

Strand

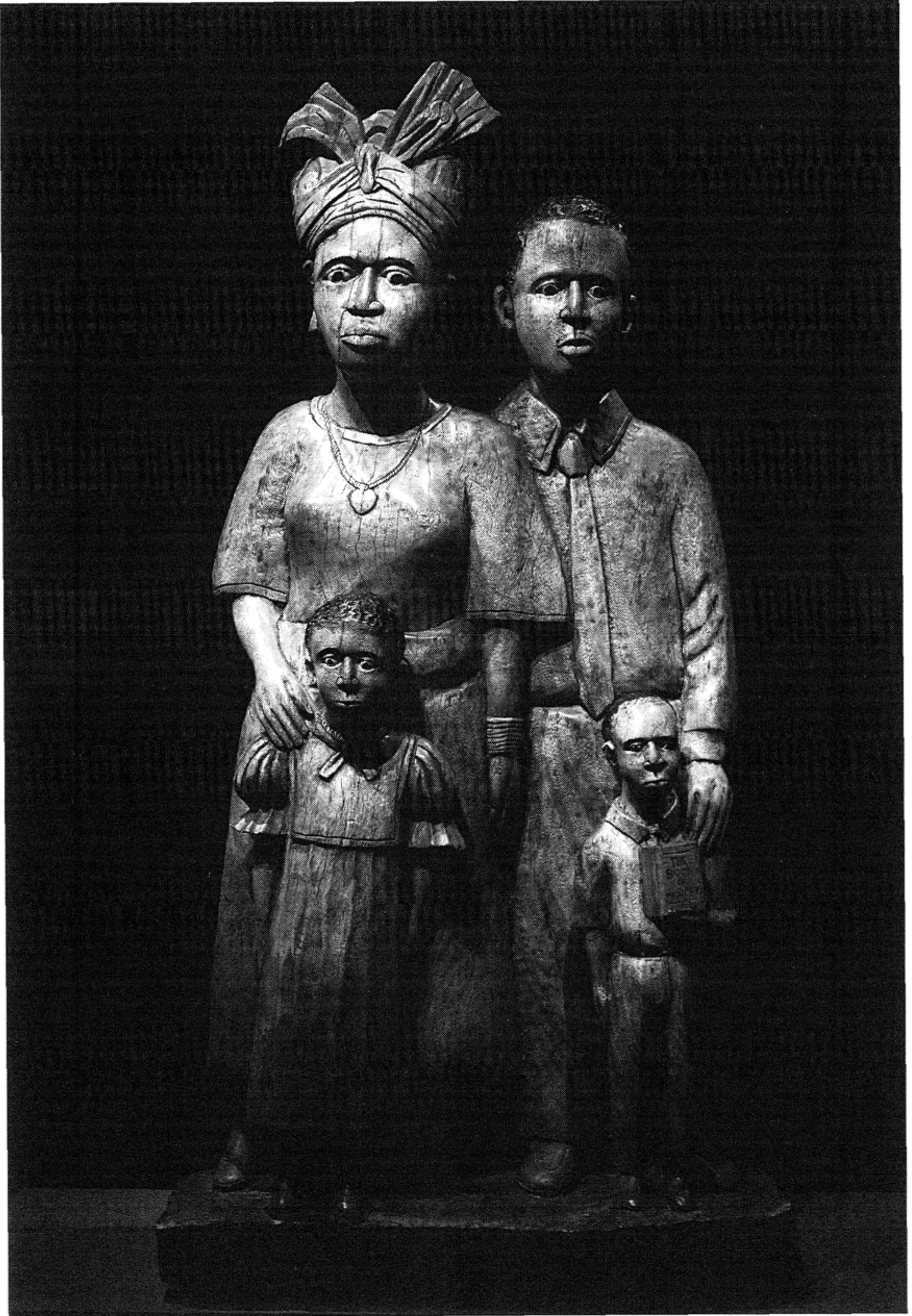
What looked like muted colors of rock
stacked in river bottoms
is alive
with old movement—
stubbed slow-motion paddles
from the stony shoulders of sea turtles
overlapping three-deep in shallows.
Far back, we'd thought to cross them, quick-jumping
through the small currents
of our wanderings down the shore.
Now we are astonished
before them—
the antique finish of splendid shells,
that moment we halted—caught
in their slow flex inside the ripple
of rising gulf tides.

The beached landmarks of words
turn strange
on our tongues, ritual bearings gone awry.
What we cannot enter
looms in us like stones.
We've read of their map sense,
compass cues scanned by some instinct
from magnetic stripes
on the ocean floor.
When the heavy lids part,
we look into deep slotted eyes
toward the grit
of slow enduring.

The sea swells around them
and engulfs our feet, soft shells
of our skins suddenly vulnerable.
We make our tribal way
around the ancient island,
wondering at the long years of navigation
before this return,
the feeding meadows of legend
where ships are caught and swallowed
in tangled kelp—the gulping deep blue
and salt life of the Sargasso Sea,
which has no shore for any man
to stand upon.

—Dixie Partridge

“Strand” received honorable mention in the 1995 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.



Lawrence Enigiator, *The Family*. Okheum wood, 48" x 24" x 16", Nigeria, 1993. Sculpted in the traditional style of Benin, this piece won a purchase award at the Third International Art Competition sponsored by the Museum of Church History and Art. Note the Book of Mormon carried by the little boy. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.