

Juginder Lamba

Juginder Lamba was born in Nairobi in January 1948. Raised in a city under British colonial rule, Lamba's childhood encounters were influenced by an international population of Africans, Asians, Americans and Europeans. Ten years later, Juginder Lamba's family moved to India. He attended Wynberg-Allen Memorial School, a boarding school in Mussoori, with his brothers and sister for four years. In India, he was surrounded by art and architecture in temples and other ancient monuments adorned with sculptures from a past millennium. As a participant and observer of constant ceremonies, festivals and rituals, these scenes and colour permeated aspects of Lamba's daily life.

In 1962, Juginder's family moved to England where he adjusted to a new environment and culture. It was here that Lamba began painting. At seventeen years old, Lamba learnt of the mythical story of Icarus, and incorporated themes generated by this story into his artwork. For Lamba, "Icarus... encapsulates our impulses to soar above the material conditions and narrow explanatory historicism that assigns each to his /her proper place and to seek to incorporate these impulses into new strategies for survival and new expressions of hope". The myth of Icarus would later continue to become a major philosophical theme in Juginder Lamba's sculptures.

Lamba graduated from Lancaster University with a degree in Politics and Philosophy in 1969, and later obtained a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from St Martin's College in Lancaster. From 1974 to 1977, he co-founded and directed Earthbound Theatre, a touring performance company. In 1978, Lancaster City Council appointed Juginder Lamba as the first Town Artist.

In endeavouring to adjust to his new British culture, Juginder Lamba fused his African, Indian and British cultural heritage. As an expression of this, Lamba taught himself to carve sculptures from wood, a material he admired since his youth in Kenya, as he says it has a unique power and resonance. In sculpting, he discovered an art through which he could express his spiritual and cultural influences and his perception of nature and humanity.

For Juginder, an integral part of the sculpting process is in the selection of the wood. He studiously researches its previous usage and undertakes a small archaeological exploration at the peat bogs from where it is retrieved. Having lain hidden for a long time, these ancient timbers impart an intense archaeological and historical context to Lamba. This lends a special quality and story to the sculpture in progress. Lamba has used different types of wood for his sculptures: bog oak, recycled dock warehouse oak (possibly from slave ships), tropical greenheart, rowan or mountain ash, lime, elm, sycamore and yew. Lamba's ideas and feelings for the sculptural composition emerge from the qualities of the wood as well as what he calls, the wood's 'presence'. The 'presence' comes from the characteristics, which vary depending on the components of a particular wood, such as its grain, density, lightness, hardness, softness, brittleness or pliability. In particular, its past uses and environment contribute to the 'presence'. In this way, a block of wood becomes a living reality to Lamba and therefore the process of sculpting becomes a highly, complex and personal one. He has said, "I feel that at all stages I am interacting with a material which has a very strong force of its own".

Juginder uses chisels, mallets and crosscut saws to form his sculptures. He says his work is handcrafted and not machined to ensure the smooth curves of his sculptures and in order to express his individual ideas and impulses. His sculptures, whilst celebrating the beauty and power of nature, address a contemporary environment where the processes of survival,

destruction and renewal prevail still, inexorably despite man's attempt at controlling nature. Forms are stripped down to their essentials and focus on an inner reality.

Lamba's early work in the late 1970s was mostly figurative however, in the last twenty years; he has been exploring abstract themes such as the 'Pods' series, which deal with themes around birth, creation, gestation and the 'Mother and Child'. He says his sculptures depict situations or emotions, which are timeless, as is evident in his treatment of family groups, mothers and children and lovers. For Juginder Lamba, the Pod themes are a direct development of the later Mother and Child sculptures. They reflect the whole process of universal regeneration and are designed as vessel shaped containers with seeds. As Lamba describes, the pods are "a mystical container of life."

Since 1977, Juginder Lamba has curated and co-curated exhibitions all over the country. His work has been exhibited in cities across UK, Europe and the USA. He has held numerous solo exhibitions and group exhibitions at galleries and art centres. His solo exhibitions have included, 'Routes' at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1999, 'From the Wood': An Exhibition by the Liverpool John Moores University Sculpture Fellow, at Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool, in 1995 and 'Relics' at the Commonwealth Institute, London and Rochdale Art Gallery in 1985. Lamba has also contributed and created work for group exhibitions, which have held significant themes, such as responses to colonialism, or independence. Examples of such work are his renowned sculpture and installation, 'The Cry' at the 'Trophies of Empire' exhibition at Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool in 1992. Here, fifteen commissioned artists were asked to respond to colonial legacies in the 500th year of Columbus' discovery. 'Routes' was an exhibition of five artists from four different continents held at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1999, in which the artists 'revealed some of the complexities, contradictions and opportunities that emerge from a cross cultural society and unsettles many assumptions about 'black art''. More recently, Lamba's work comprises private or public art commissions.

Lamba's significant public art commissions include the acclaimed national Icarus project in 1990 in which he and fellow sculptor Tony Phillips, held a series of sculpting workshops with local communities. This resulted in the creation of large, permanent outdoor site-specific sculptures influenced by the Icarus themes. In the last decade, Juginder has been awarded commissions from city councils, venues and individuals from Birmingham to Senegal.

Juginder Lamba is deeply involved in community education projects. His commitment to non-formal education and encouraging community involvement has led him to initiate diverse projects. These include local and national sculpting projects with schools and learning centres, such as the 1990 national Icarus project and delivering academic papers at conferences, such as his speech on 'Creativity, Culture and Education in the Postcolonial World' at the 'Independent Practices' conference in 1998.

As part of his dedication to broader education in the arts world, Juginder initiated and directed the South Asian Contemporary Visual Arts Festival from September to December 1993. The festival focussed on the diversity and talent of contemporary British South Asian artists and brought together over sixty artists, showing their work in twenty major venues throughout the West Midlands region.

Currently, Juginder Lamba lives and works in Shropshire.