

Al Ebanks



Image: Al Ebanks,
2016, *Together We Stand*,
from the collection of the artist

“[I create art] for the satisfaction I get from going beyond the normal way of seeing things. The gratification I get from people enjoying and acquiring my work. It’s a feeling I can’t explain.”

This information pack has been kindly sponsored by:

The Artist

Born and raised in George Town, Al Ebanks is a self-employed Caymanian artist.

Ebanks studied art at the Cayman Islands High School and over the years has developed a style on his own. "In high school they teach you to paint within the lines, but that was too structured thinking for me," he says. "My rebellious mind wanted to think outside the box even though most people in this community expected an artist to paint realistically. I painted realistically for a while, but it was torture. I wanted to go beyond."



Photograph courtesy of:
the Cayman Compass

Although successful in his career as an interior designer, Ebanks made the decision to begin painting seriously in 1989. Having built his own studio in 1990 he has dedicated the greater part of his time to art. The space doubles as a gallery.

Ebanks has continued to develop artistically, drawing from many workshops hosted by the local Visual Arts Society, the National Gallery (NGCI) and other visiting professional artists. In 1995 he was fortunate to receive a scholarship from the Cayman National Cultural Foundation (CNCF) to study stone and clay sculpting. Shortly thereafter, as a part of NGCI's Artists Away programme he studied bronze sculpture in Florence, Italy. This added to his already mature style, using charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas.

Ebanks was one of the founding members of the Native Sons and he has exhibited with the group since its inception. He has also participated in solo and other group exhibitions both locally and abroad.

He has won numerous awards including CNCF's Artistic Achievement in 2001, C.I. Government's Silver Medal of Merit for the Arts in 2010 and NGCI's Certificate of Excellence in 2014.

Ebanks was commissioned by the Cayman Islands Government to create a sculpture to capture the essence of the Caymanian woman, celebrating 50 years of voting rights for women. His work is featured in the permanent collections of the Cayman Islands National Museum, National Gallery of the Cayman Islands, the Griffin Gallery in Chicago, the Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman, the Sherry Frontenac Hotel in Miami and many private collections.

The Artwork

Together We Stand is an installation comprising eight concrete sculptures. These sculptures are abstract human forms representative of the core members of the Native Sons. Although similar they are each unique; huddled together in a circle the figures demonstrate unity.

Proficient in painting, sculpting and photography, Ebanks comfortably alternates his time between the three artforms. In many of Al's works, the form of a woman can be seen; usually overtly in photography, and often abstracted in sculptures and paintings. The hidden strength of womanhood is an important theme in many of his paintings, and reflects the importance of the woman, especially in Cayman's past, when

the man of the household often went to sea for long periods of time.

For this installation and many other sculptures he has made in clay, stone and concrete, he celebrates the human figure much like Modernist sculptor, Henry Moore.

In painting Ebanks is well known for experimentally embracing minimalism, often with numerous layers of paint in varying colours. Some of his best known work couples these layers with striations forcing the viewer to literally read between the lines.

Discussion

- Sculptors primarily use four basic techniques. The processes are either subtractive (material is removed) — 1) carving — or additive (material is added) — 2) casting 3) modeling or 4) assemblage. Discuss which process Ebanks likely uses for his life-sized sculptures.

- Consider if the other techniques may be used as alternatives to complete the sculptures.

Making Comparisons

- Visit <http://www.wikiart.org/en/henry-moore> to view the sculptures of British artist, Henry Moore at the bottom of the webpage.

- Compare his biomorphic sculptures to those created by Ebanks. Note any similarities and differences you recognise.

Follow Up Activities

- Create a sculpture similar to Ebanks' by carving a bar of soap.

- Using aluminum foil for an armature create an abstract human figure and complete by covering it in plaster.

- Using clay model a copy of one of Ebanks' sculptures.

- Visit Heroes Square in George Town to view the bronze sculpture designed by Ebanks.



Image: Al Ebanks,
2010, *Figure Of A Woman*,
from the collection of NGCI