



"Sisters"

Acrylic on canvas panel, 24 inches by 30 inches

By Chiquita Palha De Sousa

"Art has always been a part of my life," says second-year medical student Chiquita Palha De Sousa. "In fact, I won my first art prize at the age of four in Zimbabwe. I painted a princess and won my very first sketchbook." De Sousa grew up in Zimbabwe and came to the U.S. to do her undergraduate work at Lafayette College. "Towards the end of high school, students in Zimbabwe typically pick a path in the sciences or the arts," she explains, in keeping with the British educational system. "I wanted to do both," she continues, "so I ended up taking four subjects instead of the traditional three." She pursued both passions through college, earning both a B.S. in biology and an A.B. in art. She painted "Sisters" while she was in college. "Despite the high prevalence of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa," De Sousa explains, "the epidemic . . . remained an abstraction until I witnessed its debilitating effect on the family of our domestic worker, Lily. . . . As part of my senior independent art project at Lafayette College, I could have chosen to paint something picturesque and conventional, . . . but instead I felt an emotional tug to do something more meaningful." She created a series of four paintings of children affected by HIV/AIDS. This one, explains De Sousa, "depicts a young girl, orphaned by AIDS, fetching water to care for herself and her younger sister, whom she is carrying on her back. I tried to portray sadness, but determination and hope, as she keeps her chin up bravely and walks determinedly to the river." De Sousa says "art has always been a therapeutic outlet for me, and it continues to be one . . . in helping me deal with the stresses of medical school." She even uses art as a study aid; during her first year at DMS, she found it easier to remember anatomical structures if she drew or painted them as the class was learning about them. ■

For a **WEB EXTRA** about De Sousa's approach to art, with more of her work, see dartmed.dartmouth.edu/su09/we01.