

Black Artists do little on works of Black icons

By Askia Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) - When the statue of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. takes its place on the National Mall facing the Jefferson Memorial, it will not be alone among iconic Black statues created by artists who are not Black.

The King Memorial, the "Stone of Hope," will be created by Lei Yixin, from Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province in China.

"As many as 95 percent of the bronze statues and monuments to African leaders on the African continent are not done by Africans, but instead have been crafted and manufactured in China or North Korea," New York sculptor Nijel Binns told the *Final Call* in a statement.

"This is responsible for inaccurate representations of national heroes such as Patrice Lumumba, whose \$10 million statue stands in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo."

The King Memorial is a \$100 million project, which has raised nearly \$70 million

so far from corporate gifts mostly. When it comes to the Washington community and city-art, Black artists complain that there are even fewer opportunities for positive images of Black leaders and Black life, produced by Black artists.

"It's gotten out of hand," as far as statues and murals of Blacks are concerned, internationally known sculptor Uzikee Nelson said, "Because they even gave the Carter G. Woodson sculpture to a White artist who had never done a Black person in his whole life."

That project is sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in collaboration with the D.C. Commission on the Arts, who commissioned a White artist to create a statue in honor of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the author of "The Miseducation of the Negro," and the Father of Black History Month.

On top of the Woodson sculpture, which will be dedicated near his home in the Shaw neighborhood, murals of Duke Ellington, Frederick Douglass, and the Black Family Reunion, in promi-



Sentinel-Voice photo by Askia Muhammad

Sculptor Uzikee Nelson and his excellent installation "Paul Robeson: Here I Stand," at a park in Washington, D.C.

nent locations, were all painted by a White artist.

"They have a contract with him," said Nelson. "He just paints all the murals of Black people. No other artist has a chance because they go behind closed doors and vote, and say this guy, let him paint

the things for us.

British newspaper, the *Guardian* quoted a Black artist in Dr. King's hometown of Atlanta as saying that it was a "slap in the face" of Blacks to ask a Chinese to sculpt "the centerpiece of the most important African-

American monument."

Nevertheless, since last summer, Yixin has been reading about Dr. King, listening to his speeches and watching his videos, according to published reports.

Yixin told *China Daily* that his Stone of Hope will focus on "the unyielding spirit of [Dr.] King."

The sculptor said he shares King's ideals, especially his belief in non-violence and perseverance in the face of pressure.

"I have suffered myself, so I know what suffering is," said Yixin. "Though I was not tortured as much as the African-Americans, I can understand how they felt, and I adore the hero who fought for the equal rights of all the people."

The panels that select artists for these major works in Washington are mostly White, said Nelson.

"Since the Martin Luther King thing, they used to tell you who were the judges. They don't even tell you that anymore. It's all secret. It's sad to say that, but as far as I know of, the better Black artists don't even apply because

it's a waste of their effort," Nelson continued.

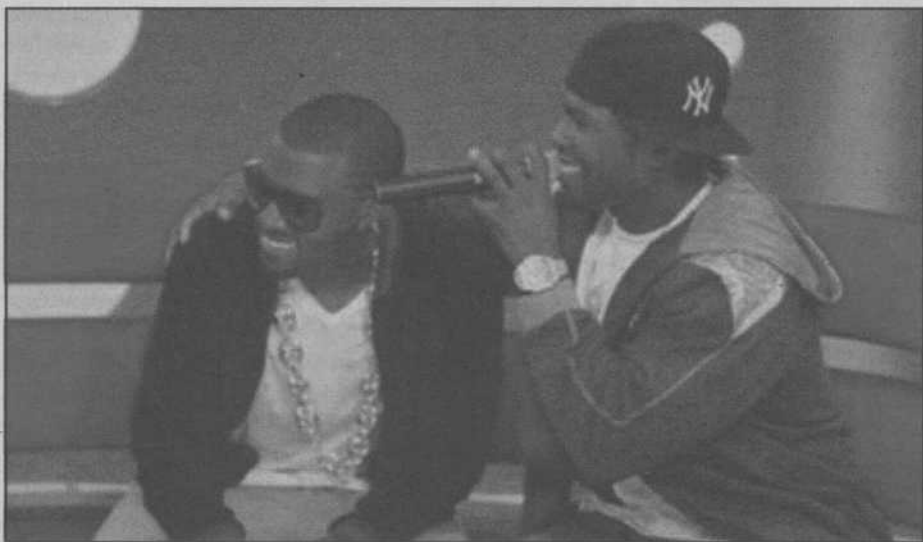
"You don't have a chance of putting something up in this town, but D.C. being the colony that it is, there is just no chance for a Black artist to put up positive images. There's just no chance."

Ironically, said Nelson, Black people are desperate for their own positive images.

"This is a city of monuments," Akili Ron Anderson said. "This is a city of museums, but if you go to these monuments and museums and come from another part of the world, you would be hard-pressed to be able to see that African-Americans were ever a part of this city, or ever contributed to it."

Only the African-American Civil War Memorial was done by a Black artist, protestors complain. But the use of White artists to depict Black historical figures goes way back. Even the Mary McLeod Bethune sculpture in Lincoln Park in Northeast Washington was installed in 1974 by a White artist.

Askia Muhammad writes for the *Final Call*.



Rappers Kanye West, left, and Curtis '50-Cent' Jackson laugh at a taping of BET's '106th and Park' on the day that both West and 50 Cent released their respective new albums in New York on Tuesday. Rival 50 desperately wants to outsell West.

West leads 50 Cent in sales

NEW YORK (AP)- 50 Cent may be getting hip-hop's equivalent of a gold watch next week. Early reports have Kanye West beating 50 in their much-hyped battle of album sales: West's "Graduation" is on pace to sell about 575,000 to 700,000 its first week out, while 50 Cent's "Curtis" is on track to do 550,000, according to *Billboard* magazine.

As of day one, Kanye had sold 437,000 copies to 50's 310,000, according to Nielsen Soundscan.

Both albums came out Tuesday, and a confident 50 Cent famously announced that he would retire if West outsold him in first-week sales.

"I just don't view him as competition based on our previous sales histories," 50 Cent said last month.

But it looks as if 50 underestimated the power of West and, perhaps, overestimated his own appeal.

"I don't think it's helped 50 that so many of these prerelease singles that have come out have fizzled on the charts right away," said Jonathan Cohen, *Billboard*'s senior editor. "There were street date changes. It has just not been a good run-up to this record for him."

Meanwhile, Cohen says West is having a more "charmed" experience, despite his recent tantrum at the MTV Video Music Awards after going home empty-handed.

"These tantrums he goes on, these outlandish comments he makes, they don't really hurt him," said Cohen. "If anything, they've got more people interested in what he's all about."

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