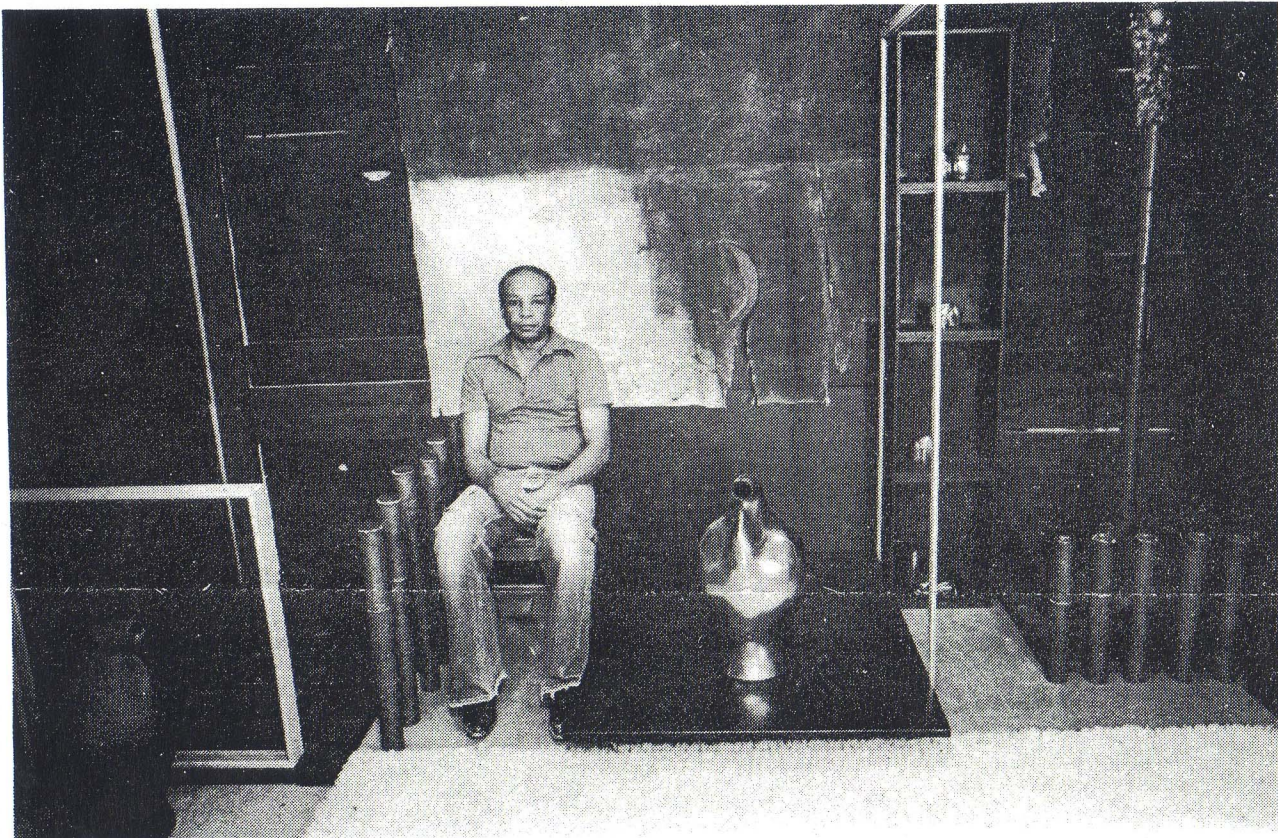
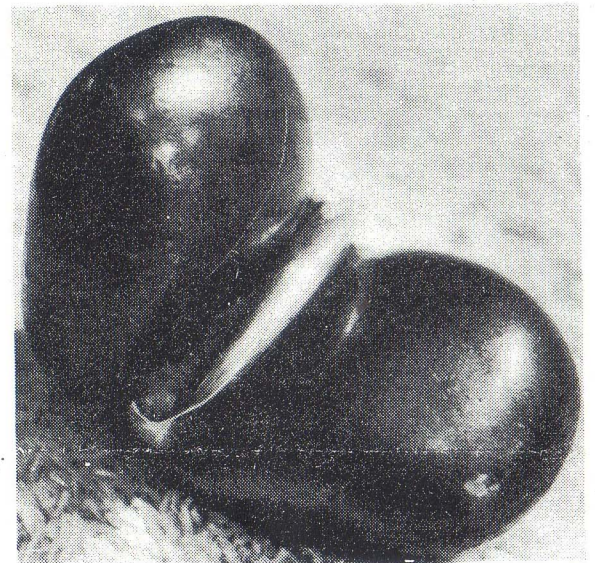


entertainment & the arts

diversions



Donald Locke sits in one of the environments he has created for his piece the Phoenix bird. The parts of the environment are moveable to get different interpretations, according to Locke.



Staff photos by John Reid

Artist derives life from desert

By Michael DeMarsche

From the barrios of Los Angeles to the boroughs of New York the voices of a thousand unknown artists can be heard daily, screaming for a new more stimulating environment. Artists are leaving big cities by the droves and, along with auto workers who used to assemble Cordovas, are hoping it's better to starve propped against a palm tree than under a snow bank.

Unfortunately, most artists find the landscape of Arizona a poor substitute for lack of talent and head back to the Soho with their suntans and Tony Lamas — leaving the desert littered with empty tubes of burnt sienna.

ASU's current artist-in-residence, Donald Locke, however, has no such plans. Locke has found Arizona to be a land of unmatched influence and a stark contrast to his native homeland Guyana, South America.

"Coming to Arizona has had a tremendous effect on my work. It's so strong in the stuff that art is made (of)," Locke said. "The environmental quality just startled me when I first arrived here; the landscape is so fresh and awesome. Most of my work was always black, but for the first time in my life I made my first non-black ceramic. I set out to make it dark, but it just came out naturally."

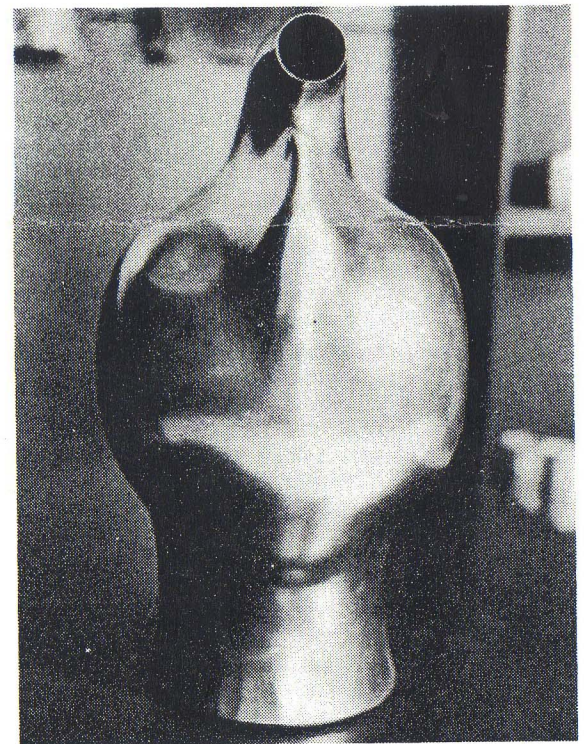
Locke views his work as "sculpture turned inside out" and is currently constructing an artificial environment in which many of his pieces may be seen. The environment will be much like a stage set where certain elements will be rearranged and substituted to form entirely new and different sculptures.

When completed, the sculpture will be arranged into 10 different scenes, photographed from 100 different views and compiled into a book. The completion of this project will be an accumulation of many years of personal interest and study into the social mores of his homeland.

"The present sculpture I'm working on really developed from a previous project, 'Plantation Series,' Locke said. "In Guyana there was a specific social phenomenon which was caused by the large sugar plantations. Everything revolved around sugar and sugar plantations — it was really a feudal system.

"The owners and men at the top would enslave and spit at the men at the bottom. There was a differentiation between housing and everything else and they tried to maintain that difference. My work is really a metaphor, rather than a narrative of the history of the society of Guyana."

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Inevitable attempts by critics and gallery owners have been made to pigeonhole Locke and his work, but all so far have proven to be insufficient. The cultural influences involved, the presence of organic and mechanical forms and the combinations of materials have made Locke's art distinctive and unique.

Locke's use and attitude toward "ordinary" or "found" objects has set him apart from other artists who may use similar media but do not have the distinctive social sensitivity to arrive at meaningful works.

"It's like what Picasso said, I'm just moving on a road and picking up different objects. As an artist you can only choose what is yours and you can't decide before hand what you'll seek."

The use of found objects in art is nothing new, and Locke is the first to admit that finding new, more innovative techniques is practically impossible to do. Technique, however, is in itself unimportant; it is the personal experiences that an artist explores and brings to his work that produces new and exciting art.

Certainly, Locke has an incredible background from which to draw, spending his formative years in Guyana and more recently living in London, England. He has not cared to limit his experiences, however, and has found his stay in Arizona a crucial part of his ever-developing work and the art of the Southwest.

"For people who work in the area in what used to be called 'crafts,' America is the only place to go. It's so big, so fantastic, so incredible that I want to stay here and in Arizona specifically.

"There is a great Southwest school of art developing and people really have no idea how big this is going to get. Southwest art has made its mark on American art, and I want to be part of the noise of the desert."