

RETREAT ROADMAKER

Carving his name with pride

by VIVIEN HORLER, Weekend Argus Reporter

ISHMAEL Thyssen spends his days with shovel and wheelbarrow, helping to build a private road in Constantia. But in his free time he wields mallet and chisel in his studio, creating strange and disturbing wood sculptures.

"My ultimate ambition is to work full-time at my art," he says in his wood-and-iron home in Retreat. "But I have my wife and three children, and I must go out to work. I have to be patient."

Ishmael, 33, grew up in a family of builders in Somerset-West. But his obvious talent for drawing and clay-modelling was soon recognised at school, and he attended art classes at a local church. Later, after reaching standard eight through correspondence, he came to Cape Town where he began to study various forms of sculpture through the Community Arts Project in Woodstock.

"We started modelling in terracotta, then a gas company gave us a welding plant and cutting torch after some of our work had been exhibited. So then we could use steel. I also like to use wood, I find wood very strong. I like to use different mediums — I can't specialise. What medi-



Picture: DOUG PITHEY, Weekend Argus.

Ishmael Thyssen, artist.

um I choose depends on how the ideas come up.

"That's why I like to do other work, like building and bricklaying — it frees my mind to move in new directions."

While working at CAP Ishmael came to the notice of prominent Cape Town artist Cecil Skotnes, who takes a keen interest in Ishmael's work. "He's very talented," says the painter. "He's one of those talented young men

who one hopes will keep working and who will eventually do something to brighten up a pretty dreary art scene."

Some of Ishmael's latest wood sculptures go on exhibition in a one-day designer

craft fair at Cavendish Square next week. The catalogue describes Ishmael's work as executed in indigenous woods, and so it is: he uses whatever he can pick up in Retreat, mostly Port Jackson, although he has also worked in teak and yellowwood.

The designer craft fairs are staged four times a year, and organiser Philip Todres emphasises they bear little resemblance to conventional arts-and-crafts fetes. "You won't find any crocheted tea-cosies here. But you will see fine art in every medium from acrylics to Zulu beads, and items on show will include brass, Cape furniture, ceramic sculpture, hand-blown glass, jewellery, fine embroidery, photography, and of course Ishmael Thyssen's wood sculpture."

Ishmael will be one of 21 artists, craftworkers in designers in the exhibition. Others include Louis Jansen van Vuren, Eduard Ladan, Tony Grogan and Christo Coetzee.

The one-day exhibition throughout the malls at Cavendish Square is on Friday, and will be followed by a nine-day show in the Forum.