

Robert Glen, Wildlife Sculptor and Naturalist

Chryssee and Esmond Martin



Rob Glen, who has spent most of his life in Kenya, is one of the most successful sculptors of African animals in miniature today. His bronzes have been purchased by connoisseurs the world over, and his keen interest as a naturalist has led him to assemble study collections of birds, bats and small mammals from East Africa, Madagascar and the Cameroons for museums in Europe and North America.

Rob was born in Kenya in 1940. He was educated at the Prince of Wales School in Nairobi and afterwards he studied taxidermy at the studios of Coloman Jonas in Denver, Colorado. There he had the opportunity to examine animal specimens from every continent and in the evenings he attended night school classes in anatomy and art. After three years in Denver, he returned to Kenya in 1959, and started his own taxidermy business in Nairobi. Later, he was called up for National Service and after that he worked for Zimmermann's, the well established and leading taxidermy firm in Nairobi, from 1961 to 1964. It was during this time that museum officials from abroad began encouraging Rob to collect specimens of the lesser known birds and animals. He organised expeditions to Madagascar, the Cameroons and western Uganda, resulting in extensive collections of unusual species for the Los Angeles County Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in California, and the Paris Museum of Natural History.

The months at a time that Rob spent in the field amassing specimens and studying the free movement of animals and the years that he worked as a taxidermist were all preparation for the ambition that he wanted to fulfil since childhood—to become a wild animal sculptor. He knew he wanted to work with bronze but for an artist living in East Africa, it was about the most expensive medium imaginable. Since there was no foundry here to execute the perfectionist methods of casting his bronze sculptures that he wanted, he had to wait until he had enough capital to bear the expense of frequent trips to England to supervise the casting of his bronzes there. In 1970, he made his first plasticine model for a bronze cast. Bronze was his choice of medium because Rob strongly felt that it would best express his artistic feelings, and, also of course, there is a permanency about



Samburu Moran

bronze—it virtually lasts forever. He flew to England with his first model, an elephant, and after its completion he was well on the way to fame. He soon became a regular commuter to London, carrying with him casts of buffalo, rhinoceros, leopard, lion, oryx, sable, Kudu, and Grant's gazelle. Last year, however, he opened his own foundry in Nairobi which employs six Kenyans who help him in the many difficult stages of producing a bronze.

Among the artists who depict wild animals, only a very few work with bronze because it requires considerable technical expertise and much time and expense. There are only two other well known bronze sculptors who have worked in East Africa, Terry Mathews and Jonathon Kenworthy; the latter's work is freer in form than Rob's and provides an interesting abstract contrast to Rob's style of dynamic realism.



▲ *Group of Buffalo at mudwallow*

Elephant scenting ▼





Lion Walking

For each animal that Rob decides to sculpt, he first makes pen and ink sketches which help to determine the particular movement that he will want to capture in bronze. He also takes closeup photographs of the animal depicting in detail the nose, the feet, etc. so that once he begins sculpting he has at hand reference material to ensure anatomical exactitude.

The actual process of casting a bronze begins with making a miniature skeleton to scale out of aluminium over the top of which Rob models with plasticine. He then makes a rubber mold to cover the plasticine and casts a wax replica from the rubber mold. The wax is covered with ceramic material and then baked at 600 degrees Centigrade for a maximum of six days. Rob then pours out the melted wax and pours in bronze. When the bronze has cooled, he breaks the ceramic mold and finishes off the bronze with hand chisels and files to remove all rough edges. Next, he cleans the bronze in a sulphuric acid pickle bath. To give the bronze the correct colour, he now heats it and adds various chemicals which oxidize the metal. No paint is ever used. At last, the bronze is ready for the final steps of this arduous process—waxing and polishing. When that has been completed, the bronze can be put on the market to be sold.

Rob Glen's most famous piece is a bronze of Ahmed, the large bull elephant which lived on Marsabit Mountain in northern Kenya. Of the ten casts made of this model, one is owned by President Kenyatta and another by James Stewart, the American actor. Ahmed was the *piece de resistance* at the Game Conservation International Convention



Masai on Lion hunt

in San Antonio, Texas. It was also in San Antonio where Rob held his first one-man show, which was followed by exhibitions in New York, Toronto, London, and Madrid. Rob has been featured on the B.B.C. television and was shown at work on A.B.C.'s "American Sportsman". Rob Glen's bronzes can usually be seen at the Tryon Gallery in London or the Gallery's branch in International House, Nairobi.

Recently, Rob received a longterm commission from the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto to cast all the big game in Africa and North America. It is a project that will necessitate many years to complete and for which Rob travelled extensively in Canada last year studying the caribou, moose and walrus in their natural habitats. Rob has also decided now to sculpt people. He has been commissioned to make a bronze of a famous dancer in the Royal Academy at Covent Garden London, and he is very enthusiastic about working on bronzes depicting the traditional life of people in Kenya. This latter project should elicit interest from many major museums which particularly during the last decade have encouraged the preservation of Africa's rich and diverse human culture.

Drs. Chryssee and Esmond Bradley Martin who have lived in Kenya for several years frequently work together as a team to write on Kenya's history and culture.