

Arts and Recreation Committee

Item 21(iv)	AR 2673
BLACK VISUAL ARTS FORUM - RESEARCH STUDY Prog. ref. A.23	

Report (182.86) by Director of
Recreation and the Arts

Recommendations

That the report be received and copies forwarded to major arts institutions and to members and advisory members of the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee.

Background

In 1982 the newly appointed Ethnic Arts Sub Committee, as a part of its strategy for the establishment of a cohesive "Arts" programme for London's Black and Ethnic minority community placed high priority on the development of a comprehensive programme to fully meet the needs of Black Visual Artists.

It is recognised that the work of visual artists forms the essence for the generation, cross-fertilized and sustained creativity of a Black and Ethnic Arts programme but because of misconception of the needs of the Black artist and without firm policy guidelines, and a systematic framework, the needs of the Black Visual Artist, have been marginalised and given little support.

As outlined, in AR 1421 'London Against Racism in Mainstream Arts' policies and programming the effect of institutionalised racism has had a dramatic effect of Black Artists manifesting towards the work and development of the Black Visual Arts. Many major institutions responsible for the employment of funding and resources for the "Arts" fall short in both examining their own policies towards combatting racism and giving support to the Black Visual Arts.

In 1985 the Arts and Recreation Committee established a commitment towards implementing a race equality programme. A Race Equality Unit was established (AR 907) for the creation of a programme to provide for the needs of Black and Ethnic Communities and to challenge racism (AR 1778).

RA/REU/SKB/1622

Introduction

There is a long history in the relationship of Britain towards Black people. This has principally found its expressions in the establishment and execution of institutionalised racist policies and practices.

The historical manifestations of this have been realised in the piracy, barbarism, and exploitation of non-Western countries through colonialism and imperialism. The values of Western Society have established and maintained a position of dominance by the formulation and execution of a euro-centric system of aesthetics. This had become the institutionalised criteria as to the determinism and classification of contemporary Art practise, thus the Art of Black people has been classified as primitive, naive or regarded as anthropological exotica.

The artistic expressions of Black people have been mutilated disregarded and marginalised with little or no regard for their own vibrant, intellectual, and creative expressions of the their communities.

The work of the Black Artist is not represented in mainstream artistic programmes and, Art Institutions do not employ Black Artists in the decision-making mechanisms, policy formulation, assessment, evaluation and monitoring procedures of their organisational practice.

There is a disenchantment with the racist attitudes which prevails within British society and the institutions which governs society. In order to represent fully the needs of the multi-racial society in which we live there must be radical intervention into the system and a dynamic response to the inclusion of Black artist at all levels of organisational and institutional development.

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In January 1985 a consultative meeting was called with Black Visual Artists to discuss strategies towards the development of a cohesive programme to meet their needs by the Establishment of a Black Visual Arts Forum. In order to establish a comprehensive philosophical ideological and formulate firm policy Arts guidelines, the Council commissioned a report research to establish the needs of the Black Visual Artists. Six consultants were appointed in accordance with the initiatives outlined in "Black Arts Future Policies and Priorities Re port 27.3.85 E/AR 391 towards meeting the needs of Black Visual Artists.

Objectives

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- (i) This paper seeks to outline the historical, philosophical and ideological framework for the development of the work of the Black Visual Artists.
- (ii) It seeks to analyse the relationships of Art Institutions and funding bodies towards the deployment and appropriation of funds and resources for the development of the work of the Black Visual Artist.
- (iii) To outline the specific needs of Black Women Artists and the duality of struggle both in terms of racism and sexism.
- (iv) To outline and criticise the system of education and its relevance towards the development of the work of the Black Visual Artist.
- (v) To look specifically at the needs of the Black Photographers work and performance artists.
- (vi) To develop strategies for the work of Black Visual Artists in the area of graphics, production, presentation and promotion of their work.
- (vii) To outline a series of recommendations towards the formulation of policy guidelines for the development of the work of Black Visual Artists in the above mentioned areas.

This research was conducted within ten days. It is recognised that this would not be sufficient time to do quantitative research, correlate, evaluate data. The contents of this research are therefore diagnostic and serve only at this stage to highlight the basic needs of the Black Visual Artists. (It is recognised that this research will serve only as an interim for a more detailed study). The research in each respective area was undertaken over a ten day period and then discussed at 12 meetings for the purpose of evaluation.

The contents of the research is attached as an appendix to the main report.

Index

- (1) The History of Black Artists in Britain - Rasheed Araeen.
- (2) The Black Artists and Art Institutions in Britain - Les Johnson.
- (3) Art Education in Britain Today - Amal Ghosh & Rasheed Araeen.
- (4) There have always been great Black Women Artists - Chila Kumari Burman.
- (5) Photography and the Black Visual Artists - David Bailey.
- (6) Performance Art and the Black Visual Artist - Mona Hatoum.

Policy Statement

It must be recognised that:

- 1 The black artist is a professional artist.
- 2 The work of the black artist is situated within contemporary art practices.
- 3 The history of black artists in Britain is part of the history of post war art in Britain.
- 4 The contribution of black artists to contemporary developments in art in Britain has been ignored. Every effort must be done to redress this situation in the interest of the whole society.
- 5 Black artists have participated in all the various developments and their work varies from one decade to another according to the social and historical conditions specific to the post war Britain.
- 6 Black artists belong to all the international movements in art since the War, since post war developments in Britain in which black artists had participated are recognised internationally.
- 7 Even when the black artist took a radical political position as part of black struggle, the work produced as a result is situated, historically as well as aesthetically, within the contemporary developments of the time when all kind of media and/or manifestations were used to expand the boundaries of contemporary art.
- 8 The black artists has thus been part of all the new developments of performance art, mixed media works, video, photography, tape/slide projections, etc. in the Seventies.
- 9 Contemporary art practices are not necessarily based on the practices of crafts or craft traditions. The relationship of the black artist to the position of crafts in contemporary art is not different from his/her white contemporary.

- 10 There is a difference between cultural traditions and contemporary art practices. Traditions are important as they provide historical continuity and contexts, but they do not and cannot replace the function of contemporary art.
- 11 Black artists do not belong to the category of 'ethnic arts'. This category has been designed by the establishment in order to separate black artists from the mainstream and then not to recognise their important contributions within it.
- 12 To see black artists in terms of 'ethnic arts' is based not only on the ignorance of their actual work but it is also an attempt to deliberately push them to the marginal roles, and then to keep the mainstream exclusively for the white artists.
- 13 The separation of black artists from the mainstream has further marginalised their position, in spite of the fact that some money is now available for their 'ethnic' activities. They are no longer able to intervene critically in and expand the scope of contemporary art in Britain in the light of their own experiences. And thus the mainstream culture is being prevented from becoming multi-racial culture.
- 14 The black artist within the function of 'ethnic arts' has become exotic, and is often judged not on the basis of artistic criteria but merely by the attitudes which are ideologically questionable.
- 15 The true multi-culturalism in this society will emerge only when all the cultures are given equal recognition and without making any distinction between the indigenous mainstream and the so-called 'ethnic minority cultures'.
- 16 There is a difference between amateurs, community artists and the commitment of the individual professional black artist. The work of individual professional black artists must be recognised in their own right.
- 17 To see the black artist only in terms of his/her 'commitment' to the community is to limit his/her artistic function and abilities.
- 18 The support structure, in terms of exhibitions, promotion, recognition and evaluation of one's work, must be available to the black artist without making any distinction of race, class, gender or sex.
- 19 The prevailing support structure is in fact not available to the black artist due to institutional racism. It is therefore the right of the black artist to demand his/her share of the publicly funded pie. But this should not be used as an excuse for developing separate funding structures or/and ignoring aesthetic criteria when it comes to the work of black artists.
- 20 The prevailing aesthetic criteria or standards of the (white) institutions are not suitable to the needs of the multi-cultural and multi-racial society. They must therefore be changed, and they must be changed within the mainstream.

- 21 The needs of the black artists are however specific, in view of the prevailing situation in this society, and they must urgently be met by making changes within the mainstream funding bodies.
- 22 The needs of black women artists also present us with a specific situation, and they must be met in every respect in view of their own specific and additional needs.
- 23 We need structural changes within art institutions to get rid of all those attitudes which perpetuate institutional racism, before anything significant can be done.

The following are recommendations put forward as a result of the research:

- i That the contents of this research be published and distributed to all major Arts Institutions.
- ii That detailed research be conducted to analyse the programme of major institutions ie the Arts Council of Great Britain, Council for National Academic Awards, Commission for Racial Equality and the Inner London Education Authority to evaluate their programme in relation to their own policies towards Black Visual Artists i.e. funding allocations, Equal Opportunities programme.
- iii That a series of training and re-training programmes be organised for administrators of major Art institutions.
- iv That detailed research be commissioned in order to document information about the history of black visual artists in Britain and subsequently to establish a comprehensive archive and information centre.
- v That a series of regular seminars and workshops, be conducted on issues relating to the work of Black Visual Artists.
- vi That funds be made available for education programmes to make people aware of the contemporary contribution of black artists to art in Britain through community centres as well as art teaching institutions.
- vii That funds be made available to set up training schemes in order to learn about the contribution of black artists in this country.
- viii That the mainstream art institutions refrain from stereotyping Black Visual Artists or classifying their work as craft, entertainment, exotica, cultural and other such titles that serve to marginalise the work of Black Visual Artists.
- ix That major galleries include the work of the Black Visual Artists as part of mainstream work.
- x That Arts institutions inspect their policies to include Black Visual Artists at all levels of their organisation.
- xi That Black Visual Artists seek to establish positions within Arts Institutions within a decision making capacity.

- xii That information be made available in the respective languages of the Black Visual Artists, by all major Arts Institutions.
- xiii That the Black Visual Arts Forum be constituted as a Black Visual Arts Institute with specific functions.
- xiv To establish a gallery, with lecture rooms and studios, in central London where black artists could show their work and where regular seminars could be held. This kind of centre should not be established on a sectarian or 'ethnic' basis.
- xv If such a gallery centre is to be established, it must be run and managed, by a body constituting all sections of black artists community, with equal representations in terms of race and sex.
- xvi To establish a fund in order to purchase the work of black artists to form a permanent collection. This fund should be established on the basis of some artistic criteria and with the help of proper expertise.
- xvii That the Black Visual Arts Institute (VCAI) monitor the practices of major institutions and make representations on behalf of the Black Visual Artist.
- xviii That the BVAI develop management training programmes for the Black Visual Artist.
- xix That the Institute develop the resources for the management, production and distributors of the work of the Black Visual Artist.
- xx That scholarships be provided for the Black Visual Artists to make a study of their work.
- xxi That an exhibition be organised on the work of Black Visual Artists in a major gallery in London.
- xxii Funding be made available for summer school programmes for Black Visual Artists.
- xxiii That commercial sponsorship be sought for the support of the work of Black Visual Artists.
- xxiv That Black Visual Artists seek union representation.
- xxv That Black Visual Artists lobby councillors and politicians for these representations and recognition.

Considerations relating to Ethnic Minorities

This report pertains to the needs of Black and Ethnic Minority visual artists and the relevant communities. It challenges traditionally, held assumptions regarding Eurocentric aesthetic.

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Considerations relating to Lesbians and Gay Men

The brief of the research was quite specific and over a limited period. However there are no adverse effects on grounds of sexual orientation.

Considerations relating to people with disabilities

The brief of the research was quite specific, and could not be expanded to take into account access to galleries for people with disabilities.

Considerations relating to Women

One of the papers outlines the specific requirement of black women visual artists.

Recommendations

That the report be received and copies forwarded to major Arts institutions and to members and advisory members of the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee.