

ERNEST MANCOBA - South Africa's FORGOTTEN GRAND-DADDY OF THE ART
ON A BRIEF VISIT "TO BE WITH HIS PEOPLE" AND TO AUGMENT HIS
WORK'S EXHIBITION AT THE JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY.

- BONGANI MADONDO INTERVIEWED
HIM ABOUT HIS WORK AND ARTS
GENERALLY.

Born on the 29th of August 1904 in Tsojowelo Johannesburg, Ernest Mancoba's childhood prepared him for a life, career and spirituality in the arts. Ernest, a frail looking old man is one of South Africa's most hidden myths as far as the arts circles are concerned.

As a young man who was brought up in a "double-toned" life, that of parents whose undying dedication and preservation of African traditional and equally supplanted by the European Christian life brought by the missionaries in this shores, the artist described his upbringing as a "blessing for his life and his people".

A highly acclaimed artist in Europe being a sculpturist, canvases oil painter and draughtsman, the old man's participation in the arts goes beyond typical pigeon holing and stereotypical artistic values. He told the interviewers that he "started pencil drawing in his younger days and continued his interest in African Art at KHAISO SECONDARY SCHOOL, Pietersburg where he taught languages after his graduation from a "Diocesan Training College at Graaf Reinet in the north.

His love for art as a cultural weapon and sense of aesthetic appreciation, was nourished and developed when he met ..

GERARD SEKOTO who was also a tutor at Khaiso Secondary School. "We used to sneak out to the Ndebele community around to have a truly African view and get to know the African Art values, the elders of that local community used to supply in their works."

to the present crop of young artists to bridge the cultural gap laid about by man made "devilic atrocities, for it blured life for all South Africans."

"All artists at all times have been alive to the idea that we must not lose our belief in the unity of mankind and must regain the spiritual integrity between the individual artist and the community when it is dangers and in development."

That was "Le Grandeur of world arts, a forgotten artist, by the majority of his country folk."

— 11 — 11 —

- BONGANI MADONDO, wishes to convey this message to the Arts Editors and readers - Ship jointly.

"I went to the Johannesburg Art Gallery not only with the intention of interviewing the old man but also to have a clear objective, open minded view of his exhibited work. I battled with my conscience not because of "lack of objectivity", not to write this article as a "critique or review" but because everyone have his own reservations and attitudes to pieces of art and general views about visual arts, hence it wouldn't be fair of the writer to churn out his thoughts and attitudes about the artist's work to the broader community."

But nevertheless the old man Ernest MANCOSA, can really do his work and continues to influence and inspire his contemporaries and the "after generation" of artists to aim high and do mental-gratifying work! Thank You.

in church for christian messages

"The main part of my exhibition in the Johannesburg Art Gallery is of 'unity and Nation building' pieces. There is no need to antiquify art and relegate it to pleasure pieces for intellectuals who have no real love for art but use art for material and elitistic reasons. Art, whatever it is, performance, visual and that regarded as 'fine-art' is a vehicle of cultural-community empowerment and as such must bring hopes and aspirations of love, life and nourish human spirit, the old man told the interviewees in deep tones, meaning no words!

"People who do not understand abstract art must not worry because 'artists (artists) more so surrealists, those practising surrealism are concerned with their personal thoughts and consequently images they depict can only be understood by themselves alone except if one is well prepared to be initiated in mental art and free flow-dreaming that is so expressed in abstract art practitioners' works.

"Art is not mathematics, he said and cannot be taught by giving reason for whatever lines and shapes is taking. Not everyone can understand what the artist is trying to portray, because it is from an artist's mind and feelings that s/he felt by the period s/he put those brushstrokes on plain canvases. Nevertheless there are people who even less versed in visual arts have 'aesthetic appreciation for arts', said the granddaddy whose work is on permanent exhibition at the prestigious -
"GALERIE MIKAEL ANDERSEN in Denmark.

Parting, he said that "Art is for all humanity and it is

Continued the old man, "I didn't stay longer in the teaching profession because my thirst in visual arts sparked off a hunger no one ^{would} stop for the arts, communal and continental arts.

"I went to Cape Town where I met an artist Lippy Lips Litz who was to influence my sojourn in visual arts and sense of appreciation for global arts as a whole. In 1938, I left for Paris, France to study Art, having been encouraged by Parisian artists who were living in Johannesburg. It is ⁱⁿ Paris that I really started to have a real vision and knowledge of what is essential to humanity, the old man narrated.

While in Paris, Ernest Mancoba's work took a dramatic change and "metamorphosised" in his words, because he started doing oil paintings and Ink-on Paper images. My whole perception of art changed, thus I didn't give titles to my works for I started to see art as it is, with no real essence in labeling my work. Hence I labeled my work Sculpture if it was sculpture and Painting! If it was that.

In Paris, Mancoba who met a young Danish lady Sonja Tesler who was later to be his wife, developed a closer working relationship with other European Artists. "I began to do pieces of art which would be a taboo in an African context. I merged African art with European one to produce a unique 'worldly pieces of art'. His sculpture of 'Santa Madonna' bears testimony to that mix of two alien influences.

"I would lie, the artist continued that my art is not influenced by my Christian upbringing, hence I tried with much vigour to combine the two forces, Apartheid and Christianity in my work thus my involvement in ecclesiastic art, abstracts used -