

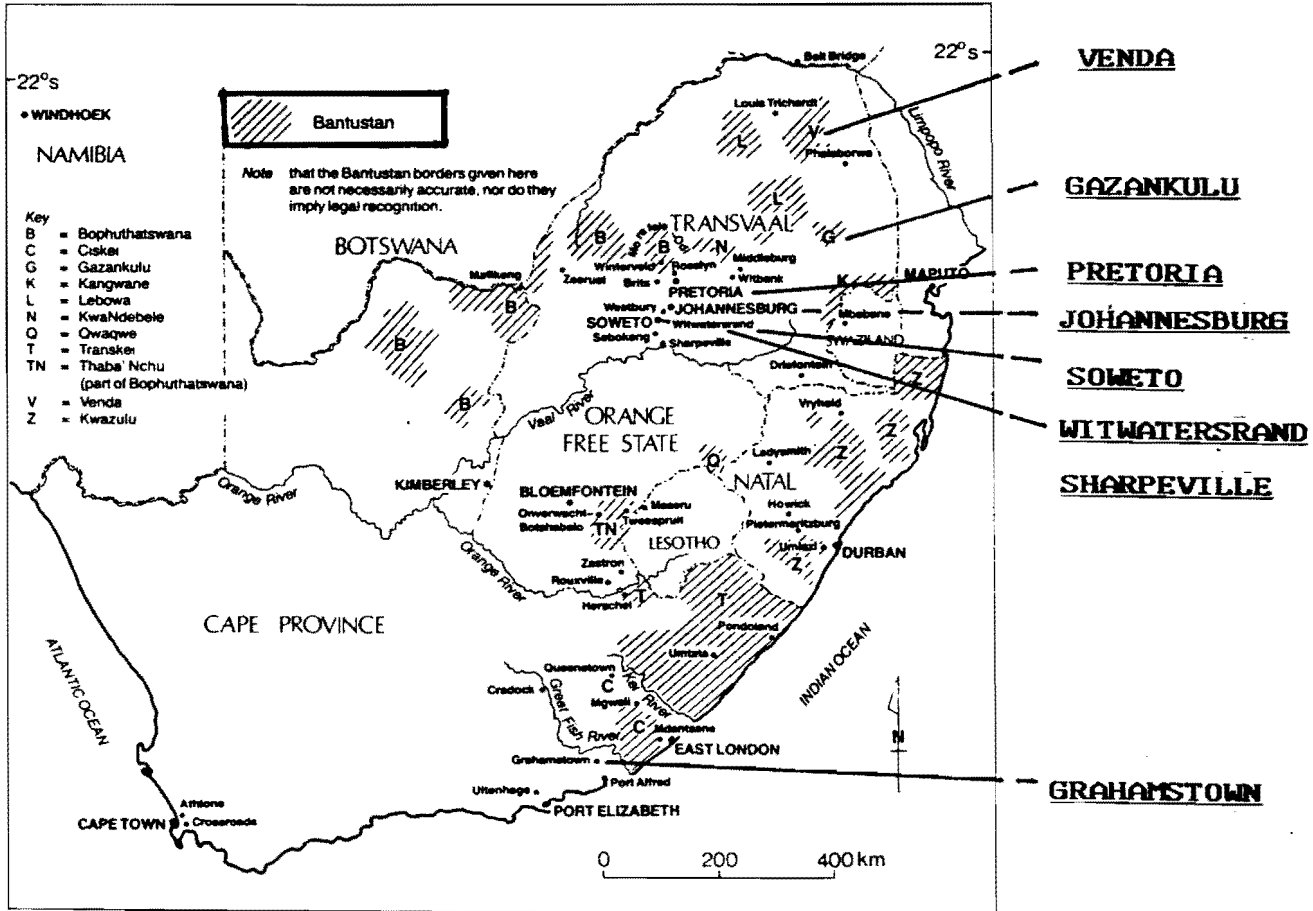
CROSSING THE LINE; THE ART AND CULTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA

A PERSONAL JOURNEY.

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South Africa

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AFRICAN: An alternative term for 'black' South African.

AFRIKANER: The Afrikaans-speaking section of 'white' South Africans.

BANTU: Used by linguists to refer to the family of African languages spoken throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa, 'Bantu' was used by the apartheid regime to refer to Africans from about 1948 to 1976 replacing the word NATIVE. Its use was closely bound up with the ideology of segregation and the bantustan policy. In the face of the uprising of 1976 with its total rejection of Bantu Education, Urban Bantu Councils and Bantu Administration Boards, the regime abandoned the word for BLACK.

BLACK: 'Black' is the current official apartheid term for those formerly named BANTU and NATIVE (and referred to by some as Africans). Opponents of apartheid use the word 'black' in a wider sense, so that 'black' and 'white' refer to two groups which make up the whole population.

BOER: A white South African of Dutch, German or Huguenot descent, especially a rural descendent of the early Dutch settlers. As 'boer' it is a generic word meaning farmer. Sometimes a synonym for Afrikaner.

EUROPEAN: A term previously used to refer to 'white' people.

HOMELANDS: One of the official apartheid terms for the bantustans. The term implies that those allocated to a particular bantustan originated from that place. See NATIONAL STATES, RESERVES.

LAGGER: An encampment protected by a circle of covered wagons.

MIGRANT LABOUR: People who 'reside' in one of the bantustans but work in 'white South Africa' on contract through the labour bureau are migrant labourers. They may only remain in 'white South Africa' for the duration of their contract. After that they must return to

their bantustan and re-apply at a labour bureau if they want further work. There are also migrant labourers from other countries in Southern Africa.

NATIONAL STATES: The latest official apartheid term for bantustans. It applies both to 'independent' and to 'self-governing' but 'non-independent' bantustans.

PASS: This term is no longer used officially. The pass, commonly referred to as the 'dompas', is the common name of the 'Reference Book'. All Africans are required to carry this 'identity' document at all times, to legitimate their presence in 'white South Africa'.

RESERVES: The term 'reserves' is an alternate name for bantustans. It is no longer an official apartheid term but derives from the 'Native Reserve Areas' which were the areas set aside for African occupation by the 1913 Land Act. The Land Act prevented Africans from acquiring land outside of the 'reserves', amounting to 7 percent of the total land area of the country. In 1936, the percentage was adjusted to 13 percent as a compensation for eliminating African Parliamentary voting rights.

SQUATTER: This term is used to imply that the people referred to have no right to occupy the land on which they are living. People who occupy land for residence without official permits are called squatters. Vast 'squatter' townships have grown up near major urban areas, largely because of the shortage of housing for Africans in urban areas.

TOTAL ONSLAUGHT AND TOTAL STRATEGY: The apartheid regime declares that it is being assailed from all sides, physically and ideologically. To counter the 'total onslaught' the regime has developed a 'total strategy' which is meant to mobilize every citizen in every possible way.

TOWNSHIP: Designated residential areas for Africans in South Africa, generally located near white cities. The largest township is the southwest township, or Soweto, located near Johannesburg.

WHITE: 'White' is the term applied to all those who are non-black. It is an official term and does not recognise any division within the 'white group' despite the existence of major language and cultural differences.

In the summer of 1987, I returned to South Africa accompanied by an American friend. This was not my first visit home in the four years since I'd left to study in the United States. However, this trip was not to resemble any of my previous visits, which had been undertaken primarily to reconnect with my family. For one thing, I was to see my country through the eyes of someone who had heard and read a lot about South Africa, but had never been there. Further, my companion's purpose was to research the cultural development of a nation in the throes of upheaval and impending revolution. As an artist and as her guide, I was drawn into a world that had previously been out-of-bounds to me. At times, situations felt awkward and unmanageable. My self-consciousness and guilt, as a woman and as a white South African respectively, prevented me from interacting directly with the people we met. I was, for the most part, a silent observer. I attended the National Arts Festival, entered Alexandra Township, visited community art centres, and travelled through the Venda and Gazankulu 'homelands', all for the first time. Alternating between moments of exhilaration and despair, fluctuating between guilt and fear, I discovered a South Africa I had not yet had the privilege to know.

As a white South African attempting to learn about black South African culture, a culture that has been masked, rendered invisible, and all but obliterated, I am constantly reminded that invisibility does not infer non-existence. If black art does not constitute 'mainstream culture,' it is because we, as a separate culture, have chosen not to see or hear it. Further, my lack of knowledge about black history and black culture does not preclude an accumulative, and constant development of black theatre, music and visual art within black communities, both rural and urban. It is neither my task, nor my place, as a concerned South African, to attempt to set the record straight by re-writing the history of South African art, for fundamental to the process of liberation is that black South Africans write their own history, defining their own culture, thereby empowering and liberating themselves.

My purpose is to bear witness. Through an account of a personal journey back to the country of my birth, I wish to share my recent acquaintance with black South African culture, to illuminate the awful consequences of denial and inhumanity, and, in conclusion, to show that in denying others the right to exist and flourish, we are depriving ourselves of a richer and more humane world.

What is most problematic in my search for substantive support for this paper, is that the history of South Africa and South African art **has** been written by white historians. Therefore, we know very little about the ways in which other peoples in South Africa

responded to historical change and development. We know even less about the ways in which their responses influenced and were influenced by their forms of cultural expression. The general point of view of many white South Africans has been influenced by historical writing such as that by George McCall Theal. His History of South Africa (1) was essentially the story of the triumph of white settlement in southern Africa. Blacks, as far as Theal was concerned, were barbarous, were almost always the cause of trouble and had achieved nothing of significance. To help legitimate white rule in South Africa, Theal propagated the myth that there had either been a simultaneous arrival of whites and blacks in South Africa, or that when whites entered the interior in 1830, it was uninhabited: for him, the establishment of white supremacy was simply part of what he called "the law of progress" (2).

This is , essentially, the point of view that was unequivocally imposed on me as a child and as a teenager growing up in the suburbs of Johannesburg. Later, as an art student at the University of the Witwatersrand, one of the most progressive universities in South Africa at that time, the history of black artists was totally omitted from the roster of South African artists. To embellish this extraordinary occurrence, the following quote serves to emphasize the patronizing attitude of the white historian now attempting to right wrongs, and, in the process, illuminating the mind-set of contemporary 'liberal' South Africans. The quote is from an exhibition catalogue entitled The Neglected Tradition: towards a new history of South African Art (1930-1988):

The Johannesburg Art Gallery is committed to reflecting and evaluating the history of South African art through its collections and researched exhibitions, and to disseminating this information to the community at large. As part of this process (this) exhibition...is one that takes on historic importance in re-evaluating South African art by tracing the development and influence of black South African artists, and **for the first time** (my emphasis) documenting this development and influence through an exhibition and researched catalogue. The compilation of this information provides students, researchers, and the public with a new perspective for the evaluation of art in this country (3).

C.M. Till, director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, goes on to say that the exhibition is an acknowledgement of the fact that the contribution of black South African artists to the history of South African art has been entirely "overlooked," the exhibition thereby "correcting any distortion which may exist" (4).

In the course of this paper I will attempt to describe the context in which this 'distortion' has been perpetuated. I will also argue that any attempt to correct this distortion without serious deconstruction of the social, economic and cultural structures of apartheid-South Africa will inevitably fail. Without a fundamental shift in attitude, and without, at the very least, the existence of basic human rights, black and white South Africans will never be equal, and freedom will continue to be a sweltering mirage on the edge of the African continent.

INTRODUCTION

Close your eyes...Now open them. As the plane banks to the left, you have your first view of the coast line. The beaches are as wide and as white as you thought you'd imagined them to be, and soon the festival bus is flying by cresting dunes crowded between crashing blues and spraying greens. You're awe-struck by the splendour around you; immersed in golden light, drenched in the beauty of this place, you forget to breathe even though the earth gives so generously of breath; you feel swallowed up by the expanse of cool sky, but you feel safe. You're alone. Open your eyes again...

The bus approaches a place like no other. You've finally landed in South Africa. It took you thirty six hours to get here. You long to sink into the yellow warmth, the soft pillows of shimmering sand. You're hypnotized as you watch the waves swell and spill... and spill, threatening to engulf the vulnerable expanse; teasing, tickling, and caressing your feet, swirling around your ankles, the water and the sand, churned by the moon, become muddy in appearance. You can no longer see your feet; in fact, you suddenly panic at the thought that the tide has re-posessed them. The water becomes greyer and darker, and you turn around to find that the edge of the earth has disappeared completely...

Welcome.

...The bus empties us onto the pavement of our destination. Chilled by charcoal rain, depressed into memories of stark contrasts and alarming pockets of nothingness, I struggle to keep from drowning. Soon I'm suffocating in my own helplessness and wonder if the

earth is punishing me by taking all of its breath away...

We have arrived in Grahamstown, site of the annual National Arts Festival: the "1820 Settlers Monument" pompously oversees this small town, as it clings to the foot of its hill, digesting art lovers as they drink, with desperation, from a white bowl adorned with scattered, decorative touches of black.

Grahamstown is one of the many environments still so distinctively and so determinedly reminiscent of British colonialism in South Africa today. The town's activities center around Rhodes University and around the Monument, which stands coldly and unswayingly as a symbol of the determination of the town's white inhabitants to "propagate and entrench the English language"(5). Meanwhile, across from the town, on another hill, stand thousands of tottering cubicles, their corrugated tin seams bulging under the stress of the many poverty-stricken black inhabitants crowded into each of them. Seventy percent of Grahamstown's black residents are unemployed, the consequence of which is a multitude of people begging on the streets. The army deploys frightening looking vehicles called 'hippos' (because of their intimidating form and scale), which facilitate the daily harassment of women and children. I've seen film footage of soldiers 'kidnapping' women and taking them on 'joyrides' in these vehicles. According to the victims and witnesses interviewed for these news reports, none of the rapists have ever been convicted. News sources report that these atrocities are committed daily, not only in Grahamstown, but in every army-occupied

township in South Africa.

Seated at a window which offered a panoramic view of Grahamstown, I watched the night swallow an unelectrified township in one gulp. Rendered non-existent by darkness, the town on the other hill drags itself into the hazy light of each day, struggling into an upright stance, only to be cut down by degrading reminders of its worthless stature in the eyes of its white neighbours.

Grahamstown's black 'co-habitants' are excluded physically, culturally, and intellectually from this extravaganza- the Arts Festival- which is said to represent the variety and diversity of the 'flourishing' arts in South Africa. They are physically excluded because of their inability to afford admission, their exclusion ensured further still by the enforcement of a nightly curfew. They are culturally excluded because, for the most part, 'South African' culture presents itself to a majority who have been non-participants and who have therefore been looking into a mirror that reflects someone else's reality. And they have been excluded intellectually because the main force of the privileged white classes is turned against the desire of South Africa's black majority to 'know'- to create darkness and slavery in which the working class is not a conscious subject but an object of the actions of others.

The exclusion and non-participation of black artists in South Africa is a direct consequence of unabashed racism and remains, for the most part, an extension of the repressive and exploitative measures

deftly contrived by the colonialists well before apartheid policy was formed and enforced by the Nationalist government when they took power in 1948.

What follows is a brief history of South Africa (6) and a summary of the formation of the policy of 'separate development', known as 'apartheid'.

Prior to 1870 and the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, indigenous black South Africans were self-sufficient farmers. When the white settlers from the Netherlands arrived at the southwestern most part of South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century, the area was occupied by various groups of people: the Khoikhoi and the San were soon dispossessed of their land and livestock in the south, and the 'military might' of the settlers continued to serve them as they gradually moved north. Murdering and looting whomever they came across, the settlers stripped the survivors bare, forcing them to become slave labourers. Despite more than a century of resistance, armed opposition to colonial expansion was effectively ended at the beginning of this century. White legislators, who had taken over virtually all of the land by now, forced black communities to become dependent labour forces by introducing a hut and labour tax which had to be paid in monetary terms. Those who refused to conform were distinguished by the absence of a metal badge pinned to their clothing and they were dealt with severely. (7) The Land Act of 1913 froze African land ownership at 7% (the 'homelands', referred to then as 'reserves'), forcing the landless to seek work on the mines and in the cities.

At the end of the nineteenth century what is now South Africa was comprised of four territories under colonial rule. The British, who had arrived in the early eighteenth century and had taken the Cape from the Dutch, abolished slavery in 1834. Blacks in the Cape and Natal territories, under British rule until 1910, had limited political rights. Those rights were quickly retracted when too many Africans met the qualifications, reducing blacks under British rule to the no-rights status of blacks under Boer (Afrikaner) rule in the Transvaal republic and the Orange Free State. Following the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902, British rule was established in all four territories, which were then joined to form the Union of South Africa in 1910. Britain then handed over administration of the country to the local white population. The Boers maintained the status quo of black rights, and the way was paved for removal of all parliamentary rights for black South Africans.

Segregation had been tried since the days of Jan van Riebeeck, founder of a white settlement in the 1650's, but had never worked because the forces bringing people together had always been stronger than the attempts to keep them apart. (That is, the white settlers were always dependent on black labour). Liberal historians in the 1940's believed that there had been a growing interaction between people and an incorporation into one economic system (8). The Tomlinson Commission Report of 1954 (which was the conclusive evidence used to support the implementation of Apartheid) stated the following:

The white colonist and settler came from the West European cultural 'milieu' to South Africa and established himself

in a new home, where he entered into contact with unchristianised people who, in the course of years and in the same field of life, became an appendage to the European, with the latter as dynamic centre (9).

The report goes on to say that a gradual 'assimilation' took place, and that soon the Bantu (black), whom the European (white) had drawn into his service as unskilled mine workers and domestic servants, had begun acquiring professional skills and were practicing them as teachers, doctors and newspaper editors. Christopher Saunders, in an essay entitled Historians and Apartheid (10), says that William Miller Macmillan attributed this occurrence to the demands of economic growth and the advent of the second world war.

In Macmillan's and C.W. de Kiewiet's analysis (11), before the 1930's, the economy was based almost entirely on agriculture and, from the late nineteenth century, on mining- then a minute manufacturing sector. But after 1933, having left the gold standard- thereby devaluing its own currency- South Africa quickly pulled itself out of depression, and manufacturing industry began to grow rapidly. Segregationist policy, implemented by General Herzog, Prime Minister from 1924, was side-stepped by policy for economic development. In the early 1940's - in the interests of economic growth during a time of war- various aspects of segregation were relaxed; the job colour bar, the pass laws (which monitored the movement of all black South Africans), and restrictions on industrial action by blacks. By the end of the war, however, old measures had been re-imposed and new ones introduced.

Apartheid was an attempt to introduce radical changes in the position of the black population of South Africa by the imposition of new political structures. The plan was to restrict black South Africans to separate territories (known as 'homelands', or 'bantustans') within the Republic, eventually stripping Africans of their South African citizenship. The 'wealthier' areas of South Africa were to become unequivocally white man's country.

Administratively, the critical new feature in segregationist policy was the notion that the homelands could be developed as viable political and economic entities, that black South Africans could be appeased by their new 'democratic rights,' and that there would no longer be a need for blacks to 'be' in white South Africa at all. At the same time, tribal rivalries were instigated by separating and 'dividing' all indigenous groups, in the hope of preventing a unified mass resistance to white power.

Apartheid policy stated that educational policy should begin by recognizing and building upon cultural differences. In his report on Bantu Education, produced for the Nationalist government in 1948, W.W.M. Eiselen said the following:

After the earlier period of pacification of the Bantu there followed a period when both Europeans and Bantu favoured the adjustment of Bantu culture to European economic and political ideals. Bantu ideas of dress, morality, religion, economics, etc., were set aside in favour of European ideas and practices, and it seemed an accepted goal that Bantu culture should be done away with. This was conceived in terms of the individualism of the nineteenth century, which felt that it was feasible to lift an individual from one society and plant him in another, and that this process should be carried out on a large scale with nothing but happy results for all concerned (12).

Apartheid, thus, was not just an intensification of traditional segregationist policies. It instilled further the belief that black culture was an inferior culture and must gradually disappear.

Separate 'countries,' separate cities, separate education, separate transportation, all terribly inferior and completely inadequate, insured the obscurity of virtually an entire nation. Confinement, deprivation, starvation, inferior health care facilities and unforgivable living and breathing space have produced, in my opinion, a people no longer able, or willing, to tolerate their confinement.

A serious omission from most analyses of the history of segregationist policy by white historians, liberal and conservative alike, is the recognition of the formation of the African National Congress (A.N.C.) in 1912, and the role that the A.N.C. has continued to play in resisting the oppression of black South Africans. Formed just two years after the Union of South Africa, the A.N.C. began peacefully protesting the racist policies, primarily those regarding the 'pass laws' of the Union. The A.N.C. continued its policy of peaceful resistance throughout the enforcement of apartheid after 1948. Many white South Africans still choose to forget the A.N.C.'s history of peaceful resistance. It was only after 69 unarmed protestors were massacred at Sharpeville in 1960 that the A.N.C., consequently banned, resolved to change its stance on passive resistance.

The idea that the destinies of white and black South Africans,

interwoven for centuries, could somehow be disentangled (by apartheid) was not a new one of course, but it had not been a serious goal of policy for generations. Forty years after the Nationalist Party took power, it is the opinion of many South Africans, including myself, that the ideals of 'separate development' are a dishevelled heap of lighted logs, destined to be burning embers and, finally, the smoking ashes out of which a new South Africa will be born.

URBAN ART AND ART EDUCATION

Our appointment was with Bongwiwe Dhlomo, Director of the Alexandra Arts Centre. At the suggestion of our contact person, we had been escorted into the township to avoid drawing attention to ourselves as we passed through the numerous roadblocks set up between this dust and smog-covered place and the affluent white suburbs of Johannesburg. (Since the imposition of the State of Emergency in 1985, most black cities and towns have been occupied by the military and/or police. Black residents are indiscriminately searched for weapons or other 'subversive' materials, ie. banned literature, T-shirts, buttons, etc. at roadblocks and in their own homes.)

I had grown up in one of those suburbs, a mere half-a-mile away from Alexandra. This was the first time I was crossing the line which had kept black children out of my neighbourhood and out of my schools (I was in my twenty-eighth year). Eleven years had passed since the brutal massacre of more than 800 school children as they'd embarked on a peaceful protest march to boycott the compulsory use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in state schools, and Bantu Education in general (13). Alexandra Township had erupted on our doorstep, and I'd seen nothing, yet I knew that very little had changed since then. The streets were still obscured by clouds of dust as cars and trucks rumbled and rattled into and out of potholes, skidding this way and that, and finally screeching to a halt at the next road block. Streets were crammed with brick structures, tin shanties, and bus carcasses, all without running water and electricity. The whole town is sunken into a slight crevice, this place that no one need see unless their misfortune is

to live there, this place that is replaced in one's evening vision by a giant curtain of smoke and is finally obliterated entirely by the restless night. (Alexandra has no electricity, thus, every evening, the township becomes a crater filled with the smog of coal fires, filling the eyes and lungs of the adults returning from work, and the children who run to embrace them.)

Yet, this is a place where the veins of the people run deep beneath the eroding streets and the burning atmosphere above them. Children who are forced to study under the watchful barrel of the gun, fill barren dance studios with their joyful, undulating rhythms. Walls are covered with art that had been begun tentatively and had gradually become bolder as the paper hadn't become 'extinct,' as the pencils, sharpened until unusable, were replaced by others. (A teacher told us of how the children had begun making tiny pictures confined to the corners of large pieces of paper, afraid that, once finished, the materials would not be replaced.) Here, children, who are burdened with the daily responsibilities of their absent parents, construct and mould their own destinies, re-discovering their heritage and culture in the process. Cooking classes culminate with the delivery of the food to school children, and dance studios become meeting halls at night; culture and politics, art and life are closely interwoven in the struggle to lift the curtain of smoke and to free the night.

The Alexandra Art Centre is one of the few centers of its kind. It is, like many alternative, non-profit organizations, supported by

corporate funding, mostly from abroad. The centre's existence is, therefore, a precarious one, since the South African government is constantly blocking the flow of foreign support as it is funnelled- often clandestinely- across the border.

Black artists have, and have had, little or no access to formalized art teaching in the townships, but then the artists of Africa, historically, have never had much use for formal art schools or specialist art stores selling expensive art materials. The making of wooden carvings, grass-woven baskets, bowls, bags and mats, and beaded clothing, etc. is more traditional to the indigenous peoples of southern Africa. In the past, for cultural and economic reasons, function took precedence over pure aesthetics. Yet, thanks to alternative programmes, painting and drawing skills gradually became more accessible, and, more and more, 'non-traditional' artists began to emerge.

To understand the present predicament of the black artist requires some knowledge of the historical context of black education in South Africa. What follows is a summary of the history of art training and Bantu Education (14):

In the 17th century, separate schools were established for slave children. It was not until 1916 when 'art-oriented' subjects were first introduced into still segregated schools- one twenty five minute period per week was allocated to 'drawing.' Industrial work

included modelling in clay, sewing and basketwork until the fourth grade. Thereafter, boys were taught the 'manipulation of simple tools,' while girls were taught 'cooking and simple domestic work.' At the time, the African school curriculum emphasized manual skills, such as gardening and woodwork, a working knowledge of either English or Afrikaans and basic reading and arithmetic.

It was against this backdrop that the National Party (since 1948) gradually removed jurisdiction of African schools from the churches and other non-state bodies. By 1965 only about 8% of the schools in South Africa were non-state 'aided.' Teacher training and taught syllabi had been placed under state control in 1953, the year in which the Bantu Education Act was passed. This was the final assurance that an adequate supply of non-competitive, cheap labour would be available to support a white economy. Education, together with other legislation, was aimed at stripping the majority of blacks of their South African nationality, thus laying the foundations for the retribalization of black Africans under the guise of 'separate development.' 'Independent' pockets of unyielding land, known as 'homelands', were allocated to people of specific tribal origins. (The carrying of a 'pass' made possible the strict control of people into the urban areas, thereby regulating the flow of unemployed workers into and out of 'South Africa'). Meanwhile, Bantu Education acted to turn Africans' attention to the urban areas by emphasizing the exclusive tribal compositions of the schools. By appointing selected black 'puppets' to sit on the 'community councils' of each of the townships, the Nationalist regime hoped

that the conservative influence and desire for power of these 'leaders,' would resurrect old tribal antagonisms. The wave of black nationalism had to be crushed, the minds of black children had to be quashed. Resistance to Bantu Education, which was formally introduced in 1955, took the same form as it had previously: mass stay-aways, and the burning of schools were counteracted with the banning of school children from school for life.

Between 1948 and 1963, there was a steady revival of arts and crafts traditions on the primary school level. The lack of distinction between the two was, perhaps, the most commendable, although probably not a deliberately affirming decision made by the architects of the Bantu syllabus. While 'encouraging' a revival of traditional skills, however, the same syllabus denied black children the history and cultural achievements of their own people (not to mention the history of their resistance to colonial rule). The most lasting deficiency in terms of 'art' education, however, was the absence of any formalized training beyond the primary school level.

Although more and more schools were built, the standard of education continued to drop. Teacher training standards dropped, students were only required to complete the primary school level (six years), and twenty-five times more money was spent annually on white school children.

The first attempt at an alternative art education was the Polly

Street Art Centre, which was started in 1950 by members of various education committees. Originally, the project was meagerly funded by the Department of Education, but soon it was dependent on funds raised by renting its hall space. Teachers encouraged students to exhibit their work, thus promoting the idea of professionalism in the arts. Visual artists, however, were unable to achieve a working-class following, as playwrights were, and consequently, attempts to make their art more salable were met with criticism of commercialism. Class issues and commercialism will be discussed in more detail in the chapters rural art and art and propaganda.

Other art centres like the Rorke's Drift weaving co-operative gave not only employment opportunities, but the opportunity to leave the centre with a three year Fine Art Certificate. Graduates, like John Muafangejo, have enjoyed international exposure and acclaim. Others have become teachers at other alternative schools, or have begun new community arts projects.

Unfortunately, not much has changed within the state-controlled education system since the instatement of Bantu Education in 1953. When students staged a peaceful demonstration in 1976 to boycott the use of Afrikaans in their schools, they were unconscionably murdered. Boycotts became more the norm after 1976, but it was soon recognised that it would be more profitable to return to school. In 1986, the slogan "education for liberation," replaced the previous slogan "liberation before education." This new attitude has placed the emphasis on emancipatory education, and alludes to the notion

that what is taught in the classroom need not resemble the required syllabus. The classroom is now a place for re-education, rather than an environment for negation.

RURAL ART; THE ART OF VENDA AND GAZANKULU

The sun began to rise before my tired eyes. Listening to the night sounds as they flowed between the rafters and the corrugated tin roof, it was difficult to discern reality from the shadows cast by the full moon on the wall. The events of the previous day refused to leave my consciousness...my stomach ached with unfamiliarity and tension. I saw images of countless cactus trees, their arms extended to protect their torsos, seeming to multiply as we sped by. I heard my travelling companion's squeal of delight as she sighted a baboon scampering across the highway, becoming nothing more than a blur on the scrubby veld.

Entering the homeland Venda (situated in the north western-most part of South Africa), we had been filled with fearful anticipation and ambivalence. Before us stretched a beautiful landscape inhabited, at vast intervals, by a people in exile. We were on our way to spend the night with a doctor and his family, bringing with us gifts and warm wishes from a colleague in Boston and the desire to know something of the daily reality of life in Venda.

Fruit markets were frequent sights on the side of the road. Mango and paw-paw trees gave generously of their fruit and of the fruits' scent. Intoxicated by the sweet smells and the abundance of colour, outward calm masked my growing panic as we drove through a maze of dusty streets crammed with chickens, goats, children and soldiers carrying machine guns. Soon, we

were hopelessly lost. Our presence was awkward and conspicuous, and the many inquisitive glances cast our way were to go unanswered. Eventually we went into a store to inquire about our whereabouts. There, a woman who seemed concerned about our presence, finally offered to accompany us to the health clinic where our host awaited us. He sat drinking champagne, removing his headphones only to listen vaguely to her expression of concern about our white presence in an area recently shaken by a commotion of automatic weapon fire and airforce jets. The South African army had arrived the day before to rid the area of the 'enemy' (so-called A.N.C. 'terrorists' who had supposedly crossed the Zimbabwean border), leaving in its wake a gentle people turned more angry.

After an uncertain afternoon, we accompanied the doctor to his home. His wife greeted us warmly and immediately began apologizing for not having dinner ready. She seemed to not notice my South Africaness, assuming I was American too. Our allegiance as women was immediate, however temporary, and the following morning her pain and loss seemed as great as if we'd been friends forever. Oceans apart, I still remember her desperation and invisibility, her isolation and loneliness. Subjugated by gender, her oppression was as tangible as I hoped my empathy was. However, that was where our common identity ended. My white privilege had granted me immediate advantages, even as a woman, in my plentiful world. I had grown up never meeting black children. The black maids and gardeners

who had contributed to the 'cleanliness' of my younger years had been the only contacts I'd ever had, but, because that contact was always confined to the white suburbs of Johannesburg, this was my first 'real' experience of black culture.

Later that evening, we sat at a table of strangers. Feeling both unaccustomed and humbled, I ate my first meal in the home of a black South African. I remember being acutely aware of the doctor's inhospitality. Feeling unentitled to my anger and deserving of his abuse, my whiteness took the stand once more. Again, the verdict was guilty, and I went to bed a foreigner in a strange land...

Dawn brought with her the muffled sounds of footsteps on the clay path which wove its way through the ripened fruits to the road-side. Our early departure was laden with gifts and an invitation to return from our 'sister'. I felt a deep hollowness as we took to the highway, wishing that the rapid motion of the car would force all the guilt and pain from my abdomen... but the discomfort was to grow with each new encounter.

We met an old acquaintance, his wife, and our guide at a small hotel in Duiwelskloof. They had planned a three day trip to visit a few artists living in Venda and Gazankulu and had invited us to accompany them. Recognizing the necessity for a guide we had accepted the invitation, grateful to have the

opportunity and the privilege. The winter sun was already high when we set off, warmth filling the car as memories of the night before held fast. Villages of clay 'rondawels' (round huts), many of them decorated with bright symmetrical patterns, were scattered at intermittent intervals between lush farm lands. The black tops ended abruptly as we entered Venda, and soon, unable to drive further, we took to the dusty path.

We approached Noria Mabasa's home on foot, winding our way through other peoples' yards to hers, which lay on the edge of dry earth, thorny scrub and blue sky. We were oblivious intruders, entering the womb of a woman who had long ago lost her husband to the mines as a migrant labourer, and more recently, to the hands of murderers on a dark township street. Noria greeted us dressed in mourning. The sadness in her eyes was unavoidable and yet, we stayed on, wandering around her home as she whispered replies to the many questions asked of her. I felt too self-conscious to address any of my own questions, choosing to rely on my personal perceptions and the information that my companions shared with me later.

The entrance to Noria's home was flanked on either side by a clay female figure: their backs turned to the outside world, they compelled us to enter the 'safe' space over which they watched. The sculptures were raw, eroded by wind and sun, crumbling, yet assured in their posture.

A large clay policeman, planted in flowering shrubs, protected

Noria's room which stood to the right of the courtyard. Many smaller policemen lay scattered in the brush behind the house, camouflaged by dust, disguised by the chickens perched on their shoulders. More chickens fluttered around a mound of shards, relics, or trash, or both. Around the corner, a small clay man in a black suit leaned against a low wall, his painted head cracked open to reveal his earthy skin. Noria, it seems, has been persuaded to 'dress' her figures to suit her patrons. Whereas many of her earlier pieces were exclusively policemen, portrayed both as protectors and aggressors, waiters, clergymen, businessmen and other 'colonial types' now inhabit craft stores, galleries, museums and private homes.

Noria is one of the many Venda artists who, in the space of less than four years, have been brought into mainstream white culture by dealers and greedy collectors. She is, as far as I know, the only woman 'artist' in the area. Apart from the clay figures, which reflect her encounters with white people in urban settings, Noria makes wood carvings, utilizing a medium traditionally limited to men. The carvings reflect another Noria, the Noria determined to continue folkloric tradition, the Noria who still dreams.

Later, Maria Mdaka welcomed us into her courtyard and, after performing a traditional dance and sharing large quantities of home-brewed beer, sold a beautiful embroidered cloth to one of my companions. Before being 'discovered' by white dealers, both

she and Noria sold their **crafts** to tourists on the roadside. It is interesting to consider that the work of these artists might be designated 'folk art' in other societies. Perhaps more than in any other society, however, designating art to the category of 'naive' or 'folk' art is implicitly condescending and is, therefore, avoided at all costs.

Hence, interested buyers and collectors are still confused about what to call the work. It was only in 1986, with the "Tributaries Exhibition," that most Venda artists had their first major public viewing. The exhibition presented an indigenous, independent and vital art that ^{had} been flourishing for years. Soon labeled 'transitional,' however, implying, a cross fertilization between western and African models, the work was instantly commercialised and marketed. The term was soon dropped because cross-referencing was not a new occurrence and was not something unique to black artists. White artists have 'borrowed' from black culture in the past and continue to do so at an accelerated rate.

In the midst of all the confusion, the work of most Venda artists can still be had, at low cost, on the side of the road and even at curios shops and flea markets in the cities. Simultaneously, work of the same quality, by the same makers, can also be bought, at great cost, as 'high art,' from commercial galleries in those same cities.

As we climbed the steep incline to the home of Jackson

Hlungwane, my shoulders ached with the burden of a dilemma beginning to etch its way into my skin. What must it be like to suddenly be flooded with requests for your work after centuries of disrespect and non-visibility ? It is my opinion that none of us 'visitors' had yet been entrusted with the answer to this question. Our boundaries felt so unalterable, our differences so vast, that I felt unentitled to the privilege and exploitative of the opportunity. I felt obligated to buy an object, mostly because that was the expectation of the artists. If we weren't there to buy, what were we there for ? Feelings of mistrust and skepticism, as a consequence of centuries of abuse and disrespect, must run extraordinarily deep. I will clarify these feelings and ideas further along.

Hlungwane lives at the peak of a foothill, on a parched landscape clothed in reddish dust. This is Gazankulu, another homeland where black South Africans have been forced to live as citizens of another 'country.' At the foot of the hill, undernourished and inadequately clothed children and young adults attend classes in a schoolhouse stripped of window panes and warmth. The same children are frequent visitors to Hlungwane's abode, about which a stranger might have the feeling of having stumbled upon something sacred.

He came into sight as we wound our way through the citadel of thick stone walls, intricate passageways and circular, uncovered enclosures, which had taken him fifteen years to build. He was sitting on the ground next to a small pile of smoking embers

(explaining, later, that the heat from the fire was curing a cancerous growth on his leg). In his hands were a carving knife and a small piece of wood, to which he gave his undivided attention during our visit. We wandered, unaccompanied, through a maze of stone walls which had no discernible purpose. The stillness of the afternoon light reflected a strange calm which stayed with us for the rest of the evening. Later, sitting on the veranda of a local bar, our glasses brimming with emotion, we witnessed the setting of the sun. Then darkness drew a curtain on the poverty beyond.

The following day... we met Hlungwane at the riverbed, a short distance from his home. He wanted to show us some of his works-in-progress, and because he hadn't found a way to transport the wood up to his home, we accompanied him through fields of huge trees to see them. He walked vigorously for a man his age, his infected leg seeming not to inhibit his movement as he forged ahead. Periodically, he would stop to remove the thorny coverings which disguised the giant tree-trunks, already severed and awaiting his hand. He explained, with amusement, that the disguise was necessary to ward off people who cannot differentiate between a log and a work of art.

Now an ordained priest, Hlungwane was once a migrant labourer. While executing a skilled job for which he received unskilled wages, he lost a finger to a machine, and when he was offered no

compensation, he left the city to work for himself and to "make his soul better." Since his return, Hlungwane has welcomed numerous visitors to his 'cathedral' for frequent physical and spiritual purifications. His altar consists of a life-size figure of Christ playing soccer, a majestic carving of Cain, carved apostles and angels. In the centre was a giant metallic flag pole, adorned with bright red and orange reflectors and plastic cherubs. To the left of the altar was a circular structure insulated with thick layers of straw, and to the right was a drop to the village and the riverbed below.

Following Hlungwane from the site of one carving to another, I was suddenly separated from our group when I paused to take in the brisk morning light, as it glowed green on the empty river bed. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a carved fish propped up against a tree. It was approximately twelve feet long, its massive body undulating with invisible currents in a waterless place. Hlungwane claims never to have seen a living fish, yet has made numerous carvings of them, their religious significance seeming to have been 'divinely' conveyed: Christ, Divine Fish, and 'fisher of men,' Hlungwane..." my name is fish...my heart catches things"(15). A firm believer that his God works through him, Hlungwane is one of the few 'artists' who still remains true to his source- Divine inspiration.

Doctor Phutuma Seoka (herbalist, 'magician', boxer, barber,

artist), on the other hand, is a man who seems to have lost his way. Once a highly respected transcriber of dreams, Phutuma has been 'led astray' by his recent success. An artist who makes "beautiful things for white people" and whose 'beautiful things' are given fresh coats of paint without his knowledge or consent, Puthuma has been shunned by his community.

When asked about his 'inspiration,' he told us of a dream that he'd had of a lion or tiger- he hadn't been able to remember which- walking through his yard. Without alluding to the symbolism of the dream, he told of how, when he began carving the lion, his hand, with a will of its own, carved the tiger. God worked through him then. Now, he works through his sons. No longer able to keep up with demands for his work, he has entrusted his soul to others, happy (it seems) to reap the material rewards of their work.

The 'old' Phutuma, nevertheless, is carved into numerous knotted tree trunks around his yard. Cynical pink faces with black beards and glaring white teeth characterize an untamable and unacquirable art, an art at the mercy of nature, and destined to die only with the trees.

For Nelson Mukhuba, an artist whom we might have visited, the future held no promise of redemption or forgiveness. His sudden success with his elegant and agile dancers, golfers and boxers was soon coloured by a feeling of doom and futility. Of a

carving he made of a man literally tearing his chest open, he said " I am an artist that can see inside the wood...I can see the picture while the wood is still on the tree. I am the doctor of wood because I can see inside the wood "(16). Mukhuba's tortured, sometimes even monstrous carvings, foreshadowed the violent murder and suicide he was soon to enact. After a ritual purging which left his wife and his two daughters dead, he set fire to his history and then hung himself from a tree.

In the late 1950's, Mukhuba worked as an assistant to stage electricians in whites-only theatres in Johannesburg. He went on to form his own band, and it was during this time that he began developing carving skills. Mukhuba was almost sixty years old by the time he started showing his carvings. Although his talent was recognized early on, people were not always willing to pay for it. The Venda government used his work, unacknowledged, on postage stamps, and the Sibasa Sun Hotel (and casino) used examples of his work as free decor.

In recent years, as overseas collectors have moved further south in their quest for exotica, the local art market has been consumed by enthusiasts. Some, it seems, are 'rediscovering' their cultural identities, while others are attempting to alleviate their racial guilt. The South African government has not imposed any restrictions on the buying, selling or exporting of black arts and crafts. This has left many rural areas

completely drained within the space of about four years. In many ways, what has taken place is a colonization of African traditions, rendering them exotica without any attempt to understand the purpose for which the objects were made or the artists' personal motivation for making them. The result is an ignorant buyer re-selling to a naive consumer, who is buying the 'Africaness' far more than the art itself. Objects are incorrectly labeled, mispriced and wrongly attributed. This greedy, consumerist culture has, again, left the artist ambivalent, exploited and invisible.

Survival is the primary concern for many artists, especially for those who have no democratic rights, who are in exile in their own country, and who have barely survived in the past. It is not surprising, therefore, that Nelson Mukhuba chose to leave this schizophrenic society, nor that Doctor Phutuma Seoka got swept away by unprecedented success, losing the respect of his community in the cross-current. Jackson Hlungwane, sculptor, shaman, and curiomaker, who stated so emphatically that he would never part with the sculptures made for his stone 'cathedral' appears to be doing exactly that. Noria Mabasa continues to please her patrons with her colourful clay figures, while simultaneously transforming oral folklore and dream imagery into carved visions. The degree to which each of these artists have been co-opted by the same society that has demeaned and humiliated them for centuries varies, but the results are tragic

for all. What remains to be seen is how long this unfortunate purge is allowed to continue, unchallenged and without moral conscience.

ART AND PROPAGANDA

The Voortrekker Monument stands on a hill just outside of Pretoria, South Africa's capital city. When I visited the monument as a twelve year old child on a compulsory field-trip, I was struck by its bitterly cold, austere and grandiose presence. Now, on my second visit, accompanied by my guest, and later, on a third, accompanied by my younger brother and sister, my observations were unchanged, although more acute. An enormous structure, the monument bears no relationship to the environment. It is simply and unsympathetically planted on the hilltop, and although one has the sense that the structure has no roots, the sheer scale and 'weight' of it gives one the feeling that it is immovable. The external design communicates far more about Afrikaans culture than do the narrative, stone-relief murals which line the four interior walls.

In addition, located beyond the circular, protective wall that surrounds the monument, stands a model of the "Battle of Blood River"(17) which displays, further, Afrikaner nationalism and racist ideology. We stumbled upon this incredulous sight as we wandered through an indigenous garden. Huge aloe plants and trees, flowering cacti, and protea bushes set the scene for a miniature Afrikaner 'laager' (a circle of ox-wagons). As we approached the 'laager,' we noticed a stream of black pebbles marching in neat rows up to it. The same black pebbles led us away from the 'laager,' through the bushes, and down a slight incline to a life-size model of an African 'kraal' (a group of round straw huts). 'Overwhelmed' by nature and by 'hordes' of

Zulu warriors, the Afrikaner proudly exhibits his victory at Blood River. More shocking than this depiction of the 'innocent' Afrikaner, outnumbered and attacked by vicious 'savages,' was a live enactment of the battle by three Afrikaans children. Before our eyes, the children, armed with toy rifles, 'shot' at various spectators, all in the presence of two black men who were manicuring this environment of their own oppression.

Children were again the vessels for adult hatred when I visited, perhaps the world's only, Police Museum. Containing undisguised propaganda, the museum's sole purpose is to instill fear in those who are either too young or too ignorant to know better. It is this conjured fear that motivates young Afrikaans children to become defenders of their parents' white supremacist nation.

Although we were asked to show identification at a place between armed soldiers and heavy security bars, I managed to record one preposterous image after another unchallenged. The first floor hallway contained displays of different torture devices side-by-side with portraits of past South African Prime Ministers. Moving from one room to another, viewing one exhibit after another, I felt both angered and disgusted. Reconstructions of brutal crimes, some perpetrated by black people on 'innocent' white people, others by 'witch-doctors' on victims of 'tribal rites', were all documented by gory photographs and/or amateurish plaster-of-paris models.

One display of a larger-than-life face of a black man glaring wickedly through the rear window of a real car, his raised arm wielding a machete above the barely visible body of a white woman, still haunts me to this day.

Unlike the makers of many other exhibits of this nature, who at least attempt to create the illusion of something real, the 'artists' who make these types of displays are not at all concerned with 'truth' to the subjects at their mercy. The viewer never feels 'tricked' by an ambiguous play of reality and illusion. The figures are clearly 'false,' their features stereotypical, their attire plastic. Unfortunately, these visual deficiencies do not distract the susceptible viewer from the slanderous viewpoint these displays are intended to portray.

We were greeted at the second floor exhibit by a large, red-drenched painting of Lenin. The 'communist onslaught' (18), a term used constantly in the media by white officials, is the focus for this series of displays. Here, in the eyes of the white regime and its supporters, the Soviet Union is the perpetrator, through the African National Congress (19), of inhumane crimes. Displays of the residue of bomb blasts include pieces of the clothing of the bomb's victims, smatterings of glass and rubber, and photographs of dismembered body parts. One moment, I was unable to restrain my incredulous laughter, and the next, I was feeling nauseous with the realization that this indoctrination results in the deadly manipulation of the daily

lives of all South Africans. These images are taken further still, flooding the state-controlled media and instilling dogmatism, hatred and fear, over and over again. In the realm of 'officialdom,' this is the only point of view presented. Subsequently, it is left to artists and cultural workers to present alternative images, and it is in this role that many artists now find themselves.

The National Arts Festival, of which I spoke in the introductory pages of this paper, encompasses both visual and performing arts. While very few visual images on exhibit there depicted social or political concerns, many of the theatrical presentations did. To my surprise, the viewpoints expressed in the twenty or so productions I saw there were many and varied. Large and small-scale productions were clearly propagandist, while other, more experimental pieces, attempted to bring diverse cultural styles together, both formally and thematically.

I was fortunate to see a play called Isegazini (which means, 'it's in the blood'), both at the Festival in Grahamstown and in a black township outside of the coastal city of Port Elizabeth. Isegazini is one of many examples of the current trend by white South African actors, musicians and artists to 'Africanize' their art forms. 'Acculturation' is the key term here, where, in a production such as Isegazini, a white artist has attempted to create a new 'culture' by borrowing

elements of black culture and interspersing them with elements of white culture. The response to the play was vastly different in the two contexts in which I saw it performed. The ninety-nine percent white audience at the Festival gave the play a standing ovation, while the all-black audience in New Brighton township laughed out loud during many of the parts that had evoked tears in the former setting. Unfortunately, attempts such as this one fail dismally, because the 'solutions' adopted by many artists are simplistic and arrogant. It is not the place of white South Africans to suddenly, in their new identification as 'Africans,' colonize black culture, usurping it without the consent of those whom they now imitate.

In a lecture entitled "The Interrupted Dialogue: The Visual Arts and Society in the Twentieth Century," Marilyn Martin illuminated the patronizing attitude of many white artists, critics, and art historians producing and writing about an art involved with the process of 'acculturation.' She said:

An aspect which requires attention in this consideration of art to society is that of acculturation. The 'in-words' recently have been 'transitional' and 'Africanisation'... 'transition' implies that the two traditions are being linked... Marion Arnold brings about a reconciliation, between the 'primitive' and the 'civilized', between the past and the present, between Europe and Africa. Karel Nel includes patterned guinea fowl, indigenous beadwork, dolls and traditional sculptures in the most cerebral and mystical conceptions... he points to a continued **dialogue** (my emphasis) between tribal ritual and space age technology (20).

To think that by merely borrowing elements of African culture, a fusion takes place, is simply to overlook the complexity and sensitivity of the situation and to denigrate the source altogether. Because the premise is false, furthermore, the promiscuous borrowings of artists such as those mentioned by Marilyn Martin, appear as decorative additions, nothing more. Indigenous black culture has to be de-colonized and re-vitalized by black South Africans themselves before authentic 'acculturation' can take place.

The fact that many South Africans have not recognised the necessity for a fundamental shift in control is evident not only in plays like Isegazini and the artwork of Marion Arnold and Karel Nel, but in much of the art being made in South Africa in general. In another lecture entitled "Theatre and Society in South Africa," Ian Steadman said the following:

With very few exceptions, white theatre practitioners have assumed that their mandate is to make up for past omissions by providing black theatre practitioners with those skills and opportunities (previously denied) which will enable them to make their way in the (now slightly reformed) theatre industry. Their error lies in assuming that their energies should be directed at educating others. They, should, of course, rather focus on reeducating themselves. Like so much in South African cultural life, it is not what must be learnt that is important, but what must be unlearnt (21).

What the majority of white South Africans do not choose to see is work being done by 'cultural workers' in black urban areas.

One of the most important attributes of this work is the value it places on 'collective' practices in community art centres and theatre cooperatives. As tools for social action, community theatre is used in literacy programmes, health education programmes and union organizing in many Third World countries.

Community theatre serves two general functions: first, consciousness raising, and second, as 'goal-oriented' theatre, it provides solutions to specific problems. The Winterveld squatter camp (22) is an example of a community that utilized both of these methods of community theatre. First, it used role-playing exercises to explore medical needs, the problems of unemployment and education, and the psychological effects of squatter life. Later, the project moved from extending awareness to showing people how to cope with these problems. An example of this was a dramatised scene showing the community-audience how to cultivate food from meagre resources. Such scenes extend the function of theatre from consciousness-raising to social action.

Following the performance of Isegazini in New Brighton township, the audience buzzed in excited anticipation of a performance of The General Motors Workers' Play. This theatre piece is one of the many union plays currently circulating in South Africa. Conceived of and performed by the workers themselves, the plays serve to inform their audiences of their right to strike, of their right to demand that certain safety

standards be met and to instill in the worker a general sense of control in his/her work situation. There is clearly no desire to consider the aesthetics of the production. The only consideration is that the message be as clear as possible. The result is a re-creation of life in the most literal sense. Water is boiled from a kettle, served by a woman to a man, who then waits until it is cool enough to drink. Each scene is introduced by a voice from behind the scenes, and the identical words are carried across the front of the stage on placards. Nothing is left to chance.

In many of the larger cities and townships, community arts centres serve as meeting places for cultural organizing. It is in these centres, too, that mass-media production, in the form of posters, banners, T-shirts and pamphlets, is taught and carried out. As in most repressive societies, the media are controlled with an iron fist by the Nationalist regime in South Africa. It follows, therefore, that if the alternative media are to serve their purpose at all, they have to do so with minimal visibility. It is not unusual to learn of one pamphlet being quietly circulated through numerous city blocks in the course of an evening, disseminating information to large groups of people. It is in this manner that large gatherings can be organized without any overt advertising, taking the police by surprise.

In South Africa, the task for art is huge. Yet, the reversal of the process of an education intended to demean and stultify

black consciousness is not going to be achieved by the flaming appeal of a poem. This process can only take place in the context of the revolutionary process itself, where South Africa's black majority begins to experience itself, for the first time since colonization, as the author of its own actions and statements. Peter Horn, in his review of Peter Weiss' The Aesthetics of Resistance, wrote the following:

The cruel aesthetics of past and present regimes in South Africa limits the discourse to elites and their elaborate signs, leaving the masses a simplified and distorted discourse which inactivates them as subjects and steers them as automata in an economics of profit and a game of power politics. And to be dismissed with popular trash, adapted to the limitations of the worker's class with concise phrases condescendingly couched in simple language is of no help either (23).

Propaganda in the hands of the state is clearly frightening in its ability to evoke wide-spread fear and paranoia. In the hands of revolutionary educators, however, its role is constructive rather than destructive, **unless** it becomes the only acceptable form of medium and message. In other words, 'simple language' does have a place in the process of consciousness-raising and mobilizing large numbers of people working for radical change. The tendency, however, in revolutionary societies is to replace art with propaganda. Cultural workers need to recognise that dogma should not replace dogma and that art has a major part to play in the deconstruction of the hardened dogmas of the society they wish to replace.

Art constantly insists on the complexity of the situation and often the same situation demands simplicity. Propaganda, which intends to have an immediate and short-term effect, cannot allow for misunderstanding. Art, however, accepts and reflects the ambiguities of life, reminding us that nothing is absolute, that nothing is permanent. It allows us, then, to accept human vulnerability and to respect the right to freedom of expression. With this basic human right, individuals will feel empowered by self-direction and will actively become determinants of their own futures.

NOTES

1. George McCall Theal's "HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA", referred to by Christopher Saunders in his essay "HISTORIANS AND APARTHEID", in "SOUTH AFRICA IN QUESTION", John Lonsdale, ed., page 14.
2. Ibid., page 14. Theal believed, like all white supremacists, that blacks are inferior to whites, that black culture is 'primitive', as opposed to 'developed' and that whites have a specific role to play in the 'advancement' of 'mankind' in the process of evolution.
3. C.M. Till, "THE NEGLECTED TRADITION: TOWARDS A NEW HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN ART (1930-1988)", page 5.
4. Ibid., page 7.
5. Quoted from the "1820 SETTLERS MONUMENT" brochure, Grahamstown, South Africa, 1987.
6. IDAF, "APARTHEID; THE FACTS", page 9.
7. Gavin Younge, "DEAD IN ONE'S OWN LIFETIME; ART IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA", page 12.
8. Christopher Saunders, "HISTORIANS AND APARTHEID", in "SOUTH AFRICA IN QUESTION", John Lonsdale, ed.
9. Adam Kuper, quotes the 1954 report of the Tomlinson Commission, formally known as the "Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa", in his essay "ANTHROPOLOGY AND APARTHEID", "SOUTH AFRICA IN QUESTION", page 37.
10. Christopher Saunders, "HISTORIANS AND APARTHEID", in "SOUTH AFRICA IN QUESTION", John Lonsdale, ed.
11. Ibid., page 17.
12. Adam Kuper quotes W.W.M. Eiselen, in his essay "ANTHROPOLOGY AND APARTHEID", "SOUTH AFRICA IN QUESTION", John Lonsdale, ed., page 40.
13. On June 16th, 1976, police shot at school children protesting apartheid education.

14. Gavin Younge, "ART OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS".
15. Gavin Younge, quotes Jackson Hlungwane, "ADA, VOLUME 2", page 27.
16. Gavin Younge, quotes Nelson Mukhuba, "ADA, VOLUME 3", page 11.
17. The Battle of Blood River was fought between the Boers and the Zulus, the Boers slaughtering thousands of Zulu warriors and claiming victory.
18. see "TOTAL ONSLAUGHT", glossary of terms.
19. The African National Congress struggled to regain equilibrium after the Sharpeville Massacre, and laid plans for the peaceful protest of May 1961. African leaders had, as a result of the massacre, begun reassessing their attitudes towards violence. Until this time, Nelson Mandela, by then the leading figure of the ANC, apparently retained the hope that nonviolent pressures might still persuade the whites to change their policies. But the suppression of the protest on the eve of the inauguration of the Republic led Mandela to conclude that the government was "relying exclusively on violence with which to answer our people and their demands." "Fifty years of nonviolence," he declared, had "brought the African people nothing but more and more repressive legislation." Now "only two choices" were left: "submit or fight." In June 1961 Mandela and other ANC leaders agreed the time had come to fight. Even then and until the 1970's, however, violence was to be limited to property, such as the power pylons and symbols of the state. In the 1980's, in response to military aggression in the townships, the ANC began targeting military headquarters, and white South Africans began to experience, for the first time in the country's history, the strategy for violent retaliation for the liberation of black South Africans. This strategy is dependent on the supply of weapons from beyond the borders of South Africa since weapons are unavailable to black South African freedom fighters. The United States has offered no support to the ANC, and as a consequence, the ANC has been forced to accept military and humanitarian aid from the Soviet Union.
From SOUTH AFRICA : TIME RUNNING OUT", PAGE 174
20. Marilyn Martin, "THE INTERRUPTED DIALOGUE: THE VISUAL ARTS AND SOCIETY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY", lecture delivered at the National Arts Festival, 1987.
21. Ian Steadman, "THEATRE AND SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA", lecture delivered at the National Arts Festival, 1987.

22. Ibid.

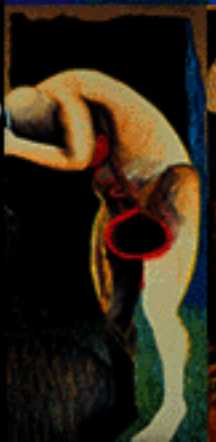
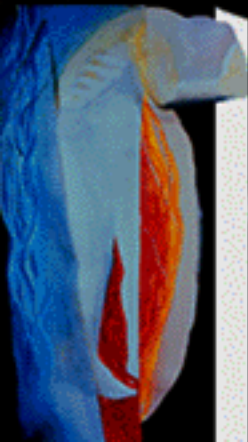
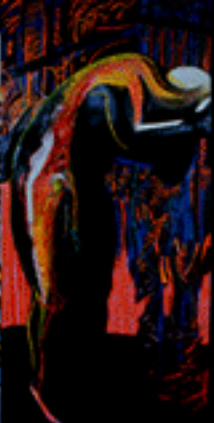
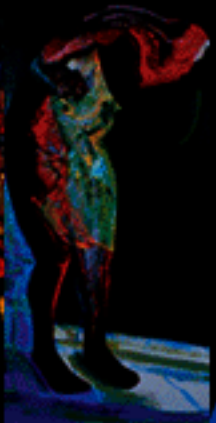
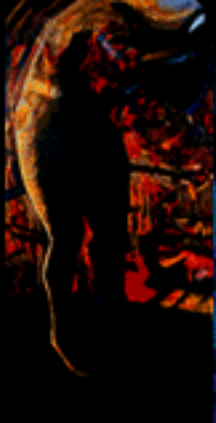
23. Peter Horn, "THE AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE", page 9.

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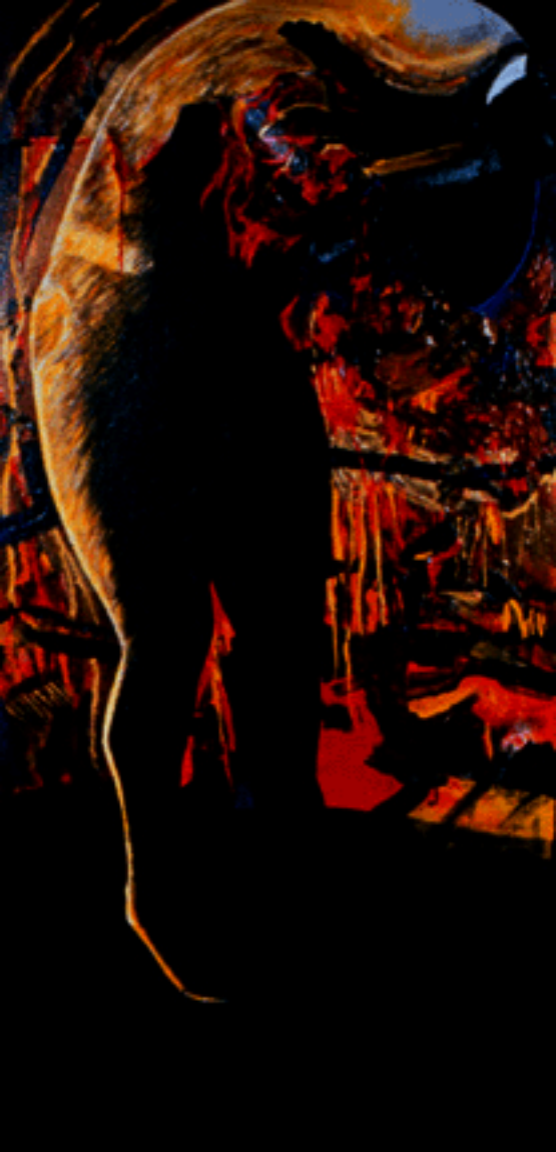
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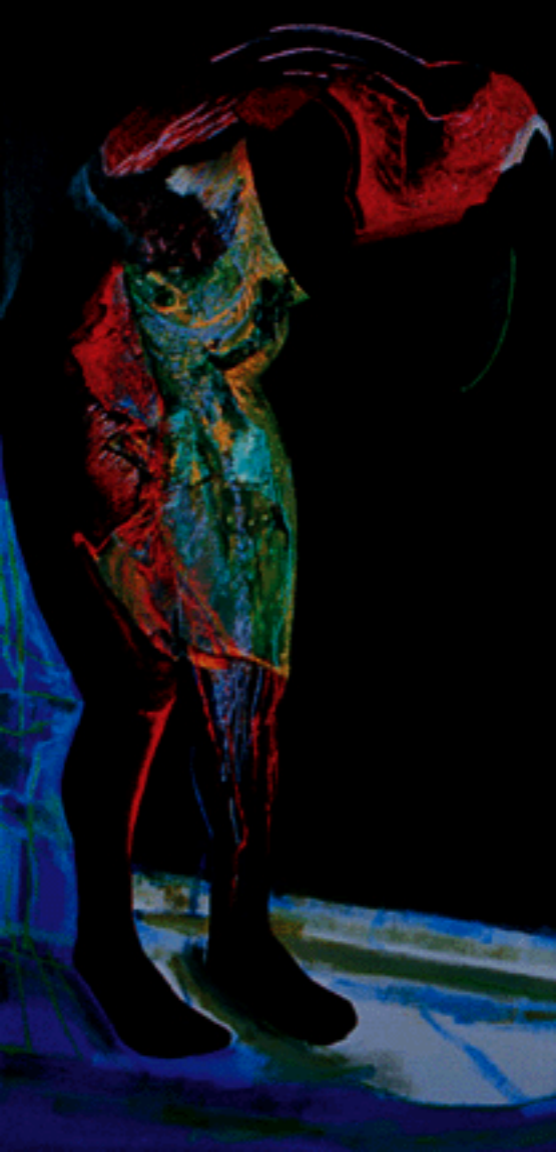
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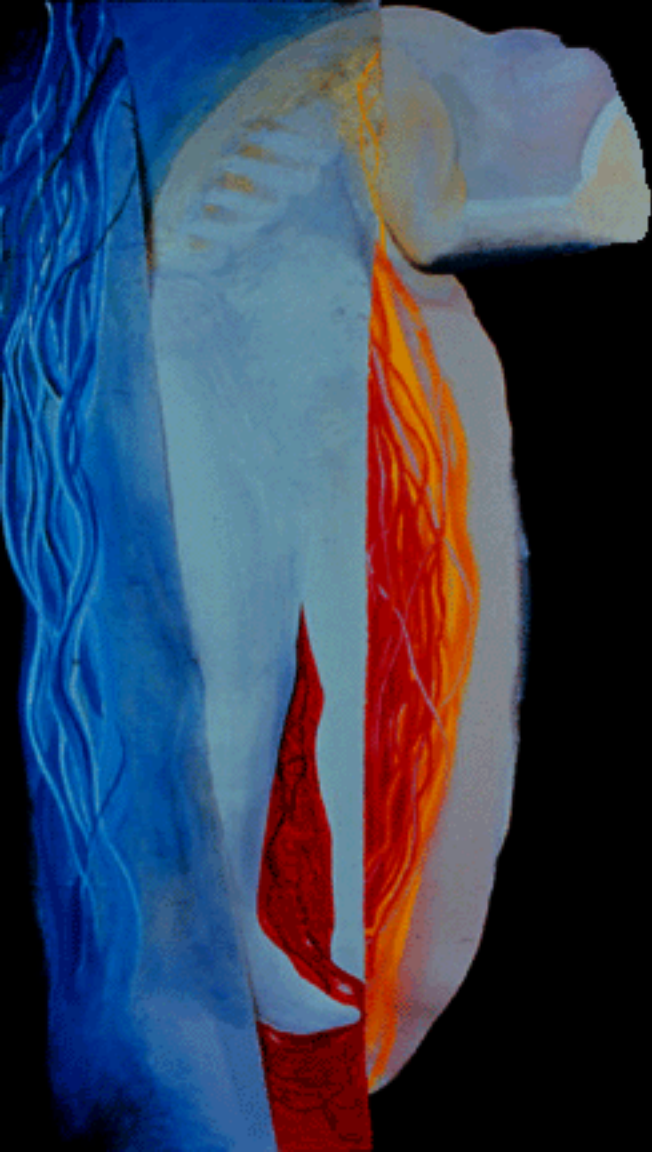






















THE PAINTINGS

Eight years ago, I climbed a crusty, brittle mine-dump for the first time: the city sprawled below and before me; rusted, eroded coco pans lay tangled here and there with razor-sharp blades of grass, an eery cemetery, its victims buried haphazardly in a senseless, greedy past. A week later I visited a working mine; a miner posed proudly before a shiny black coco pan while my camera froze the scene forever. The same camera recorded images of abandoned mines and their mechanical allies for months after that. One particular image of steel, figure-like apparatuses strung up with huge chains by their 'heads', became the basis for a series of paintings made between 1984 and 1986. The metaphor was discarded for the figure in 1987, and a series of paintings portraying social, economic and political conditions of apartheid-South Africa was begun.

The panels were begun at the end of 1987. The series narrates a process of self-actualization and change. I began with the premise that South Africa's black majority, while victimized by racial and economic oppression, is mobilizing to determine its own future. What inevitably emerged is a series of self-portraits; the figure, flat to begin with, gradually begins to force its way out of the canvas. Parts emerge in relief, and slowly the figure gives birth to its empowered self.

SERIES ONE

To a young Johannesburg-born child, the majestic goldmine dumps which dotted the outskirts of the city inspired little more than curiosity as to why grass was planted in neat rows along the sides of them and how the rock became fine gold dust. In school, I was taught that miners were guided through maze-like tunnels by small flashlights attached to their hard-hats, that canaries were carried with them- their deaths a sign that oxygen was running out. I also remember photographs of black miners pressed against pounding drills, sweat running in streams from dust-masked eyes and deafened ears. Elevators hurtled two miles down into pitch-blackness, their passengers returning twelve hours later, numb with heat and exhaustion, aching with hunger and thirst- sometimes into night, sometimes long dead...

1200 men are injured and 600 killed in mining accidents each year.

...The elevators spit their passengers into the loneliness of night. Men drag themselves through rows of indistinguishable buildings, walk beside endless rows of concrete beds, finally reaching no.68, no.576, no.1267. Aching bodies lie down dreaming of vast open spaces, star-strewn skies, and silences interrupted only by the soft breath of wife, mother, son, lover.

Most miners see their families for only three weeks of each year.

The shaftheads of those Johannesburg mines still remain. Only they and their apartheid victims know the severity and the costliness of a system that renders human life worthless while simultaneously producing unfathomed wealth for the privileged few.

SERIES TWO

We approached Noria Mabasa's home on foot, winding our way through other peoples' yards to hers which lay on the edge of dry earth, thorny scrub and blue sky. We were oblivious intruders, entering the womb of a woman who had long ago lost her husband to the mines, and more recently, to the hands of murders on a dark township street. Noria greeted us dressed in mourning; the sadness in her eyes was unavoidable and yet, we stayed.

The entrance to Noria's home was flanked on either side by a clay female figure: their backs turned to the outside world, they compelled us to enter the 'safe' space over which they watch. The sculptures were raw, eroded by wind and sun, crumbling, yet assuring in their posture. A large clay policeman, planted in flowering shrubs, protected Noria's room which stood to the right of the courtyard. Many smaller policemen lay scattered in the brush behind the house, camouflaged by dust, disguised by the chickens perched on their shoulders; more chickens fluttered around a mound of shards, relics or trash, or both. Around the corner, a small clay man in a black suit leaned against a low wall, his painted head cracked open to reveal his earthy skin. Noria, it seems, has been persuaded to 'dress' her figures as colonial 'types'- businessmen and clergymen inhabit craft stores, galleries, museums and private homes.

Since the time of my visit, the reddish-brown clay walls have been adorned with colourful, organic shapes. The entrance-way figures have been replaced by two new figures: on the left, a woman, naked except for a small beaded apron; on the right, a male city-dweller clothed in suit and hat. Noria's rural presence is re-united with her husbands urban absence.

