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6-2-2016

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# Gardner-Webb Artist's Sculpture Series Inspired by African-American Experiences

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Office of University  
Communications

June 2, 2016

*University Faculty Member Doug Knotts' Work Featured in Regional Art Festival, Exhibit on GWU Campus*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—A Gardner-Webb University faculty member's interest in African-American culture has inspired him to spotlight the impact of racial tensions across the country through pieces of sculpture.

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Doug Knotts discusses one of his sculpture pieces.

Doug Knotts, who serves as a professor and the chair of the Department of Visual Arts at Gardner-Webb, created 26 sculptures, titled "Unarmed African American Altered Portrait Heads," to symbolize those whose deaths inspire dialogue about race relations. "This series is about the loss of life," he shares, "and the loss of potential contributions to society."

Knotts became deeply interested in the lives of young African-Americans as a middle school art teacher in Charlotte in the 1990s. "I often observed in my classes the struggle of African-American students to find a way to fit into the culture of the school and the community," he relates, adding that news of racial and social unrest in recent years has caused him to think about the lives of his former students.

For the sculpture series, he worked from photographs of African-Americans, mostly Gardner-Webb students, to create portraits simulating actual people, also incorporating elements from his studies of art history. "I decided to include symbols, images and ideas that were practiced by African cultural groups as visual manifestations of the lost cultural identity of African-Americans," he expounds. "So my sculptures are altered portraits."

His sculptures are on display now through June 10 in the Tucker Student Center Gallery on campus. The series was also recognized this spring with juried selection into the 2016 ArtFields festival and competition, an event that gathers the work of artists in 12 states for a series of exhibits and events in Lake City, S.C. Knotts' pieces were among work exhibited in a variety of businesses and other venues in the city, including locations such as banks,

barbershops, libraries, antique shops, grocery stores and warehouses. “Actually viewing the work in these types of locations is revolutionary because it promotes unity among the black, white, Mexican, Asian and other businesses,” he observes.

This summer, Knotts will share techniques for creating three-dimensional portraits, similar to his African-American series, during a “Topics in Sculpture” course at Gardner-Webb. He believes his work as an artist has an important connection to his work as an art educator. “Students learn by seeing art created,” he explains. “In university art departments, the current trend is to provide art professors with workspaces and require that they produce their own work in front of students so students can learn by observation. Our department does as much of this as possible.”

*Artwork displayed in exhibits on the Gardner-Webb campus represent individual artists, not necessarily the values or views of Gardner-Webb University.*

*The Gardner-Webb University Department of Visual Arts offers individual instruction with an average studio class size of only eight students, and numerous experiential opportunities to guide students from a foundational study of history and technique to the development of an independent style. While refining artistic talent through hands-on practice, students also experience the professional art world through a variety of options to display work and visit famous galleries to explore pieces by renowned artists.*