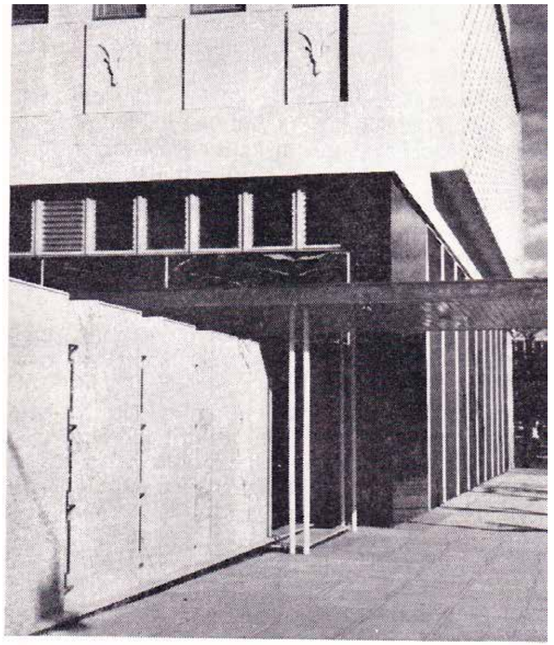
The delicate tracery of brise soleil at the Salisbury Club

by TERRASTONE (Pvt.) LTD.

Box 2058 SALISBURY Telephone 660454

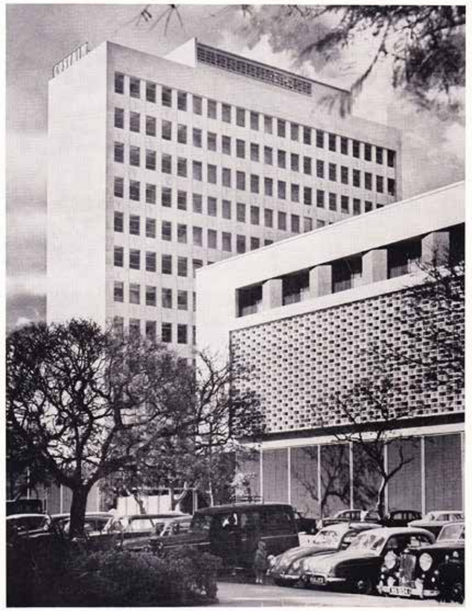
16 ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN *September, 1961*

Advertisement for Terrastone Ltd - part of the Salisbury Club



ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN *August, 1961*

Architecture and Design magazine feature on the Salisbury club featuring Antelope reliefs sculpture design by David Chudy

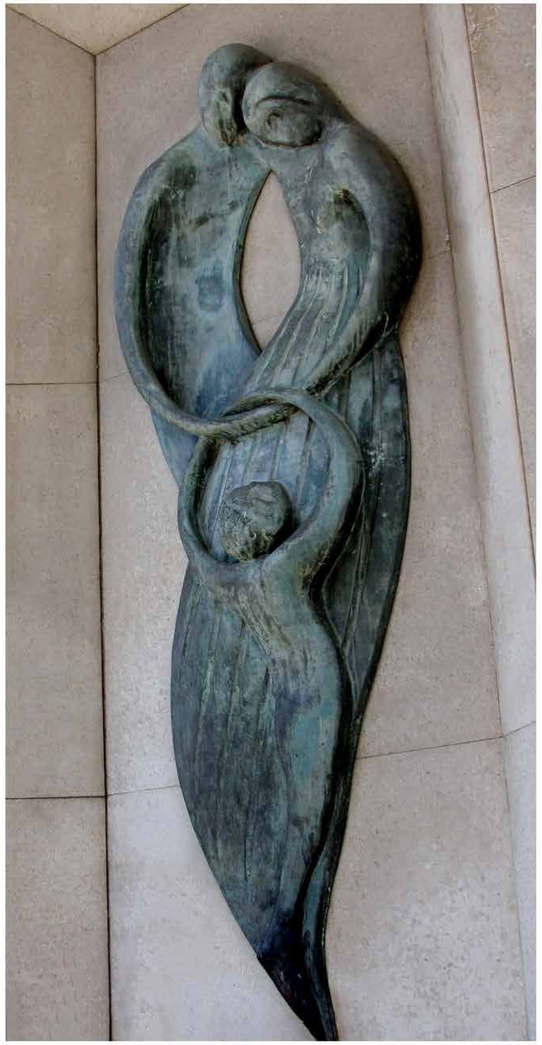


The delicate tracery of the brise soleil on the Salisbury Club and the clean sculpture of the reconstructed stone on the office block.

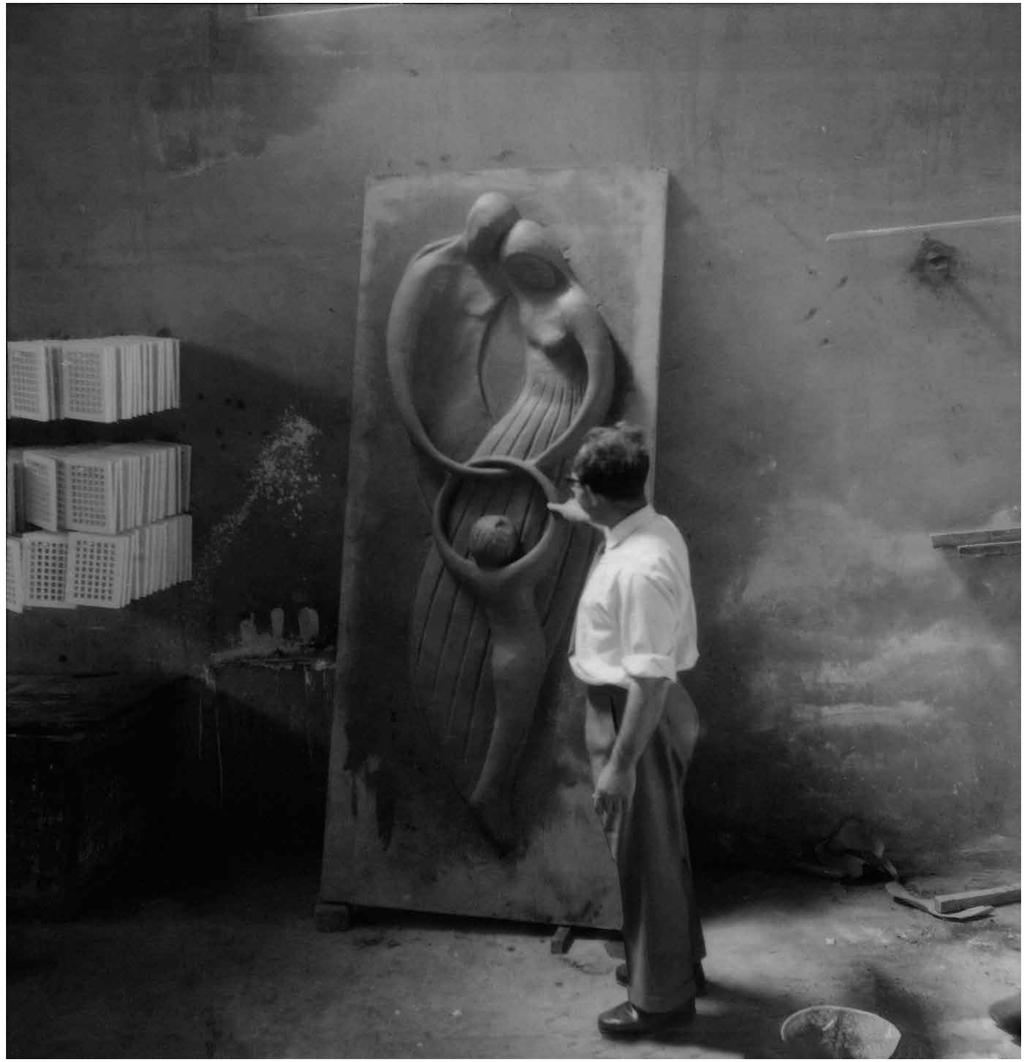
by TERRASTONE (Pvt.) LTD.

ox 2058 SALISBURY Telephone 660454

Advertisement for Terrastone Ltd, featuring Antelope reliefs designed and sculpted by David Chudy



Bronze sculpture on Woolworth building, Bulawayo

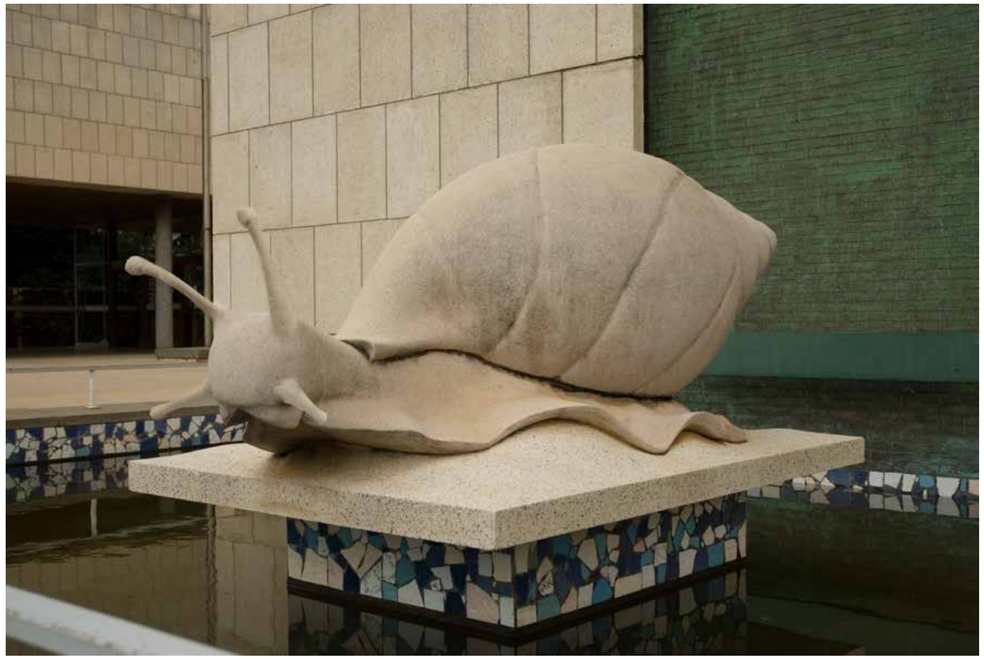


Woolworth 'family sculpture' prepared for bronze casting - `David Chudy makes final touches

Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences

Praying Mantis - Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences

Tortoise - Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences



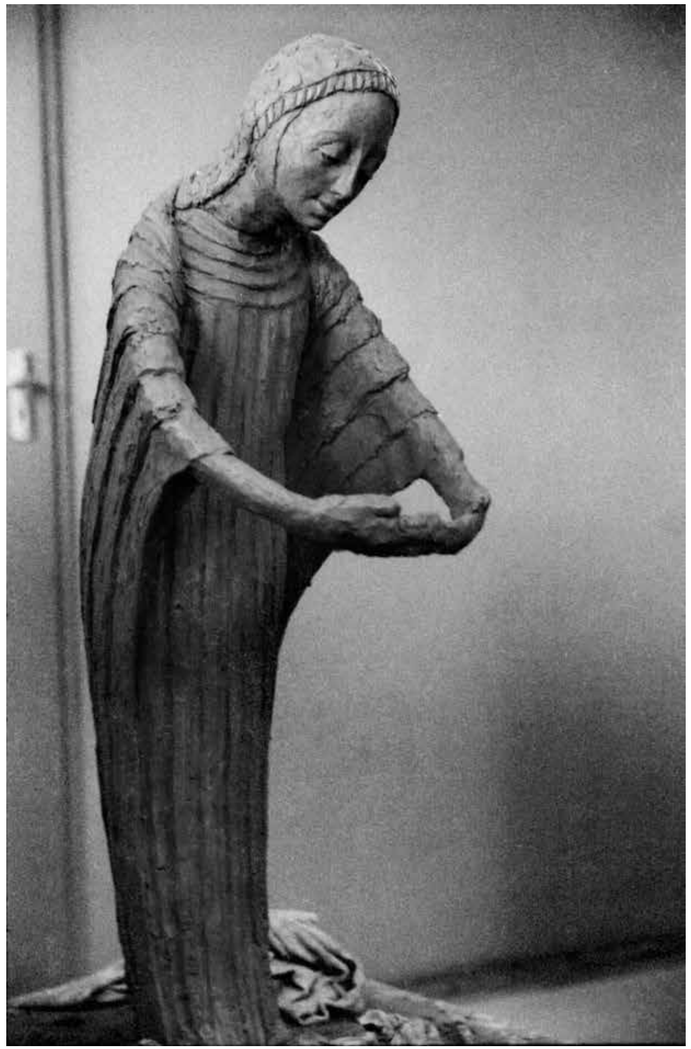
Snail - Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences

Pangolin - Scaly Ant Eater - Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences

This actual live pangolin was used by David Chudy to model the sculpture for the museum, before being released into the wild. The pangolin is currently the world;s most trafficked animal.

Madonna and child studies

Madonna and child study



Madonna

Madonna and child study

Unfinished Business - End of an Era - The End of Innocence

David Chudy spent his last years in a frenzy of creative activity, not just in making artworks, but following his passion into scientific realms. He continued his self-funded research into bat echolocation, and he set about inventing electronic devices. Taking advantage of the insights revealed through those discoveries[1], in his final year he was preparing to conduct parallel research into dolphin speech. This would have presaged an unprecedented level of international travel.

Having missed out on a formal education, and having been self-taught in almost everything, he confounded expectations through his life. The amazing, flexibility and visionary thinking he demonstrated, especially in these last years, as well as the sense of authority it lent him, gives a tantalizing glimpse of the path his career might have taken, had his life not been cut short so early.

Art is significantly about 'potential' and is a 'pathfinder activity'. Judgment of its worth is not limited to its final form. One of art's functional roles in society is 'stimulating and propagating inspiration' in its audience. David Chudy's last art works arguably give a few clues to the style of work he might have done in subsequent years.

It is likely his work would have been more individually defining than anything he had done before. The stylistic cues we find in the later work are probably sufficient to build a picture of its self 'a step beyond itself and the work of others'. There is undoubtedly 'unfinished business' here; but we are left with a sense that the 'baton is passed on', and the work continues beyond its creator to the viewer.

The second piece of unfinished business involves David Chudy's scientific paper on bat echolocation. It was calendared to be published by Nature Magazine pending clarification of a few minor queried points. He told his wife Ellen that all had been resolved, on the eve of his sudden passing. It was to be written up the day after, and this never happened. He was 56 on July 27 1967. The task of collating the data after the fact was daunting, and in a spirit of generosity, compatible to his general attitudes to knowledge and human understanding, Ellen donated all his research documentation, to other leading international bat researchers.

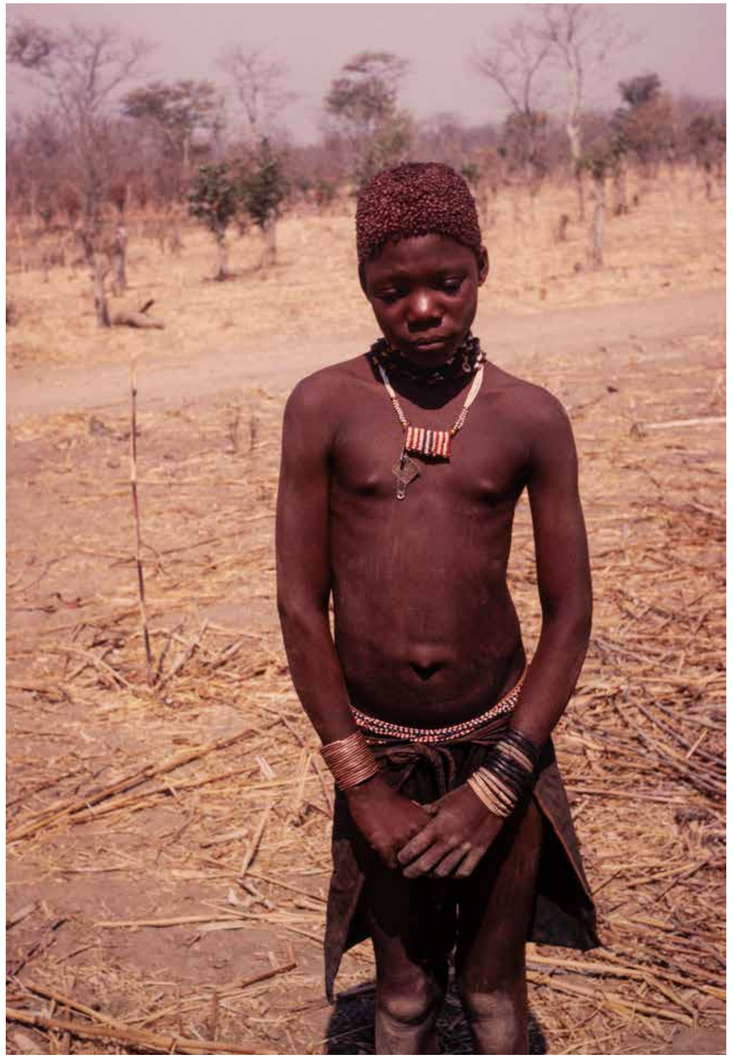
It is hard to assess the worth of the dolphin speech hypothesis[2] in retrospect. Many different forms of sonar for imaging have been envisaged, but seemingly very little of the research has been published. The military likely has a monopoly in the field, conceivably for undersea applications such as mapping enemy installations, or tracking submarines. Concepts, specifically relating to David Chudy's ideas - about how dolphins themselves might see, think, or communicate about their environment - do not seem to have been explored (or discounted) in the near 60 years since his death.

Meanwhile on the socio-political front: the 'Winds of Change' would soon sweep away the Federation. Nyasaland became Malawi and Northern Rhodesia became Zambia. Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia, with its relatively large and dominant white settler community. This tiny, but affluent, over-confident minority feared 'one man one vote majority rule' would be a London diktat. As a consequence, the white electorate lead by Prime Minister Ian Smith voted to make a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain on November 11 1965.

The country swiftly became an international pariah. Independence regarded as illegal by the international community led to sanctions aimed to squeeze the rebel regime into submission. Members of the white

1 Sonar 'blind aids' to permit mobility based on sound pictures of the immediate environment. And sonic 'burglar alarms' which sensed any change in sound pattern in an environment after - flooding it with specific ultrasonic signals

2 The original idea was that dolphins process their sonar in ways similar to bats which means that what they hear internally bears no resemblance to their sonar signals or their echoes. But their communication may be a language built around the sound pictures they hear internally. If we could process their sonar in a similar way, we may be able to share picture words and perhaps understand what they are saying.



Young Karanga woman, Sabi Valley - photo David Chudy

settler population were persona non grata in most countries. Rhodesia was now a land on the defensive – no longer the can-do place with that unlimited blue sky future, which had inspired David Chudy and been the dream of so many for decades.

He had been enriched by connecting with people of different races and different cultures, since arriving in Africa. Understanding and bridging the technological and cultural gaps alongside indigenous people, had been both rewarding and mind-expanding. And contemplating untouched nature gave a sense of linking to prehistory.

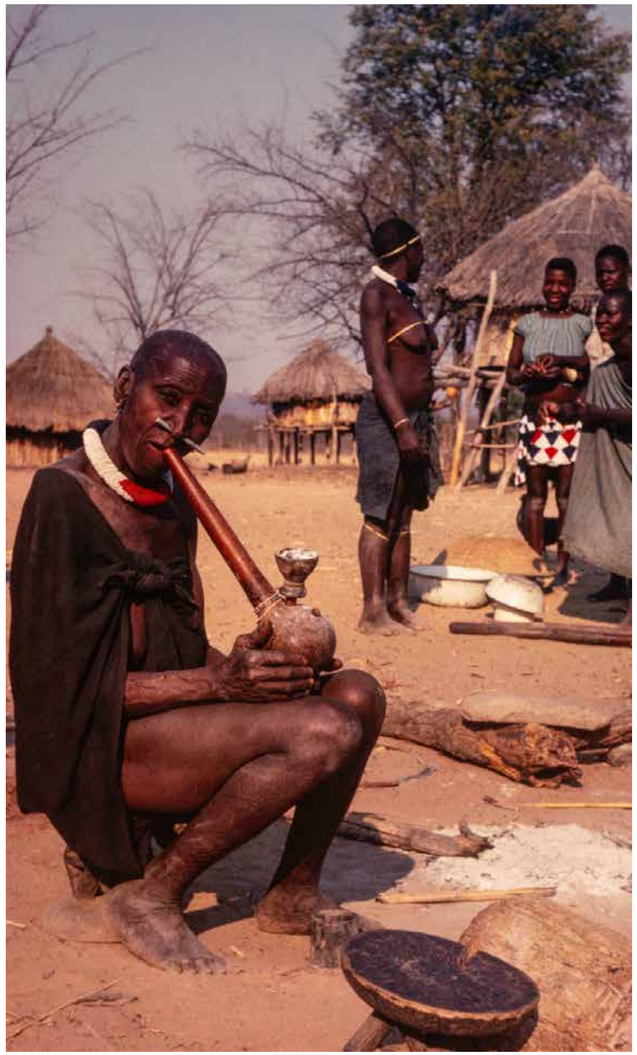
He was now dismayed by the county's swift transition from a place of adventure and massive potential to one where human rights were deemed way too much of a luxury.

The country now aligned itself with attitudes and policies of apartheid South Africa. With that, a rapid erosion of tolerance, even on an artistic level ensued.

Africa may have been unforgiving but it had been vast, and full of possibility. Now, this part of it was full of backbiting, rather small minded, often ruthless white men studiously ignoring the bigger picture. They were only interested in gloom mongering and talking about 'what they had built' - and most importantly - keeping what they had accumulated. Amid the immediate posturing in the context of Africa's long history, anyone with a plain vision could to see the inevitability. They were bound to loose and leave a shabby legacy, and it was only a question of time.

Meanwhile they faced what an unfortunate, unprepared, indigenous people who, under colonial rule had never been given the chance to 'own anything to lose' - except for ill-defined ideas of freedom - which the whites now told them where 'the misleading words of 'trouble makers'. They were told not to think about freedom but, fixing for a fight, no one could be bothered to substitute this with anything meaningful or positive.

David Chudy died a mere twenty-two months into this unfortunate period of political turmoil. In the months



Village scene - photo David Chudy

immediately preceding it, depressed for the first time in his life, he knew that far too little had been done to prepare the country for the racial and material challenges which had always been so clear for him to see.

Put simply: too little imagination, too little careful thought, too much posturing and self-congratulation, combined with breathtaking ideological stupidity by his fellow white settlers would fail, even in terms of their own stated objectives of 'preserving Western civilization'. Being cognizant of the actual developmental and sociological challenges of the country and broadcasting that competently to a wider listening world prove a bridge too far. But it might well have offset the ensuing civil strife and war. Doing ju ju dances, white man style and 'throwing of the bones', not for rain but for continued unregulated free enterprise, and special privileges for the advantaged, was what was chosen instead. But the timing was wrong and the magic was too fairy-tale. Too few would be convinced by it, even in those days.

The Smith regime held on for more than a decade, fighting an increasingly bloody civil war until threadbare, failing, and no longer supported by apartheid South Africa, they gave in.

Thus arrived phase two, with a new reality and a new country name: 'Zimbabwe'. Phase two commenced with the handing over a now soiled baton of failure to Robert Mugabe's incompetence, misrule and bankruptcy.

David Chudy's era of colonial settlement and the early emergence of the indigenous people into a technological age is now rapidly slipping into dusty obscurity. Our understanding of the African countries in which David Chudy lived and worked are colored by recent history and any other artist living through subsequent turbulent or dysfunctional times would likely set themselves very different briefs.

There is an overriding innocence pervading David Chudy's work, reflecting the sense that Africa and the African bush was bigger and purer than the men, good or bad, who lived and died there.

This, overlaid with the sense of optimism so many felt in the aftermath of World War II, allows his lifelong body of art to serve as a valuable record of a time, now almost forgotten. A visual legacy from the end of an era, helping us to feel and understand a period vital to Zimbabwe's history and in turn, its relevance to the wider world.

David Chudy lived through an era in which societies with vastly different types and levels of technological integration came together, offering so much potential and so many lessons and insights. Most were ignored or scorned, in the service of acquisitiveness, greed and fanciful short sightedness. Generations are left with the immensely difficult task of catching up.

David Chudy was survived by his wife Ellen, who passed twenty-seven years later in July 1994.

David and Ellen Chudy in the 60's

Chronology of Country ane City Name Changes

Before and after Independence from Britain:

Northern Rhodesia is now Zambia
Southern Rhodesia is now Zimbabwe
Nyasaland is now Malawi

Timeline

1953 Northern Rhodesia was federated with Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the Federation was broken up in 1963

1964 Northern Rhodesia became Zambia

1963 Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia

1965 Rhodesia - minority government made Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Great Britain. 1979 UDI ends after approx. 13 years.

1980 Independent Zimbabwe is formed. Salisbury became Harare.

For the sake of historical simplicity country and town references in this document refer to the names commonly used at the time in question.

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Website: www.davidchudy.com
Information/contact: philip@philipchudy.com