

HISTORY OF BLACK ARTISTS IN BRITAIN

(A General Perspective & Analysis)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper, given the limited scope of the inquiry, is to merely outline the history of black artists in Britain and their contribution to contemporary art and culture. However, it is my attempt here to deal with most of its aspects, as far as possible, so as to have an overall view of the whole thing. It is important to have the actual information about what exactly has been produced by black artists, but at the same time it is also important to understand under what material and historical conditions this work has been produced. In order to understand the full significance - aesthetic as well as social - of the achievement of black artists it is imperative that their work is therefore firmly located within contemporary or modern art practices and without treating this work as a different category based on the fact that they have different cultural backgrounds than that of the British mainstream.

If black people in Britain are British, then their separation from the mainstream British culture can only represent their cultural marginalisation.

However, the question of the 'different category' or the exclusion of black artists from the mainstream based on this category is in fact the main issue here. It would be true to say that the work under consideration here has always been seen by the establishment to be outside the modern mainstream, even when some black artists managed to enter the mainstream. It was soon realised that they had entered an alien space and they had to be chased out or eventually ignored.

Even if the work of black artists was different, in terms of using images or forms from their own cultures and representing aesthetic sensibility specific to African or Asian cultures, is this enough to exclude them from the history of contemporary art? The history of the development of modern art over the last hundred years or so clearly shows that such thing does not affect the position of European artists who make use of the values of Afro/Asian cultures. The position of black artists is affected for different reasons, which has nothing to do with the nature of the work but essentially with the nature of the ideology of modern art.

The ideology of modern art is the ideology of the dominant Western culture, which now is globally dominant, and which is underpinned by

the assumptions of racial superiority (or difference) and imperialism. These assumptions were in fact formulated and rationalised as part of Western philosophical texts in the 18th and 19th centuries, at the time of European colonial expansion and world domination in order to justify exactly this domination. It will not be possible or necessary here to deal with all the aspects and complexity of what now is called colonial discourse (ie philosophical and scientific texts produced as part of colonial world view since the Renaissance), but it is important to recognise that without the understanding of this colonial discourse we cannot fully understand our position in the world today. Homi Bhabha, who has recently made an important contribution towards the understanding of the complexity of the colonial stereotype, has pointed out that we must treat colonial discourse as part of the colonial power:

"It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject people' through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledge of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate type on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction". (emphasis added).

The importance of the above quote lies not only in the fact that it explains the complexity of coloniser-colonised relationship vis-a-vis classical colonialism but also its application to the situation in Britain today. Not many people realise that the colonial stereotype or a population of degenerate type is being maintained by a new apparatus of neo-colonial administration in which the colonised is being given a role of functionary class in the field of culture. This class, instead of challenging the colonial stereotype, is in fact rationalising it as something good. The preservation and promotion of Afro/Asian cultural traditions in Britain is seen something essential for the creativity of black community. The populist demagoguery of the emerging black functionary class, based on ethnic cultural differences mixed with antiracist rhetoric, is creating the new boundaries based on multiculturalism in which to contain the colonial (rather neo-colonial) stereotype to serve the dominant ideology.

However, the area of cultural production under consideration here is visual arts, which include not only the tradition of painting, sculpture and print making but also the diverse and heterogeneous practices of mixed media, performance and photography. It is however important to recognise the central position which painting and sculpture continue to occupy in contemporary art practice. Even when the actual making of painting or sculpture is not in vogue at a

particular time, such as in the '70s, the importance of painting and sculpture remains, in the sense that they continue to provide a reference point or historical terms of reference. It is not my intention here to under-value the importance of photography, mixed media works, performance etc. today, which in fact increasingly provide necessary critical space to confront the established order inherent in the practice of painting and sculpture as the main areas of visual arts. It is not without significance that during the retreat or reactionary time the practice of the tradition of painting/sculpture becomes predominant again.

Our historical starting point here is postwar arrival and presence of black people in Britain, which includes artists from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. In addition we now have a new generation of black artists born and educated here in Britain. To use postwar period as a historical watershed for this particular inquiry does not mean that we do not or should not recognise earlier presence of black people in Britain. However, postwar period has its own historical characteristics, which are specific and which are important in the understanding of the contribution of black people to contemporary art in Britain. It presents us with an extremely fertile ground, which again is complex and problematic. From the point of view of the history of modern art, it presents us with a unique historical period in which black people were actually able to enter into the centre of the contemporary culture and challenge its humanistic assumptions, which actually are based on white racial superiority. For the first time in modern history we find both the coloniser and the colonised together face to face within the same contemporary space, and yet both are separated not by the relationship of classical colonialism of the ruler and the ruled but by the subtlety and ambivalence of imposed cultural differences.

To use a metaphor, the colonised has apparently broken the chains and has jumped into the ring to take the bull (art) by the horns; but there is nobody to clap or applaud, for the applaud is only meant for a bullfighter of special racial breed. The 'surrogate' bullfighter is not really 'defeated', eventually, by the bull but by the uselessness of his or her act in the absence of spectators or audience. Moreover, the completion of the act demands recognition from others. It is this 'surrogatory' position of the black artist in contemporary culture which is most significant, not only that it represents his or her marginalisation but the recognition of this marginalisation is important for his or her creative potential. It can give the black artist necessary tool, a new power, to confront the values of the contemporary or modern culture dominated by the West.

However, this paper does not seek, because of the limited space, to fully analyse the achievements of the individual artists, although this is something which has to be undertaken in the long terms. The emphasis here is on collective achievement in relation to changing historical and material conditions, from one decade to another, from one generation to another, in order to show the changing nature of this achievement. This will necessarily question and undermine the

the prevailing presumption in Britain today according to which the creative ability of the black artist is fixed within his or her own cultural tradition. The relationship between artistic practice in contemporary culture or context and the cultural traditions is not direct and organic. It presents us with a complexity which is applicable to both white and black artists.

The question of racism is now commonly recognised, including by the establishment. It is also now commonly believed by most black artists in Britain that the ignorance of their work has to do with racism. But what exactly is the nature of racism in art? Can we easily recognise it and point out its exact location in the culture, in the complex mechanism of art production, recognition, evaluation and education? Of course, we can take up a common view and say that the very exclusion, the absence, of the black artist from the history of contemporary art is a sufficient proof and that there is something wrong the way the history of art is written. I have deliberately used the word 'contemporary' here, because it is only in the 20th century that this exclusion becomes total.

We are here really talking about institutional racism, which is extremely subtle and has a complex history of development. But what do we exactly mean by institutional? Sure they are not just grand buildings, such as the British Museum, National Gallery, etc., although they are depositories containing artefacts of values representing the values of the society. But the British Museum and National Gallery represent two different value systems, and the value difference here is not in the value of the objects in monetary terms. Neither is this difference arbitrary. This very difference represents an institutional value, in fact a world-view, that has taken centuries to develop as part of colonial discourse. In other words, these institutions have been conceived in a particular manner, in terms of the ideas that have gone into their making. And if these ideas are racially based ideas, then these institutions represent institutional racism. Furthermore, the ideas which go into making institutions or that which in turn represent institutions are not confined inside particular places. The very function of the institutions is that the ideas they represent are accepted by and become part of the common consciousness of the people to which these institutions belong.

It is therefore important to explore first the history of the development of these institutions as value systems, the nature of the ideas which went into their developments. This will necessarily involve not only looking into the prevailing values and attitudes of the society but also how these values and attitudes have developed historically over the years or centuries.

Finally, I shall try to summarise the whole thing in order to identify the significant points and develop a strategy to confront those values which are obstacles in the way of the development of this society into a truly multiracial society and in which the full creative and critical potential of the black artist is recognised.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The rise of economic and political and military power of the West since the Renaissance was not enough to rule and dominate the world and at the same time maintain its humanistic facade. It had to, therefore, rationalise its domination of the world, other races, by pseudo-scientific methods to make this domination look natural, in conjunction with the production of philosophical material and other kind of knowledge that would present it as an historically advancing and civilising phenomenon and sustain West's power of the world indefinitely. As part of this development, West also documented and analysed other world cultures and thus made them part of its own world perception, and as a result of which the concept of ~~the~~ universal history of art developed.

The concept of universal history of art is specific to Western civilisation, developed after the Renaissance and since then has been continually developing according to its own idea of evolution, and at the same time which has been constantly applied to other cultures, including peoples, all over the world that came under the rule of colonialism. Its main purpose has been, as it will be more clear later, to allocate non-European cultures to different past historical periods in terms of linear historical continuity in such a way as to give the West the most advance and forward position. The ideas that went into making this universal art history were often racially based and they are today with us as part of modern art history.

The structures and ideologies of art history actually determine the context of modern or contemporary art practice in the sense of even defining what is art and what is not art, who should go into history of art and who should be excluded from it, as recent feminist art historical writings have clearly demonstrated by showing that the position of women in history of art was affected by (white) male domination. It is therefore essential to investigate if there exist ideas in art history that affect our position in the world today.

The history of universal art was conceived as the history of human progress towards some kind of perfection, and contemporary art is seen to be the latest phase in its linear continuity. The concern for human progress towards betterment, towards some kind of perfection and salvation is not a Western invention. But the theory of linear progress and freedom, based not on any empirical evidence of human behaviour or need for it but essentially on an ideological framework in which all different cultures and different races of people are chained together in an hierarchical order, is specifically Western, based on the idea of progress in Western philosophy.

But what is this idea of progress? To explain just this books have been written, and my attempt here to describe or explain it is necessarily over-simplified. Generally speaking, we can say that some idea of progress must exist in all peoples and all cultures, even when the nature and manifestation of it may vary from people to people. If

human beings have evolved from the animal origin, through a process of reflection and rationalisation, then this process must necessarily be common and progressive among all people even when it is not manifested in a linear manner. That there exist complex social organisations in all cultures is not under dispute here. All cultures in the process of social organisation produce ideas, beliefs, cultural values, some kind of artefacts - temporary or permanent - in their attempt for survival, subsistence and improvement. The ability to move beyond one's own territory and relate to other people and establish a sophisticated system of interrelationship that goes beyond mere need or concern for subsistence, must also belong to all human beings irrespective of racial differences. There does not exist any scientific evidence to prove the contrary. All civilisations and cultures throughout the world manifest in themselves the idea of progress.

But the idea of progress under consideration here is different and specific. It is specific to Western civilisation, particularly beginning with the Renaissance. What is singular about this Western civilisation is its grotesque ambition to supercede every other culture or civilisation in its schizophrenic desire to control, dominate and rule all the people all over the world. It is a paradox of history, given all the material and cultural resources available to it, that the West had to rationalise its idea of progress through constructing a philosophy of racial superiority in order to assert its dominance. It can be argued that once Augustinian idea of all human races originating from one source begun to be questioned after Reformation, giving rise to a conflict between monogenetic and polygenetic theories, this inevitably lead to pseudo-secular and liberal scholarship to human classification, based on the limited knowledge available then. Nevertheless, this inevitability had no empirical basis. It was merely a conceptual framework in which to realise the a priori idea of progress under the absolute supremacy of the West, in which to realise the final salvation of all human kind.

In the following pages I shall only discuss those ideas, briefly, which are applicable specifically to the development of the concept of art history in Western thought, which today is the main discipline that determines the nature of contemporary art practice and thus of history of art. The general ideas related to the idea of progress are in fact integral part of the development of the concept of art history; the concept of universal art history being synonymous with the idea of universal progress determined and realised by the West. What is interesting is that within this framework, or perception, there are peoples who are considered to be incapable of any progress themselves, and this incapability is attributed to racial factors.

Winckelmann is considered to be the first writer to write a universal history of art, published in 1764, in which he employed the prevailing doctrine, in order to establish a hierarchical structure for world culture. Comparing Oriental art - Egyptian and Persian, with Greek art he puts Greek art triumphantly along its path of progress while Egyptian and Persian arts remained stagnant and moribund.

Winckelmann's formulation, which established historical supremacy of Greek art over the arts of all other cultures only by using the argument of climatic determinism which attributes backwardness to hot climate, was important for later historians, particularly Creuser and Hegel. Furthermore, once the supremacy of Greek art was established, this "lead to the seizing upon the shapes of Greek and Roman bodies", as pointed out by Robert Nisbet in his book History of the Ideas of Progress, "as criteria for the biological best in the modern world; biological and also mental and cultural best! The fusion of the two Enlightenment obsessions - science and belief in Greco-Roman superiority - helped popularise the use of 'scientific' measurements and other tests for determination of who among modern peoples were closest to the Greeks and Romans, and who were farthest and therefore the most primitive and backward."

Hegel is an extremely important figure in European thought, and his influence has been universal as one of the major philosophers of the idea of progress. What concerns me here is the way Hegel uses India as a primitive model and then builds up the whole evolutionary continuum in which the West takes up the most advance position. The result of which, by implication, is not only that non-European people are seen as belonging to the past cultures, but they become fixed entities with historically exhausted physical and mental abilities.

One is amazed by the extent of fascination and admiration of the West for other cultures, and the amount of efforts it has put in in documenting, studying, contextualising and philosophising world cultures. But at the same time one cannot fail to notice its ambivalence towards other cultures. It first builds up a complex ideological framework to look at others' cultures, other peoples, and by fixing them in the past historical periods, rationalises its own position as the last chain of human evolution. Hegel's ideas provide an extremely important framework in this respect, especially those related to the development of art history. It will take too long to discuss the whole complexity of Hegelian philosophy, but I will quote here Pratha Mitter from his important book Much Maligned Monsters:

"For Hegel, every nation had a preordained place in his 'ladder' of historical progress and reflected a unique 'national spirit'.

Hegel also argued that each particular facet of nation or culture was interlinked with the rest, for the national 'spirit' permeated all spheres of life. The conclusion was that if we were to judge a particular type or tradition of art we must first of all see what particular national spirit it represented and to what particular point in history that nation in turn belonged.... Paradoxically, his dynamic principle of history, the dialectics of change, only helped to establish a fundamentally static image of Indian art, its immemorial immutability, its unchanging irrationality, and its poetic fantasy, all predetermined by the peculiar Indian national spirit. It needs to be repeated here that Hegel's characterisation of the Indian 'spirit' was not based on empirical evidence but determined essentially by India's temporal position in Hegelian metaphysics... It was thus condemned

to remain always outside history, static, immobile, and fixed for all eternity."

Although Turgot, Condorcet, and others devoted to the idea of progress, thought in terms of cultures and civilisations arranged in linear order, rather than in terms of races, in the 19th century racist hypothesis became increasingly common as explanations of the vivid differences of cultures on earth. Although Gobineau's essay on the Inequality of Human Races (1853-55) is perhaps the main source of racist conceptions of human progress which during the 19th century spread throughout Western civilisation, the idea of 'fixity' of certain people or races and their specific cultural achievements fixed in the past is evident in Hegel's Philosophy of History and History of Art which have been most influential in the development of modern art history.

However, it is my contention here that there is no essential or basic difference between the liberal scholarship, represented by Hegel, and those who put forward their racially based ideas and theories openly and explicitly. The idea of racial or ethnic determinism and of past 'fixity' as applied to artistic production or achievement are common to both groups of thinkers. The ideas of 'racial romantics', for whom a style of art was determined from the start by the unique spirit of race and whose special talents could not be imitated by people belonging to a different race without exposing themselves to grave dangers, may not be very useful today in understanding institutional racism in Western societies as these institutions have now become highly sophisticated. But there is no way to find out if these ideas have not penetrated these institutions. It is more likely that these institutions are the historical recipients of these ideas. And if on later stage these ideas were rejected there must be an evidence for this. We find no such evidence, either in the common prevailing attitudes or in the art historical texts.

Moreover, it is not necessary for these ideas to exist in their extreme forms, particularly when there is no essential or basic difference between the liberal and extreme positions. They can always either lay dormant under the carpet of liberalism or re-emerge, as has happened recently in Britain, in the form of a benevolent theory of multiculturalism in which the question of 'ethnicity' or ethnic determinism becomes important again.

Many of the extreme ideas of the 'racial romantics' historians were in fact rejected by later historians and thinkers, but they did re-emerge during Nazi Germany, which only shows that ideas do not die away by themselves just because they have been ignored. It can also be argued that Marxism rejects the nature of Hegelian dialectics and world-view, and on this basis we can ignore all those racially based ideas in Western philosophy. However, historical materialism has not in any way changed the course of modern art history which remains within the domain of bourgeois dominant culture.

Paradoxically, however, the course of art in Europe was changed about hundred years ago. The supremacy of ethnocentric aesthetics based on the classical art based on Greco-Roman models was eventually challenged by the emerging modernity of modern art in the late 19th century. But that did not change the position of Afro/Asian people to the historical processes in terms of their participation. The shift that eventually took place in the beginning of the century in Europe in the form of Cubism, in whose emergence African/Oceanic art played a major role, became a shift from ethnocentrism to Eurocentrism. It was important to abandon then the limited and exhausted perspective of classical traditions and to utilise the unlimited resources of exotic cultures. This did not challenge, in spite of apparent sympathy of European artists with the colonised peoples, the historical supremacy of the West over the rest of the world. It merely helped Western artists to come out of their ethnocentric parochialism and address the whole world.

It is a total traversivity to say, as Michael Newman has implied recently in an article in Art Monthly, that modern artists - by which he meant European artists - by abandoning classical aesthetics and appropriating other cultures were offering a critique of imperialism. Modernism arrived at the historical moment when imperialism no longer required classical models to perpetuate its world domination. It was the moment of universal expansion and consolidation for the West, not only at economic and political levels but also culturally, and its artists were able to seize the moment to universalise its art and cultural practices as the symbols of new progress and freedom. It was therefore in the interest of the West to abandon the limited and monolithic perception of art and culture inherent in Western classical traditions, in order to move to a position of universally diffusing heterogeneous models.

Nevertheless, while the cultures of other people were allowed to enter into European consciousness, to become appropriated, transformed and integrated into modernism, the people representing the very same cultures continued to be seen even incapable of transforming their own cultures in the context of the new reality, let alone participating internationally in modern cultural practices. The new exclusion was not incidental, but was actually rationalised during the same time in the early century on the basis of the difference between 'modern primitivism' and the actual 'primitivism' of colonised people.

A demonstration of this difference took place recently in the form of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York: Primitivism in 20th Century Art. The exhibition comprised of 200 works of African/Oceanic sculptures, masks, artefacts, etc. and some examples of modern works, since Gauguin, which were influenced by African/Oceanic cultures. What was most revealing about the whole thing was its unashamed acceptance of the appropriation of the cultures by Western artists, and at the same time continued relegating the very same cultures and the people who produced these cultures to some primitive period in past history.

William Robin, Director of the Exhibition, makes the point in his introduction to the catalogue that he is not concerned with the so-called 'primitive' works of art; and the only function of the whole exercise was to look at what he calls 'modern primitivism' and how it compared with the 'primitivism' of the people who made the 'primitive' works of art. He describes the 'modern primitivism' as the discovery by the modern artist of his unconscious mind which was suppressed by Greco-Christian traditions of Western civilisation. It represented the rebellion of the Western artist against the sterile rationalism in European culture and his desire to find new ways to express his wholeness - the wholeness being the combination of both rational and irrational factors, the recognition of both conscious and unconscious levels of mind. Thus the new found freedom of the Western artist, to appropriate anything he likes and from any culture, is given historical validity as it is contextualised and rationalised in the historical development of Western/modern art. To give further credibility to the genius of Western artist, in spite of the fact that there is enough evidence of the physical contact between many artists and the African/Oceanic works of art that were available in Paris in the early century, it was emphasised that the similarity between modern works of art and those of African/Oceanic cultures is incidental. Western art would have arrived at what is called 'modern primitivism' even without the knowledge of so-called 'primitive art', through the logic of its won history. The comparison, which was the function of the exhibition, only confirms the validity of 'modern primitivism', which represents logic, rationality, mobility, and historical consciousness; while the 'primitivism' of African/Oceanic works represent everything opposite.

Besides obvious implication of racism, and it is remarkable that this view is being expressed in 1984 by one the most important and enlightened institution of the country that claims to be the most civilised country of the world today, the argument is extremely thin and intellectually dishonest. However, it does represent an attitude that is endemic in the contemporary art circles of the Western world.

It would perhaps be useful to point out here that the world 'primitive' is though now used exclusively for African/Oceanic cultures, it was not so in the last century. Before of the turn of this century, the terms was in fact used indiscriminately for all the cultures other than European cultures. The term 'primitive art' was coined at the beginning of this century to categorise objects which had not been previously regarded in the West as works of art. Today there are variety of terms, such as primitive, Oriental, Islamic, Egyptian, Pre-Columbian, etc. but their differentiation is only to separate different areas of the world, as different categories of anthropological museums in the West, for efficient control and administration. The underlying perception that determines their position in history remains the same: they all represent materials in anthropological museums representing primitive cultures: anomympus, underdeveloped, backward, fixed; and the only way they can be rejuvenated and are allowed to re-enter into history is through the genius of Western Man.

I would like to recognise here that Western history is not full of only negative aspects or that there are no people in the West who have any concern for humanity at large. There are people in the West, that is Europeans, who cannot be described as racist or imperialists; but nevertheless many are caught in the ideological complexity which they do not fully understand. They are part of a collective consciousness produced by colonialism, and since no fundamental change has taken in the Western societies, it must be difficult for many to escape this context at all levels. My analysis here does not concern individuals but the ideological and philosophical perceptions that have divided and continue to divide the world. between active and passive, between modern and primitive, between advance and backward, on the basis of ethnic or racial differences.

However, here is an interesting statement by the Congress of International Progressive Artists, held in Dusseldorf, May 1922.

"From all over the world come voices calling for a union of progressive artists. A lively exchange of ideas between artists of different countries has now become necessary. The lines of communication that were torn up by political events are finally re-opened. We want universal and international interest in art. We want a universal international periodical. We want a permanent, universal, international exhibition of art everywhere in the world. We want a universal, international music festival that will unite mankind at least once a year with a language that can be understood by all.

The long dreary spiritual isolation must now end. Art needs the unification of those who create. Forgetting questions of nationality, without political bias or self-seeking intention, our slogan must be: 'Artists of all nationalities unite'. Art must become international or it will perish."

Although the above statement is somewhat naive, in the sense that it does not recognise the reality of the colonial world and the inability of the colonised people to participate in the creation of new, modern, international culture. But it does express the need for all the people of the world to participate in and develop an international culture. This statement is also important, in the sense that this kind of statements coming from the West were in fact taken at the face values and in good faith by the artists in the colonial world. This was partly the reason for the movements of artists from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to the metropolis of the West. The reality they actually faced on their arrival in the West was different, and that is the subject of my next chapter.

Modernism & Black Artists

The idea of progress and freedom was widely proclaimed in the colonies, and in fact colonialism was often justified on the basis that it brought progress to the colonised people and it would also ultimately provide framework for the freedom of all humanity. This was particularly incorporated in the colonial educational system, the purpose of which of course was to create an educated elite who could join the colonial system and serve it.

One of the consequence of this education was that the educated elite in the colonies became uprooted from its own cultural traditions, and this was particularly the case vis-a-vis visual arts. Even when the traditions were not forgotten or ignored altogether, they became marginal to the production of art in most parts of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

It is difficult to deal here with specific situations, and therefore my account and analysis here is generalised and oversimplified. There were of course exceptions to the rule: there was constant opposition to the colonial type of education. However, the influence of the colonial education remained predominant; and which also paradoxically provided leadership for anti-colonial struggles.

The models which were the basis of art education in the colonies were often outmoded, conservative and backward. When European artists were revolting against and overthrowing the whole tradition of Greco-Roman classicism early this century, as part of their search for new modes of expressions that would express the spirit of their time, art students in the colonies were being taught how to draw faces from the Greco-Roman casts imported from Europe. Modern art gave a basis to the colonial artist to revolt against the traditions of conservatism, European as well his/her own. This revolt was often also the result of the participation of the artists in anti-colonial struggles.

The War II played an important role in the further development of consciousness of the idea of progress and freedom, as it was often claimed that the war against Hitler was a war for universal human freedom. This also coincided with the acceleration of anti-colonial struggles throughout the world, particularly in the Indian sub-continent where many artists became part of the struggle. As a matter of fact, it was during this time that many artists in the Indian sub-continent, including Sri Lanka, formed themselves into groups who were often called progressive artists' groups; and I believe similar things happened in the rest of the colonies. The progressiveness of these groups manifested in their support for freedom from colonialism and progress for their countries based on modern technology; and for their own practice as artists they adopted modern art, with variations to express the specificity of their own cultures as well, as the expression of their own commitment to modern progress.

The end of War in 1945 ended with celebrations all over the world. The celebrations in Paris were particularly significant for the history of modern art, as the interest in modern art re-emerged as an expression of new progress and freedom for all humanity. Modernism was seen by the Nazis as a 'degenerate art', as part of international socialism and communism, and it was thus banned in Germany. And so after the War, it became a new symbol for human progress and freedom. Many exhibitions of modern art were held in Paris as part of this celebration, and Picasso in particular was turned into a heroic figure. Exhibitions were also held in most major cities of the world, and great international publicity was given to these events. With the re-emergence of interest in Modern art, many new galleries were opened in the major cities of the West after the War, with many publications of books and periodicals on modern art which also began to reach the newly independent countries, such as the Indian sub-continent.

The end of War also accelerated the independence movements in the colonies, the first result of which was the independence of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. This gave a tremendous feeling of freedom throughout the colonial world, with tremendous release of creative energy particularly among the intellectuals who began to see their horizons expanding beyond the boundaries maintained by colonialism.

Art in particular became a focus and expression of this new freedom. But, at the same time, it was difficult to express this freedom as there were no new institutions which would recognise this new freedom of expression immediately after the independence. Colonialism had destroyed the indigenous institutions and the colonial institutions that replaced them did not recognise the full creative potential of the colonised. Artists who fought for this new freedom, as part of anti-colonial struggles, suddenly found themselves in a practical situation where there were no institutions to support and recognise them. This created a post-colonial dilemma among many Third World intellectuals, particularly among visual artists, whether to stay in their countries and fight for their place at whatever cost or to leave for the West where they hoped to get support and recognition for their artistic endeavours.

However, it is important here to point out the priorities of newly independent countries were obviously of economic and political nature, and it took some time before the need for new cultural institutions was understood. Furthermore, the artists were also encouraged by their own countries to go abroad (the West) to learn more and improve themselves, in a hope that they would come back and help build new institutions, particularly in educational field.

Before I deal further with the postwar situation, I would like to mention a black artist who had made Europe his home in the thirties. Ronald Moody, after studying art in Calabar College in Jamaica, where he was born, and in Kings College, London; settled in Paris in 1936. He had some exhibitions and recognition there before he was made to leave Paris because of the War. He arrived in England in 1941; and

had since lived in London. He died in 1984 without receiving any recognition from this country.

I have particularly mentioned Ronald Moody because he was one of those artists who typified the spirit of the time. He believed in universal 'brotherhood' and in the function of art beyond national and ethnic cultural boundaries. This was in fact the spirit of modern art; and this was the spirit with which most of the artists from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean arrived in England after the War.

However, the movement of black artists in postwar/post-independence period was part of the general movement of colonial people in general in search of better opportunities of life. The difficulties the artists faced after arriving in the West were the difficulties black people in general faced in white societies of Europe. They all had the same expectation from 'mother countries', and when they were disappointed and frustrated by the way they were treated here they all joined together in the common struggle against racism and for human equality.

However, it would be wrong to assume that there was an organic relationship between the artist and his/her community based on common cultural backgrounds; and the solidarity was due to entirely this relationship. The alienation of the modern artist in the West, which is a function of advance capitalism, was passed on to the colonial situation in the sense that colonialism is an extension of modern capitalism; although the reasons for the alienation of the modern artist in the colonial situation are much more complex in view of the fact that he/she is uprooted from his/her own indigenous cultural and historical traditions. This is extremely important to remember because it is presumed, both by the right and the left, that the difficulties of the black artist in Britain are entirely due to his/her 'dislocation' from his/her own cultural tradition; and if this tradition is re-introduced in Britain all the problems will be solved.

Let us now cast a glance at the actual situation in Europe itself which will give us some understanding of the milieu in which the black artist entered when he or she arrived here. The War had not only caused a tremendous physical destruction, in terms of actual human deaths and the destruction of the cities, it had caused tremendous mental anguish in the postwar period, which became part of the consciousness of many artists in Europe. In Paris, particularly, many young artists became preoccupied with the problems of re-establishing some rationale for the continuity of art activity; in the face of moral dilemmas of occupation and violence, the memories of War and nightmares... But, on the other hand, there were also people who wanted to forget the War and re-establish the optimism of the tradition of modern art.

The situation in England has always been marginal in terms of modern art movements, since all the pre-war movements in this century took place in the Continent. And therefore the immediate postwar situation here.

continued to remain oriented towards Paris. But, London did not have to go through the post-occupation dilemmas of Paris. With the exception of a few, such as Bacon, the pre-occupation of the British artist was to re-establish links with modernism before the war. And therefore the 'new' experiments showed the mish-mash of the influence of Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, etc.

Something very different happened during this time as well which had a lot of repercussion on the situation of the newly arriving Afro/Asian artists in Britain. After the independence of the Indian sub-continent, many English people suddenly felt at a loss, particularly that small section of the population that somehow was in favour of independence of India. And therefore when the idea of British Commonwealth was put forward, it was enthusiastically hailed by these people. In fact when people from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean began to arrive in England, it was seen by the liberal intelligentsia as the development of the Commonwealth; notwithstanding the fact that Britain desperately was looking for labour force to do its post-war reconstruction of economy and infra-structure. In the art scene there was an entirely new enthusiasm, based on the idea that London could attain an international status as the centre of the independent Commonwealth.

It was in the midst of this situation, postwar dilemmas, reconstruction and new optimism, that artists like Ivan Peries from Sri Lanka, Francis Souza, Avinash Chandra, Tayab Mehta..from India, Aubrey Williams, Frank Bowling.. from Gyana, Uzo Egonu..from Nigeria, A J Shemza, Ahmad Perwez..from Pakistan, Kim Lim.. from Singapore, to mention only few, arrived in London. In the beginning, they all faced the same situation people in general faced: they found difficult to draw attention to their presence in Britain who could, and did, contribute to the development of contemporary art in Britain. But by the mid-50's when the art scene began to pick up confidence, they began to be noticed by the liberal establishment. It was the time when many galleries started to emerge in London and which showed new and young artists; and some even became particularly interested in 'Commonwealth' artists. By the end of '50's, Souza, Chandra, Perwez, Shemza, Williams, Geoffrey, became particularly known and they regularly showed along with their white contemporaries. There was no separation of artists based on the idea of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, although some kind of cultural pluralism was expected due to the Afro//Asian backgrounds of the new Commonwealth people in Britain. Many critics, among them John Berger, Edward Mullen, in fact hailed the presence of 'Commonwealth' artists in London and supported them. Late George Butcher particularly hailed the fact that the artists from the Indian sub-continent were contributing to international art in the same way Picasso and Miro did in the early century.

All these artists were not doing the same kind of work, so that they could be categorised together separately. The only thing that they all encountered was the feeling of not belonging to this society when they arrived here. This of course came as a result of what every black person encounters in this society. But I'm not here talking about the kind of

racism which is visible and is commonly recognised. There is something else which is very subtle and is specific to the structures of art establishment, the function of which is to maintain a 'difference' in the role of white/European artist and the role of the Others who are not white or Europeans. This concern for 'difference' is not openly spelled out, but is sometime expressed in terms of establishment's benevolence. In the beginning this 'difference' was important in the recognition of some 'Commonwealth' artists of Afro/Asian origins, but since this 'difference' represents an unresolvable contradiction of colonial discourse (modern art) it was not possible for these artists to maintain their position indefinitely.

Before these artists came to England, their main preoccupation as artists was to be part of the context of modernism, which in postwar period was declared by the West to be international. The basis of their work was not the values of their own respective traditions. They actually saw a transference from, not abandonment of, their respective cultural contexts necessary for them to enter into the international arena. But soon after they arrived in England they realised that the expectation from them was very different: they expected to be the representatives of their own cultures, whether they liked it or not.

Avinash Chandra has described a funny story somewhere in this respect. Once he took his work to show to a gallery in London. And when the gallery direct realised that Avinash was Indian, he asked him if he could paint Elephants and Tigers... This may appear a trivial incidence, but Avinash has never forgotten it. In fact, this kind of encounter with the art world has been a common experience of many artists; although Avinash's encounter was exceptionally crude and silly. I believe that there were many artists who were shattered by this kind of experience, causing in turn what we call today 'black identity crises'. This experience, which can be called 'black experience' as it was specific to only Afro/Asian people, underlines the work of many first generation of black artists in Britain. There was a positive thing to all this, in the sense that this helped many artists to look into the possibilities of using their own cultural forms in their work; and some actually did and came out with syntheses which were the expressions of their own experiences.

However, all these artists were part of common and general postwar situation in Britain. Immediately after the War there were no coherent movements here. Individuals sought individual solutions according to their own understandings and perceptions. Loneliness, alienation, tortured 'self', etc. were some of the conditions of the existential milieu of the time, and it was within this milieu that Afro/Asian artists able to situate their own experiences and made their own contribution to art in Britain. They did not take avant-garde positions, as implied by Geeta Kapur in relation to Souza, because their work did not set itself in direct opposition to the historical precedents in the history of modern art. Their experience of being 'Others' became their priority, which they expressed in their own individual ways. They realised that they were in the midst of a culture which was not wholly sympathetic to their taking up advance positions. Nevertheless, they

did stand up and challenge the presumptions of Eurocentric culture about them, by not allowing themselves to be used merely as exotic presences. Their stand and work has not been properly analysed and understood, which is a different story.

It was not my intention to take up the work of individual artists and discuss them here. But to do a brief analysis of two artists, both from India, will be of some interest here.

Francis Souza came to England in 1949. His early work is based on Indian subjects and iconography, but using a modernist methodology and technique of painting. Soon, in England, his concern is shifted to the expression of 'self'. He starts using caricatured faces, which often take up grotesque proportions, to express the brutality and brutalised personality of the individual in our time. At other level, he takes up Catholic imagery to express his own dilemma of being caught between two cultures. His use of the image of Christ as a metaphor or symbol for the tortured 'self' can be compared with his contemporary, Francis Bacon who is also concerned with the expression of self, loneliness and alienation. The contradiction we face here is that we cannot use a common context: the pain of the colonised is not recognised in colonial discourse.

Souza's contribution is important in the sense that he has arrived at a synthesis that expresses his being in the world to which he wants to belong but at the same time he does not and cannot. It is a kind of synthesis that I'm sure he would have not arrived at if he had remained in India. His work belongs to a postwar historical reality which created a movement from periphery (colonised world) to the centre (metropolis) of the postwar capitalism. In other words, his work reflects unresolvable dilemma of the self-exiled intellectual from the Third World who finds it difficult to come to terms with the reality of his/her own post-colonial society.

Avinash Chandra's early work consists of landscape painting. He arrives in London in early '50s and soon develops his own new style of work based on so-called rhythmic dance movements in Indian sculpture. It is said, incorrectly in my own opinion, that Chandra has transformed the spirit of Indian sculpture in his own contemporary work. Chandra, I think, is much more complex than that: the rhythmic aspect of his work which is often seen as the content of the work is only a mask. The importance of his work lies in the fact that he has been able to look at the so-called Indian tradition in a new and contemporary way; and in such a way that it reflects the reality of the Indian society (and his own) today. On the surface, it's all rhythmic, gay, colourful and dynamic - even to the extent of being vulgar, but beneath it it is fragmented and tortured. Pain and pleasure are both expressed at the same time in one complexity. In this respect I find Chandra's synthesis much more interesting than that Souza's work, since in case of Souza pain and pleasure is separated and expressed differently. For pain, for Souza, Christ body becomes a symbol; while he gazes at the naked body of the female model or the woman for pleasure.

Chandra, on the other hand, takes up a role of the butcher (if you would forgive my metaphor). He cuts up the body, both of male and female, in such a way that the parts almost become or are reduced to sexual organs, which are then thrown into the space to whirl around in rhythmic movements. The whole notion about the Indian society, particularly in the West, that Indian society is in harmony with itself, in the way gods and goddesses are depicted in Indian sculpture, is questioned through the use of parody. The bright beautiful colour and powerful rhythm of the lines often help disguise this fact and make it very difficult to read his work in its full complexity. I would like to extend my analysis further in order to reflect upon, perhaps, Chandra's own predicament as a sensitive human being who is expected to play a role, a role perhaps of an exotic Indian artist in Britain. He does this extremely intelligently; but without succumbing fully to that role.

Although some of the artists I have mentioned above managed to establish themselves by the end of '50s, but their success was short lived; and today none of them have any place in the history of postwar British art. Their failure to consolidate their position was due to complex reasons, which were personal, historical and ideological. However, it is important to understand that no artist working in contemporary context can sustain his or her position indefinitely, in spite of some commercial success, without attaining a position in the historical account of modern developments in art.

The fact that artists from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean have no place in the history of contemporary art, has been noticed even by white art historians. Prof. Norbet Lynton, the present professor of the History of Art at the University of Sussex, realising this situation back in 1962 wrote:

"A few years ago there appeared a handsome internationally published volume entitled Art Since 1945. It is significant that this book, purporting to present 'art today' ranged geographically from Poland and Yugoslavia westward to the United States and simply omitted everything east of Belgrade and West of Seattle. To ignore the Oriental contribution to modern art is such an act of ingratitude to a group of civilisations from which many of the concerns and attitudes of modern art derive that one is justified in interpreting it also as a defensive act against developments that, if seen, would tend to outshine whole selections of western artistic achievements..."

Prof. Lynton was not actually speaking about 'Oriental' art, but he was writing about Iqbal Geoffrey, a Pakistani artist who was then living in Britain. Iqbal Geoffrey's story is not a unique story. He was given a lot of support in the early '60s and he managed to establish himself in the art world, but only after few years later he was dropped from the scene. He became too big for his shoes! So it happened with almost all the artists who gained some recognition in the late '50s and early '60s.

The greatest paradox of all this is that when Prof Lynton himself wrote a massive history of modern art in 1982, The Story of Modern Art, he did not mention a single artist of Asian, African or the Caribbean origin in his book. He was no longer the person he was twenty years earlier. During his tenure as the Director of Exhibitions for the Arts Council, between late '60s to late '70s, black artists received no support from him.

The early '60s was the beginning of the postwar economic boom and optimism. In the '50s new schools, colleges and universities were established as part of the new economic and social planning; and by the early '60s students began to come out of these institutions and look for jobs. Students who came out of art colleges did not look to Paris for any inspiration but towards New York.

With the emergence of America as a world power after the War, and the international promotion of Abstract Expressionism as a latest art movement, New York became an important art centre of the modern world; and which in turn affected the historical position of Paris. When in the early '60s English artists began to show in New York and in turn American art was shown (which actually began to be shown in the '50s with large exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism) in London, this signalled a new beginning in the transatlantic alliance with international repercussions, besides the beginning of American domination of British art scene. Suddenly the Channel became wider than the Atlantic. By the mid-'60s there were many galleries in London which operated on a sort of exchange programme with galleries in New York.

This alliance, it appears, also affected the position of black artists in Britain. If we cast a glance again on the whole history of modern art developments in the 20th century, it becomes clear that its continuity has been sustained by, among other things, the infusion of other cultures into it. The presence of black artists in Britain was seen by some to be performing this function of providing a 'catalyst' for British art; but on the other hand this was not allowed to happen for ideological reasons. And when London turned to New York, the whole situation completely changed, materially as well as historically. New York had the intellectual leadership and the money. In this new historic nexus, the black artist, being a colonial and foreigner, lost all his/her significance.

However, the Sixties was a different situation, not only from the point of view of the shift in the art world but also the nature of the work of some black artists who managed to take up avant-garde positions and challenged the monopoly of modern art by the whites/Europeans. In this period, the nature of the contribution of black artists is different from their predecessors. They managed to achieve a historical breakthrough; and this breakthrough was not in terms of the recognition of their achievement but the exposition of the contradiction within modern art context, whose boundaries remain defined by the racially based ideas of the 19th century colonial discourse.

The work of black artists in the '60s is also firmly located in the specific and historical conditions of this period in Britain, which was dynamic and optimistic. In this respect, the names of Rasheed Araeen (Pakistan), Kim Lim (Singapore), Belraj Khanna (India), David Medalla (Philippines), and Li Yuan-Chia (China), are important.

The emergence of Kinetic art in the late '50s in Europe was a reaction against the mental pessimism of the postwar period and continuation of the optimistic tradition of modernism. In England this reaction also began to be manifested in colourful works, particularly in the sculpture of Caro et al.

At the time when the sculptors from St. Martins (Caro et al) began to take up dominant position in the form of formalist, rigid and hierarchical works, there also emerged a group of artists in Britain who continued maintaining some kind of connection with Paris. Their work in a sense was antithetical to the dominant British sculpture represented by Caro et al, and which was informal, organic and kinetic. David Medalla who came to England in 1960 'belonged' to this group. Between 1964 and 1966 he was involved in running an art gallery in London which was one of the most avant-garde centres of its time, the Signal. He also edited its magazine called by the same name. During this time he showed many important artists from Paris, particularly Latin American artists living in Paris, besides doing his own work which was one of the most original work done in the early '60s. His use of informal material, such as soap liquid (which was turned into huge clouds by the action of electric motor), sand, mud, etc. anticipated the later movements in sculpture. His suggestions for conceptual works were published in Studio International in 1966, some years before the emergence of Conceptual art. In 1967 he gave up all kind of individual art activity and pioneered a collective participatory art activity under the name of a group called Exploding Galaxy... In the early '70s he was one of the few black artists who actively supported the anti-imperialist struggles in the Third World, also making works of art which were related to these struggles.

Similarly, Rasheed Araeen, who came to England in 1964, also took up an antithetical position to the dominant sculpture of the time. Soon after he was in London he became fascinated by the work of Caro et al; but after some time this fascination was turned into a critical and oppositional position. The resulting work was symmetrical, serial, systematic and kinetic: in other words, it was in opposition to the dominant sculpture which represented assymetric, compositional and hierarchical values. This work was unique in Britain, but not internationally. In New York, during the same time, some artists also took up similar position of opposing the tradition of composition in modern sculpture. Their work became internationally known and is recognised as important part of contemporary developments: the Minimalist sculpture. . .

In Britain, Araeen's work of the '60s (Minimalist sculpture) is not recognised and is dismissed as an expression of his Islamic tradition. The interesting thing here is that Minimalist sculpture of New York is based on the principles of symmetry and seriality which are derived from

the tradition of Islamic geometric art. While the art establishment here did everything possible to promote the work of New York artists, it did not see anything significant in the similar work done in Britain. (Perhaps things would have been different if the Minimalist sculpture in Britain was the work of a white/European artist!)

Belraj Khanna is another Indian artist who came to England in the early '60s and produced highly individualistic work. His work represents the struggle of the modern artist, as an individual, to find an authentic identity in the midst of plethora of contradictory images of contemporary life. Although he did not belong to any group or movement, his work does show and reflect the concerns of the Sixties, both at formal and content levels: it is optimistic and celebratory.

The only woman artist who was active, besides Yoko Ono's short appearance as an artist in the mid-Sixties, was Kim Lim. Her work of the time was much more interesting than her husband, William Turnbull who is very established British artist. The reason for this comparison is only to point out that her work showed a clear departure from the fussy and complicated compositions of most her British contemporaries with whom she often exhibited. Her work employed simple and symmetrical shapes, which was a different approach to sculpture both syntactically and metaphorically.

To sum up the Sixties situation, it can be said with confidence and in the light of a critical and historical analysis that the achievement of black artists in this decade was exceptional. We did not and do not need special or separate criteria to evaluate or judge their work. The actual problem they pose for the white society is that they represent advance and pioneering positions within avant-garde modernism; and this society does not know how to deal with this situation in the light of its prevailing values and attitudes.

Post-Modernism & Black Art

By the end of the Sixties the economic boom was really over; and the hippies began to leave the country and go to India. In London many galleries began to feel the pinch, and many in fact were closed down. War in Vietnam, students uprising in Paris, Black Power movement in America, and general discontent with the system, all added to the opening of a crack in the bourgeois establishment. The response of many artists almost all over the western world, including Latin America, was to abandon the whole idea of making objects for the bourgeois households or establishment, leading to new experiments and manifestations that went beyond the historical supremacy of painting and sculpture as the only areas of visual arts. Seminars and informal discussions were regularly held in the early '70s about the relationship of art and politics; and the political reality of the time actually entered into the production of art.

Black Power movement in Britain made its own important contribution to the overall struggle of the time; and it was during this time in the early '70s that the question of racism in art was openly raised and how this question could be incorporated in one's art practice as part of black struggle. However, it would be wrong to say that black artists did not show any awareness of racism in art before. It is hard to imagine that there would be artists of Afro/Asian origins in Britain who did not encounter racism or go through the experience of being black. This black experience has in fact been the common cause of identity crisis among black artists, who tried to overcome this crises by looking into their own cultural traditions and incorporating their forms into their own contemporary works; and the resulting syntheses are in fact their contribution to art in Britain. The social and historical conditions of their time did not help them incorporate the question of racism in their work; and it should not be considered their failure. The conditions in the early '70s became drastically different, both socially and politically, as well as in terms of artistic experiments and directions, and it became possible for black artists to raise the question of racism and then incorporate it in their work as part of radical developments.

The emergence of Black art in the early Seventies in fact represents the continuity in the recognition by the black artist of the contemporary context, common to both white and black artists, and without creating a separate category for him/her own practice based on the difference between the European culture and Afro/Asian traditions. If Black art posits a different context, it is the context of racism. It has emerged out of the historical discourse of racially based ideas in Western philosophy that underpins the monopoly of modern art by white/European artists.

Black art does not necessarily invalidate the work of earlier black artists who did not attempt to incorporate the question of racism in their work. While the earlier artists rightly attempted to place themselves within the mainstream on the basis of a common assumption that the terms of reference of the history of modern art were available to all human beings, the development of Black art is based on the rejection of this assumption. Although all artists, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex, must demand that they all should be located and treated within contemporary context and they have every right to look for their place within this, Black art attempts to expose a basic contradiction of this context which arises from its Eurocentricity; and which in fact is responsible for the and exclusion of black artists from the history of contemporary art.

It is therefore the essential priority of Black art to question this very context, the values and ideas that this context represent. Once you enter into this context, exploring it historically, one cannot avoid the issue of racism, given the fact that the ideas of progress which are basic to modern art or modernism are racially constructed. In other words, the very questioning of the Eurocentric context of contemporary art practices, and its racially based ideas, becomes integral to Black art.

However, the rejection and questioning of the prevailing terms of reference which are Eurocentric does not mean turning one's back to the dominant

culture and re-locating oneself somewhere outside the contexts of contemporary art practices, by adopting a position of nostalgia for one's past cultural tradition. Black art's objective has been to take a strategic distance from the centre of the contemporary dominant culture (modernism) so as to bring it into a critical focus. Once a critical space is thus created and based on the recognition of one's own specific human struggle, it becomes possible to challenge the dominant centre. This critical has also enabled the black artist to re-construct his/her new identity, or/and develop a radical position, as part of overall black struggle for human equality.

It is not necessary here to mention the names of those artists who have been important to the development of Black art in Britain. What is more important here is the recognition that all art produced by black artists is not Black art. Black art is specific within the overall history of black artists in Britain.

For example, traditional African art cannot be considered as Black art, since its basis has been its own indigenous material and historical conditions. Africans have been African peoples. And now the replacement of the word 'African' by 'black' only expresses their experiences of (white) colonialism; and if this experience is expressed in art then this art can be called Black art. In other words, Black art is the expression of the experience of racism, whether through colonialism or otherwise.

In Britain, the common experience of both African and Asian peoples have been white racism; and it is for this reason that both African and Asian people here call themselves 'black'. It is the articulation and expression of this 'common experience' in art which is the basis of Black art.

The experience of racism creates a particular human condition, such as an identity crisis, and the basic function of art is to express human condition. Black art therefore expresses an authentic historical experience.

However, an incorporation of the antiracist position in a work of art does not necessarily lead to good or significant work of art. Whatever the specific conditions of the time, art must always deal with the complexity of human experience, incorporating both individual and universal human aspects. Unfortunately most of our young black artists today, who claim to be producing Black art, lack this complexity. All they do is to throw some antiracist slogans in their work and hope for the best. The question of racism in art is extremely complex, and the young black artist of today does not understand this complexity out of his/her ignorance. All institutions in Britain (or the West) represent ideological structures which have been built on racist assumptions; and as far as art institutions are concerned they have not been challenged even by the left which has become complacent with some antiracist slogans and throwing benevolent carrots to its so-called 'ethnic' minority. Without the understanding of these ideological structures, which underpin contemporary artistic activity and its recognition, we cannot deal with institutional racism.

The development of Black art in Britain took place in a specific historic period, beginning roughly in the early Seventies, and this period is often

referred to as the period of postmodernism, on the basis that this represented an important shift from the classical modernism. The classical modernism being conceived as a linear sequence of modernist styles in painting and sculpture developing one after another; and which supposed to have reached its peak in the '60s in the form of various individual styles of formalist painting and sculpture. In the '70s, the modernist preoccupation for the continuity of the development of styles was replaced by the concerns and priorities of the human struggles of the time, such as socialism, feminism, black and Third World struggles; and which in turn lead to new experimentations and developments of new modes of expression beyond just making painting or sculpture. Video, photography, performance, tape/slide projection, sound, the use of language as visual signs, issuing of theoretical and ideological texts, etc. all became part of visual arts culture and helped expand its territory of artistic practice. An individual artist was no longer preoccupied or concerned with the creation of a single style as an expression of his/her unique personality (during this time Lacan had shown that there was no such thing as 'unique personality'). Instead disparate and varied means, including the use of language, became part of the individual's practice. The traditional barrier between the theory (art criticism) and practice (work of the artist) was a result pulled down, giving rise to a situation that was a threat to the establishment, for such definite boundaries are important for its control.

Black artists in the '70s were also engaged in various new experiments, using all the means, forms and technologies, giving rise to innovations and new concepts, based on the priority of their struggle. In this respect, Black art has made its own, and in its own right, a unique contribution to the development of postmodernism, even when this contribution is not recognised by the establishment.

New Generation of Black Artists

I'm deliberately treating this as a separate category, not because these artists represent the youngest generation of black artists, although some of them are very young. It is more to do with the fact that their work represents a new and different development, beginning in the late '70s. In some way it is a backward movement, created by the importance that have been given recently to the role of Afro/Asian cultural traditions in the development of art of so-called 'ethnic' minorities in Britain.

These artists do recognise the issue of racism in art, but at the same time they feel they are vulnerable as artists if they engage themselves in the issue of racism as part of their work. Instead, they have adopted a position of somewhat similar to so-called ethnic arts; although I'm not happy with the usage of this term. Their basic concern is to explore the possibilities of making their own cultures as the basis of the contemporary art practice, by using or appropriating their traditional forms. The idea is to find one's roots and then use one's own culture as a bridge between the cultures they have been caught in.

Anish Kapoor represents an important figure in this respect, and he has been taken up by the establishment. He is no doubt an imaginative and competent artist and his work is somehow original, within a limited context; and he is therefore being used also as a model to lure other black artists into following that kind of direction.

It is not my purpose here to degrade the work of these artists. They are the product of a particular situation. But, nevertheless, their work has a non-critical position in relation to the dominant culture. It is part of the recent international phenomenon of cultural eclecticism, which is a reaction to the critical function of the avant-garde modernism.

The argument here is not against the use of one's own culture or cultural traditions as part of contemporary art practices, but the way the cultural traditions are being used. They avoid the central issue of radical art practice, which is the central issue of modernism in the age of descending and dehumanised bourgeois culture. Their appeal is often at the level of exoticism.

This kind of work is being justified on the basis of the loss of the artist's identity in an alien culture. The loss of identity or identity crisis is not new to black artists. Earlier artists who came to Britain from Africa, Asia or the Caribbean also faced the crises of identity; but as a result of which they did not give up their critical position or resort to their own traditions for their salvation. The fact that the young generation of artists have been born here is not enough to justify their position in terms of their re-locating themselves entirely within their own cultural traditions and without making these traditions undergo a change in the light of the reality they are part of in Britain.

It is obvious that Afro/Asian people in Britain are ~~not~~ part of British society and their contemporary art practice cannot be situated entirely in the traditions of Afro/Asian cultures. It is not often understood that art is different from culture: it is something part of the culture but at the same time is different from the culture it has its roots in. And this is particularly true of our contemporary societies. Art is the dynamic part of culture and its creativity is dependent very much on its changing nature. As an end product art may or may not be a mirror image of its culture or even have a sympathetic relationship with it. In times of crises, art is often and can be in confrontation with the static and rigid nature of culture. Preservation of a culture or cultural traditions does not necessarily lead to creativity in art. It is therefore necessary to separate the role of art from culture, in order to grasp its full potential and creative and critical force in society.

Rasheed Araeen (c)
August 1985

A SYNOPSIS

The history of black artists in postwar Britain begins with Ronald Moody. After studying art in Calabar College in Jamaica, where he was born, and in Kings College, London, Ronald Moody settled in Paris in 1936. He had some exhibitions of his sculpture there, as well as some recognition, before he was made to leave Paris because of the War. He arrived in England in 1941, and had since lived in London. He died in 1984 without receiving any recognition from this country.

Ronald Moody is important in many ways. He typified the ambition of the colonial artist who looked to the West for opportunities and recognition. He strongly believed in universal function of art, the art which belonged to its own time and went beyond national and ethnic cultural traditions. This was and is in fact the spirit of modern art, the predominant art of 20th century and which is today influential all over the world. This was also the spirit with which most of the artists from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean arrived in England after the War.

The end of the War represents a historic watershed, as it coincides with the beginning of the independences of West's colonies and the industrialisation of the cities of the newly independent countries all over the world. This resulted in the movement of people from rural areas to the industrial urban centres as well as to the cities of Europe which desperately needed labour for its postwar reconstruction.

The postwar arrival of black artists in Britain was part of this general movement, a movement from the periphery of international capitalism (Third World) to its metropolis (the West). It was a search on the part of the people from the Third World for better opportunities of jobs and standard of life. But it was also an attempt on the part of Afro/Asian artists, who were influenced by modern art, to situate themselves in the centres of contemporary/modern culture so that they could make their own contributions to its development.

The difficulties the artists faced once they were here were the difficulties black people in general faced in this society. It is now recognised by almost everybody that the attitudes of this society towards black people are part of its long history of racism, which has become deep-rooted as part of its collective consciousness. The position of black artists is affected by these attitudes.

The position of black artists has nothing to do with the difficulties this society faced in trying to understand the values of cultures which were alien to its consciousness or sensibility. The work of black artists has been part of general development of contemporary art in Britain, as they have always considered themselves as part of modern movements which incorporate and recognise the values of cultures

all over the world. Their contributions should therefore be recognised within the context of the mainstream modern culture.

If black artists have made original contributions - which they have - to the development of contemporary art in Britain, why aren't they recognised like their white contemporaries? This is obviously to do with racism. The question of racism is important here to understand the position of the black artist in this society, but it is more important to recognise the way racism in art actually manifests. It can and does manifest by dislocating black artists from contemporary contexts, on the pretext that they represent different cultural backgrounds and aesthetic sensibilities.

It is extremely important, therefore, to recognise first the true nature of the work here, which is contemporary and cannot be pushed under the carpet of 'ethnic' multiculturalism. To say or imply that the work of black artists has not been recognised because it represented the kind of work which was alien to this society is a total humbug. The inability of this society not to evaluate and recognise this work has nothing to do with the work itself. It is more to do with the idea that non-European peoples belong to past cultures and have little to do with contemporary or modern developments. And if they want to be artistically creative, their creativity must necessarily be determined by the values of their own past cultures.

The separation of peoples in their creative abilities based on ethnic cultural traditions was formulated in 19th century Europe as part of its many racially based ideas that justified its colonial domination. Although modernism rejects ethnocentricity, but it has not yet come to terms and deal with its basic contradiction in terms of the role of non-European people in its universal developments.

While modernism (or modern art) claims to be international, global and universal in its manifestation and in its incorporation of world cultural traditions, it strongly protects its basic and central idea of Eurocentricity by protecting its monopoly by white/European artists. In other words, European or white artists must alone be creative in the modern context and produce ideas and values for the sake of the whole world. The people of the periphery (black/Third World) can follow these ideas, but they must not put themselves in a position to challenge them. This is based on the idea of white supremacy inherent in Western philosophy since Renaissance.

Modernism manifests the idea of universal progress. And since Renaissance this idea of progress means the development of the world under the absolute tutelage of the West. That is, progress all over the world in the field of philosophy, science, economic and technology, etc. must be led by the West as part of its colonial/capitalist expansion.

Modern art incorporates this idea of progress as its historical dynamic, and this is recognised and accepted today all over the world. What is not often clear and understood is the the fact that behind its

universalism is its idea of domination of the world. When black or Third World peoples take up an independent and advance position, whether it is in politics, economy or culture, it becomes a threat to its Eurocentric domination.

Modernism, with all its universal humanism, has not thus been able to deal with this contradiction, because this would necessarily entail abandonment of its Eurocentric ideology. Racism in modern art is a function of this contradiction.

This society, like other Western societies, whose mainstream culture is dominated by modernism, is therefore not able to see the true and full value of the contribution of black artists in Britain. It must first recognise the full creative potential of all its different people without categorising them differently based on past cultural traditions. In other words, it must give up its Eurocentricity, which historically is underpinned by racism.

To give up its Eurocentric ideology would entail structural changes deep within its various institutions, which without the development of true socialism is difficult to envisage. However, the idea of socialism in itself is not a guarantee against institutional racism. The evidence in Britain today is that there is a reluctance to understand and recognise the complexity of this issue even amongst socialist circles. This is partly to do with common ignorance and partly due to political expediency.

It is sad that our white socialist friends often display this ignorance; and those who are in power try to cover this ignorance by doling out money for amateurish activities among the so-called ethnic minorities. This is not only sad but dangerous, as the underlying attitude here displays a paternalism of worst kind and which as a result degrade further the position of black people in this society.

The very concept of 'ethnic arts', which are being widely supported and promoted today, is based on the 19th century idea of ethnic determinism in art, which was developed to give historical continuity to European culture and its supremacy over other cultures which were seen to be outside history. It helped explain and rationalise the disparate forms of art and cultures all over the world on racial or ethnic differences of peoples, societies and civilisations. It also 'fixed' the creative ability of non-European peoples within the past cultural traditions, which were seen to be ethnically determined; and therefore the peoples representing these traditions (or civilisations) began to be seen outside the historical continuity that has today reached in the form of modern technological culture.

I'm not arguing here against the presence and recognition of many cultural traditions here, among them of African and Asian origins. But the value of these traditions is not in the preservation of their traditional forms as part of contemporary activities, but in their

ability to transform themselves in the reality of the present time. And this ability depends very much upon their relationship with this society, whether their place is determined by the idea of human equality or otherwise. If this relationship is determined by something other than human equality, something other than historical forces, then this represents their marginalisation.

The ability to transform will be realised only when the dominated cultures challenge their marginalisation, when they take up a critical position within or in relation to the dominant culture, which in our case is racist and Eurocentric. The struggle here is not only against racism in general but how it manifests in relation to art.

Moreover, the location of this struggle is within its own professional practices, within its own market place. And this struggle is not possible within the limits of so-called 'ethnic arts', as they often represent non-professional and non-critical positions. Community arts, or community based (non-professional) activities, do have their own values and importance, but they also represent a distraction from this struggle.

The presence of (professional) black artists in Britain represents the struggle against the racism of this society in general as well as against the form of racism which manifests in art but is not explicit. The struggle of first generation of black artists to situate themselves within the context of mainstream contemporary culture (modernism) and to demand that they should be seen within this context, offered a challenge to its Eurocentricity. The history of this contribution has been totally ignored, and is being ignored today even by the radical section of this society.

When black artists arrived in Britain after the War, this society was busy dealing with its postwar situation both at physical and intellectual levels. While it was trying to come to terms with its postwar anguish, it also engaged itself in its reconstruction. This was reflected in the kind of art that was being produced immediately after the War. While some artists tried to establish a new rationale for the continuity of their art activities, others tried to re-establish links with the pre-War modernism.

It was in the midst of this situation, postwar dilemmas, reconstruction and new optimism, that artists from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean arrived in England. In the beginning they all faced the same situation which black people in general faced. But in spite of the general difficulties, the shock of confronting racism of the society they thought was a civilised society, they managed to situate themselves within the general context as to recognise the human condition and priorities which became the basis of postwar art in Britain. In other words, they became part of the contemporary art scene here.

Something very different happened during this time as well, which had somewhat of a positive repercussion on the situation of black artists.

After the independence of the Indian subcontinent, many people in Britain suddenly felt a loss, particularly by those who in fact were in favour of the Indian independence. They did not want to break their emotional link with India. And therefore when the idea of British Commonwealth was put forward they hailed this idea enthusiastically. When artists from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean began to arrive, it was seen by this liberal intelligentsia as part of the development of the Commonwealth. The art scene also began to pick up a new enthusiasm on the basis that at least London now could become an international art centre, as London would become the centre of the independent Commonwealth.

However, black artists did find it difficult in the beginning to draw attention to what they were doing as artists. But by the mid-fifties when the art scene in general began to pick up confidence, they began to be noticed by the liberal establishment. It was the time when many new galleries started to emerge in London which showed the work of new and young artists; and some of the galleries became particularly interested in 'Commonwealth' artists. By the end of '50s, Souza, Chandra, Pervez, Shemza, Williams, Geoffrey, in particular became known among the art circles. They began showing along with their white contemporaries. There was no separation of artists based on different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, although somehow some kind of different work was expected from the artists of Afro/Asian origins.

By the early '60s, these artists began to receive critical acclaim and support. Many critics, among them John Berger and Edwin Mullin, in fact hailed their presence in Britain. Late W G Archer particularly hailed the fact that the artists from the Indian subcontinent were contributing to international art in the same way Picassos and Miro did in the early century.

Black artists were not doing the same kind of work. And therefore they could not be categorised together and separately from their white contemporaries. They were often referred to as 'Commonwealth' artists, but so were white artists from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, as well. Both the first and second "Commonwealth Biennials of Abstract Art" included artists from all over the Commonwealth as well as indigenous British artists. In fact, the first prize in the first Biennial in 1963 was won by Aubrey Williams, who came from Guyana and was then living in London. Aubrey Williams still lives in London today, but unknown and neglected, unlike his white contemporaries who took part in the Sixties Biennales with him.

However, there were people in the art world who somehow expected something different from black artists. And many artists in turn were able to attract the art world on this basis, particularly Chandra and Shemza. Although this did help some artists, particularly Chandra who thus made a lot of money in the '60s, their work in turn was never properly analysed and understood. It was only exposed at an exotic level, and when the curiosity was over all was forgotten. However the

reason for the neglect and ignorance of the black artists in Britain is much complex: it has to do with his/her lack of place in the contemporary history.

Before these artists came to England, their main preoccupation as artists was to be part of the context of modernism, which in postwar period was declared by the West to be international. The basis of their work was not the depiction of preservation of the values of their own respective traditions. They actually saw a transcendence from, not abandonment of, their respective cultural contexts necessary for them to enter into the international arena. But soon after they arrived in England they realised that the expectation from them was somehow different: they expected to be somehow part of their own cultures, whether they liked it or not.

Many artists were in some way shattered by this kind of 'different' expectation from them. Confronting racism openly in the streets at the same time, they began to feel caught up between two cultures. Many made use of this experience, which can be called 'black experience' as it was specific to Afro/Asian people, positively. They began to look into the possibility of using their own cultural forms in their work; and some actually did as a result came out with new synthesis that expressed their own experience in this society or the contemporary world.

However, black artists remained part of common and general postwar situation. Immediately after the War there were no coherent movements. Individuals sought individual solutions according to their own understandings and perceptions. Loneliness, alienation, tortured 'self', etc. were some of the conditions of the existential milieu of the time, and it was within this milieu that black artists were able to situate their own experiences and made their own contribution to art in Britain. They did not take up avant-garde positions, as they realised that they were in the midst of a culture which was not wholly sympathetic to their taking up advance positions. Their experience of being 'others' became their priority, which they expressed within the contemporary contexts. They did stand up and challenge the presumptions of a Eurocentric culture, by not allowing themselves to be used merely as exotic presences.

Although some of the artists I have mentioned above managed to establish themselves by the end of the '50s, their success was short lived; and today none of them have any place in the history of post British art. Their failure to consolidate their position was due to complex reasons, which were personal, historical and ideological. However, it is important to remember here that contemporary art works attain their permanent value by their place in the history of modern art. For the black artist to enter this history is to expose a basic contradiction (Eurocentricity) which this society do not yet want to resolve.

However, there emerged a group of black artists in the Sixties who challenged the Eurocentricity of modernism by taking up avant-garde positions. They questioned the prevailing and dominant models of contemporary sculpture, which emerged in the early '60s in Britain, by their own alternative prepositions based on the recognition of historical continuity through the dynamics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The nature of this contribution is different from the work of earlier black artists, who were mainly concerned with the idea of synthesis between the two cultures they were caught in and its expression within the dilemmas and frustrations of the time. The '60s was an optimistic time and the idea of progress in art became again its main concern. The contribution of black artists has to be understood within this specific historical context.

The organic, kinetic and informal sculpture of David Medalla, who came from the Philippines, was a challenge to the formalist and dominant sculpture of Caro et al. Medalla has lived in Britain for twentyfive years, and his work in the '60s in particular was admired amongst the serious critical circles. But he was never a favourite artist of the establishment: he was black and he was avant-gardist. His radical ideas were obviously a threat to the status quo, to the established order of the dominant and formalist British sculpture which had established itself internationally, but his position was historically determined and what he did had original qualities and should have been part of the history of British avantgarde.

His later work, of the late '60s and early '70s, became more and more ideological which affected his position in Britain. His open denunciation of the bourgeois establishment and his open support for a socialist revolution, for anti-imperialist struggles in the Third World, made him a thorn in the flesh of white establishment. And today nobody wants to know him.

In the later part of the Sixties, the dominant British sculpture was again challenged by a black artist. The compositional nature of modern sculpture (Caro et al) was critically questioned and as a result the development of Minimalist sculpture took place in Britain. During this time, some artists in New York also took up similar position by questioning the compositional basis of modern sculpture, and the result was again the development of what is today known as Minimalist sculpture and which is historically and internationally recognised as one of the important modernist developments. The work of New York Minimalist has been recognised and promoted by the establishment here. And yet the original British contribution to this area is not recognised even in Britain.

To sum up the '60s situation, it can be said with confidence and in the light of a critical and historical analysis that the achievement of black artists in this decade is exceptional. We do not need here special or separate criteria to look at or evaluate their work. The actual problem they pose for the white society is that they represent advance and pioneering positions within avantgarde modernism; and therefore this society does not know how to deal with this situation in the light of its prevailing values and attitudes towards black people.

The difficulty of this society to recognise the actual achievement of black artists within modern context was recognised by some black artists in the early '70s. They realised that the historical 'terms of reference' of modernism was based on the continuing role of white supremacy in the modern developments. And thus the presence of black artists within modern context creates a contradiction which the white society cannot resolve without undergoing a formidable revolution that would shake its institutions of its racially based ideas.

This was the time of black struggle, of black power movements, and some black artists as a result began to raise questions which went beyond the preoccupation of modern art practices. The question of racism, implicit in the very historical 'terms of reference' of modernism thus became part of new black art practice. And thus the emergence of what we today call Black Art.

The emergence of Black Art in the early '70s in fact represents the continuity in the recognition by black artists of the contemporary context, common to both white and black artists, and without creating separate categories based on cultural differences. If Black Art does posit a different context, it is the context of racism which should be open to challenge by all people. Black Art proposes an additional and specific 'terms of reference' which are related to the specific nature of the struggle against racism.

Black Art does not necessarily invalidate the work of earlier black artists who did not attempt to incorporate the question of racism in their work. While the earlier artists rightly attempted to place themselves within the mainstream based on the assumption that the 'terms of reference' of the history of modern art were available to all human beings, the development of Black Art is based on the questioning of this assumption. Although all artists, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex, must demand that they all should be located and treated within the same contemporary context and they have every right to look for their place within this, Black Art attempts to expose the basic contradiction within this position. It points out that a Eurocentric value-system cannot recognise the true value of the work of black/Third World artists.

It is therefore the essential priority of Black Art to question this very context of modernism, the values and ideas that this context represent. Once you enter into this context, exploring it historically, one cannot avoid the issue of racism, given the fact that the ideas of progress which are basic to modernism are racially constructed. In other words, the very questioning of the Eurocentric context of contemporary art practices becomes integral to Black Art.

Black Art represents a specific historical development within the history of black artists in Britain. It deals with the experiences of Afro/Asian people resulting from white racism. Black Art can be international if it embodies this specific experience.

However, it is also important to understand why there is continuing reluctance in all quarters to recognise this history, which represents a tremendous achievement of black people in this country. It was not an easy task to perform in the face of the hostilities of this society and without any support from the art establishment. It can be said that the lack of information about this achievement is responsible for this reluctance. But who is responsible for this ignorance in the first place? And how do we explain the continuing reluctance of many people and bodies to look into this area? Whenever this issue is raised there is a general misbelief. Even when concrete steps are taken to initiate a comprehensive research, we constantly face complacent attitudes.

There is a further problem, partly to do with the ignorance and shallow thinking of many people who have taken up our leadership in cultural matters and have become our representatives. Often these people have no artistic background and their perceptions are formed by the consideration of something other than the knowledge and expertise required in such matters.

The function of art in the modern society is complex, as the relationship

of art with the culture has become problematic. Culture is the context in which art is produced, but art as an end product may or may not be a mirror image of what is represented by culture at a particular time. It may not even have a sympathetic relationship with the culture which provides it with a historical context. In times of crises, art is often and can be in confrontation with the culture which represents an established order or tradition. Preservation of a culture or cultural traditions do not necessarily lead to creativity in art. It is therefore essential to separate the role of art from culture, in order to grasp its full potential as a creative and critical force in society.

The role of the black artist today, particularly in British society is complex and problematic. S/he has to perform more than one roles at the same time: while struggling against the conservative ideas of his/her own cultural tradition, she has also to challenge the assumptions of the dominant culture which is racist and Eurocentric. But, on the other hand, the role which is being given to him or her - and it is the only role which is being recognised - is under the category of so-called 'ethnic minority arts' and which limits his/her creative abilities and critical function in this modern society.

As a matter of fact, the role of the so-called 'ethnic arts' is reactionary and it has negative implications in terms of the struggle against racism, which must challenge differentiation of black people from the indigenous white people in terms of their separate roles. The contradiction of 'ethnic arts' is not resolveable even when those people who practice or support 'ethnic arts' take up anti-racist positions. Martin Barker, in his important book The New Racism, has argued about the emergence of new racism in Britain today, which is not based on the idea of white superiority but on the maintenance of a separate status for black people based on cultural differences. Here is what he says:

"It is called up by the stimulus of those who are genetically unrelated, whose cultures reveals their different origins, and specially those who display their genetic difference on their skin. Of course, it is not claimed that these outsiders are degenerate, immoral, inferior; they are just different... It is all the more dangerous, if that is conceivable, than older forms, because it can ward off any spectres of Nazism; all the time such writers, politicians and activists will distance themselves from doctrines of superiority/inferiority because racism is not possible or needed in that form any longer. The unit has passed on, and now takes a new form: we have a 'natural' tendency to stay apart from culturally alien things; even if they are not inferior, they are culturally different."

Although the above passage is about the new Tory philosophy, the idea of 'difference' is also fundamental to the idea of 'ethnic arts'. The argument here is not against the recognition of other cultures in Britain and their positive roles in the development of this society into a multi-racial society. But the idea that the creative ability of black people is 'fixed' within the limits of their own cultures is based on the racist philosophy of 'ethnic determinism', as I have argued before,

and which was developed in the 19th century in Europe as part of the colonial discourse. Sadly, the category of the so-called 'ethnic arts' has similar implications.

It is in fact preposterous that this category should have been conceived, in view of the actual evidence about the work of black artists. It has always been the attempt of the establishment to push the black artist out of the mainstream and to the margins of this society; and the 'ethnic arts' have done exactly that.

Nobody here is denying the fact that there does exist differences between many cultures that exist today in Britain, but to differentiate people on that basis is entirely different and can only be understood at an ideological level. The issue here is made more difficult in view of the fact that many people who support 'ethnic arts' are not racists, and they often act only to help black people. And in turn, there are many black people who are quite happy with this separate category as it helps them to get funding more easily.

However, the ideological issue remains. And it cannot be pushed under the carpet of well intentions, ignorance or political expediency. The black artist is in fact fed up being a football game in community politics; and it is time that his/her role as an artist is taken seriously on its own right.

The black artist is of course part of the community in the sense that she/he represents and shares the aspirations, ambitions and frustrations of his/her respective community. But the relationship of the individual artist with the community or society in the present technological age is complex and problematic. And this must be recognised in the case of black artist as well.

It must be recognised that the society cannot be divided on the basis of culture, let alone of cultural differences. The division of the society today is due to class, race and sex. It is not that we cannot combine cultural and class/race issues in one struggle. I think they should be. The idea of multi-culturalism is not altogether reactionary. In fact all the cultures in this country should be recognised, as part of our common environment, our common heritage. The point I'm trying to stress is that all cultures must be equally recognised and without making any distinction between the indigenous mainstream and so-called 'ethnic arts'. In other words, the whole citadel of 'ethnic arts' must immediately be demolished, as it has been erected on an ideology that is questionable.

All the cultures together within a particular place or boundary constitute a common environment, with all its material and intellectual resources, forming a common context within which each individual exists and interrelates with others in his/her endeavours for subsistence as well as for expression.

The history of black artists clearly shows that black artists belong to this common context, and they should be recognised as such without any separate categorisation or assumptions.

The Black Artist and Art Institutions in Britain

A diagnostic and critical analysis of the position of Art Institutions and their relationship to the Black Artist.

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Background

Historically Art Institutions have been the bastions for the presentations and preservation of the Art of the British Society. They have been show-cases for the exhibition of a culture who historically have developed barbarism, privacy and executed cultural imperialism and in many years of colonial oppression glorified in the savagery of slavery, dictatorship and colonialistic rule and oppression.

The stains and scars of this savage history still finds its manifestation in the neo-colonialistic attitudes of Art Institutions within the contemporary context of representing the needs of a multi-racial society.

As Art Institutions operate within British Society there is an imperative need for them to effectively come to terms with challenge and eradicate institutional racism and respond affirmatively to the needs of the Black Visual Artist.

- 1 Art Institutions have been essential for the creation and preservation of a social aesthetic. All Art movements throughout history have had influence on attitudes and social trends. Art institutions embody these trends and have developed a social and political determinism as to the idealization of the position of Art and the intellectual significance of its operation and contribution to the preservation of the Art products of a culture.
- 2 There are numerous functions of Art Institutions. They intricate, develop, preserve, administrate, exhibit documents. They socially educate and provide a plateau for a discourse on the historical and philosophical context of art and provide a basis for the development of a critical perspective. Such is the significance of Art and the social power rested in Art Institutions that they have become responsible for, and contribute to works shaping the state of artistic and creative consciousness of society.
- 3 Thus in a multi-racial society Art Institutions have an imperative responsibility towards totally representing the constituents of that society. There must be critical intervention into the traditional roles and a position of Art Institutions and their realism to the Black Artists. They must be fully integrated and incorporated into all aspects of decision making and policy formulation, programme construction, monitoring, assessment and evaluation. It is not until this happens in total that we can say that Art Institutions are representing a multi-racial society and an Art for here and now.
- 4 The political implications of challenging Art Institutions policies and practises are important to grasp. It is these institutions that represent the artistic and creative consciousness of society. They shape and formulate policies and also distribute resources. There must be a radical challenge to these Institutions to implement what maybe revolutionary changes in organizational practices.
- 5 It is the decision making capacity of the Black Artist that is totally imperceptable in mainstream art institutions and funding bodies. Thus only real power or capacity to influence policy decisions and programming of Institutions have been withheld from the Afro-caribbean/Asian Artist. The resulting consequence of overt and subtle forms of this institution, racism, prejudices the position of the Black Artist and marginalizing or alienating and contributions or expressions of the artist.
- 6 In a multi-racial society there must be equal representation of all the constituent members of that society. The Black Artist has been rejected on an intellectual, historical and ideological level. They have been consciously and unconsciously alienated with minimum opportunities for the advancement of their work and little access to positions in management and positions within institutions and organizations controlling the deployment of resources.

Introduction

The position of the Art Institution and the development of a euro-centric system of aesthetics classification.

In order to establish a critical perspective and diagnostic analysis of the roles and structures of the Art Institutions of British Society it is essential that there is a clear understanding of the historical context in which they have developed and their response and relationship towards the presence and the work of Black Artist.

The historical relationship and influence of Western societies on Afro caribbean/Asian cultures has been manifested in terms of colonialism and cultural imperialism. This has resulted in the derivation of a system of euro-centric aesthetic which has positioned Western art history in terms of a superior and self-sustaining system of knowledge. This has its basis in the influence of Greco-Roman forms and philosophies towards the development of a 'pure' system of form and beauty. There has been a historical regard for that system of aesthetics as the absolute measure of the normative values, in relation to Aesthetics.

The effect of colonialism and imperialism on Non-Western cultures has been one of the suppression of the intellectual cultural and aesthetic values of these cultures. There has been an alienation of the significance of these cultures in their own right in contributing towards the evolution of the linear continuum of the progression of ideas.

The portrayal of a euro-centric cultural dominance has been presented in terms of a 'world' view. This has been as a result of the social and intellectual mobility and cross-fertilization of Western ideological discourse on the development for the criteria of the preservation of knowledge. A system of classification was derived regarding 'International Art' as having its roots and development in euro-centrism.

This system of classification for the criteria of the measurement of aesthetic significance and contribution to the knowledge of a global perspective was embedded into the social and political structures of western cultures by the means of institutionalization and through colonialism injected into non-western societies as the ideal form of aesthetic credibility.

The subsequent significance of this system of classification on non-Western cultures is that artistic and cultural expression were regarded as 'primitive', 'naive' or regarded as sensationalized exotica having no real philosophical basis for their construction.

The importance of grasping the significance of this system of classification by Western Society and its relationship to the development of the work of Black Artist within a contemporary context is essential for the analysis and deconstruction of euro-centric aesthetic elitism. There was a political significance in the development of such a system of classification in that it justified and rationalized imperialist and colonist attitudes of the dominant culture towards the oppressed. This attitude revealed the patronization of the dominant culture in relation to the rationalisation of its capitalistic intentions.

There is an important social significance for the Black Artist working in the contemporary context of British Society. In that the work the Black Artist produces is judged in relation to this system of euro-centric aesthetics and thus classified as insignificant or misunderstood in relation to having any real bearing on mainstream arts practices. There has emerged new forms of classification for the pigeon-holding of the black artist such as 'ethnic' or 'multi-cultural' thus marginalizing the significance of the work of the Black Artist. The Black Artist is continual being judged by this ideal of euro-centrism, which is not their ideal but one which has been formulated out of colonialistic oppression.

The Psycho-social implications of this classification are vast in regard to the re-affirmation and justification of the dominant culture in maintaining this system of superiority. It transcends mere symantics but the dominant culture 'feels' that it is superior and is perfectly justified in acting the way that it does. This racial and cultural superiority is infiltrated throughout society and its institutions and absorbed into the very fabric of society. In short it is racism.

The system has a dramatic affect on the Black Artist in regards to his/her self-esteem, having no positive feedback, or response to their work in the mainstream of British Art practise. There is an identity crisis which ensues and the Black artist is literally forced to create his/her own space within British society to develop their expressions of their creative consciousness. This results in the development of artistic ghettos.

It is necessary therefore for a radical intervention into the Art Institutions of British Society. A dynamic response to the deconstruction of the historical system of classification towards the position of the Black Artist and a relocation of the Black Artist within positions of power and influence within art institutions whereby they can influence and determine arts policies and practices.

The British Society is a chief exponent of this development of euro-centric system of aesthetic classification. These values have historically been built upon a system of colonialistic oppression and barbarism of Africa/Asian, Caribbean cultures. The dilemma of the British systems of art therefore is that if there is going to be any realistic discourse fowards producing a system of aesthetic values that truly represent a multi-racial society, there must be a critical understanding of the historical development of its own art history in relation to colonialism and how that has affected its own social consciousness through the institutions of British society. There must also be a deconstruction of these historical and institutional values and a critical analysis of British Society respectively to the needs of a contemporary multi-racial and equal society.

Objectives

It is the objective of this paper to identify, outline and discuss various aspects relating to the evolution, construction and effective administration of visual arts practice in relation to the Black community.

Its objective is that of an analysis of the policies and practices of organizations and institutions, especially connected with the development and management of the 'Arts', and an inspection of their ideologies, structural framework and composite network of institutional practices and attitudes which

subsequently affect the deployment of funding and resources to their constituent members vis a vis the Black Visual Artist.

Towards the formulation of a series of recommendations based on the development of short and long term strategies and a framework within which such a strategy can be effectively implemented.

The Emergence of the Black Visual Artist and the response of Art Institutions.

1.1 The recognition of the specific needs of the black community in relation to the development of their creative, cultural and artistic expressions is a relatively new phenomenon in British Society.

1.2 Historically the Black Artist has been alienated from the mainstream of British art practice. There has been a miscomprehension of the aesthetic and cultural ideologies of Afro/Caribbean/Asian communities and the relative expressions of the creative consciousness of the Artists of these communities.

1.3 The system of euro-centric aesthetics has historically been projected as the criteria for aesthetic credibility and measure consequently the work of the Black artist has been classified as 'primitive' and 'naive'.

1.4 There is entrenched in the ideology of western culture a classification as to the definition of the art of Black people. It is largely orientated in their misperception of black people as craft producing cultures. Artistic constructions in terms of painting and drawings were solely perceived in terms of an evolution of western history. Thus institutions attitudes in terms of provision for "ethnic" groups are justified in the form of the acquisition of 'craft objects' for preservation within British museums documenting the cultural history of Black people. Even these crafts never presented in terms of the colonialist attitude of the oppressor and the oppressed, the thief and the victim, but in terms of anthropological and archaeological exploration for the preservation of primitive cultures.

1.5 There has been a rise in the consciousness of the historical and political positions of the black community both in terms of Asian/Afro-Caribbeans residing in Britain and British black people who have developed through the social educational systems of British societies. This has resulted in an articulation and revolutionary challenge to the suppression of the role of the black artist within the context of British society.

1.6 With this new force within the black community articulating their needs and challenging the structures which have been oppressing and maintaining the oppression on the intellectual and artistic practises of the black community. There is a rise in the challenges to the prevailing policies within organisations and administration of the Arts of the British Society. This change in attitude and perspective is a part of a new social and political change and has become a vital spark for the content of the work of many Black Artists.

Cross fertilization of the work of the Black Visual Artist and the political climate was essential to legitimize and give an impetus to their work.

1.7 There has been over the years a development of social institutions representing the needs of Black & Ethnic communities, i.e., CRE, GLC, Commonwealth Institute, but these institutions have been far from developing

any wholistic appraisal of their institutional attitudes towards their own conditioned values of racism.

There has been support from Art-Institutional bodies but this has been nominal support in terms of grants to black and ethnic organizations with little back-up or monitoring, this has further served to ghettoize the work of the Black Visual Artist rather than develop any strategic implementation of a Black Visual Arts policy at all levels of their organisation practices.

The Political Context

2.1 An essential factor for consider in regard to the administration of the Arts vis a vis Black Visual Arts, is the political context within which organisations and institutions determine and govern their policies and regulate their programmes and resources.

2.2 Institutions are governed by policies which were developed in relation to social politics or governing institutional politics. As these politics affect every area of our lives it can be seen that the relevance of those political decisions have a bearing upon the development of the work of the Black Visual Artist. This can be seen in the effect of Thatcherism in relation to the cuts of local councils and how that inevitably affects the position of the black community which is often disadvantaged. The element of power is essential to the construction and implementation and evaluation of policies, thus the political opinions of individuals in power shape the development of Black Visual Arts.

There is an absence of any black voice in parliamentary decision making processes, and relatively few black councillors. Therefore there is no effective representations of the needs of the Black Community and their artistic expressions.

2.3 There is limited reprisal of the Black Visual Artist in terms of Trade Union representation. There has been a long historical absence of adequate Union representation in the visual arts field. This further compounds the problems of the Black Visual Artist in realizing their needs and achieving positive action.

2.4 In regard to the decision making personalities of the political machinery, the fact of classism is central and there results polarization of class values and attitudes. A system of white male middle class values is imposed upon social values.

The element of the imposition of class values upon the classification of what is "the acceptable aesthetic" forms the basis for traditional art institutions.

2.5 The inter-linking of international western influences on the position and attitude of the Black Artist is important as the position of the Black Artist even though present in British Society have historical and cultural international links.

2.6 The power of silencing the artist through means of censorship is a result of institutional and political control and power, and its resolution is crucial to the context of the work of the Black Artist. As the socio-economic

and politic basis to the work of the Black Artist is essentially political and the artist is immersed in a race/class struggle.

The redefining of "Ethnic Arts"

3.1 The ideology of multi-culturalism is intrinsically linked with the inappropriate-administration of the needs of the black artist. The prevailing attitude as outlined in the Arts Council's document 'The Glory of the Garden', its strategy for the development of arts in Britain for the next 10 years, states that Britain is now becoming a multi-cultural society and thus the needs of these cultures must be serviced. This attitude epitomises the concept of white administrators in relation to the needs of the Black Artist. In spite of their 'goodwill' one must realize that the central issue goes far deeper than that of "shuffling the cards in the deck" but to "who is holding the pack".

3.2 The situation concerning the Black Artist transcends that of a multi-cultural exercise and must be seen within the context of deconstructing the essential base of the values system of western society. Indeed the very nature of the development of the multi-cultural discourse is based on individuals who are the product of an institutionalized society whose attitude towards black peoples is racist. This racism and social conditioning is reinforced by the educational system and social institutions to formulate the western "concept" of "ethnic minorities". Thus in order for there to be a constructive identification of true 'multi-culturalism' an anti-racist principle must first be identified and racism eroded from individuals, institutions and society. As one can see this is a complex issue of interrelating networks which combine many philosophical, political and social aspects and would take much time. But the work must start with Western imperialistic society deconstructing their own racism and value laden system and the mechanics which perpetuate that system i.e. politics, media, education, legal, social institutions.

3.3 Following on from this argument is an analysis of the term of "Ethnic Arts". This itself is entrenched within a fundamental political discourse. Essentially the classification of "ethnicity" is one given to that of a multi or cross culturism yet when identifying racism to identify the specific classification and needs of the Black Arts and the needs of the Black Visual Artist that is (Afro-caribbean, Asian) we must address ourselves specifically to the nature of racism being a result of western imperialism thus the term ethnic is not relative to the social political struggle of the Black Arts.

3.4 In essence when we address ourselves to the classification of ethnic groups the context becomes cultural for there are many ethnic groups in society. The precise administrative strategy thus becomes one of provision for the cultural needs of the various ethnic groups in British Society inclusive of the British people and priorities are appropriated towards the dominant culture. This attitude totally undermines the historical relationship of those groups, and both the colonialist power relationship of the British cultural system and also the intrinsic racist attitudes which are ingrained with the British system as a result of the conditioning effect of institutionalism.

It is essential therefore to see that the racial prejudice of white people combined with the power relationship of institutions combine to form a system of a classification which maintains their position of power "Ethnic Art". In

order to deconstruct this systematic linguistical classification one must firstly realize the difference in definition of what is "Ethnic Art" and the Art of Black peoples. Ethnic Art infers a multi-cultural stance not challenging the intrinsic racist attitudes which prevail in British Society. The work of Black Artists, essentially and politically determine a differentiation between White "ethnic" groups and Black groups. The stance for the generation of a strategic implementation of policies to cater for the needs of the Black Arts must be the implementation of Anti-Racist measures to deconstruct the prevailing individual prejudice and institutional racism and the placement of Black peoples in positions of power for the constructive of a vibrant, relative and dynamic Arts programme for Black people.

3.5 It must be recognized however that the savagery of British colonialism has affected other cultures. The needs of the communities and artist must be provided for, but the essential relationships of the power relationship of these cultures is complex in terms of racial prejudice but should not be confused with the position of Asian and Afro-Caribbean cultures, Black Artists,

3.6 The idea of ethnicity can perhaps can be highlighted in the mounting of an exhibition by the Arts Council of the Art and culture of the 'Red Indians' at the Hayward gallery, which was seen as a cultural and anthropological exercise without recognition of the affects of colonialism and racism upon this culture. This was true also in a more sophisticated sense with the exhibition of Indian Art. Yet there has been no attempt to trace, either on a cultural or artistic basis, the art and culture of Afro-caribbean, Asian peoples and the contemporary context of that work as to its affect on contemporary artists working within the British Society.

The Nature of Institutionalism

4.1 In order to grasp the complexity of the situation facing the black artist within the context of a racist society, it must be recognised that the British infrastructure is implicitly racist. The decision-making function and balance of power in relation to classism - socio-economic networks are entrenched in racist attitudes.

4.2 Research has shown that 91% of British people admit that there is racial prejudice. It has been shown that individuals pick up racist attitudes at an early age. This happens as a result of social-conditioning through the various institutions shaping the life styles of British society.

4.5 The racism sexism which exists in society and the power classification existing in institutions dictate and appropriate according to the institutions' racist values as to 'who gets what'.

4.6 So we have two essential factors to contend with.

(1) Whose making the decisions and on behalf of whom.

(2) The result of those decisions - who gets what.

It is therefore obvious in order to tackle racism which exists in Art institutions and funding bodies one must break into this spiral of acquisition and distribution and challenge the value system on which these allocations are made and the underlying support structures. These are the very elements which perpetuate stereotypes and maintain the status quo in regard to racist

attitudes and practices in society. There are fewer black Art Administration functions of power or mechanisms within Art institutions where the Visual Artist

Thus whether it be in education or governmental institutions, values are passed on to their constituents and discrimination against the work of the Black Artist.

Power and Control

4.7 An element which must be addressed in the destruction of the prevailing institution is the aspect of control. This is linked to the issues of political power and embodied in the attitudes of the major culture.

The essential situation is that it has always been profitable for the power structure to maintain power and control. Relinquishing power admits to years of colonial oppression. There would be backlash of guilt which would be difficult for the dominant culture to reconcile, and remuneration of the plunging of the Afro-caribbean/Asian culture would be immense.

4.8 Thus there must be continued revolutionary challenge from the Black community in response to white oppression. This is the very essence of Black Art. It draws its vibrancy from the political struggle of black people in society.

4.9 The element of accountability for the misuse of power within institutions needs special attention in relation to the development of the work of the Black Visual Artist.

The process of effective monitoring has not been adequately given attention to in the past both in terms of effective infrastructural research in relation to the implementation of the equal opportunity policy and also effective ethnic monitoring in relation to - i.e., recruitment and training or the intake of black students to higher education institutions.

Funding Black Visual Arts

5.1 The Arts Council and other major institution assess their applications for funding by Panels as power imbalance in terms of who is making the decisions. There are few black individuals on Assessment panels. Thus Black Artists are discriminated against.

6.2 There are many statutory bodies who receive perpetual funding from funding bodies like i.e., Royal Opera, the Arts Council. Those groups, for instance, the National Theatre, have few black individuals, so a large proportion of funding is eliminated from the Black Artist. There are very few Black organizations who receive such regular funding indeed the ones which do receive nominal grants are threatened by the cuts in spending, i.e., Steel and Skin, Tara Arts, Black Art Galleries.

6.3 Business and alternative sponsorship is poor coming to Black Artists. The investment value and promotion of the work of the Black Artist is understated.

6.4 The difficulty of being a professional artist not having regular sources of income means the work of the Black Artist is often time restricted to evenings and weekends. Thus the activity of work is restricted. This is more particular for black people as they are discriminated against in the employment field.

6.5 There is a complete miscomprehension about the production and presentation of the work of Black Visual Artists. Funding received by the small network of galleries who do show the work of Black Artists does not give adequate promotion and documentation to their work. So very few catalogues, posters, prints, etc. of their work are produced.

6.6 In dealing with this area many black artists and Art institutions find themselves in a dilemma when it comes to generating, maintaining and distributing funds. The argument is often used that in regards to funds that the problems encountered are the same for the white artist but there are general factors that affect the position of the Black Artist in relation to generate funding.

6.7 Historically it can be seen that the Black Artist has been a result of prejudice in that there are very few artists who have been given grants, or specific black art institutions developed, i.e., Black galleries, archives, collections, exhibitions.

6.8 There is a lack of information to the artists. Information is often times sent to white organisations and there is little access to that information. Information is geared principally towards accommodating white artists/institutions. There is often a failure both to print information in other languages yet the Art Council for instance claims that it is making special efforts to cater for the needs of a multi-cultural society.

There is also a misunderstanding in terms of the processing of information received from black artists particularly in interpreting different languages and the intentions of these cultures in relation to producing their work.

6.9 In terms of application for funds from funding bodies many black artists as a result of the socio-economic spiral in which he/she finds themselves may find it difficult to meet criteria of funding bodies in relation to necessary administrative skills, working out budgets and other technical information. There is little provision for artists to acquire this type of information.

There are few opportunities hereby the Black Artist can get information about artistic management, presentation and distribution of their work.

There are a few Artist's Agents who will take on black artists and understand their requirements.

Funding Institutions

7.0 It is extremely difficult to ascertain facts relating to actual spending on Black Visual Arts from the major funding bodies, i.e., ACGB, GLAA, GLC. There does seem to be amounts allocated for the provision of Ethnic Arts which is generally a small proportion of a general AAS budget. The Ethnic Arts budget is allocated to groups selected to meeting various criteria of institutions. Most institutions over the years have concentrated their

budgets on the other arts disciplines, ie, Dance, Theatre, Film, Music. When it comes to accessing quantities spent on Black Visual Arts which historically has formed the basis for these other disciplines and in terms of regenerating creative impetus is essential to maintain, they get very little funding. The main funding given to the Black Visual Arts is in the area of Crafts. Unfortunately once again, we see the perpetuation of neo-colonialistic values in terms of defining Black Visual Arts.

7.1 There is virtually no philosophy policies, monitor, and evolution processes, which has been derived for the construction of a financial support programme for the Black Visual Artist. As is also missing any constructive strategic framework for the implementation of such a programme.

A Critic of Art Institutions in Relation to the Work of Black Visual Artists

The Arts Council

8.0 In 1984 Sir William Ress-Mogg, Chairman of ACGB, in his appraisal of the Keynesian approach to the development of Arts in Britain, gave praise to the fundamental approach of decentralisation and meeting the needs of the artist in all levels of society. Unfortunately the very structures which are advocated for the restructuring of the arts take no account of Black visual Artist and only serve to reinforce the institutionalised values of the Arts Council in regard to the Black Artist.

8.1 The Arts Council, in identifying its list of criteria for funding assessment, stated that 'the employment and other opportunities extended to members of ethnic minority groups'. Yet inspection of the Council, itself, in regard to its implementation of a equal opportunities policies, falls far short from this. This attitude is reflected in the Region Arts Association with very few of them having any Black visual arts policy.

8.2 The Council continues to support major galleries and institutions who in relation to their giving any representation to Black Artist is minimal.

8.3 In terms of implementing measures of retraining staff in relation to challenging its own institutionalised racist practises, very little has been done.

8.4 There exists no Black Visual Arts programme within the Council itself and in relation to the various disciplines there is very little representation of Black Visual Arts.

8.5 The Arts Council itself is cutting finances to mainstream galleries who have provided an output for Black Artists in the past.

8.6 The Art Council links with major educational institutions. Again its attitude towards the construction of a Black Visual Arts programme would have considerable influence upon the educational system.

The GLC

9.0 Although the GLC has done much to remedy its own responsibilities in relation to the creating and perpetuating of institutionalised racist attitudes it has still a long way to go in developing a cohesive programme for the administration of the work of the Black Visual.

9.1 The GLC is the only leading council to have developed race relations work in relation to tackling racism in the arts. However, it has only been since 1985 that the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee has been in operation and from 1985 the Ethnic Arts Officer has been appointed. Prior to this the input of the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee in relation to the Council's general arts policy was monitored from the Ethnic Minorities Unit. Again compartmentalizing, categorising, polarisation of Black and Ethnic Arts as a separate entity rather than an inspection of the total Arts programme from the Council and an implementation of the race dimension.

9.2 The GLC has given very little support to the Black Visual Artist in their own right but has sort to include them in various festivals and stalls in their Arts and Recreation Programme. This does not do much for the image, importance and prestige of the Black Visual Artist while white artists enjoy a totally different treatment.

9.3 There has been a categorisation of the work of the Black Visual Artist with the work of Craft again preserving the western colonist tradition that the expression of the Black Artist is only within the culture of craft.

9.4 There has been a concentration and deployment of funding to other disciplines, e.g., films, music, theatre, dance, but the Black Visual Arts has had nominal support in terms of development.

9.5 There has been support for galleries which although have had there contributions without adequate understanding of their contributions to Black Visual Arts and constructive monitoring could militate against the advancement of Black Visual Arts in the creation of a black gallery ghettoisation. There has been little manifestation of the GLC's plans to show Black Artist at there mainstream galleries and institutions.

GLAA and Other Funding Bodies

10.0 Many of the criticism which relates to the major art institutions apply in the cases of smaller, provincial, or localised institutional bodies. There are little or no funds which are appropriated towards the development of the work of Black and Ethnic Artists.

10.1 There are certain local councils within with a high populous of black and ethnic minorities but little provision for the needs of the Black Visual Artist. Some councils cater for the festivals of ethnic communities but rather address themselves to redressing of their own policies to implementing ethnic arts programmes.

10.2 Certain local councils, namely Woolwich, Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth and others have supported galleries within their areas. These galleries from time to time provide a venue for showing the work of black artists but with the effects of Thatcherism. Many of these galleries will suffer from lack of funding thus affecting the opportunities for the Black Visual Artist.

10.3 There has been a long tradition of the collection of art within the British culture. Indeed from the plunder of the commonwealth and the savagery of colonialism vast artifacts were stolen from countries. Art galleries and

museums are a preservation and monument of the barbarism of the British cultures. There is a lengthy historical and philosophical discourse which one could expound but within the context of this paper this is limited.

10.4 It can be understood that if the very essence of these institutions are built upon colonialist the assessment to the Black Visual Artist will be limited. Many of the mainstream galleries make little or no provision for the work of the Black Visual Artist.

Public Galleries

11.0 The Tate, National, National Portrait, the Royal Academy, and even more contemporary galleries, e.g., the Hayward and Serpentine, have done little in terms of analysing their own policies in regard to the inclusion of the work of the Black Visual Artist in a British or international context.

11.1 The major exhibition of the Art of India, when shown by the major galleries failed to incorporate sufficiently the expertise of Black Visual Artist, thus the perspective of work shown was that correlated by white art historians and administrators.

11.2 Even more contemporary galleries like the ICA, or Riverside Studios still fail to encourage or incorporate the work of Black Visual Artist in any such significance as a more indigenous artist. There is a lack of understanding of any philosophical and ideological context in which Black Art has evolved and should be presented. One would think such a task would be a challenge for such galleries whose philosophy and politics are based on challenging the very traditions which classify modern art practises.

Black Galleries

12.0 There have in recent years been the development of galleries specifically designated to the exhibition and formation of the work of the Black Artist. They have encountered many problems in terms of generating finance.

12.1 Many of these galleries have arisen out of a political context and unfortunately artistic criteria has not been fully developed in relation to the needs of the Black Artist.

12.2 It would be the opinion of many white institutions that, now there are Black Galleries, these will serve the needs of Black Artist. This only serves to produce a ghettoisation of the work of the Black artist and there is little or no challenge in terms of incorporating Black Artists within the mainstream of the British society.

12.3 In the creation of Black Art Galleries there is the danger of polarisation of Afro-Caribbean and Asian artists. There is a lack of understanding from administrators of the political and racial context of the nature of the philosophical and historical basis of the struggle of the work of Asian and Afro-Caribbean artists.

12.4 There has been the development of a major Black Artist centre by the GLC and Camden Council at the Roundhouse. There are many concerns in relation to the development of such major institutions and its successive service to the promulgation of the work of Black Visual Arts.

Training

13.0 One of the major areas in relation to the effective administration of the work of the Black Visual Artist is that of training. It has been recognised by the Minority Arts Advisory Service as a priority and they have established an access course at PLC for individuals desiring to have a wider knowledge of this area.

13.2 There does, however, need to be a great emphasis placed on the development of resources for training. Funding bodies should seek to encourage detailed research of the management of the needs of the Black Visual Artist.

13.3 As local councils adopt a great apprehension of the needs of Black Artist there will be a need to effectively administrate these needs. In the past the administration of Ethnic Minorities arts has been by white administrators having little knowledge of the context of the work of the Black Artist.

13.4 There also needs to be retraining for those Blacks within positions of administration but have not the adequate artistic knowledge and appreciation of the needs of the Black Visual Art. There is often a lack of the ability to articulate the needs of the

ART EDUCATION IN BRITAIN TODAY

What is Art Education?

Art education in Britain today is provided, regulated and controlled through formal and mostly publicly funded art education institutions in the forms of art schools, university departments, polytechniques, etc. Most of these art teaching centres were set up in the last century to institutionalise crafts and fine art education as well as industrial design through governmental control and administration; which in turn thus also provided models and resources for the fine art education in the colonies.

The basic purpose of art education was and is to teach basic drawing, industrial drawing and design, skills in various fine art techniques and crafts, related essentially to painting, sculpture, pottery, ceramics, print making, etc. depending upon the nature and scope of a particular institution.

Recently, the teaching of mixed media works, photography, video and films, performances, environmental studies, etc. has become important part of contemporary art education.

The teaching of skills and techniques is necessarily accompanied by information of their developments through various historical periods, including the present time, and thus rationalising their historical importance and continuity as well as their validity to contemporary practices and developments.

The skills and techniques are not taught in some abstract manner, but they are always referred to the actual works of art or crafts, which helps the students to explore the material and aesthetic relationship of the skills and techniques to actual work of art.

The teaching of theory is essential part of art education, which provides a critical framework to analyse, understand and appreciate work of art; and which also provides the students to develop theoretical frameworks for their own works.

The consciousness of history plays an important role in the productive and creative forces of human beings, and the unbroken continuity in the historical developments provides contemporary contexts.

The teaching of history of art, which gives information of the past human achievements, is essential to contemporary consciousness in art teaching and practices.

The discipline of art history provides philosophical and ideological rationalisation of the information provided by history of art, and thus turns this information into significant knowledge and gives it a validity in the contemporary contexts.

Art history also provides recognition to its chosen works of art, both traditional and contemporary, through this rationalisation.

The teaching of history of art and art history plays an extremely important role in the development of the creative potential of the student as a future artist, by providing a dynamic and context for his or her work in the continuity of historical developments uptill today.

In other words, the purpose of art education is to teach basic and essential skills, provide material, historical and philosophical frameworks, their explanations and rationalisations, and thus prepare the students for professional careers as artists, teachers, art critics and historians, designers, print makers, etc. in the contemporary world.

Sources of Art Education

The basic source of art education are the skills and techniques developed in the West as part of the development of art in Europe. The basic drawing classes still emphasise things such as light & shade, naturalism, perspective, assymetric composition, etc. which are essentially part of European tradition and sensibility.

The empasis on life drawing, useful though it may be, has its origin in European traditions. The concept of drawing, or the ability to draw naturally, as the basis of good painting or sculpture is again alien to many non-European cultures.

The basic source material, both in terms of examples of actual works of art as well as theoritical information, is history of Western art.

When other source materials from other cultures are sometimes used, they are treated marginally. And their historical development and significance is never fully explained.

The works of art as a source material are both traditional and contemporary. But whenever non-European works are used they are always traditional.

Most histories of art include art from all the cultures from all over the world, and in all cases the achievements of non-European cultures are treated as part of past traditions.

Even those histories which sympathetically treat non-European cultures, such as the recent book A World History of Art by Hugh Honour and John Fleming - which won the Mitchell Prize, the most prestigious award in the field of art history, do not include in them anything from non-European cultures when it comes to 20th century. The obvious implication is that these cultures have produced no significant work in modern times.

The knowledge of contemporary art is the most important source material

for contemporary art education, which gives the student a contemporary context and identity for his or her own work; and which also provides a historical continuity as the contemporary art is part of the continuity of art in the West over the last 500 years or so.

20th century phase of this historical continuity is supposed to provide the modern context for the contemporary developments of non-European art and culture as well. This has allowed the contemporary European/white artist to appropriate other cultures, but no non-European artist has found a place in this historical development.

The knowledge of contemporary art works is provided by modern museums, public galleries, which house permanent collections as well as organise regular exhibitions, and which also produce regular publications in the form of books, catalogues etc. The exhibitions in private art galleries, accompanied by glossy publications, also provide an essential source of contemporary art knowledge.

This knowledge is given validity and legitimisation by art critics and art historians who provide analytical and theoretical framework to it. These art critics and art historians often teach in art education institutions, and thus their views become part of the important apparatus of the contemporary art education.

In addition, living contemporary artists often make regular visits to art education institutions and thus play an important role in art education. Many of these artists, who are exclusively white and European, have important positions in these institutions as teachers, lecturers, professors, etc.

Without exceptions, the head of the departments are thus obviously white and Europeans, who establish and control the teaching syllabus.

Regular conferences and seminars are often held, locally within the institutions, nationally as well as internationally, to discuss theoretical issues related to social, historical and aesthetic matters, which provide an essential platform to debate the controversial matters as well as to disentangle and resolve difficult and complex issues. These conferences and seminars are important part of the contemporary art scene and education, which also allow students, teachers, artists to debate the matters openly and publicly.

Exhibitions, conferences and seminars are often, if not always, reviewed in art magazines and the important material from them is published in book forms. All this become an important source material for art education.

Art Education for Whom?

The basis on which the whole structure of art education is built is both ethnocentric and Eurocentric. That is, the teaching of the basic skills and techniques is related to European traditions in art. And the

~~proves~~ this teaching is the recognition of the history of Western art and its supremacy on the art of other cultures, both traditional and contemporary.

This supremacy is not based on any empirical evidence or the understanding of other cultures by the West, but this position is ideologically constructed in order to give the West historically advance position. The philosophy which underpins this position is the rationalisation of the cultural differences of other races and their 'backwardness'. In other words, racism is important part of this ideological construct.

This position is maintained today by the monopoly of contemporary art by European/white artists, nationally and internationally, and which has a direct bearing on the nature of art education today.

The most important part of art education today is the provision of contemporary art knowledge in terms of the knowledge of recognised artists, particularly those who are still living. Since no black artist is recognised in Britain, this knowledge is exclusively of white artists

Furthermore, there are no black art teachers (ignoring very few exceptions). This is also to do with the ignorance of the history of black artists in Britain. Many recognised and established artists also teach and this helps students to keep in touch with contemporary art scene as well as latest developments. Listening and talking to the practicing artists provide an important understanding of their work, and this understanding is important part of the process of the student's identity.

The teaching of art history is confined mainly to the history of art in the West, including modern/contemporary periods. And when other histories or cultures are dealt with they are always dealt with marginally.

The teaching of such an art history can be shattering for black art students. The effect of such a teaching can be described by what happened to a Pakistani artist who was a postgraduate student at the Slade School of Art (University College) in 1956. At that time Prof. Gombrich taught art history there, based on his famous book The Story of Art, and when he came to a chapter on Islamic art he finished the whole thing in five minutes. Such a dismissing treatment of almost one thousand years of Islamic art had a shattering effect on Shemza, who still lives in Britain that he went home and destroyed all his work. (Shemza is one of the founding members of the movement of modern art in Pakistan).

The example of Shemza is not unique. Almost every black art student confronts such a situation everyday in the British art institutions. There are many examples of black art students dropping out, either from particular classes or from the education system altogether. Identity crises are quite common amongst young generation of black art students. The blame for this is often put on the students: they are lazy; their social and cultural backgrounds are different; their 'inherent' inability to cope with the modern/contemporary situations.

The reasons given here are all humbug. The fact is that the present art education is only suitable to the white society and its white artists. It

is totally inadequate in terms of the needs of a multi-cultural and multi-racial equal society. The skills, the techniques, theoretical texts, historical knowledge, all are exclusively based on the concept of history of art which gives Western art traditions supremacy on other cultural traditions, so much so that Western artists today see it their historical right to monopolise contemporary art practices. Naturally, the perpetuation of this kind of perception and its incorporation in the art education marginalises the role of black art student and thus take away his or her confidence to become a professional artist or/and a teacher.

In fact we have enough evidence to show that the present art education system is extremely harmful to the development of the creative potential of all those who are not white. It is not uncommon for black art student to suffer alienation and identity crises as they constantly face values which by implication relegate them to inferior or marginal positions. Many white students, on the other hand, develop an exalted view of themselves as they begin to see their own dominant roles in the contemporary world.

Consequently, there is a lack of interest among young blacks to go into visual arts, as there is no successful black artist in Britain to inspire them and give them confidence to struggle for their position as artists in the contemporary world. Moreover, what is actually available to them, from both art world as well as art education, has little to do with their own experience and view of the world.

The examples of successful artists, both dead and living, play an important role in the contemporary art education, which provides the art student with his or her identity as well as hope for the successful future. No such examples are available to the black art student.

ALTERNATIVES

Art education in Britain today has remained unchanged since its colonial times when its cultural institutions were very much part of its imperialist world outlook. This outlook is still being perpetuated, though perhaps unconsciously and sometimes out of ignorance. Art teaching even today at every level remains geared, as I have said before, to the production and provision of skills and knowledge useful only to the idea of this society maintaining the centrality of its monolithic white or Eurocentric culture indefinitely.

However, it is being now recognised in some quarters that the present art education is not adequate in terms of the needs of a multi-cultural and multi-racial society, and alternatives are being suggested to improve the situation.

The most common suggestion is the use of artefacts from other cultures, particularly of African and Asian traditions. This can and will improve

the atmosphere of art education institutions, in favour of those who are not white. It can also change the consciousness of white art students in terms of broadening their horizons.

But the mere introduction of these 'artefacts' will not change the basic structure of Eurocentric art education, as they will certainly be put, in the present circumstances, to marginal uses without affecting the mainstream teaching.

I have deliberately used the word 'artefacts' rather than art works, because that is how they are being referred to and are being labelled as 'ethnographic material'. The use of this material in art schools and colleges, as being suggested by ILEA and the CRE, for example, will only lead to the exoticisation of the atmosphere of these institutions. The very concept which calls the material from Afro/Asian cultures as 'ethnographic' is questionable.

The present educational system is based on the division between art historical material (found in modern museums) and ethnographic material (found in anthropological museums, such as British Museum) and this division is maintained by racially based ideas in Western philosophy since the Renaissance, and which determines the advance and civilising position of Western art while the art of other cultures are given positions in the past and fixed traditions. If we really want to change the present situation in the interest of a multi-racial equal society, then the basic concept that determines advance and backward positions in art and cultural practices must be questioned and challenged first; because this basic concept is very much part of the prevailing art education system.

In the light of the fact that ILEA and CRE have yet no policy about the contemporary art practices among black people and their importance to art education, we do not find it surprising that they should put so much emphasis on the use of 'ethnographic material'. Actually it fits well in their perception of so-called 'ethnic minority arts' which is based on the presumed difference between mainstream culture (which again is presumed to be Western) and the arts of so-called 'ethnic minorities' (which again are presumed to be of traditional nature).

The argument here is not against the importance and usefulness of cultures of Afro/Asian traditions in this country. They are part of this society and they must play their roles in the developments of this society into a multi-cultural society. The important question here is about the way we are going to achieve this goal. Can we achieve this goal without providing a contemporary context or contexts to these cultures?

Anti-racism is one such context, but how are these cultural traditions going to question the racism in art and art education? By their mere presence? They have been present in the West for centuries, and how did they question the racism? On the contrary, they have been used through anthropological studies to maintain their historically 'marginal' and 'backward' positions.

The dominant culture of this society has never objected to the presence of Afro/Asian cultural traditions here. In fact Europe has been using these cultures for over a century in their own contemporary developments. The question here is not the presence or exposure of these cultures in this society; they are acceptable as long as they do not question the fundamental values of this society. In other words, they are acceptable if they play a marginal role, an exotic instead of critical.

The fundamental question here is in fact about the position of Afro/Asia (ie black) people in this country, in this contemporary society. This is important because this has direct implication to the nature and state of art education in Britain today. The creative ability of black people in this country is not determined by their cultural traditions but by their contemporary environment; and the proof of this is the achievement of black artists in contemporary developments in Britain.

This achievement is not being recognised and is not being allowed to enter into the art education system, because this will shatter the whole myth of the intellectual superiority of the white man, the modern genius. It is okay to have some 'ethnographic material' around art colleges, but can you imagine black artists running the art departments on the basis of their achievements in contemporary contexts?

The basic issue here is therefore to question those ideas and attitudes, the structures, which have denied the black artist the recognition of his/her achievement in contemporary art developments; and which have thus prevented the contemporary ideas produced by the black artists in this society into its educational system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are here concerned with contemporary art education, and any questioning and improvement to its prevailing system must be carried out from and within contemporary contexts. In the light of the present priorities of a developing multi-cultural and multi-racial society, this education must be based on the recognition of all cultural traditions placed equally in relation to each other and within historical contexts.

Racism is part of the Eurocentricity of contemporary/modern art and art education, and this must be questioned and in fact rejected in the interest of a true and an equal multiracial society.

The exclusion of the black artist from the mainstream modern art is due to its basic contradiction: it claims its universal humanism in terms of providing contexts for progress and freedom for all people and yet it maintains the monopoly and supremacy of white male artist within it. In other words, the Eurocentric ideology of modern/contemporary art will find it difficult to give equal recognition to the black artist. It is therefore our task as black artists and teachers to challenge the Eurocentric ideology of modern/contemporary art.

This challenge can only be mounted by providing evidence of the achievement of black artists in contemporary developments. The history of the contribution of black artists to contemporary art in Britain must therefore be recognised and made part of multi-racial art education system immediately.

Black artists themselves must be given the task of providing **this** contemporary material and disseminating it, which will improve the whole basis of contemporary art education. This will benefit both black and white art students, not only in the sense of the provision of more knowledge but the ~~ideas~~ which will necessarily challenge racially based ideas in the present art education system.

The contemporary nature of this knowledge will provide a common context and identity for both white and black art students. This will not only provide a solution to the problem of identity crises among black art students but also help white art student to get rid of his or her presumed dominant position in the society.

Of course, the forms and values of Afro/Asian traditions will be part of this new education, but they will not be treated as part of 'ethnographic material'. Their roles in contemporary contexts will be fully recognised and as part of contemporary art practices. They will form part of common source material in the new system.

In order to achieve the above goals we would require black art teachers. There is no other way we can bring confidence and pride to black art students, which constitute a minority in the whole system.

There are not many black artists or teachers who are aware of the whole history of black artists in Britain. We will have to establish special courses and training schemes for this purpose of teaching this history to them first.

Art education institutions must be made aware of this whole problem, and they should be asked to make necessary changes to incorporate/integrate contemporary material from black artists in their new curriculums. For this purpose they must take up black art teachers.

We would require books about the work of black artists, which give not only information but also proper historical and critical analyses, in the light of their place in the postwar contemporary developments.

We need new art histories which will give us our own interpretation of the world and its various cultures. So far, most of the analysis which is available to us about the history of Afro/Asian arts is written by European art historians, who not only lacked full understanding but their interpretation was biased by the typical European perception about other cultures.

Our task is to deconstruct the whole human history written by the West before we find our rightful place in it. This must be the function of art education in a multi-racial society.

Rasheed Araeen



THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN GREAT BLACK WOMEN ARTISTS!

"Our credibility as autonomous beings and thinkers in the white-male-run intellectual establishment is constantly in question and rises and falls in direct proportion to the degree to which we continue to act and think like our Black female selves, rejecting the modes of bankrupt white-male western thought."

Although this quote refers to black women intellectuals, it can equally be used to highlight the problems we face when trying to establish the very existence of black women's art, and a strong social and political base from which to develop our study of it. Firstly, we have to struggle to establish our existence, let alone our credibility, as autonomous beings, in the art world. Secondly, we can only retain that credibility and survive as artists if we become fully conscious of ourselves lest we become demoralised or weakened by the social, economic and political constraints which the white-male art establishment imposes and will continue to impose on us.

This paper, then, is saying black women artists are here, we exist and we exist positively, despite the racial, sexual and class oppressions which we suffer. Firstly, however, we must consider in more detail the way in which these oppressions have operating in a wider context - not just in the art world, but also in the struggles for black and female liberation. This is because, as Barbara Smith says of our struggle for intellectual and artistic recognition in general, "the politics of black women's studies are inextricably linked to the politics of black women's lives". Indeed, the emergence of black women artists in Britain can be directly traced to the two political movements already mentioned, plus a third, the more recent Black women's Movement. As Parita Drivedi point out,

"In relation to political work in Britain Black women have always carried on in the traditions of resistance and struggle against our oppressions as black women workers and as black people."

It is true to say that although black women have been the staunchest allies of black men and white women in the struggle against the oppressions we all face at the hands of the capitalist and patriarchal system, we have hardly ever received either the support we need or recognition of our pivotal role in this struggle.

In relation to black men, to us as though, having taken our support for granted for so long, our brothers harbour a fear of the possibility of us organising around our own needs and confronting them with their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing us. We have been accused of "dividing" the Black struggle by raising feminism as an issue. We are asked to forget or keep quiet about our oppressions as women for the "common good" of the movement. However, we still acknowledge that black men and women have a common struggle, but one which includes the struggle against sexism. The Combahee River Collective make the position clear:

"Although we are feminists and lesbians we feel solidarity with progressive black men and do not advocate the fractionalisation that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as

black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with black men against racism while we also struggle with black men about sexism. We have a great deal of loathing and criticism for what men have been socialised to be in this society, what they support, how they act and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, or their biological maleness, that makes them what they are."

With regard to the women's movement, it would appear that this became monopolised by white middle class women and removed to academic institutions even faster than was the case in the U.S.A. This is not to say, of course, that black and white working class women have not been organising autonomously for centuries in this country. It is just that feminism per se, because of a combination of divisive media campaigns and white middle-class women's racism and elitism, came to be seen as the concern of these women alone. Thus, in many cases, the cause of women's liberation was, and still is used for the career advancement of individuals through a fight for "respectability" within patriarchal institutions, rather than making the unification of all women in the struggle against sexism a primary concern.

Black women now realise that because of the specific ways in which we are oppressed by white-male dominated society, we must present a new challenge to imperialism, racism and sexism from inside and outside the established Black Liberation movement, and at a critical distance to the white-dominated feminist movement. It is this realisation that has had a great deal to do with many second generation Black British women reclaim art, firstly as a legitimate area of activity for blackwomen as a distinct group of people, secondly as a way of developing an awareness denied us by this racist, sexist class, society, of ourselves as complete human beings and thirdly as a contribution to the black struggle in general.

Having said this, Blackwomen's ability to do any or all of these 3 things is restricted by the same pressures of racism, sexism, and class exclusivity which we experience in society in general, in the fight against the bourgeois art establishment. In which I include colleges, universities, galleries, funding bodies and all other institutions which are directly or indirectly responsible for the production and administration of art and artists.

Leaving aside the question of the way in which the art establishment oppresses us for the time being. I want to consider the main challenge to imperialist art history which has been put forward to date. This is important because this is an art history, written by the white male art historians and artists who control the art establishment, which only acknowledges white men as truly creative and innovative artists, whilst recognising art by white women only as a homogenous expression of femininity and art by black people, (or more accurately, with the terms of reference use, black men) as a static expression of the ritual experience of the daily life of their communities, be they in the third world or the imperialist hinterland. In this system of knowledge, black women artists, quite simply, do not exist.

Nevertheless, if we look at the way in which these assumptions have been questioned to date, particularly by which women, we can still see nothing that acknowledges that black women exist. Art history is an academic subject studies in patriarchal art institutions, and white middle-class women have used their advantageous class position to gain access to these institutions by applying pressure to them in a way which actually furthers the exclusion of black artists in general. White women's failure to inform themselves of the obstacles faced by black artists and in particular black women artists has led to the production of an extremely Eurocentric theory and practice of 'women's art'. For example, To Sika Parker and Griselda Pollock, two ex-students of the Courtauld Institute in London, attempt to analyse the way in which art by women has been marginalised and dismissed in their book Old Mistresses. Although they draw many valid conclusions and point out the massive contribution which women have made to the development of artistic practice, their comments refer exclusively to white women, with the exception of one mention of Kim Lin for her role in organising an exhibition.

Another informative illustration of the way in which white women have failed to come to terms with black women's artistic experience is the way in which Judy Chicago, the established white American feminist artist, treats us as subjects. Her work The Dinner Party features a dinner table set with 39 plates, each for a particular group of distinguished women and bearing a creatively imagined vagina. However, the one plate which does not bear a vagina is the one set for black women. Instead, it bears 3 faces - one weeping, which "personifies" black women's oppression, another screaming and raising a clenches fist to emphasise our 'heroism' and a third in 'African design', smiling as if African women had no woes before their transportation to the first world. The fact that Judy Chicago allots only one plate to black women, as if only one thirty-ninth of the world's 'outstanding' women were black, is bad enough as a token gesture; to use such cliched symbols of our experience which appear as more 'direct' than the vaginas used to represent white women's 'complicity' is extremely racist.

It seems that white feminists as much as white women in general either do not attempt to or find it difficult to conceive of black women's experience. Some of those who do not attempt to may claim that they cannot speak for black women, but this is merely a convenient way of sidestepping their own racism. The fact remains that, in a patriarchal and sexist society, all black people suffer from racism and it is quite possible for white women to turn racism, which stems from patriarchy, to their advantage. Black men are unable to do this and, theoretically, are unable to turn sexism to their advantage, although they can do this for short term gains which in the long term will never benefit black people as a whole. This has happened to a certain extent in the art world, where black men have failed to recognise black women artists or have put pressure on us to produce certain kinds of work linked to male-dominated notion of struggle. However, because of their race and class position, black men have been unable to turn the resources of art institutions to their advantage in the same way that white middle-class women have.

society or rejected. In other words, should Black British artists's work bring into embarrassing relief contradictions found within the dominant ideology, then the established institutions will find the works incomprehensible or uncomfortable."

In the case of Black women art students who I have been in touch with, those who have done more overtly political work have made their white tutors very uncomfortable and, as a result, hostile, whilst students who have done less obviously challenging work have been questioned for not producing the kind of work which tutors expect black people to produce. Class differences amongst Blackwomen are significant here, for working-class Blackwomen have generally been quicker to reject the ideology of the art establishment and have therefore found it more difficult to accept any form of token status or to produce work of a more acceptable nature. One woman, now at Bradford art college, was rejected by Brent art college after warning her interviewers of "what you're in for if you take me on" and presenting them with work whose political content (about the abuse of blackwomen) they neatly circumvented by talking about "materials, tactile qualities, texture, texture, texture." Another working class Blackwomen who attended the Slade School of Fine Art, after leaving photos of police actions during the 1981 uprisings in the printmaking department to be processed, was sent a note saying:

"It would appear that the work you left in the department recently was of a personal nature. It should be understood that the department cannot deal with the private work of this sort."

Those who have not taken such an oppositional stance have still suffered from having their work analysed within a very narrow framework because their tutors have expected them to produce "ethnic" work which reflects their "cultural origin" using, for example, "bright carnival colours". Both white tutors and students have expressed confusion when such work has not been forthcoming, as the following comments from black women art students show:

"I've never used colour much. I think that after the first 3 months it was quite obvious that I wasn't going to produce bright pictures... I've never taken kindly to being treated as an exotic dancer or something, so they lay off. In fact, they ignore you... you're difficult, hard to tutor."

"I was aware of feeling that I wasn't much good to them because (i) I've wasn't from Africa or another Black country (ii) I was brought up with a white family in a white part of England, Norfolk (iii) I did not speak another language or have wonderful things about my culture to teach them."

Another tendency of white tutors, irrespective of the type of work they are presented with is to discuss art from Africa and other parts of the Third World with Blackwomen students in a patronising and racist manner. One student complained that

"They often reel out some gobble de took about naive or primitive art somewhere along the line. They half expect you to be an expert and half don't have a clue what to say to you and they must say something... It's not the fact that they want to discuss African art/'primitive' art with

you (that is infuriating)... It is the fact that they do so without making any connection between what you're doing and what African art does. The fact that they're terrified that you'll know more about it than they do. The fact that they believe everything that Edward Lucia Smith says about 'primitive' and never look at it from any other perspective. They feel the need to slot you into that 'primitive' bag and file you away on their habitat bookshelves or display you on the.. coffee table with the other exotica they've found."

Of course, the assumption that black women will produce work with 'ethnic' or 'primitive' associations is one that white tutors make about black men as well, but it is important to point out that male and female white tutors alike are more inclined to see black men as having a more prominent role in this misconceived tradition. The same student who wrote the above added:

"Funny how they always refer to you as some sort of bridge or crossing point between two things. Black meets woman. that's handy. As if you don't have an experience of your own, but borrow from the brothers and sisters in struggle."

The experience of an ex-student of Leeds university art department emphasises this denial of the Blackwoman artist's identity by white tutors:

"I think that often they would have preferred to ignore the fact that I am black and placed me entirely in a struggle with that of white women's. I think that they often found it hard to cope with the fact that I was producing work about the politics of being black. I think that when I first went to Leeds University they were generally 'blind' to the fact that I was black, I was just a 'radical woman', which is right, but I had to point out the power relationships between white and black women, their grounds for solidarity and their boundaries."

It seems, then, that when art colleges and universities give places to Blackwomen, which is itself a rare event, all the forces of the dominant aesthetic ideology are brought to bear on the Black women artists are ignored, isolated, described as 'difficult', slotted into this and that stereotype and generally discouraged in every conceivable way from expressing ourselves in the way that we want to. This system of oppression and exclusion extends well beyond our time as art students. There are no full-time lecturing posts at art colleges or universities filled by black women in the entire country - instead we are offered 'freelance' work as visiting lectureres, which will near be enough for us to initiate a critique of contemporary art practice which is so desperately needed in every single art department in Britain.

In addition, black women artist are denied the opportunity to develop their work as individuals in the same way that white artists can through grants from sources such as the Arts Council, the Greater London Council, regional Arts Associations and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Even though some of these sources such as the GLC and the Greater London Arts Association have recently begun to realise how much they have neglected Black visual artists, on the only occasion that a black woman has received funding as an individual from the GLC, this has still been on unsatisfactory terms. The way in which this woman received her funding was not nearly so straightforward. In the

first place she was funded for a year by the Arts and Recreation Department of the GLC on the condition that she was attached to a community arts centre as a 'community artist', and the stipulation was made that the work she produced should not reflect her desires as an individual but 'the interests of the black community'. Furthermore her materials budget was cut back considerably, the equipment needed for the medium of printmaking which she uses, and when she applied to the Arts Council to make up for this loss, her application was rejected on the grounds that her work was too much like a 'research project'. After a further application to the Equal Opportunities Commission was rejected, it became clear that the way in which she had been funded by the GLC actually reduced her chances of obtaining funding from other sources. The GLC had ignored the importance to the black community of the experience of individual Blackwomen, and funded her on the basis of a historical notion of 'community' or 'ethnic minority' arts, but when it came to applying to the Arts Council, it appeared the the role she had been pushed into was not individual enough. her rejection letter read:

"We do not think that your proposed project fits the terms of reference for this training scheme which is specifically aimed at developing the individual's skills, and is not to assist with research projects".

As for the EOC, all she received from them was the briefest rejection letter despite the fact that her work did fit well into their criteria for funding research projects.

A major problem here is that the GLC is a local government institution rather than an art institution, and so when it deals with culture generally, through its Arts and Recreation department, it does so in a way which is orientated towards 'entertainment' as if it were a form of social welfare, rather than art. This is not to criticise individual officers but to point out that they are ill-equipped to deal with visual arts in terms of range of skills, resources and knowledge they possess.

If the GLC continues to fund Blackwomen artists only as 'community artists' then we will remain in a kind of funding no-woman's-land because the Arts Council, racist and sexist as it is already, will continue to see our work as un-fundable research projects and, as was the case with the application already mentioned, refer us to the marginality of the "ghetto artist", completely outside the mainstream British art world.

This should dispel the myth about black women having an advantageous position as 'double tokens', which is still widely believed. The same black woman who was refused a grant by the Royal College was told by a white woman from the Women Artists' Slide Library that things are 'all right' for Blackwomen who must find it easy to get funded. The reality is in fact similar to the experience of Black American woman intellectuals, who find that their "salaries,... tenure and general level of acceptance in the white male 'community' of scholars are all quite grim."

Part 3. BLACKWOMEN ARTIST FIGHT BACK:

"What our multilayered oppression does not explain are the ways in which we have created and maintained our own intellectual traditions as black women - without either the recognition or the support of white male society."

Barbara Smith's words point out the resilience of Blackwomen in the face of oppression. This has manifested itself in the art world through our ability to produce and exhibit work despite all the social, political and economic constraints described above. Exhibiting, of course, is no easier than any other part of the process - many blackwomen have related to me the impossibility of showing work as mainstream galleries. It is inspiring to see the way that Blackwomen artists have organised together to exhibit since the first all-Blackwomen's shows in Britain at the Africa Centre in 1983. However, this was not just a beginning; Blackwomen artists have been actively involved in exhibitions with white artists and black man artists for several years, but these all-Blackwomen shows and the ones that have taken place since then - Blackwoman Time Now, 1985 International Woman's Day Show, Mirror Reflecting Darkly, etc - represent a significant new direction which has much to do with the development of what described above as "our own intellectual traditions".

It is obvious that the majority of Black artists see their work in opposition to the establishment view of art as something that is 'above' politics, and Blackwomen artists see their work as integral to the struggles of Blackwomen and black people in general, as the words of one of us show:

"The images shown are different. Indian women, women under apartheid and... anti-nuke stuff. The ideas/issues/subjects, plus my own culture have determined the content and form. They represent a consciousness and a culture. When I express personal thoughts, I try and create something which is more direct and harmonious. It try to bring about an awareness of what is going on. It sort of reflects the changes the women's movement has attached to the personal in the political world. They both merge."

As is pointed out here, although Blackwomen's own culture plays a large part in determining the content and form of our work, we often concentrate on different issues to black men who, as another Blackwomen artist points out, often believe that "artists who are making through their works a collective, aggressive challenge to cultural domination are 'real' Black artists and making Black Art. But some male artists fail to understand or comprehend the struggles women artists go through to assert their identity and survive." She suggests that, as long as we accept that Black Art is art produced by Black people; any further attempt to place barriers around Black Art may be destructive.

"Black artists can do everything, allow everything to everybody. Let us think of ourselves as being able to not just have one line but many other lines going out to every direction because we're people. If someone wants to paint and not use figures, that's fine to me. Some abstract paintings are lovely for what paintings are. But if a Black person does it, they shouldn't be persecuted because they're not doing what is considered to be 'Black Art'."

Part 2. THE STRUGGLES OF BLACK WOMEN ARTISTS

So far this paper has only considered challenges to white-male domination of art and society, rather than the operation of that domination through art institutions. This has been important firstly to show why the support of movements opposing white-male domination have not necessarily served the interests of blackwomen and secondly to establish where black women's art is coming from, especially in relation to white middle-class women who tend to take up any women's movement, be it in art, education, politics or anything else, as their own. We acknowledge the fact that the main opponents to our emancipation are white men, but it is very necessary to understand now the struggle against that opposition is divided in order that we can more effectively unite against it.

The first stage of most blackwomen artists' encounter with this opposition is their entry into art college. There are hardly any Black women attending art college in Britain, and those who do, according to the replies to a survey of blackwomen artists I carried out, seem to have experienced a mixture of hostility and indifference from their college because their white tutors work within an imperialist art tradition, using the aesthetic conventions of the dominant ideology, they are unwilling to come to terms with Blackwomen students or their work. This resistance manifests itself in many ways - some Blackwomen art students have found themselves asking why they as individuals found it so easy to get into art college, only to realise that they are there purely as tokens. In this situation, one student who is the only Blackwomen in her year is now virtually ignored by her tutors:

"They encourage me to believe that I have no taste for art and my position as a black women artist is a privilege rather than a deserved position."

It appears that Blackwomen's very presence in white male-dominated art institutions is frequently called into question. For example, an Indian women was asked in her interview at Winchester art college where she would be able to complete her course before her parents 'whisked' her off for an arranged marriage, even though she had already completed a 2 year foundation course, whilst the only Black British women to have been offered a place at the Royal College of Art was denied a grant and obliged to support herself during her studies despite the fact that Blackwomen are the most economically underprivileged group in society.

Apart from denying us the support and encouragement that white art students receive, art colleges also make us feel as though we don't belong inside their walls by the way in which our work is looked at. A male black artist makes the general point :

"Because art is a form of communication and because black artists have their own location in the social structure as black people, the art work they produce is a mediation of the consciousness of the social group to which they belong. Should their social group possess a different ideology of the dominant ideology, this will be portrayed in the work they produce. Depending on whether their ideology takes an alternative, erroneous or oppositional stance to the dominant ideology they will either be accommodated by British

Recommendations

- 1) Workshop, Studio, Exhibition and Gallery Space.
- 2) Funding made available for a continuation of this paper.
- 3) Funding of a directory of who's who and where in Black Womens Art Studies.
- 4) Funding of a national interdisciplinary Black Women Art conference.
- 5) Funding to allow the creation of our own publications, including both academic Black Womens Art Journals.

Already existing institutions can/must respond to the following needs and recommendations:

- 1) That university departments and Art Colleges etc provide a climate open and supportive to the teaching of materials on Blackwomen's art.
- 2) That universities and individual art departments making, hiring, promotion and tenure of Black women's faculty a priority and fulfilled affirmative action directives.
- 3) That universities and Art Depts implement more programs for 're-entry' women with particular outreach to Third World and Working-class communities.
- 4) That Black womens Art courses be made accessible to all Black women not only these who are in universities.
- 4) That journals make a serious effort to identify and publish the work of Black Women Artists scholars, particularly their research on Black women.

All of our visions require fundamental social, political and personal change. For Black Womens Art to flourish, we call for:

- 1) The eradication of racism in the White Women's movement through a serious examination of their own racism and a recognition of Black history and culture.
- 2) The eradication of antifeminism and homophobia in the Black community and particularly among Black women academics.
- 3) A strong Black Feminist movement supported both by White feminists and by the Black community.

NEEDS

- 1) Black women artists must maintain a constantly militant and critical stance toward the places where we must do our work.
- 2) To begin to devise ways to break down our terrible isolation in the White male art institutions and to form the kinds of support networks Black women have always formed to help each.

- 3) Need to find ways to create our own places, conferences, institutes, journals, where we can be the Black women we are and gain respect for the amazing depth of perception that our identity brings.
- 4) To do the work involved in creating Black Womens Art Studies requires not only intellectual intensity by the deepest courage. Ideally this is hard work, passionate and committed research, writing and teaching, drawing, painting, video, film, photography, performance, graphics, sculpture, Art, Art, Art whose purpose is to question everything.
- 5) The bias of Black womens Art studies must consider as primary the knowledge that will save Blackwomen's Lives!
- 6) There are still far too few courses, and far too few Black women in Art institutions where women might have the opportunity to teach. Although people involved in women's studies are becoming increasingly aware of issues of race, the majority of White women teachers and administrators have barely begun the process of self-examination which must precede productive actions to change this situation.

Politics of Feminism/Black Feminist Movement (Barbara Smith).

The politics of feminism have a direct relationship to the state of Black Women's Art and Literature. A viable autonomous Black Feminist movement in this country would open up the space needed for the exploration of Black women's Lives and the creation of consciously Black women - identifies art.

1. Funding Bodies consult all artists before employing any artist to carry our work.

Libraries to keep slides of our work.

More Black artists on panels for funding bodies.

Links made between Britain and Women's own countries of origin and such visits be supported, eg it is not recognised by funding bodies that it is crucial for all Artists work to progress.

That college libraries have a policy on the purchase of non-European based source material.

Policy in Liberal Studies Dept towards art which has its roots in non-European culture.

Recommendations that funding bodies take into account differences and similarities between all black women. That also class, cultural background, communities, education, aspiration, homes of each women is taken into consideration at all times.

Postcards, Posters produced etc of womens work.

Documentation of all Exhibitions and Workshops, to be kept and published.

Links made between Britain and womens own countries of origin and such visits be supported.

THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN GREAT BLACKWOMEN ARTISTS

A SYNOPSIS

We face many problems when trying to establish the very existence of Blackwomen's art, and a strong social and political base from which to develop our study of it. Firstly, we have to struggle to establish our existence, let alone our credibility as autonomous beings, in the art world. Secondly, we can only retain that credibility and survive as artists if we become fully conscious of ourselves, lest we are demoralised or weakened by the social, economic and political constraints which the white-male art establishment imposes and will continue to impose upon us.

This paper, then, is saying Blackwomen artists are here, we exist and we exist positively despite the racial, sexual and class oppressions which we suffer, but first, however, we must point out the way in which these oppressions have operated in a wider context - not just in the art world, but also in the struggles for black and female liberation.

It is true to say that although Blackwomen have been the staunchest allies of black men and white women in the struggle against the oppression we all face at the hands of the capitalist and patriarchal system, we have hardly ever received either the support we need or recognition of our pivotal role in this struggle. Blackwomen now realise that because of the specific ways in which we are oppressed by white-male dominated society, we must present a new challenge to imperialism, racism and sexism from inside and outside the established black liberation movement and at critical distance to the white-dominated feminist movement. It is this realisation which has a lot to do with many second generation British Blackwomen as a distinct group of people, secondly as a way of developing an awareness (denied us by this racist, sexist, class society) of ourselves as complete human beings and thirdly as a contribution to the black struggle in general.

Having said this, Blackwomen's ability to do any or all of these three things is restricted by the same pressures of racism, sexism and class exclusivity which we experience in society in general. The bourgeois art establishment only acknowledges white men as truly creative and innovative artists, whilst recognising art by white women only as homogenous expression of femininity and art by black people (or, more accurately, with the terms of reference used, black men) as a static expression of the ritual experience of the daily lives of their communities, be they in the Third World or the imperialist hinterland. In this system of knowledge, Blackwomen artists, quite simply, do not exist.

Nevertheless, if we look at the way in which these assumptions have been challenged to date, particularly by white women, we can still see nothing that acknowledges that Blackwomen exist. Art history is an academic subject,

studied in patriarchal art institutions, and white middle-class women have used their advantageous class position to gain access to these institutions by applying pressure to them in a way which actually furthers the exclusion of black artists in general. White women's way which actually furthers the exclusion of black artists in general. White women's failure to inform themselves of the obstacles faced by black artists and in particular Blackwomen artists has led to the production of an extremely Eurocentric theory and practice of "women's art". It seems that white feminists, as much as white women in general, either do not attempt to or find it difficult to conceive of Blackwomen's experience. Some of those who do not attempt to may claim that they cannot speak for Blackwomen, but this is merely a convenient way of sidestepping their own racism. The fact that in a patriarchal and sexist society, all black people suffer from racism, and it is quite possible for white women to turn racism, which stems from patriarchy, to their advantage. Black men are unable to do this and, theoretically, are unable to turn sexism to their advantage, although they can do this for short term gains which in the long term will never benefit black people as a whole. This has happened to a certain extent in the art world, where black men have failed to recognise Blackwomen artists or have put pressure on us to produce certain kinds of work linked to a male-dominated notion of struggle. However, because of their race and class position, black men have been unable to use the resources of art institutions in the same way that white middle-class women have.

PART 2. THE STRUGGLES OF BLACKWOMEN ARTISTS

The first stage of most Blackwomen artists' encounter with the art establishment is their entry into art college. There are hardly any Blackwomen attending art college in Britain, and those who do, according to a survey of Blackwomen artists I carried out, seem to have experienced a mixture of hostility and indifference from their college. Because their white tutors work within an imperialist art tradition, using the aesthetic conventions of the dominant ideology, they are unwilling to come to terms with Blackwomen students and their work. This resistance manifests itself in many ways - some Blackwomen art students have found themselves asking why they as individuals found it easy to get into art college, only to realise that they are there purely as tokens, and in general it appears that Blackwomen's very presence in white-male art institutions is frequently called into question. Apart from denying us the support and encouragement that white art students receive, art colleges make us feel as though we don't belong inside their walls by the way in which our work is looked at. Those of us who have done more overtly political work have made white tutors very uncomfortable and, as a result, hostile, whilst students who have done less obviously challenging work have been questioned for not producing the kind of work which tutors expect black people to produce. Class differences amongst Blackwomen are significant here, for working-class Blackwomen have generally been quicker to reject the ideology of the art establishment and have therefore found it difficult to accept any kind of token status or to produce work of a more acceptable nature. Those who have not taken such an oppositional stance have still suffered from having their work analysed within a very narrow framework because their tutors have expected them to produce "ethnic" work which reflects their "cultural origin" using, for example, "bright carnival colours", and white tutors and students alike have expressed confusion when

such work has not been forthcoming. Another tendency of white tutors, irrespective of the type of work they are presented with, is to discuss art from the Third World with Blackwomen in a patronising and racist manner.

Of course, the assumption that Blackwomen will produce work with "ethnic" or "primitive" associations is one that white tutors make about black men as well, but it is important to point out that male and female white tutors are more inclined to see black men as having a more prominent role in this misconceived tradition. One Blackwomen student at Bradford art college commented:

"Funny how they always refer to you as some sort of bridge or crossing point between two things. Black meets women. That's handy. As if you don't have an experience which is your own, but borrow from the brothers and sisters in struggle."

It seems then, that when art colleges and universities give placed to Blackwomen, which is in itself a rare event, all the forces of the dominant aesthetic ideology are brought to bear on us. Blackwomen artists are ignored, isolated, described as "difficult", slotted into this or that stereotype and generally discouraged in every conceivable way from expressing ourselves in the way that we want to. This system of oppression and exclusion extends well beyond our time as art students. There are no full-time lecturing posts at art college and universities filled by Blackwomen in the entire country - instead we are offered "freelance" work as visiting lecturers, which will near be enough to initiate a critique of contemporary art practice which is so desperately needed in every single art department in the country.

In addition, Blackwomen artists are denied the opportunity to develop their work as individuals in the same way that white artists can through grants from sources such as the Arts Council, the Greater London Council, regional arts associations and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Even though some of these sources such as the GLC and the Greater London Arts Association have recently begun to realise how much they have neglected Black visual arts, on the only occasion that a Blackwoman has received funding from the GLC as an individual, this has still been on unsatisfactory terms which differ significantly from the terms on which the only black man in this position has been funded. The man in question has been funded without any preconditions except that he produces a certain amount of work, whilst the woman was funded by the Arts and Recreation Department of the GLC for a year on the condition that she was attached to a community arts centre as a "community artist", and the stipulation was made that the work she produced should not reflect her desires as an individual but "the interests of the black community". The GLC had ignored the importance to the black community of the experience of individual Blackwomen and had funded her on the basis of a historical notion of "community" or "ethnic minority" arts, but when it came to applying to the Arts Council, it appeared that the role she had been pushed into was not individual enough. The rejection of her application to this body read:

"We do not think that your proposed project fits the terms of reference for this training scheme which is specifically aimed at developing the individual's skills, and is not to assist with research projects."

If the GLC continues to fund Blackwomen artists only as "community artists" then we will remain in a kind of funding no-woman's-land because the Arts Council, racist and sexist as it is already, will continue to see our work as unfundable research projects and, as was the case with the application mentioned, refer us to bodies such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities, further relegating us to the marginality of the "ghetto artist", completely outside the mainstream British art world.

Part 3. BLACK WOMAN ARTISTS FIGHT BACK

The resilience of Blackwomen in the face of oppression has manifested itself in the art world through our ability to produce and exhibit work despite all the social, economic and political constraints described above. The first all-Blackwomen's show at the Africa Centre in 1983 was not just a beginning; Blackwomen artists have been actively involved in exhibitions with white artists and Black men artists for several years, but this all-Blackwoman Time Now, 1985 International Woman's Day Show, Mirror Reflecting Hardly, etc. - represent a significant new direction which has much to do with the development of what Barbara Smith describes as "our own intellectual traditions".

It is obvious that the majority of Black artists see their work in opposition to the establishment view of art as something that is "above" politics, and Blackwomen artists see their work as integral to the struggles of Blackwomen and black people in general, but although Blackwomen's own culture plays a large part in determining the content and form of our work, we often concentrate on different issues to black men who, as one Blackwomen artist points out, often believe that "artists who are making through their works a collective, aggressive challenge to cultural domination are "real" black artists and making Black Art. But some male artists fail to understand or comprehend the struggles women artists go through to assert their identity and survive."

Alice Walker illustrates the difference between these two ideas of Black Art in In Search of Mother's Gardens and goes on to put forward an alternative way for the black artist to operate.

"I am impressed by people who claim they can see everything and event in strict terms of black and white but their work is not, in my long contemplated and earnestly considered opinion, either black or white, but a dull, uniform gray. It is boring because it is easy and requires only that the reader by a lazy reader and a prejudiced one. Each story or poem has a formula, usually two-thirds "hate whitey's guts" and one-third "I am black, beautiful and almost always right". Art is not flattery, and the work of every artist must be more difficult than that."

"My major advice to young black artists would be that they shut themselves up some where away from all the debates about who they are and what colour they are and just turn out painting s and poems and stories and novels. Of course the kind of artist we are required to be cannot do this (our people are waiting)".

Alice Walker's advice is important here, for she is not suggesting that we cut ourselves off from the outside world, because we cannot forget the mark our oppressions as black women have made on us, or the fact that "our people are waiting". The point is that what we need as artists is the opportunity to create the situation she describes so that we are allowed to develop an understanding of ourselves and of the struggle we have to wage within British society for recognition and respect. If we are able to do this by having adequate resources put at our disposal, we hope to share our experiences with, awaken the consciousness of and impart our strength to the whole society.

Photography and the Black Visual Arts.

"Historically Black peoples have been the preoccupation/subjects/objects of photographic discourses. It has always been a medium that has misrepresented us in the construction of its images. It is beyond the frame, beyond the photograph that needs to be examined. These are the issues that some Black practitioners have taken on board, questions we are asking ourselves, and the Black communities we are part of - to forward/hasten a critique for themselves and for ourselves..." (SAMMOFA Film and Video)

This paper on Black photographers in Britain aims to go "beyond the frame" and photographic boundaries by looking at the contribution of Black photographic practitioners within the British photographic discourse. This is not an academic exercise but a practical policy outline. For I hope to attain concrete proposals or recommendations from researching the different histories of Black photographers and the conditions/enviroments/discourses that they have to work within. In order to do this, the paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will be look at the conditions that these photograhers have to work within, from a historical perspective. The secound section will describe how these conditions affect the work and practice of Black photographers with the last section concentrating on the specific recommendations that could resolve these problems.

Section One The Historical Perspective.

"Photography was invented as an instrument of the evolving Western World and has ever since been associated with the technically and economically advanced societies. Thus, photography, as an expensive and originally exclusive commodity has become a symbol of the West. It is the eyes of the privilege that knowledge is gained from photographs and it is through the eyes of the privilege that we gain photographic knowledge of the sufferings, customs and exotic, commonly associated with the colonized, the Third World, the Others..." (Issac Julien)

Photography has become one of the most easily accesible mediums in our society - if we do not own a camera we have access to one - and the fact that we are surrounded and bombarbed by images to the point where most of us consume these images means that most of us take these images for granted. This point is important, for by the act of looking people are not just consuming photographs but are consuming particular messages, signs and codes.

This idea that photography is merely a social construction of messages, signs and codes means that photography always distorts reality and does not capture the real. Photographic images have no substance and are only ghost images in the sense that so many power relations are obscured that no knowledge is gained from photographs. The only knowledge that is gained is the knowledge the spectator attaches to the image which is fundamentally influenced by the dominant culture.

Photography is not neutral and the power it wields is not its own - this power can only be wielded by those who have access to the means of photographic production.

Images do not speak for themselves; there is an underlying/invisible social process going on, a process of social construction which transforms the human Black subject through objectification and stereotyping into an inhuman exotic savage. This stereotypical imagery is dependent on the person who took the photographs. For it is through the photographers' voyeuristic desires which are influenced by the dominant racist culture that we can see how photography reinforces racial stereotypes and contributes to the construction of Blackness. To understand this process we have to look at the origin of photography in relation to the functions of the state and colonialism.

The conception of photography as a neutral/objective medium capturing the real was based on its original function as a tool for the state in nineteenth century England - where photography was used by the police and medical professions. However, it was Anthropology in the colonial era using photography as a means of surveillance to categorise, identify and control subject nations that the functions of photography as a means of appropriation and control were beginning to reveal themselves. For it was through the voyeuristic perceptions of the West that we acquired images/knowledge of Black peoples as exotic savages reinforcing the West hegemony - a process which is still maintained today.

These images of Black people as criminals and dancers are not only a legacy of colonialism but are part of a complex colonial discourse which historically 'fixes' the image of Blackness into a form of 'otherness' where there is a psychological phobia of Blackness as a threat (depicted in the images of criminalisation and savagery) and a voyeuristic desire to construct Black subjects as objects of desire in the form of musicians and dancers - posing no threat at all. This colonial discourse comes into play in the act of looking and taking images of Black people, for as Stuart Hall suggests:

"White discourses have been constructing us as simpletons, as simple minded primitive as smiling country people not yet quite up with the fast ways of the advanced world for centuries, ever since slavery. It is a reading to be refused..." (Stuart Hall)

Black peoples since the creation of photography have become only mere objects of white photographic discourses which is a dangerous/problematic position since a discourse defined as:

"...an arena of information exchange, that is, a system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity... That is, the overall discourse relation could be regarded as a limiting function, one that establishes a bounded arena of shared experiences as to meaning..." (Allan Sekula 'Thinking Photography')

This arena of information has been, and still is primarily shared between the white middle class male academia/practitioners who have excluded Black photographers from sharing and participating in this arena. White photographic discourses are dictated through magazines such as Screen, Z.G?, Camerawork, Ten 8 - through funding bodies such as the Arts Council and GLAA - through collages such as PCL, LCP - and eventual galleries where exhibitions by white photographers on Black people such as the Home Front, Mapplethorpe and American Pictures exhibitions take major priority over Black exhibitions by Black photographers because of this shared arena of knowledge. These are the conditions Black photographers have to work within. A hostile environment which affects the form, content and visibility of a Black photographers work.

Section Two - The Black Photographers' Experiences.

Ask any person if they can name five white photographers and the answer on the whole will be yes. However, ask any person if they can name five Black photographers, the answer will on the whole be no. Many people will argue that very few Black photographers exist and the ones that do exist are not up to standard. For here lies the problem Black photographers are invisible with Black women photographers becoming 'doubly invisible'. It is not as if Black photographers do not exist, for if a comprehensive study was carried out in England to find out the amount of Black photographers in the country - the extensive list will carry some of these names and organisations: Newton Brown, Annette Carty, Horace Ove, Geoffrey Morris, Syd Burke, Mumtaz Karimjee, Keith Piper, Eddie Chambers, Ingrid Pollard, Lance Watson, Brenda Agard, Lesley Mitchell, Marc Boothe, Vanley Burke, Armet Francis, Black Womens Photo Visual Collective, David Lewis, Rasheed Areen, Mitra Tabrizina, David Joseph, Southall Black Sisters Group, Patrick Friday, John Richards, Paulette Pipe, Photoculture, Chila Burman..... the list is endless.

For it seems natural in this society that Black people should be the objects/subjects of photographic discourses and unusual that Black people should be participating as practitioners, exploring these photographic discourses. To some, the idea of a Black photographer, seems threatening. Yet these Black photographers remain invisible. To understand this phenomena of invisibility let us look at these Black photographers histories which share similar themes.

Invisibility under the visual arts category.

In general the funding institutions and the mainstream gallery institutions categorise photography under the visual arts sector. (only the Arts Council and GLAA consider separate categories) Many photographers feel that this categorisation is dangerous since the present vogue is to fund and show work in the form of painting, sculpture and the performing arts. Although, this favouritism permeates the Black Visual Arts

sector which leads to a situation where galleries find it favourable to fund and show the work of Black painters and sculptures. There is also a trend where it becomes favourable and feasible under the Ethnic Arts policies of funding bodies and galleries to give major priority to Black (visual) 'entertainment' arts and low priority to Black photography. This policy not only under-funds Black photography but alienates Black photography in general which leads to a situation where major Black art exhibitions ignore photography - such as the New Horizons exhibition and the Creative For Liberation exhibition.

Funding situation.

The main sources of funding for Black photographers are GLAA, GLC, Arts Council, KCB, Bursaries and Awards. However, funding for Black photographers are scarce for several reasons. Firstly due to the cuts and Thatcherism most of the funding institutions have been severely affected. Secondly, photography is generally under-funded due to its categorisation within the visual arts sector and the low status it has in the arts world. For the past history of funding to Black photographers have shown that this funding is few and far between. When Black photographers are eventually funded it is usually a Black male photographer who is usually given a small grant award. This small award will affect the quality and quantity of the Black photographers work, since it is usually not enough to cover all the expenses necessary to display an exhibition professionally, thereby leaving the Black photographer with no alternative but to work under impoverished conditions. Furthermore, this funding policy affects the progression of Black Women photographers which leads to a catch 22 situation for many Black Women photographers; for if they are rarely funded they are rarely seen, and if they are rarely seen, they are rarely funded. A situation which worsens yearly.

Gallery situation.

Only since the opening of the Black Art Gallery in Finsbury Park and the Brixton Art Gallery that some visibility has been given to Black photographers. For instance,

"Performers and Performances" with Marc Boothe at the Black Art Gallery and "Roadwork" at the Brixton Gallery. Although, other galleries have shown Black photographers work eg. The Peoples Gallery - again this gallery situation (the allocation of space) can be related to the funding situation that Black photographers face. For the allocation of gallery space to Black photographers is very minimal over long periods with most galleries only making sure that they maintain their quota of Black photographers exhibitions. When gallery space is allocated to Black photographers, it is usually given to male photographers who are confined to a small space which again affects their work is presented. Once again Black Women photographers are given low priority and are only allocated space on a collective basis and not an individual one.

Documentation/publishing/purchasing.

One way to perpetuate the invisibility of Black photographers is to not document the work and to ignore it completely. Black photographers exhibitions have usually come and gone without being documented by the press (only sometimes the Black press); have been exhibited without catalogues, and in some cases without cards and posters. For instance, Horace Ove and Armet Francis exhibitions were both in mainstream galleries yet both exhibitions have gone undocumented and have hence become invisible. Many Black photographers have experience this due to being under-funded by the funding bodies which leaves these photographers with little or no money to spend on catalogues and publicity. This leads to a situation where the photographers have to publicise, market and preserve the work themselves - a hard task to maintain and upkeep on a limited budget and time.

Myths about Black photographers.

We have seen in the funding and gallery situations that Black photographers are under-funded and under-represented, when both facilities are made available to the Black photographer it is usually under conditions not of their own choosing. Meaning that pressure is placed on the Black photographer by these institutions to work with

a certain context and a short space of time. Furthermore, in some situations, the Black photographer has no control of the presentation, marketing, documentation, quantity and size of their work. Generally the consensus is that the funding and gallery bodies will fund and display Black photographers work on the condition that they will produce certain types of work or that their work falls into the type that is acceptable to these institutions - which is generally the documentary style genre. This is problematic in the sense that this categorisation, stereotypes Black photography - Black photography - and Black photographic discourses. Yet this stereotyping is a myth, for if one looks at the work of Black photographers in this country you will find that there are different styles and traditions within 'Black Photography'. For instance Ove and Francis can be seen as specialising in documentary/portrait photography starting from the 1960's with younger photographers such as Tabrizina, Agard and Chambers using photo-montage to subvert documentary styles, whereas other photographers such as Karimjee use a subtle form of image/text to glorify the image and display the image within the context of art/aesthetics. So to say and dictate that there is one style of photography is unacceptable and dangerous.

Conclusion.

The research has demonstrated that the experiences/histories of Black photographers in Britain is primarily linked to the attitude of the dominant racist culture towards Black people and specifically the hegemony of white photographic discourses which have historically constructed the image of Black people. White photographic discourses shape and direct the form of Black photography which eventually affects the content of Black photography. Yet, within this hostile context, there is a move by Black photographers towards challenging, promoting, exploring and understanding images of ourselves.

Recommendations

1. A policy of positive discrimination towards Black Women photographers needs to be implemented and adhered to by all Art institutions and funding bodies. This will ensure that Black Women photographers are given priority and support (By Black male photographers as well) in all areas and forms of photography. In order to implement this policy a research needs to be conducted outlining the specific needs and changes which could be adopted by several organisations.
2. A basic up to date list of Black photographers needs to be drawn up and published. The list will document the different styles of each photographer with examples of their work. The list can only be successfully compiled through a form of research which will give access to different photographers as well as access to funding, administrative, literary and picture resource (for students).
3. A system of documentation of Black photographers work needs to be set up. Meaning the buying and storing of Black photographers work as well as making sure that catalogues, cards and posters become an integral part of Black photographers exhibitions.
4. Integral links/monitoring of the major bodies such as GLAA, GLC, Arts Council as well as projects such as the Roundhouse needs to be established by the agencies concerned and the Black photographers.
5. Forum/network of Black photographers needs to be established for group shows, seminars, talks in schools, collages, working on policy, contracts, as well as contribution to critical theory and Black Aesthetics.

Synopsis of paper on Black Photographers and the Black Visual Arts.

Photography is one of the most widely consumed mediums in our society which is often regarded as "art" in some elite circles and the "appliance of science" in others. Yet, for the Black community, photographic discourses cannot be neglected or taken for granted. This is due to the fact that the history of photography has its roots within the racist colonial history of British society. A history that dictates to us and bombards us with images of photographs by Man Ray, Cecil Beaton along with contemporary photographic images by photographers such as Snowden and Mapplethorpe. Within this context of British society obsession with consuming past/present history of white photographers and their discourses - there is the work and practice of the Black Photographer. A practice that is often ignored, due to the hegemony of the white British photographic discourse, yet on another level, consumed only on the terms dictated by the white photographic discourse.

This synopsis on Black photography and the Visual Arts will look at the history of the work/practice of Black Photographers and the context that they have to work with. The context is the history of the British colonial discourse; whereby photography v. Anthropology in the nineteenth century crudely contributed in reinforcing stereotypical images of Black people as inhuman exotic savages. Leading to a situation today where Black people have become the mere objects of photographic discourses/images and not the people participating in the production of these images. For example, Black people are bombarded with images of the Ethiopia crisis, imagery of dancers, athletes, and musicians, a legacy of this British colonial discourse. This is the context Black photographers have to work within, a context most white photographers are immune to because they are actively reinforcing/perpetuating this hostile colonial photographic discourse.

Yet it seems more than coincidental that it is this same photographic discourse which excludes Black photographers from participating in this arena; the same photographic discourse which is dictated through magazines like Screen, Z.C., Ten, Camera, and Camera Work.

the same photographic discourse which is supported by the Arts Council, GLAA, GLC;
the same photographic discourse which supports white photographic exhibitions on Black
people such as the Mapplethorpe, Home Front and American Pictures exhibitions.

This photographic discourse permeates every section of the visual arts which on one
level, negatively constructs the direction of Black photography, while at the same
time, positively constructing the invisibility of Black Photographers and their work.
For the fact that there are many Black photographers in Britain, is a notion which
is often ignored/neglected because of the hegemony of this photographic discourse
and the status Black photography has in visual arts. Black Photography, has to compete
against the 'entertainment' forms of Black Visual Arts, such as theatre and dance as
as the other forms of visual arts. This has led to a situation where most funding bodies
and space allocation institutions look favourably towards funding and giving priority
to the Black 'entertainment' arts - thereby eventually giving low priority to photography.
Black Photographers working within this context, live/work in a 'catch 22' situation.
Meaning that since they are rarely funded, they are rarely seen and since they are
rarely seen, they are rarely funded.

DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM PERFORMANCE ART

Performance Art is an umbrella term that covers a vast range of activities and is therefore always hard to define. It is best described as an area of the visual arts which is not geared towards the production of an aesthetic objects. To a certain extent - especially in it's beginnings - a political statement about the commodification and 'fetishisation' of the art object was inherent in the choice of Performance as a medium of expression. In performance, the work of art is impermanent and ephemeral and the emphasis is on art's communicative and participatory function and a direct rapport or interaction with the audience without the 'mediating art object'.

Artists involved in this area are usually hostile to the label Performance Art because they feel it suggests entertainment and possibly a concern with excellence which creates a confusion with the performing arts (theatre, dance, music...). Although performance may borrow from other disciplines, like theatre, dance, poetry, music... it creates a different phenomenon which remains distinct because of its emphasis on unrehearsed, improvised type of action. It is also a non-specialist area of art practice. Some artists prefer using descriptive terms like: Time based Work, Live Action, Event, Intervention or even Demonstration. Others, in a desire to explode all boundaries and limitations imposed by the art establishment, resist all labelling and see their activities as an 'all - inclusive' art that no painting or sculpture can hope to achieve.

Roselee Goldberg in her book entitled 'Performance: live art 1909 to the present' has this to say, about defining performance:

"...by its nature, performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists. Any stricter definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself. For performance draws on any number of references - literature, theatre, drama, music, architecture, poetry, film and fantasy - deploying them in any combination."

In the first part of this paper, I would like to question the Eurocentric assumptions in recent discussions about ritual as the source of inspiration for Performance Art. I then consider the historical background of Performance and look at the avant-garde movements of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. All of these movements favoured the use of multi-media presentations and had a distinctly rebellious, anti-establishment character. And lastly I look at Performance Art in the last 20 years and the contributions of Black artists to this area.

Performance and Ritual

When attempts are made at tracing the origins of Performance Art, as we know it today, so-called 'primitive' cultures and ancient rituals are very often referred to as the oldest source.

One such example is Stuart Brisley's film 'Being and Doing' (produced with Ken McMullen) in which parallels are drawn between performance art (in England and Eastern Europe) and two English folk rituals still celebrated to this day: The Padstow Hobby Hoss and the Haxey Hood ceremonies. But hasn't ritual always existed in Europe as part of 'folk' culture rather than 'fine' art or 'high' culture.

David Medalla in an article about performance (Park Bulletin, May/June 1983) gives a more correct reading, in cultural-historical terms, of the connection between performance and ritual. He locates its origins in the avant-garde movements which have been directly influenced by 'primitive' or exotic cultures. He argues:

"Certainly in our time, there still survives cultures whereby 'artistic creation' is inextricably linked with performance (as we understand it) such as shamanistic rituals, the ceremonial dances of the American Indians, the magic rites of Australian aboriginals, etc. The link, incidentally, between those 'archaic' cultures and the 20th century avant-garde is not fortuitous, or many western artists, have consciously sought inspiration and spiritual nourishment from so-called, erroneously labelled 'primitive' societies e.g., Picasso, Matisse, the Surrealists, Brancusi, Kandinsky, Klee, Miro, Max Ernst, Pollock, etc."

What Europeans became aware of 'artefacts' from other cultures, in particular African masks and ritual objects, not knowing their function, they were first attracted to the aesthetic value of these objects. And, in Adrian Henri's works:

"... surviving potsherds and masks in the ethnographic museum have been isolated from their context and assimilated into a nineteenth-century conception of 'material culture'. With the re-evaluation of primitive art at the beginning of the twentieth century came a rediscovery of the possibilities of visual art as a social function; however obscurely, Picasso and Apollinaire must have been aware of the magical, ritual significance of the beautiful objects in the museum-cases."

So was the idea of visual art as a collective event encompassing different disciplines introduced to European culture in this way?

In Western terms, 'primitive language' (this usually refers to ancient/prehistoric and foreign/exotic cultures and puts them in the same category) is common to all. So, when Western artists are "primitivising art", they are "using the common language of the collective unconscious", as Lucy Lippard puts it in her book 'Overlay'. She then goes on to say:

"It is common to find ancient or foreign or 'primitive' cultures plundered for their mysterious (or, at worst, merely picturesque) qualities." Then, almost as a justification, she adds: "Sometimes an artist with an eye on the bandwagon and the market will borrow the form but drain the content from his or her source in a mood of scholarly tourism... Some artists fortify their forms

or emotional instincts with anthropological information, or superficially graft such information onto currently fashionable styles. Others work from inside, arriving at primal images from their own needs, overlaying personal on historical and perhaps even biological memory."

What is implied here is: yes, there is the individual case of a Western artist plundering other cultures, but others (the serious ones) arrive at these "primal images" through their own endeavours, probing deep and hard within themselves where primal forms and the knowledge of other cultures have been imprinted on their "biological memory".

When Western artists "borrow from other cultures, a whole system of valorisation is applied to this process in order to explain that it is not a simple case of appropriation. On the other hand, when looking at the work of non-European modern artists, the notion of 'ethnic determinism' is introduced to question the validity of their work when it uses elements from their own cultural background. This 'ethnicism' implies that it is 'natural' to the artists - i.e. no rational process is involved - therefore it cannot be part of modern art discourse as defined by the West.

Two examples to illustrate both these points:

The first example is a text that appeared on the wall next to Picasso's painting "Les Femmes d'Alger" which was shown along with African masks in an exhibition entitled 'Primitivism in 20th century Art' at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1984). The text went into a lengthy documentation, with precise dates of the first appearance of African masks in Europe. The purpose of the exercise was to prove that Picasso had not come into contact with the artefacts before painting 'Les Femmes d'Alger'. Therefore, it is concluded, the close resemblance of Picasso's paintings to African art is "fortuitous, representing affinities (with tribal art) rather than influences". Picasso's affinities with African art were no doubt the result of his own rational development and creative genius.

The other example is from a review in Performance Magazine (Dec/Jan 1983) in which Rob La Frenais describes a performance by the Japanese artist Mineo Aoyama as "... refreshingly physical, vigorous and decisive, involving as it did pure 'zen' actions with respect to the immediate environment. But isn't that a bit too predictable for a Japanese artist?"

This statement begs one or two questions: should a Japanese or Black artist completely negate his/her own background in order to be allowed entry into the modern art arena and is it considered acceptable and as part of the modernist discourse, when a Western artist (like many have done) uses "pure 'zen' actions" in his/her work?

There is also a prevailing assumption in the modern art discourse about modern 'primitivism' that if the Western artist switches off his/her intellectual faculties, he/she can 'reconnect' with and 'regain' the knowledge contained in other cultures. This is very clearly stated in 'The Hidden Order of Art' by Anton Ahrenzweig when he says: "It is perhaps due to the fact that our own modern art is often content to work from low irrational levels of the mind alone, that our civilisation has become so receptive to the art of other civilizations, prehistoric, historic, primitive and exotic."

This lumping together of prehistoric, primitive and exotic cultures and associating them with the irrational and unconscious, has obvious racist connotations and is not new to Western ideology. The classification of cultures/people into advanced and backward was used in the 19th century to establish the superiority of western man and therefore justify his dominating, restructuring and having authority over the colonised people and their cultures. Writing about the way Western scholars perceive and define the Orient, Edward Said explains:

"thesis of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about biological bases of racial inequality... to these ideas was added second-order Darwinism, which seemed to accentuate the "scientific" validity of the diffusion of races into advanced and backward, or European - Aryan and Oriental-African. Thus the whole question of imperialism, as it was debated in the late nineteenth century by pro-imperialism, as it was debated in the late nineteenth century by pro-imperialists and anti-imperialists alike, carried forward the binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures, and societies. He further adds: "Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Orient linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien".

Similar associations between exotic people and the 'Neurotic', 'childlike', 'unconscious', 'mad and retarded' elements of Western society were extensively used by Freud and further developed by Jung - to name a few - and are all based on theories of 'ethnic and biological determinism' which is best illustrated by Dr. Carothers who in 1954 put the idea forward that the normal African is a 'lobotomised European'.

Modern art discourse is based on the ideology of the white establishment built on theories of white racial/cultural superiority.

Black artists have participated in all aspects of modern art but, unless the racism inherent in the ideology of the British art establishment is removed, the contributions of Black artists will not be incorporated in the British main stream. Their work will always be marginalised and classified as 'ethnic' or 'natural' therefore peripheral to the modern art main stream.

Historical Background

Performance art can be traced to a number of experiments and manifestations of the period preceding the 1st World War. This period saw the emergence of Cubism which was directly influenced by African/Oceanic art which was a liberating source of inspiration and offered the Western artist enormous possibilities for experimentation. By rejecting the laws of classical perspective, the Cubist principles of fragmentation and reconstruction, 'autonomous structures' created by the imagination, free association of any

visual elements etc... opened the way for the formation of a number of movements which were the first to use multiform expressions: Futurism, Dada and Surrealism.

One characteristic of these movements was that they involved visual artists as well as poets, writers, and agitators who collaborated to create mixed - media events that aimed to challenge the bourgeois monolithic view of art which overdefined painting no sculpture as the ultimate and unique art objects. Their manifestations had a distinctly 'activist' and often overtly political character.

Italian Futurism

Futurism, the first movement of this kind was formed by the Italian poet Marinetti. He issued a series of manifestoes, from 1909 to 1922, declaring that museums are like cemeteries and urging painters to "go out into the street, launch assaults from theatres and introduce the fisticuff into the artistic battle". They engaged into face-to-face confrontations with audiences and raged against bourgeois concepts of "good taste and harmony and the tyranny of tradition and commercialisation". They organised evenings of improvised performance using a wide variety of tactics which led to the idea of 'Variety Theatre': a mixture of poetry, film, acrobatics, song dance clowning... which was used as a means of disturbing a complacent public and "coerced the audience into collaborating, liberating them from their passive roles as stupid voyeurs".

The Futurists also introduced the concepts of simultaneity, improvisation and chance which, they declared "was the only way to capture the confused fragments of inter-connected events encountered in everyday life". Their manifestoes examined every artistic medium: Noise Music (or Bruitism, the precursor of musique concrete), Aerial Ballet, Film, Architecture, Stage Design and Radiophonic Theatre...

These performances were an inspiration for artists in Moscow, Paris, Zurich, Berlin to turn to live events as the surest means of getting the attention of the widest public for their art and ideas.

Russian Performance

Russian artists were attracted to the idea of Futurism, as a weapon against art of the past, at a time when they were reacting against the Tzarist regime and its values. Their performances were first shown to cafe audiences but very soon took out to the street to reach a wider public.

The Constructivists announced the death of painting and collaborated with the Futurists to create "Production Art". They believed that "in order to oust the reigning academics= speculative activities such as painting... must be put aside". They insisted that artists use "real space and real materials" as the only means towards a socially useful art.

Russian performance took on a more overtly political approach using agit-street theatre, 'Living Newspapers', bill board posters, 'Variety Theatre', film,... and made use of the popular propaganda activities to promote their revolutionary ideas, for instance, in 1919 the agit-trains and ships carried performers to all parts of Russia.

The Dada Movements

The Dada movement was formed in 1916 in Zurich by a group of anarchic painters, poets, dances, etc., who worked together to form the 'Cabaret Voltaire'. From the beginning, Dada had claimed to be 'Activist' and had a commitment to social and political action. They were committed to the breaking down of all traditional concepts of 'fine art'. Using anti-rational, absurd gesture, they evolved a new style of outrageously provocative cafe-cabaret which was used as a satirical and political weapon against a bourgeois culture that they self had produced the war. Against a background of war and chaos, Hugo Ball advocated that the "regeneration of society would come about through the union of all artistic media and forces".

Dada had borrowed concepts of simultaneity, chance, 'bruitism', from the futurists. Their evening events comprised simultaneous poetry readings, cubist dance costumes, theories, manifestoes, paintings, 'Negro Rhythm; and masks... also, in 1917 the Dada gallery exhibited 'Negro Art' and their performances of the time included African inspired dance, costumes and masks.

In 1917 Dada had spread to Berlin where it developed into a more revolutionary and politically nihilistic tendency and became a total social protest rather than an art movement. The Berlin Dadaists were involved in the 1918 uprising and their 'Dadafair' in 1920 included a dead pig in Prussian officer's uniform hanging from the ceiling.

Marcel Duchamp was an important figure of the time. Although he never joined any movement, he was adopted by both Dada and the Surrealists and collaborated in some of their performances. As early as 1913 he had been committed to an anti-aesthetic position and believed that he work of art should no longer be an aesthetic commodity but a free creation. He introduced the notion of ready-mades, and the Independents exhibition of 1917 was marked by his 'Fountain' (a urinal). Marcel Duchamp is considered to be the connecting link between Dada And Surrealism.

Surrealism

Surrealism as a movement was founded by the poet Andre Breton in Paris (1924). It was very much derived of Dadaist ideas of the absurd and anti-rational which was extended to include ideas suggested by psychoanalysis: a methodical exploration of the unconscious using 'word-association', 'making Dream' and 'Automatism'. They were also explicitly political in their intentions. They organised a public protest at the outbreak of the Moroccan war in 1925 and the street was the focus of many of their activities. Surrealism dominated the political, artistic and philosophical life during the period before the 2nd World War.

Here it is also worth mentioning the German teaching institution called, The Bauhaus, which was the first to provide a specific course on performance since its opening in 1919. Although their manifesto called for the "unification of the arts in a cathedral of socialism", their 'Mechanical Ballets' were mostly formal studies of elements of movement and space ending up as carefully choreographed productions. They were not as intentionally provocative or overtly political as the Futurists, Dadaists or Surrealists. But like those movements, the Bauhaus had emphasised the importance of performance in its own right.

Postwar Period and Today

After the 2nd World War, Happenings and the Fluxus events were the direct precursors of today's Performance Art.

Happenings appeared in America in the late 50's as an extension of Environment Art. There were one-off public events in which the spectator was invited to participate. All Kaprow explains that it was time to "increase the responsibility of the observer". At one of the earliest Happenings, you will simultaneously experience them". So, the Spectators were actually designated as part of the cast. This desire to give the spectator an active role in the process of making the work was no doubt a dismissal of the position of the artist as the unique creator and an attempt to break down the barriers that separate artist, audience and artwork.

The Happenings phenomena in America was short lived. It never formed into an coherent group or movement and very soon their techniques were appropriated by the off-broadway theatre. After the enthusiasm for these manifestations had died down in America, there was a great deal of interest for this form in Britain, Germany, Austria and, outside Europe, in Japan and Latin America.

Quite independently of the European/American axis, autonomous developments took place in some 3rd World Countries. In Brazil, for instance, Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, inspired both by early modern art and the popular culture of Brazil, went on to create highly original forms of participatory art. Both artists exhibited in London during the 60's.

In Europe, throughout the 60's and 70's, a time which saw a lot of experimentation, individuals and groups were constantly exploring new possibilities for confrontation and direct engagement with the public. Many groups were formed. Some were street theatre groups, other came out of traditional theatre like The Living Theatre of New York and the People's Show in England. Others were collectives of artists with no theatrical orientation or skills. Amongst the most interesting of these groups were the Gutai Group of Japan (started 1955)... the Exploding Galaxy (initiated by Deviz Metalla - 1967 in London) and the American/German Fluxus movement (Geys, Brecht, Vautier, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paki...) and the Theatre of Mistakes (initiated by Anthony Howell in 1974).

One tendency of the performances of the early 60's was towards destruction and violence.

A very influential figure in this area, the German artist Gustav Metzger was known for his socio-political involvement and theories about audience participation. He organised the 'Destruction in Art Symposium' in 1966 at the ICA which showed, among others, the work of English artist John Lagham who had been using the burning of books as part of his assemblages, and the very violent and sadistic work of the Viennese artist Herman Nitsch. Nitsch's public disembowling of carcasses and the use of blood was part of his 'abreaction theatre' which he started in 1961 and like much of the work of the Viennese 'Actionism', it was supposed to induce a cathartic response in both the artist and the audience. Similar tactics were used by English artist Stuart Brisley his work was politically motivated towards making comments about the alienation of the individual from society, and his actions were designed to shake an anaesthetised and complacent public. Like Brisley the German artist, Joseph Beuys created events which involved 'feats of endurance'. He later on became dissatisfied with this kind of work and became committed to the exposition of his political views directly to the audience through lectures and discussions.

In contrast to this expressionistic type of work was the more formalist work of Gilbert and Georges the 'Living Sculptures' and the 'Nice Style-The world's First Pose Band'.

With the emergence of the Black struggle and the womens movement, the 70's were a very politically charged period and were dubbed 'the Golden years of Performance'.

Womens artists, especially, gravitated towards performance because it had less of a male 'shadow' over it (Carlyle Reedy, Sonia Knox, Rose English, Sally Potter, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Annabel Nicolson, Anne Bean...).

A number of Black artists were also very active in this area: David Medalla (Philippines), Rasheed Araeen (Pakistan), Diego Barbosa (Venezuela), Helio Oiticica (Brazil), Li - Chia (China), Leopoldo Maier (Argentina). Some of these artists made significant contributions even though they stayed only a few years in Britain. Others such as Li Yuan-Chia, David Medalla and Rasheed Araeen have continued to live and work here up to the present.

David Medalla came to Britain from the Philippines in 1960 and for 25 years has been a pioneer of ideas and form in several movements: Kinetic art (60's), conceptual, Environmental and Participatory art (late 60's - early 70's) socially and politically conscious art (mid to late 70's) and Performance art (late 70's and 80's). He has also been involved with funding galleries, magazines and artists groups connected with these movements. And yet, and Guy Brett pointed out in his monograph on the artist, Medalla's work has been totally ignored by the British art establishment "For nearly twenty-five years, and based mainly in London, David Medalla has been one of the most active and imaginative figures in contemporary arts. Unlike many artists who become associated with one style, one 'moment', David Medalla has been a pioneer of ideas and forms in several artistic movements as they have unfolded

over the last two decades: Kinetic art in the 1960's Conceptual, Environmental and Participatory art in the late '60s and early '70s, and Performance art in the late '70s and '80s. And he has been involved with founding galleries, magazines and artists' groups connected with these movements... The admiration felt for him by many artists and writers, in several countries, and by visitors to his exhibitions, contrasts strangely with the almost total neglect of his work by the British Art establishment. For, in twenty-five years, he has not been invited to participate in a single official survey exhibition of recent art in this country".

In 1967 he initiated the 'Exploding Galaxy', a group of young artists, musicians, poets etc. who presented outdoor events in London, Amsterdam and Paris. A series of performances which took place in 1968 on Parliament Hill were inspired by Buddhist stories. One of those, for example, involved, in his own words "the making of a gigantic 'human body' composed of dozens of people on one of the slopes of Parliament Hill". The galaxy involved collaborative creations, but afterwards David Medalla devised structures and events that invited the creative participation of the general public. For example, in 1968 he made 'A Stritch in Time' a structure that was made of rope and cotton reels incorporating long sheets of cotton on which people were invited to ~~see~~ anything they liked. This piece was set up in public places both in Britain and abroad. He called these works "Participation Structure".

In the late 70s he began a new and different series of performances which were both autobiographical and historical reflecting on the position of the artist at different times in history, for these performances he used an elaborate combination of costumes, masks, music and objects. In the late 60s, returning for a trip to Africa and Asia, his art became politicised, he co-founded a group Artists for Democracy (1974-1977) whose aim was to combine artistic experimentation with giving support, both material and cultural, to liberation struggles throughout the world.

Among the activities of AFD were the organisation of the 'International Arts Festival for Democracy in Chile' at the Royal College of Art in 1974, and an exhibition of the American Indian Movement in 1976 to protest the Arts Council's exhibition of traditional North American Indian artefacts 'Sacred Circles' at the Hayward Gallery (Part of the American Bi-Centennial Celebrations).

Rasheed Araeen was also a member of AFD. He has been one of the most outspoken critics of the British Arts establishment's continuous policy of ignoring Black artists contribution to art in Britain. He has also made the most lucid and far reaching analysis of the position of Black Visual Artists in Britain.

Rasheed Araeen is a Pakistani artist who has been living in London since 1964. He made coloured constructions uniting geometrical elements with random processes and created participatory events utilising elemental forces such as water and fire, in the early 69s. The direct intent of Rasheed Araeen's performance was stated unambiguously; its concern with contemporary political issues was direct, and at the same time linked with the artist's personal history. He was the first Black artist to use the slide/tape medium, and the only one to be included in the First International slide/tape show at the Riverside Studios in 1977.

In 1972-73, Rasheed Araeen became politically active as a member of the Black Panther Movement. He produced the most politically outspoken work in the years that followed. He made a series of collages two of which celebrated the history of Indochinese people against American Imperialism. In 1974 he produced the slide/tape work, 'Playing Anguish' in which he linked his subjective experience with his socio-political reality and in 1977 he gave the 1st presentation of his performance piece 'Paki Bastard' which, in Guy Brett's words: "was part critique of bourgeois art activity, part tracing of existential experience - a bareing of the heart and of heartache - and part a call to arms for the black struggle. Identity as artist, identity as black person, identity as exploited worker, were the three themes whose interrelationship was questioned continually in the piece, as it ended with a synthesis of the three realities".

In 1978 Rasheed Araeen founded the "Black Phenix" magazine (with the poet Mahmood Jamal) in which he published his 'Preliminary Notes for a Black Manifesto'. It was a militant statement pointing out the racism of the white establishment, the issues of Eurocentrism and the marginalisation of the Black artist.

Despite the significant contribution David Medalla and Rasheed Araeen have made in the last 20 to 25 years (and continue to do so) to the British art scene, both artists (along with many, many other Black artists in all areas of the visual arts), have received NO OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OR SUPPORT BY THE BRITISH ART ESTABLISHMENT. There isn't any of their hanging in the Tate Gallery, and their work has near been included in any major exhibitions in England or abroad.

In 1979, they jointly wrote a letter to the British Council protesting the omission of Black artists from a Paris exhibition of British art in the 70s 'Exists't'il un art Anglais' (the same is true of a major retrospective of British art since 1960 "Arte Inglese Oggi", Milan 1976). This is what they wrote in their letter:

"It is not the first time that Black artists in Britain are being ignored in this manner and a glance at the official art exhibitions at home and abroad will clearly show a consistency in the official attitude. We now feel concerned because the British Council is adamant in persistently projecting the white image of British reality, and as if Black artists have not done nothing significant in the field of art reflecting a contemporary reality."

To go back to Performance Art, one of the characteristics of modern art is that it has included activities like these that expanded the concept of what art is.

Performance started as collective events in the 60s with the intention of taking art out of the confines of galleries and museums and closer to an alienated public. But over the years, performance activities have become more and more individualised, formalised and institutionalised, or otherwise turned into nightclub entertainment and cabaret type of work.

It is not surprising that, in the present climate of conservatism, there is a strong move towards the 'return to the object' Many artists who had been active in the area of performance have gone back to the traditional forms of painting and sculpture. And it is no more supervising that the new area of experimentation has had to be axed. The recent Government cuts have affected no other area of the visual arts, so drastically. This has been dramatically illustrated by the sudden closing down of the experimental departments of one London school after another in the last 4 years.

At present, there are no more venues for performance in London. And those venues outside London that still show performance work, have recently introduced a s4it of limiting (if not completely stifling) rules and regulations in their application procedure which seems to advocate a certain type of prescribed theatrical work (detailed advanced scenario, script, the whole score... have to be scrutinised by assessors). Some of these venues require the performance to be 'premiered' in their gallery, when performance, unlike theatre, is supposed to b a one-off event created for a specific time and space and therefore not repeatable. Some venues are even going to the extent of requiring an audition!!!

As against all this, there are artists who are still working to further performance principles of direct response to particular social/environmental situations and the spontaneous interaction with the public. For example, in a recent London event "Roadworks" Brixton Gallery (meagerly funded by GLAA) 10 artists (including Rasheed Araeen, Kumiko Shimizu, Mona Hatoum) worked in the streets of Brixton showing clearly that this kind of work is still alive and well.

Black artists working in this area and having had traditionally no appreciation or support for their work (especially when it is making radical social comments) are particularly vulnerable. It is this subversive potential of performance which is so vital to support.

See appendix for information on the work of Black artists* who are working today in this multi-media area:

- Mineo Aayamaguchi (Japan)
- Rasheed Araeen (Pakistan)
- Mona Hatoum (Palestine)
- John Hendrickse (South Africa)
- David Medalla (The Philippines)
- Prafulla Mohanti (India)
- Kumiko Shimizu (Japan)
- Da Wu Tang (China)

*All the artists listed above have been interviewed with the exception of David Medalla.