

Arts and Recreation Committee
Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee

Report (24.6.83) by

Principal Race Relations Adviser

Item	
6	E/AR 85
VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS POLICY A DISCUSSION PAPER	

- The attached paper on Visual Arts and Crafts Policy has been submitted by Errol Lloyd for discussion by the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee.

1 GLC FUNDING POLICY AND PRACTICE

It is necessary for the sub-committee to clearly define the scope of 'visual arts' and to consider making it as wide as possible to include crafts, photography, video, and perhaps even carnival and other costumes etc. This would ensure that we are not trapped within an outmoded and elitist definition of visual arts with its usual 'fine art' bias.

The precise type of application that the committee can respond to should also be made clear to artists and groups so that the type of situation which arose with at least one artist can be avoided. Previously an application was made which would have had the support of the sub-committee but due to legal restrictions the grant could not be awarded.

2 TRAINING

To what extent do the present facilities which exist in schools and art colleges take into account the changing nature of British society? Does a Euro-centric orientation alienate potential artists from ethnic communities from taking up places in arts schools and prevent them from realizing their potential as artists? These are questions which need to be looked into, and if there is need for change, the sub-committee should consider practical and creative ways in which it could intervene to help change the situation. This could be the task of any future worker on an arts training scheme which has been canvassed recently.

VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS POLICY
A DISCUSSION PAPER

Concurrent Report (27.6.83) by Comptroller of Finance

No observations at this stage.

FN/C3/2258.

Concurrent report (27.6.83) by Head of Legal Branch

A full appraisal of the legal implications will need to be made at a later stage.

DG/LB/G3/AJM

VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

The GLC Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee has not been able to date to give to ethnic artists the kind of practical assistance which many of them need. There are a number of reasons for this. In many instances artists work alone and in isolation and do not know of the existence of funding possibilities. Another factor is that the funding policy of the GLC and other funding agencies, favours the funding of groups or companies from the performing arts where there is some tangible 'public benefit'. This need for some element of 'public benefit' is a legal requirement and as such has militated against the 'bursary type' grant which funds an artists or writer for instance to create work.

It is therefore necessary for the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee to come up with solutions, as this committee has taken the decision that it will not be a passive dispenser of grants, but will itself formulate an overall strategy for the promotion of the arts. This involves the sub-committee in making its own initiatives in those areas of the arts which is under-funded.

The visual arts has been identified as one of these under-represented art forms, and as such should be the subject of special initiatives from the sub-committee. The following is a broad outline of some of the possibilities. Some of the ideas put forward may be impractical for the sub-committee at the moment, but I feel it is still necessary at this moment to highlight the potential areas of development.

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3 RESOURCES

In the area of training and in arts education generally, one of the recurring problems is the absence of visual arts resources. In particular there are few books, cards, prints, posters etc. of the works of contemporary artists from ethnic communities. One of the overwhelming reasons for this is the cost involved in reproducing art work especially when it involves colour reproduction. There is also the feeling among mainstream publishers that there would be an enormous financial risk involved in publishing an expensive quality book with reproductions of works of art, when the market for such a product is not established.

There is also a real absence of films and videos etc. which records the work of contemporary black artists and makes it available to the public and to students etc.

The sub-committee should therefore address itself to the need for the promulgation of work of black artists and look at the practical ways in which the situation can be eased. At the very least, one of the initiatives could be the production of a book which reproduces as much of the work as possible with a minimum of text. There is also the possibility of the production of posters etc. referred to above - all of which would help to counter the general lack of exposure black artists suffer from as far as their work reaching a wide public is concerned.

Another arm of this same general purpose of gaining wide exposure, should be the support of existing journals and magazines and other periodicals which consider in a critical way the work of black artists.

4 STUDIOS

One of the everlasting complaints of black artists is the absence of studio space. This is a very real problem and is at the heart of any serious attempt to offer meaningful help to artists, as the conditions for the creation of their work must be paramount. This could be part of the initiatives involving local authorities. Disused building could at reasonable cost be converted into studios and be made available to local groups at reasonable rent if necessary.

5 EXHIBITIONS

The sub-committee could take the initiative in organising an exhibition of the work of black artists in London and other minority groups as well. This need not take the form of a grand multi-ethnic exhibition in which all ethnic minorities are grouped, but could be small more specific exhibitions. Conversely there could be a specific amount of the funds available for visual arts be reserved for assisting others who mount exhibitions of the work of ethnic artists. Touring exhibitions could also be organised under the auspices of the sub-committee.

6 ART GALLERIES

The policy of subsidiary art galleries devoted to the exposure of the work of black and other ethnic minority artists should be continued. There should also be some pressure placed on those mainstream galleries which receive public funds to include ethnic artists in their exhibitions when the quality of the work produced satisfies the criteria of that gallery.

7 COMPETITIONS/PRIZES

The sub-committee could also make funds available for competitions and prizes, which would have the effect of stimulating artists to raise the standards of their work.

8 PURCHASE OF WORKS OF ART

There are one or two local Education Authorities which have made funds available for the purchase of works of art by ethnic artists. This could well be one of the initiatives of the sub-committee as well and would have the effect of bringing immediate financial benefit to the artist, and at the same time making the work of art available to the public. This would be the case if the work were donated to a local school or library or some other public institution for display. There should also be efforts for existing collections which either go on tour or are part of the stock of a lending library to contain the work of ethnic artists. There are also black institutions which I feel sure would be only too pleased to receive a work of art for public and permanent display.

9 COMMISSIONS

There is a good case for the commissioning of murals and public sculpture as this would have a profound bearing on the shifting of public aesthetic sensibility towards a more cosmopolitan and tolerant sensibility. This would best be achieved by local artists working with the support of their community and not something foisted on an unsuspecting community without any consultation.

10 ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE

A scheme to encourage Arts Centres, Youth Clubs, Universities and Colleges of Further Education to operate an 'Artist-in-Residence' scheme which would benefit ethnic artists could be instituted. This would be one practical way in which an artists could work for a defined period without the normal day to day financial stress and pressures. This would also allow the artist to pass on skills acquired over many years to others on their way up.