

WOMAN'S FORUM

BOLDLY FORWARD

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at she cannot. When she realizes, though, that it is impossible to possess all the knowledge, she can relax and help find the answers in books and experience.

This brings us to the point that it is how we get information that is important. We must determine where we can find it and not how to get into our heads. We cannot. And here we must do again between knowledge and wisdom. Remember the previous discussion on the difference between the two? Wisdom is more of an experience than an acquired, earned respect.

One of the men I know of, Sir Laurens van der Post, said the following about wisdom in his book *Yet being some other*: "... man and his natural inclination in the movement of the world ... was necessary for his attainment of true wisdom." (p. 233). By this means that we get wise when we are in touch with ourselves and the world around us. We should keep in touch with nature because it is there that we learn about peace and the natural rhythm inherent in it. One gets the feeling of being overwhelmed and tensed up when you are out of nature and it is here that we can go back to basic values and feelings within ourselves. In

today's high tech world we often forget about our roots in the earth and we come to believe that we do not need it. Yet we desperately do. I believe one's priorities in life would be so much clearer if one regularly went back to nature and therefore to oneself.

Apart from our contact with nature we also need to work on our interpersonal relationships. People are always more important than things and if we have warm and loving relationships with our children, spouses, parents, friends and acquaintances we will have little trouble determining our priorities. Fortunately these aspects do not need technology to survive and prosper. What we must do however, is to see that the changes and novelties in the world around us do not blind us to these basic values.

To conclude, therefore: our best "weapon" in a fast-changing society is the self. If you feel good about yourself and you are honest with yourself, you will make the right decisions. Maybe not all the time, but that is how you learn — from mistakes and wrong decisions. So let us be brave and honest and make our way through life's ups and downs. Let us see the changes as challenges, as new experiences where it is up to us to deal with it in our own way. Boldly forward!

# THEY BEAT WITH LIFE

## THE BLACK ARTIST AND HIS ENVIRONMENT: RENDERING AND COMMENT

KATINKA KEMPF

In time, the art of the black peoples of South Africa will be absorbed into that of Indian, coloured and white and be amalgamated into a true South African art. However, today it is still possible to discern a difference between the creations of these different groups, and the white inhabitants are slowly, albeit reluctantly sometimes, trying to understand and appreciate the creative powers of civilizations so very different in background from ours. One cannot lift the art of a man, be it music, literature, theatre or fine arts, from the

ambience of the culture from which he and all his forbears have originated.

In the early sixties a group of Johannesburg artists, under the leadership of art dealer Egon Günther, decided to try and define an African character in art by way of the Amadlozi-group. Amadlozi means "Spirit of our Fathers", so the recognition of the importance of tribal characteristics is obvious. The activities included exhibitions, both in South Africa and overseas, and encompassed both black and white artists, of whom the

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*In Our Church* — designed by John Muafangejo and woven in carakul wool by the weavers of the Rorke's Drift Art School, size 264 x 217 cm. A wonderfully graphic depiction of the visit a white bishop paid the local church. Decoration in the church is African in character: shields and spears.

best-known ones are Cecil Skotnes, Hannes Harrs, Edoardo Villa, Cecily Sash, Guiseppe Cattaneo, Sydney Kumalo, Ezrom Legae. It is particularly Cecil Skotnes who, through his teaching at the Polly Street Art Centre, and his continued encouragement of black talent, made the most lasting impression. His own work also echoes the mystique of Africa, for he uses the harsh criss-cross lines of arid land, the burnt colours of black, greyish-white and blood-red that are the colours of much of our landscape. Polly Street, however, was an exception in that generally much of black art was undetected and even fewer artists had opportunities to study art. Besides this, almost all black artists who were lucky enough to get art lessons, were beholden to the white man: he taught, bought, publicised and in fact, the black man had little or no contact with his own kith and kin in the artistic field.

One of the first black painters who made a name of consequence was Gerald Sekoto. Although his art showed distinct realistic Western influences, he painted the environment he knew well: that of the township and its daily occurrences and business. He settled in Paris in 1947 and has kept on painting township scenes from memory — these have, however, lost most of their appeal of genuine experience and emotion.

Another black painter who painted township life and particularly its

squalor and poverty, was Efraim Ngatane. His work leans heavily on the use of colour in an abstract way.

An artist concentrating on heads of noble monumentality is Maqhubela. Ben Macala also draws and paints big round heads with enormous eyes and stylised, thick rounded lips of considerable sentimentality: the work unfortunately becomes too stereotyped and borders on tourist art. The Polly Street Centre produced a number of important sculptors as well, of whom Sydney Kumalo is best known. The early work had an innate monumentality, with strong frontal characteristics that reminded one of the classical African masks and ancestral figures of Central and West-Africa. He managed to impart a wonderfully effective surface texture to his sculptures that not only pleased the eye, but had marvellous tactile qualities. Unfortunately the sculptor has been influenced by Henri Moore in later years, and his sculptures have lost the dignity that his early works possessed in great measure. Ezrom Legae's sculptures and graphic works tend more towards the abstract and as a result, also have a more Western style.

Two draughtsmen who imbue their drawings with great compassion are Julian Motau, who unfortunately was murdered as a very young man, but who showed exceptional promise, and Mslaba Dumile, in whose work a rather macabre note sounded from time to





Sydney Kumalo — Mother and Child — bronze, height 70 cm. Kumalo has successfully synthesised the stylised masks and ancestor figures of traditional African art and the sophistication of European art in this moving sculpture of the bond between mother and child. The cross-hatched bronze surface adds interest to the overall effect.

time: a man-eater or ogre, or a depiction of the concept of fear, are some of his subjects. Sithole is a gentle sculptor who, tongue in cheek, creates fascinating bird-beast-man creatures which he carves out of wood, often utilising roots of trees that already, by their convoluted shapes, suggest certain unknown creatures to him.

A scholastic influence which cannot be disregarded when discussing black art is that of Rorke's Drift. Rorke's Drift in Natal near Dundee is a Scandinavian mission station where work is done among the Zulus. Right from the

beginning the idea was not only to bring Christianity to the Zulus, but also to teach them crafts which would enable them to earn money. The result was beyond expectation. The Swedish teachers who came to teach pottery, weaving and graphic art, were careful not to destroy the natural feeling for design, rhythm and colour of the local people, but simply taught the skills necessary to express themselves in clay, wood or on paper. I think it is true to say that the result from the Rorke's Drift workshops is almost more popular overseas than it is in South Africa. The

Julian Motau's Mother and Child in charcoal, size 110 x 74 cm, is a very good example of the dexterity with which the black artist handles the contrast between black and white to achieve an expressionist character. The expressionist usually makes use of colour and distorted images; this is obviously not necessary to Motau, as he fully succeeds in expressing emotion through these limited means.





weavers learnt how to process the raw wool from the fully-grown karakul sheep, how to spin and dye and how to set up a tapestry loom. The designs are based on legends, stories, everyday happenings, and owe little to the Renaissance rules of perspective to

which we Westerners are so accustomed. A herd of elephants will simply be depicted in 4 or 5 rows, each row standing with heavy, solid feet on the backs and heads of the preceding row. The pots owe much in shape to the utility ware the black tribes used to

Gerald Sekoto — Street Scene — oil on canvas, size 45,5 x 53,5 cm. An oil painting by one of the earlier practising black artists. Sekoto who left South Africa for France, and totally lost the typical "township art" character of his early work, was one of the pioneers of black art. Note the stocky, earthy figures and squat houses. In contrast to contemporary black art, there is no vestige of violence or unrest.



P.D. Mogano — Dennelton Village, Eastern Transvaal — watercolour, size 53,5 x 72,5 cm. Mogano uses an almost photographic preciseness in his watercolours of township life. An interesting contrast and movement is formed by the corrugated iron walls, roofs, the V. of the birds and the plain white washing in the foreground.

make in clay for centuries to store in or drink from — and the decorations are generally naïve, sometimes the vessels are in the shape of animals or birds.

The graphic work, often in the linocut technique, is usually decorative and narrative. Azaria Mbatha in particular, reveals a natural feeling for rhythm and a good sense of balance between black and white. What typifies many of the Zulu graphic artists' work is the consolidating of a number of

episodes of a story into one contained unity — a concept that was quite well-known during the middle-ages.

Mbatha, who was born in 1941, was the star pupil of Rorke's Drift, and was sent overseas to study. Unfortunately it seems that he now has also lost that particular quality which made his work uniquely African in character.

Other well-known products of Rorke's Drift are John Muafangejo, who hails from Ovambo, and Ndlovu.

An important fact which emerges as



the art of the black man is studied, is that he is mainly preoccupied with his own people, and also, that people interest him, their loves, joys, plays, sorrows, all the manifestations of being human, in fact being a black human. Landscape and still-life feature only as long as they are part of the environment of that human being. The question that comes to mind now, is, whither black African art? As the black man gets better education and is exposed to more white culture and art, is it possible that his own culture and art could disappear altogether? For that matter to what extent will white South African art remain aloof from the influence of black art? It is in

conceivable that no cross-influences have taken place or will not, in future, take place in even greater measure. Art schools and art tuition is on the increase in townships, often under the direction of black teachers. Groups such as Fuba and Kathlahong, venues such as the Market Gallery, all are the underpinning for a vigorous growth of artistic awareness. Besides this, important business sponsorship, such as that of BMW with the marvellous "Tributaries" a collection of art from South Africa, amongst which was a sizeable number of black work, that was sent overseas some time ago, opened the eyes of a considerable number of people to the so-called transitional art

Azaria Mbatha — "Invitation" — linocut 74/100, size 30 x 50 cm. Mbatha is one of the most talented of the Zulu artists trained at Rorke's Drift. Not only does his work result in a marvellously composed design, but he has understood the principle of simultaneous depiction of different scenes at different times, as was applied during the Middle Ages, very well.



Albert Ndlovu — "The Israelites and the Red Sea" — linocut, 29,5 x 30,5 An example of the harmonious composition achieved by the artists trained at the Rorke's Drift Missionary School. A strong emphasis is placed on pattern, so that the dense mass of Israelites on the right hand side, the wavy sea and the riders on the left, form a well-unified entity.

of Noria Mbasa who models strange, stocky men of clay which she paints in strong colours, or the fascinating creations of dr Phatuma Seoka, who "sees" animals in tree trunks, branches and roots, and paints them in realistic enamel paints: the white

leopard has black spots and a wide-open, blood-red maw. Nelson Makhuba was sensational with his dancers in wood, tall, attenuated, thoroughly contemporary. Unfortunately Makhuba (born in 1925) recently committed suicide.





Dr Phatuma Seoka —  
Leopard — wood,  
painted, size 83 x 111 cm.  
An example of so-called  
transitional art, this  
branch or root of a tree  
has, as if by magic, been  
turned into a leopard. In  
work like this the  
inventiveness and fresh  
vision of the black artist  
is well illustrated.

The Market complex, both its theatre and its exhibition space, provides a place for exposure, often unavoidably, of politically-inspired as well as protest art. That is as it should be. Black art must take its place in contemporary society, and hopefully, if and when times become more stable and peaceful, the pendulum will swing back towards a narrower centre without the excesses of over-emotional outpourings.

# Boldly Bussing

COLYN JAFFE

08h00. Departure. And as the bus begins to move slowly forward, it is proud testament to the departure from years and years of rigid government prohibition on private commercial transport enterprises. And with the start of another new journey, the bus ventures boldly forward into the new future.

Immediately, the stewardess' voice comes over the intercom, welcoming the passengers aboard. She proceeds to announce pertinent information: that the journey time from Durban to Johannesburg will be eight hours; that there will be a half hour stop at Montrose for lunch, and that everyone should feel absolutely free to call her for absolutely anything they need. A ribald murmur of male voices sprints momentarily throughout the bus. The stewardess draws attention to the service buttons