

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

6-29-2021

Exhibit by GWU Art Professor Featured on July 8-Aug. 12 at Cleveland County Arts Council

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "Exhibit by GWU Art Professor Featured on July 8-Aug. 12 at Cleveland County Arts Council" (2021). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 2259.
<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive/2259>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Gardner-Webb Publications at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@gardner-webb.edu.

FACULTY

Exhibit by GWU Art Professor Featured on July 8-Aug. 12 at Cleveland County Arts Council

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JUNE 29, 2021



Doug Knotts' Sculptures Inspired by African American Experiences

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—A collection of 26 sculptures by Doug Knotts, professor and chair of the Gardner-Webb University Department of Visual Arts, views racial tensions across the country through the lens of historical elements from African culture. The terra cotta pieces, called “Unarmed African American Portrait Heads,” will be on display July 8-Aug. 12 at the Cleveland County Arts Council, 111 S. Washington St., Shelby, N.C. Gardner-Webb serves as an Affiliate Member for the Arts Council.



▲ Doug Knotts

Most of Knotts' models were students from Gardner-Webb, and a few were middle school students he taught in the 1990s at a magnet school in Charlotte, N.C. He intentionally chose students as his models

to represent the individuals whose deaths have led to rallies, marches and dialogue on racial injustices. “I informed all models what the show was about before taking their photographs to use as reference studies,” Knotts shared. “All the models agreed that some light needs to shine on the problem of racial profiling.”

He added, “These may just be clay sculptures, but clay is a sacred material. I hope the ideas that are embodied in the work can be heard.”

Part of the exhibit has been shown at Gardner-Webb in an open discussion with students about racial inequities. In 2016, the series was a juried selection for the ArtFields festival and competition, a prestigious event in Lake City, S.C., that features the work of artists in 12 states.

Knotts said altering the portraits to reflect African heritage was an intuitive aesthetic decision, as well as his response to the loss of self-image he witnessed in his students. He explained the meanings of a few of the techniques:

- Face painting manifests an emotional state of celebration or observance of an event.
- Scarification symbols are traditionally practiced to beautify the body and mark the individual as a person of courage.
- The colors of green, black and red are part of the Universal African Flag.
- A bowl of Kola nuts; chewing the Kola nut releases caffeine and other stimulants and helps to ease hunger and restore vitality. Kola nuts were used as sacred offerings during life events.

The sculptures are for sale, except for one—Mike, a student he taught in the sixth grade. “Mike struggled with his identity through the years that I got to know him,” Knotts said. “He challenged me in so many ways as a teacher and a human being. He didn’t know easy, or fair, or hope. I present him with the impish smile that he used to disguise the difficulties of his young years. This entire series of sculptures was created to recognize the tremendous potential of the young African American students that I have taught over the years.”

An opening reception will be held on July 8 from 5:30-7 p.m. at the Arts Council. Knotts’ former and current student, Deborah Hamilton, one of the models for the exhibit, will offer opening remarks at the event.



- ▲ The sculpture on the left was modeled after Mike, one of Doug Knotts' students at a Charlotte, N.C., middle school. The model for the image on the right, "Peacemaker," was one of the first art majors in the program.



#1. Scarification patterns across the face give the sculpture some cultural identification. The model is Lamar who was a student in my classes about five years ago. Lamar is a business graduate of GWU and works in sales for a local phone company.

#1. Head of Lamar
Traditional Terracotta, porcelain inlaid eyes
Encaustic Finish
20 inches high, 12 inches wide

About The Cleveland County Arts Council:

The Arts Council (<http://www.ccartscouncil.org/>) was chartered in 1987 and is a non-profit service organization whose purpose is to sponsor and encourage cultural and educational activities in Cleveland County. Its goals are to provide a central location for the arts in Cleveland County, administrative service to member art organizations in the county, and art education for all age groups.

About Gardner-Webb University:

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.

