



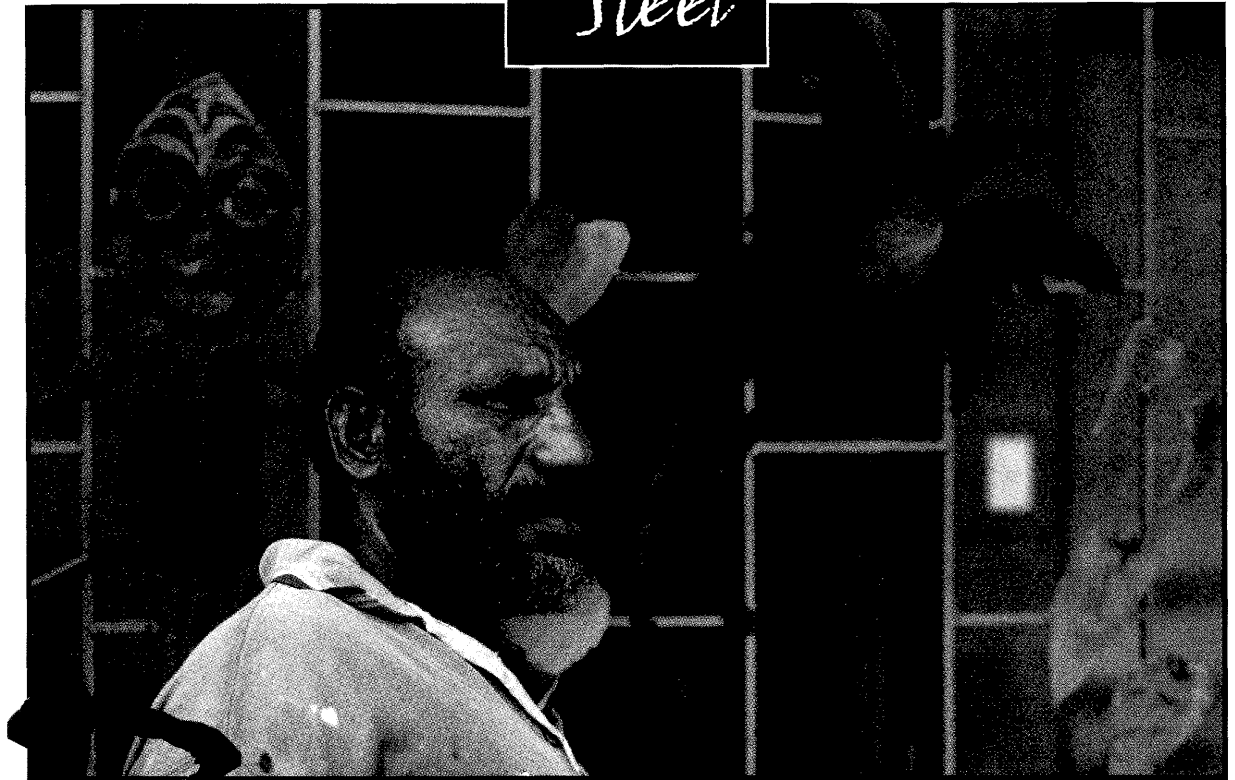
The Word in Steel

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Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea, has been classified by Air Security International as one of the ten most dangerous cities in the world for travelers. Unfortunately, many people come to the city in search of work and with little means of obtaining food and other necessities of life. It is hard for them to return home partly because Port Moresby is surrounded by high mountain ranges and for most people the only way out is to fly, and partly because of the shame factor. They do not want to return home as failures. A situation like this is a breeding place for petty theft and organized criminal gangs.

Religious houses are not exempt from the violence, so when the Divine Word Missionaries at the seminary in Port Moresby built a new residence to house the increasing number of seminarians, they added security features including a metal grill separating the living quarters from the outside courtyard. Some metal grills

appear to be more suited to a prison than a seminary; however, the SVD grill at Bomana is different. The rector decided to commission world-renowned Papua New Guinea artist Gickmai Kundun to transform the grill from an ugly 20-meter-long metal grill into a work of art illustrating the message of Divine Word Missionaries. The work took four months to complete by means of oxy-welding and careful grinding.

The message is simple. Divine Word Missionaries has the mission of proclaiming God's Word to people everywhere. So the central piece is a figure in steel representing the Lord. At the very center of the 3-meter-high figure one may see clearly the logo of the Society. On either side of the figure are symbolic items depicting life in the three dimensions of sky, earth, and sea. There are fish, crabs, turtles, snakes, animals of various sorts, birds (and even a space ship on its way into space, for as

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Gickmai says, "The Lord's Word has to go into space too!" Some of the images in this artwork depict the cultural richness of Papua New Guinea: a "dukduk" figure from the Islands, a "mudman" from the Highlands, and a house typical of the coastal areas. Papua New Guinea as a whole is symbolized by the Bird of Paradise, the national emblem of the country.

Gickmai Kundun has a long history of creative artwork. Born in Ombondo Village in the Simbu Province in Papua New Guinea, he attended the mission school at Mingendi and soon put his artistic talents to good use. During recess he would draw illustrations on the board for teachers to use in their classes. Later he won a scholarship

to the National Arts School. He found the painting course there boring and began to experiment with metal sculpture after which he decided to adopt that art form. Gickmai says, "I had an idea once when I came across a rubbish dump, about working with car bumpers, spark plugs, beer cans and things like that, and I figured that there'd be lots of raw material around."

Since then he has exhibited his work in Australia, New Zealand, Cook Islands, Western Samoa, Vanuatu, and India. Besides his artwork, Gickmai spends time as the chairman of the Church Board of the Nine-Mile Catholic Community in Port Moresby.

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