

Opening Remarks 1982 South African Art Exhibition.

I feel honoured to stand before this honourable audience tonight and talk about this cultural event - the exhibition of South African Art. I feel so because this Art Exhibition is a significant one by its Historical nature and therefore the word of a more seasoned cultural worker was more appropriate than mine.

This Cultural project is divided into two parts, namely, Exhibition of paintings, sculpture and photographs. The Exhibition starts tonight while the second part the Symposium and Festival starts on the fifth of July, and deals with <sup>literature and</sup> ~~the~~ performing arts namely - music, film, theatre and dance. But it would be important to explain the forces that have inspired and sharpened the need for this cultural event, more so that the event is so imbued with the burning issues of the day. The theme of this exhibition is ART TOWARD SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT but I must hasten to ask, what art? Whose social development? The act of creating art, is not different from the act of building a bridge - it is the work of many hands. Therefore art is social, so are the other art forms like writing, theatre and music and so on. This means that art is part and parcel of the rules and ~~laws~~ <sup>laws</sup> which govern societies. So, the fact that in South Africa the majority of the people are engaged in struggle for liberation, means that art and cultural workers cannot be divorced from this process.

It is at this point that I would like to comment on the outlets of artwork in South Africa namely, the galleries and museums and also the critics who influence the forms and content of art in my country. These institutions, are nothing else but agents of <sup>imperialist</sup> ~~of~~ institutions in London, Paris, New York etc. That is to say, it is the tastes and

wants of these business institutions and critics which decide which work will be exhibited, and bought, and which cultural worker will be regarded as a success. So far, the art critics have been nothing else but mouthpieces of the tastes of these cities. Artists in South Africa are grossly exploited by these institutions which also contribute to the element of alienation of the artists from the community, which communities in the first place make them and nurture them. It is not a surprise then that artists view galleries and museums with great awe, and the men and women who run them, as extremely dangerous people. The art galleries are a menace in the memories of ~~black artists~~ and museums themselves are lost in their own puritan obscurity. On the other hand, since these are the only outlets, and the artists keep creating, a cruel vicious cycle is created and those artists who break it internally, are being lured with fame and fortune abroad, soon to realise how they have jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. This cruel and vicious cycle is explicitly reflected by the works of the artists through meaningless distortions of limbs and bodies, mystification is apparent and the deliberate shrouding of images in mystery. That then is the hopeless state of art in my country.

However we are hopeful. This exhibition then, is a step towards not only being hopeful but also being practical about creating an alternative for artists in South Africa. The exhibition here today, is the work of the artists themselves. This exhibition again is important in another respect all South African races, Africans, Coloureds, Indians, and whites are represented in this exhibition. Cultural workers not only created the works of art, but also, actively participated in organising it and making decisions about what the exhibition has to say about the people of South Africa. But of importance is the political statement which the works of these artists make, the exhibition is a statement against Apartheid and Bantustans.

If we look around us we realise that we are confronted with various points of dealing with the same kind of reality. In some works we see a dangerous sense of fear and despair whereas in some other pictures we are strengthened by the optimism and hopefulness of others. It is this element of optimism and hopefulness which has brought us all together tonight; it is this indistructable and enduring spirit of struggle that norishes our quest for social developepment and jastice. How do cultural workers and artists parttake in the struggle for national liberation and self determination? We hope that this exhibition will provide answers to that question.

Again it is at this point I would like to thank the National Museum and Art Gallery of Botswana for having hosted the art exhibition of my country. It is through the wisdom of Mrs. Nteta and the help of the Museum staff that we who are plagued by censorship, bannings and exploitation have been able to make our voice heard through this project. We would like to thank them. I would also like to thank the international sponsor bodies who contributed finatially to this project, for their international support.

Thann Mupfe 1982

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