

Bob Marley statue now at casting

The Bob Marley statue has been completed and is now being cast in bronze at the foundry of Milton Osbourne, a Jamaican living in New York.

The sculptor, Christopher Gonzalez was in Jamaica recently to report on the progress of the work to the office of the Prime Minister, from which he had received his commission.

Work on the statue began in early June last year. The 7'7" piece features the late reggae singer in a prophetic stance - a mike in one hand guitar slung over the shoulder and with eyes closed.

It is expected that the casting will be completed in time for it to be sent to Jamaica for an official unveiling in May, as part of 'Jamaica 21' celebrations.

It will be mounted at Jamaica Park, the site selected at an area outside the National Stadium - at the corner of Roosevelt Avenue and Arthur Wint Drive. Jamaica Park will house monuments and statues of outstanding Jamaicans who have achieved international distinction in the arts, sciences and sports as part of government's policy in honouring such nationals.

Tangible tribute

Minister of State for Culture, the Hon. Ed Bartlett has underscored the importance of holding up models to the society and hence the policy of paying tangible tribute to outstanding nationals.

"No society can progress without models for inspiration. The society will need achievers. The society will develop and grow if it can demonstrate the path to excellence. This is best shown by the lives of the citizens. It is particularly important for Third World countries to be able to look to its own for example and emulation. By the same token, it is important to be careful in the selection of the models as those chosen might want to duplicate others rather than charting their own path," Mr. Bartlett states.

The artist Christopher Gonzalez agrees with the Minister on the question of models producing inspiration and sought to include this quality in his work.

"There is a spiritual quality to the composition which is deliberate," he states. "Some people say that Marley was so energetic, and on stage so electrifying. I agree, but I wanted to have a composition that would outlast fashion even in generations to come. I decided to use the whole prophetic image that would

stage

last rather than using an action pose with locks flying. That concept was too common and too rock and roll."

The overall image of the statue is full of symbolism even in some minute details which might escape the eye of the casual observer. The artist feels that the life of Marley justified this portrayal especially since he was a product of a particular cultural and spiritual group.

"Despite the fact that people looked on Marley as a superstar, we can't forget that he was a product of the Rastafarian religion," explains Gonzalez, continuing that "Rastas are the only ones who say proudly they are children of God who have the God within them... I am very much personally involved in the Christ-like spirit or the divine in us - whether we call it the Christ self or the I.. The whole thing of the locks becoming one with the roots gives the concept of man being a part of nature and coming from the earth. The mike itself is also a prophet's staff ... I use it as a symbol of the rod being like the power of God moving through him and he moves through the power of God. It is a complex symbology.

"Originally I had the eyes open but decided against it. I felt that by having the eyes closed it would leave more room for the imagination. The beard was made purposely to look like berries or fruits because Marley was supposed to belong to the sign of Joseph - the fruitful bough.

"The body is naked because having clothes on that figure would ruin it. It couldn't flow. You couldn't have the integration of flesh and locks if it was so. It all goes back to the superstar thing. I wanted to give the feeling of naturalness. A few years ago Rasta would tell the people how they were living wrong and they would be the fiery preacher, the preaching nomad..."

Personal experiences

Mr. Gonzalez who has seen Marley perform at the Peace Concert at the National Stadium and again at a concert in Berkley, California, has these personal experiences to draw on. In addition Tuff Gong artist Neville Garrick provided him with photographs and video tapes of concerts. He worked in the presence of a wooden panel full of

Marley posters, pictures, album, jackets and magazine articles.

To add to the Marley aura, he would play a continuous diet of Marley songs as well as the works of other top reggae artists - Toots and the Maytals, Steel Pulse, Third World, Rita Marley, Judy Mowatt and Marcia Griffiths as he plugged away at honing the unformed clay into a national tribute to one of Jamaica's most famous sons. Mr. Gonzalez who was chosen for this work because of his reputation in sculpture, nevertheless said that this work presented a new challenge to him technically.

"It is the largest most complex three dimensional work I have done," he states.

"It has brought me closer to the music of Jamaica. It has made me

look at the influence of Rasta with a closer view and the overall significance to the culture of Jamaica. It has also made me spiritually more conscious and led me into reading the Bible more. I have matured artistically by doing it. One significant thing I have learnt is not to postpone life. You must live now and not in the past or in the future."

Jamaica now awaits the final casting and unveiling of this tribute to one of her most illustrious sons. Jamaica Park is being readied for the event.

The Government will have sole rights to reproduce and sell reproductions of the statue with 10% of the retail on each reproduction or 10% of the ex-factory price sold to non-government outlets going to the sculptor.