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Vigwecet Aly ica,
Tlueâ\200\224-Spt. (484.

GÃ©rard Sekolo.
eer eeREES

A South African artist

Â« The cruel hand that does shatter happiness and hopes
of the neighbour may be the result of a pronounced sel-
fishness, while this selfishness be the result of lack in
self confidence; and the latter happens to b
defect, that may cripple â\200\224 the vi
which is: â\200\224 Creative Art.Â» Â°

f -
Gentlemen,

As you have asked me in your last letter to contribute my
thoughts in the congress of Negro Artists and Writers by having to.
tell in short of the difficulties confronting a South African Negro |
in Art, I gladly take up this seals to show you the picture
of the situation as | personally see it and as I five personally

rlue of the human mind

experienced it.

Let me therefore begin my letter b laying a stress on the factâ\200\231
that I yates this but asvanyartistyas,1 have

given my whole livin

Unfortunately as a result of some political activities, the freedom I should expect: from my community (as a South African citizen) is so narrow that often my creative power is diminished for I personally think ;

as Sey

er ephemeral
dignity > for

In my country unhappily this freedom is not evenly granted to artists of all those belonging to the white skin - have almost all the liberty they may desire, those of the less white skin (mixed blood) have according to the look of their colour, much less room to roam in, but the plain black ones have almost no room at all! a
' Any member of the community belonging to the two latter groups is: refused admission in all the Art schools, and no social gathering of the white group would tolerate his presence !

This is the law of the country | . . .

As we know that creative art is opposed to this law of the human beings by order of their colour skin, the Negro artist therefore feels often deprived of his rights as a full citizen to contribute

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is a great.

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in art towards the pride and dignity of his countryâ\200\231 in which he is made an outcast. i

- It could be proved in many ways that Art does not accept the colour line.

~ In my Â¢ p for instance, .1 have seen on many occasions pure white members of the community â\200\224 artists or art loving people, sneak out of bounds laid out by the law to meet me halfway so as to exonerate views on this interior human language? which is the pride and dignity of all mankind. I had at one time that I left from one small town where I was a school teacher for little children (little Negroes of course) and the biggest city in my country â\200\224 Johannesburg, where during first few weeks I was introduced to a white young lady artist.â\200\231

This happened in the office room of an English schoolmaster belonging to the community of Resurrection in the Anglican church) who directed 2 Negro boarding school, and who soon became an enthusiastic admirer of my paintings. ~â\200\224 ,

This young lady artistâ\200\231 was also wary indeed she immediately offered to as I had no chance at all to leave

they only â\200\230would admit but purely white student

Although I was happy about a Meglio but accepted this offer and went to her for two of I b During this time I had to sneak in and out like a frightened cat for I know just how serious an offence it was before fact-a crime, for 4 Negro to visit a purely white lady : matter where, how or why :

of course knew how serious it was put nevertheless. tion . are me time, I could have under:

our bond, yet I now understand and accepts no colour bar. =

my

never say back and ever better with my great appetite. She was SO sweet as even to feed me 1 the days we were working together 1

her studio. But as he had the obligation to join her family during this hour, she'd arrange that the Negro servant brings me a very sumptuous meal on a tray all neatly laid out. ;

My first experience of this big lack was like a real Â¢ hold from

blues 2 insomuch that very surprisingly, even my habitual keen appetite had let me down \ As more restless of these unlawful frequent: came to an end, but did not say I insist on my continuation. So excuse the time went to Â¥ I was on the scene â\200\234of my subject matter. somehow set away from it all, for I ~â\200\224- Â«should 2

ever catch me bere trying to be smart, then not a single person
on earth could take its teeth away from wy throat D514
left and went to my lawfully area â\200\224 the native

da,
the many jllustrations (in my personal eases) ft

rove that art accepts no colour bar, 15 of 9 case when one Jay in
the office room of the English master (at the Negro Boordins

artist |

A SOUTH AFRICAN ARTIST

School) â\204ç] was j ntroduced to a white at

al ? er, Not as a white Boss
; â\200\230Negro and imposing his superiority upon the inferiority

of a Negro, a though he knew all about standard mind |
As I knew that in the teaching job my spare time was too little
for the amount of work I had in mind, then I thought of looking

ar another type of a job that would at least leave me my evenings
ree,

This time I thought it mi
i truck upon one as_

at

ght have been simple and instructive -

} Baliery., (â\200\231 appily
, : ban has been lif-
t may mean a happy evening for a hungry Negro

now very recent
ted !) so the resu

One of my illustrations showing â\200\230that the colour bar bears an
unfounded logic in art is a case of when my English master friend
(at the Negro Boarding School) took with him one dav a

wo of mv
aintings to be judged by a hanging committee of the annual South
Afsicanâ\200\230Art Exhibitlon, thes two paintings were (eerornineyy

me) accepted and after the opening of this show, were even.
very attract

vely reproduced in the daily newspapers worded :

â\200\230his filled me with great excitment, although I did not believe
in the last two words â\200\224 Â«house boyÂ» for I has just failed to
pass as a floor sweeper:in the municipal art gallery. But all the
same I felt that things were moving, for, these two Pieces were
even pongnt by white people (of course) and my great delight at:
re was by far higher than the price I received for the two pain-
ings. ,

I was still warm as a result of this big happening, for it was
the first of its kind in the history'of South Africa, when one day
I received a letter from one of the few art authorities inviting me
to. send in two other pieces of my work to another exhibition of
a small-group of which he was the director.

On my receiving this letter I could not have expected greater .
happiness in life for I thought that â\200\224 after all I did not need ary-
more feel guilty of being in this world ; but this illusion was soon
intervacted by frequent unhappy scenes and various obstacles in
my way : for Â« Here I am in this big golden city of Johannesburg,
sihere the tall beautiful buildings go ne in the sky; Down there
accross the road I can see a Grore of Negroes on the go !... Look.
as they go with those hands in those chains! and behind goes a
white man with pride! In a black helmet, sparkling buttons and a
gun by his side |...

Around that corner over there â\200\224 awaits a white policemanâ\200\231s â\200\224
van : â\200\230 :

Into that van each Negro Goes,

They pushed, Andâ\200\231Bang

They closed that door! .

While evâ\200\231ry hand in all those chains

Still had remained

Oh,

What a shame !... ?

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Now they go to jail for they've failed to produce a complete series of their identification papers 1? st

What does all this mean? Is ev'ry one of those men a criminal ?... Perhaps !!!!?

Scenes of this nature were very common, So that I later on just learned to be stubborn and refused to let a drop of tear go from my eyes.

_ However, I felt that my works of art were so far being appreciated by handful of while artists and art loving people. But still I lived in a constant fear. What aggravated my eas was the fact my papers too were not a job â\200\224 this being the only way to get them all up-to-date. ,

Somehow,veryâ\200\231 fortunately I was saved from many dark and ugly situations by one of my old papers, which identified me as a school teacher, But this did not always satisfy the man jin the black helmet, for: the paper showed I was a school teacher else where not in Johannesburg.

So I had always to make up & little story â\200\224 that I had come

all in a hurry to see the sick and am going back the same evening to where I belonged |

It was through the help of my English friend (the school master) that this obstacle was finally Cleared off. As one of this teachers had fallen ill in the hospital, he therefore appointed me to replace this member of the staff. Here once more, I had to teach the little children, and within a month and two weeks the teacher had recovered, and I had to go; but with a brand new pass in my pocket I felt | was walking on air ! Now I can be able to renew even my annual papers too, and can go all the streets up

and down looking for a job. This is real life now, I am a free man.

and an accepted artist too |> .

It was two days after my service at the school had come to an end, that I was going up one street, still looking around for a while: but full of confidence and free from fear of the man in the black helmet, when I noticed outside one of the buildings, a poster showing that inside there was an exhibition of paintings going on. I as a painter was naturally attracted to go in and see what other painters do. So following the direction of the arrows I walked up the stairs to the second floor, turning, to my right I here I could see already from outside. huge Flocks of women in long beautiful dresses, some were even holding bunches of roses to give the finishing touches to their charm. This time I had already taken my hat off and my right foot into the hall when suddenly a man came rushing at me vigorously shaking the inside of his one hand in my face and pointing emphatically with the other to the direction I came from ! as usual.

All this had taken me by surprise just like a car accident and I was so flabbergasted that I did not even have time to dare say I was an artist myself,

Back to the street I had to go with my head full of confusion once more and this time even less confident I walked into the bureau of the boss with my hat in the hand pleading for a job. few hours later. on the same day as I was standing on the pavement trying to think what way I should take, I had done almost all the buildings of the area, across the street I noticed, the policeman, in the usual black helmet who was beckoning me to

Very early

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his side. But, as I was not particularly enthusiastic to meet him, I rushed hesitatingly, dodging the traffic. When

I got to the spot he was standing, I had my brand new

papers all in my one hand with my hat in the other, and

my knees slightly shivering before him, just like an amateur entertainer with a stage fright !

After carefully looking through each paper he then commanded me to go on, and not just stand on one spot.

At this I was for a moment dazzled as I had just been trying to work out my next direction; however, I soon got out of the trance, turned quickly to the direction of my back and got away. ;

I felt very uneasy with my new papers only after I had been perfectly sure I was completely out of his sight !

My days with the new papers were not as bright as all that after all. However one afternoon I had called on my English friend and was introduced to another friend of his who owned an Art gallery. He also took interest in my paintings and even agreed to hold a small exhibition for me. .

This show was so successful I sold each of the 14 paintings at two guineas a piece all this happening within two days.

I could hardly believe myself, This joy was simply breath taking !
Even the idea of a job I can leave out for a while for, I have no luck that way at all. :

As I did leave it out, it was not long that a real big surprise came my way: .. One of my paintings has been bought by the municipal Art gallery .? > This gallery that had refused to take me as a floor cleaner, but now going to hang my paintings side by side with the works of other white artists ?... I just hope that I am not dreaming. » .

Life becomes real worth living for now I can proudly walk into a paint-shop, buy my art materials, and work with new courage. for I know that there are however certain white people who are conscious of the fact that even Negroes do feel the need for this interior human language which is the virtue of the mind and a pride to any living community.

It is therefore the law that imposes colour line, has failed to realise all its pride >.

As I had just shortly made some money Now, and had bought some materials for my work, I now took the brush almost with my two hands and painted my native location street scenes - 6. q: the backyards with women digging holes in the ground to bury their unlawful intoxicating drinks. :

I very often would have an inspiration after a police raid was

erformed in these back yards by a storm of the men in the black

elmets, sparkling buttons and each a a by the side, who in.
their company had Negro police too! With the latter, although
gutorised with all the rights to arrest other Negroes, but may not
lift one finger or have a Say in the case of a white citizen doing
something he may imagine unlawful | pay

This Negro police also runs short of several other qualifica-
tions e. q. the black helmet etc... | All the same he does wear a
uniform Sut a khaki one. The hat is of a broad brim turned up-
wards on the one side, the buttons rather modest, but a pair of Â©
big boots with a knob at the end, and no gun by the side. Howe-
ver round his waist there is a tight belt with a shine of a pair or .

H handcuffs by his side.

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These raids would sometimes be concentrated mainly on the men whose papers were not all in order and would take place rather early in the mornings as the labourer leaves his home on his way to work.

On a morning like this I would try to avoid going to town (should I be in need of some materials) until the raid was thinned out; for although my papers were all in order, I hated taking part in this whole thing, moreover that one had to fall into a long line and had to wait till his turn came to be checked.

But as these operations very often lasted till noon time or very much later, I sometimes just got tough and went it through, for however round about 11.30 a.m, the queues of the unchecked ones

â\200\230would have grown much smaller, leaving several lines of the lavy offenders chained together and waiting for police vans to load - them away.

Sometimes they would be marched slowly up one street and down by the other, while another group of the police is doing some little extras for the day in the back yards.

The women caught with selling their drinks or in possession, sometimes with their children on their backs, would have to join the lines. Although chains were not frequently used on women, during these raids. .

For my subject matter I would include scenes of little children dressed in ragged clothes, some plainly naked playing with old rusted tins. The interiors of houses where quite often families shared one room. The fruit seller and the location shops. I would also paint the Sunday parties (particularly exciting) which were generally composed of several styles of dancing, loud and gay shouts almost drowning the sing-song part of the show. Here the music would be of very piercing notes and cheerful carefree tunes too would be included. .

These parties were almost free from the police disturbances,
and here women of the backyards would make good business on
their skokian drinks ; for after the men had helped themselves to
a few tins of this beverage, they would often become so happy-
go-lucky and carefree that the police generally thought it rather
unwise paying them regular visits on such occasions.

ohannesburg â\200\224 the great city of gold and from day

i i ith thirst to create and to enjoy
us well th i Artists with whom I might
have exchanged ideas in Art. But in this domain | felt almost alone
for the only two Negro Artists I knew, lived in areas very far apart
from. one another and far from mine. So I would always find it
difficult to contact them as they had to search for other means of
making a living: , = . â\200\230

However I had my way always opened to visit this English
master friend, and to go to the art gallery which handled my
works ; although these two places were quite a long way from my
nalive location, and taking a trip to any of them did not always
give me the mental comfort I desired, for once more I'd meet some Â»
of those ugly scenes I -had expected to see â\200\224. (in spite of the fact
that it was through these ugly scenes I had to earn my, meagre
living) but it was also through this gallery that for the first time
in my life I enjoyed the freedom to see the works of other white
artists and to observe their technique. ;

. This has heen of great belp to me. â\200\224 I just had to Jearn in

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1 the â\200\230 the long run to ignore the attitude of certain Customers that could
glace Stare at me from down upwards i for this reason â\200\224 whenever there Â°
a his would be an opening of a show by another artist (more especially

When this was accompagnied by a few drinks of the dry wine)
town I'd be in full agreement with the hint that the gallery director
thin- once casually made, quite understanding to me, of
king conveniences in y
ito a

Â¢ oughts and make me '

very forget for a while that my movements were much too limited in.
r ho- the country I belonged.
nied As time went along I left Johannesburg to live in another -big
law town not so far away, Here | soon found a gallery to accept my
load work. This making an additional proof

work. that in artâ\200\231the colour line
is a lie, and could be a crime when it is imposed upon the minds.
of human beings, ,

During this time I met an artist of white colour who also had
done his studies in Euro

ft
pe, and by then taking charge of a chil. 4
m drenâ\200\231s Art Centre (white children ee made friends with fd Apr
join ~â\204¢ me and would Occasionally invite me to this centre, giving me- Bs
men fy: access into his studio to look up the Art magazines, . F
FY But somehow I did not feel at home, as the kids came peeping a
shil- sy 6 loo frequently for my liking, for I regarded them as Part of hu- Sey
with fa manity closest to reality,â\200\231 and therefore could take quite freely, eh
ilies fg. So I soon very Poiltely avoided my visits, moreover that even tk;
ould =} srown-ups would come peeping in rather â\200\230questionable man- ae
ere a 6h ner! : : nif
Teay â\200\230 That my friend did not get into trouble, I fail to understand
the fF Cup to this day! .
unes ls town was by far less hectic than Johannesburg, but the
sobriety of its buildings was very pcasantly in harmony with
ices, the beauty and charm of the hills that half embraced it,
3; on In this same town there lived my gentleman artist friend [
s to have already mentioned meeting in Johannesburg, who spoke |
pv- to me on a human level tone.
er It happened that one ony this friend sent an invitation card
inviting me to an Art Exhi ition of his works to be shown in -
dy one room of the local university.
ys! As my friend had not hinted to me the general inconvenien-
Ke ces of visiting a show on its first opening day, I therefore thought

lone it just polite to Â«take the bull by its horns > and go. banking
part all my hope on the dignity of the university â\200\224 but still choosing
d it lo make my visite towards the very end of the ceremony,
s of This movement Proved quite successful, for on my arrival
the house had thinned down to my satisfaction and | immediate-
â\200\230lish Iv felt cheerful: when the director of the galler _ (then taking
â\200\234my care of my paintings â\200\224 not so far away from this universityâ\200
\231s
my premises) came to Say <halloÂ» to me, in a cues of a
rays young English lady to whom I was at the same time intro ced,
me As the director had come from his near-by gallery. Pparticu-
fact larly to help receiving the visitors and to answer questions of
igre Prospective buyers, he soon left the young lady and I talking
â\200\230ime about the paintings. ; :
hite It was not long that I noticed this young lady was excep- |
lionally keen on exchanging ideas with me because she was new
tin in the country, -

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A little later as we
onc more my director friend with one cu

restaurant. As the cup was being hande
being sur rised that the cup is only one, wants t
didnâ\200\231t feel for tea ?
At this I promptly re

So my director friend
same restaurant and come
to me and left the two of

with his work.
Now, by the look of things, this young

feeling fine!

As we continued our conversation on another
stimulating drink, from the door a rush of
man almost like a flash of lightning!

a glimpse of a long thin face when she
the other end of the room, standing face to face
while we were merely exposed to her

before the
the students

to this young lady, she
to know if I

continued our conversation and

lied "with greatest pleasure".

being a gentleman. went again to the
back with another cup, handed it
us together, for he had to go on

young lady and I, both are

at while enjoying our

was
with my artist friend
and flinging her arms right and left,
must have come from this restaurant of the

and with the corner of my eye, the looks on the young
that she had guessed the same,

heard my young

!
up all in white

students ;
lady's face made me understand |
and so our conversation on Art had ended. All

neighbour say was "I'm so sorry" |
At the other end of the room, the middle-aged woman, dressed-

sed up all in white, was still going on this time bending back-
wards, sideways and forward nearly hitting her forehead on
the table, to: mask the importance of her very urgent message |
Fortunately or unfortunately for me, from the distance
was standing, I could not overhear the wording of this heated
message. For it was bad to guess.
However,

middle-aged woman

respected the presence of by her efforts to restrain
her voice and to swallow the worst beaten message.

Not just shouting loud and breaking the ceilings + instead, concentrating more on the positive esticulations of her limbs !

This mission was soon ended by her quick short and snappy

strides towards the door as she kept her arms at an arm's length

from her sides !

on came to collect th

The director friend so e two cups, but
face, and

with a sad smile on my
where

home, home to my native localion
felt from my pockets that I

and so went to the next tobacco shop.

I was just going to put my foot at the entrance when suddenly
I see tt of a young man who had alreadyâ\200\231 shoul-

dered me out of his way. This was 2 white citizen, pomnpousâ\200\231y

shaking his big proad shoulders as he swaggered towards the

shopâ\200\231s counter and very proudly yelling out words that meant :

Â«< White always in front and black always alt the back >.

ed this act so attractively that J] was fully convin-

a big < hitÂ» on the stage 25 4 clown : 49

Jed this performance as more of an entertainment

J belong!

Before going ou
was out of smoke,

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A SOUTH AFRICAN ARTIST y 289Â°

than anything else ; after my disappointment at the university
the story Iâ\200\231d thought all over, but only to have understood a few
days later that it had been more serious than I had imagined, for

on the same evening all the students had gathered together pro- |
testing strongly, as they thought is a disgrace an insult to the

prestige of their university that they should start sharing their
cups with Negroes !

I later felt very hurt to learn that all the blame had been
thrown upon my artist friend.

Finally somehow this university
one of the influential Professors, who
that the Negro in question even ma
sor went to say where they ma
desired. As a result of this some students did 80, who on seeing
those pictures exclaimed: Â«Oh, one would think that. they were
made by a white man? >

It is with all these varied experiences together with very
many others, I would not choose to jaention that I come to this
conclusion :

a) While the South African Negro Artist at present has a very narrow room in which to roam, with comparatively shameful possibilities to meet his material needs, *.

b) a very thin chance to poonce ideas, as he is being refused in all the schools of art and socia gatherings,

c) while he is being exposed from day to day to such scenes, that have taught him to close his eyes and hide his tears â\200\224, Â°

There is on the other side, the white artist and the white art loving person.

Both these do not fully enjoy the entire liberty they would have desiredâ\200\231; for im Art:

â\200\224

rage was calmed down by â\200\224
furthermore made mention:
de pictures himself, This profes-
y see these pictures if they: so

Â«This colour line is just a lie
And could be a crime
When so imposed
on
Human Mind, Â»

I therefore look forward into the very near future, that all the inhabitants of my country, who see from day to day the same com-s. mon land, living under the same climatic conditions, will soon realise that they have one common need; for

Â« All proud human beings are chasing the same wild goose â\200\224
The Truth Â» which we can feel only through this one interior hu-

man language â\200\224 Â« the creative art Â» which is the virtue of
Â« the human mind 9, Â©

GÃ©rard SEKOTO.

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