



discourse

“... the highest form of human excellence is to question oneself and others.”

Socrates

Comment

“Culture – The Tree, the Stem and the Root of the Nation” read the posters for the //Ae//Gams Art and Cultural Festival that was held earlier this year and so, inspired by these words, *Discourse* has taken tradition, heritage and culture as the themes for this issue.

The following ideals are contained within the Preamble of the South African Heritage Resources Act (25 of 1999):

- To encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy so that it may be bequeathed to future generations
- Our heritage is unique and precious and it cannot be renewed
- It helps us to define our cultural identity and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to build our nation
- It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing shape our national character
- Our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequities
- It educates, it deepens our understanding of society and encourages us to empathise with the experience of others
- It facilitates healing and material and symbolic restitution and it promotes new and previously neglected research into our rich oral traditions and customs.

The Namibian National Heritage Act, No.27 of 2004 makes provision for a Heritage Register as well as a National Heritage Council to “promote public understanding of Namibia’s heritage and develop and conduct information and educations

Perspectives

Discourse asked a cross-section of people the following question: What role do you think heritage, tradition and culture play in modern society? These are the responses:

“Christine Carpet” a woman in her late 50s, who sells Oriental carpets, had this to say: “Tradition and culture is the finishing school of a school education as there are certain things you don’t learn at school. It is refinement, identity and pride.

“Unknown culture” a craft seller in her 20s said: “As youngsters we have already forgotten about our culture and are more dependent on Western culture. It would be good to teach it at schools. Cultural festivals should also be held.”

“Gret” an executive personal assistant working for a Windhoek NGO, had this to say: “As a short comment concerning the role that is played by tradition and culture in modern society, it is my personal opinion that every single person should know his/her origin, ancestors and with that, their culture as well. This normally causes such person to be a strong, proud and more self-confident human being, which again can lead to all kinds of successes in day-to-day life. Such people also “live it” during their free time and are therefore more level-headed and balanced characters.

In comparison to that, a person that has not had the opportunity to learn to know and appreciate her/his culture, traditions and people, mostly does not have a “hold-on”, has less “back-bone” and never has that same kind of pride and confidence. This normally occurs among people living in an urbanised environment and causes such persons to easily become victims of drug dealers or other abuses (e.g. alcoholism).

Obviously any community is stronger, more striving and successful in all ways, when its

Comments Continued from Page 1

(sic) programs". Aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific or socially significant heritage is thus protected by law.

The contributors to this issue of *Discourse* include artist and lecturer, Nicky Marais and published Eastern Cape poet, Cathal Lagan. An interview with Director of the National Art Gallery of Namibia, Joe Madisia, takes the place of a lead article in this issue of *Discourse* and the views of the "person in the street" are highlighted.

Our next issue will deal with the role that human movement studies plays in education and community building. We invite your contributions.

We wish all our readers a happy Festive Season and a peaceful and prosperous 2010.

Bryanie van Harmelen

Editor

Perspectives Cont from Page 1

members are healthy, strong and enthusiastic characters with back-bone, which mainly derives from knowing his/her traditions and culture."

"Culture freak", a facilitator in his 50s feels that "modern society can be compared to an orchestra, tradition and culture may strive to be artists playing certain instruments because of their historic origins. Tradition and culture – whatever their achievements and values – should realise that they could never be playing the first fiddle AND conducting the orchestra at the same time. At this moment in time, the conductors have different names – like, for example, economics and politics."

"Tim Porter" an IT specialist in his 20s had this to say: "Even today, cultures are important because they promote communication and interaction amongst people. It is easier for people to socially accept other people with the same culture. Many cultures have traditional leisure events through which people can socialize, hence establishing communication between them.

Unfortunately a lot of conflict today is caused by cultures in modern society. Rival cultures often

compete, sometimes violently, for the dominant title."

"John Katsong" a facilitator in his 20s said: "From my understanding tradition is a set of norms and rituals that have been preserved over a period of time and are followed by an ethnic group. Culture is a way of life. Therefore tradition seldom changes while culture is ever changing. If this is correct then tradition and culture play a major role in today's "modern" society.

Firstly tradition reminds us where we come from. In today's metropolitan society one can easily lose one's ethnic identity and forget when one's ethnic group is. Tradition allows us to live in a modern world but not forget where we come from or what our forefathers used to do.

Secondly we are blessed to have a very peaceful culture in Namibia which promotes prosperity and allows for freedom of speech. With this said, the culture of a country is very important and the direction in which the leaders steer it is equally important."

"Nyanyukweni" is a young office worker who feels that: "Tradition and culture contributes to the social welfare of different people in our society, it is the fabric of mankind today.

Tradition and culture contributes to the smooth functioning of our society because it guards us against evil deeds such as corruption and crime.

Tradition and culture gives our society its identity and pride that contributes to nationhood.

Tradition and culture is the fundamental foundation of our society, it keeps us together and collectively in our daily activities. It is the spirit of our forefathers that is passed from generation to generation."

"Gardener", a retired university lecturer, said that she felt that heritage, tradition and culture still have a considerable role to play in modern society. "It does need to be said that 'culture' is dynamic and does change and shift as do 'tradition' and rituals. Culture impacts on every aspect of social life, both positively and negatively. The positive aspect is that they provide a social identity and cohesion, the negative is that culture can be used

as an excuse for extending vested interests.”

“M-L” a teacher trainer had this to say: “In modern multi-cultural and multilingual society tradition and culture create a sense of ‘belonging’ to particular traditions of the past when life seemed to be simpler.

Tradition and culture give a person a sense of pride: that he/she has ‘roots’. People may learn certain behaviour/practices from examining their past which may be relevant to modern society (e.g. indigenous knowledge)”.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING VISUAL ARTISTS NAMIBIA – A NATIONAL COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS

By Nicky Marais

Visual Artists – Namibia, or VAN, has been in existence since June 2005 when a group of artists met at the National Gallery of Namibia and decided to create an organisation to support and promote all visual artists in Namibia.

Artists, like all Namibians, have been victims of an artificially, and often cruelly, divided society. The years of colonialism, occupation by apartheid South Africa and war took their toll; unequal opportunities resulted in some artists having many resources, including training, experience and facilities while others literally discovered their talent by drawing with a stick in the sand and struggled to advance from there.

Slowly the profile is changing, the Visual Arts Departments at the University of Namibia and at the College of the Arts, as well as the John Muafangejo Art Centre, are producing wonderfully talented and committed young artists, in spite of families’ natural distrust of a career that seems to have little financial reward!

Artists tend to be solitary creatures, struggling alone with the creative process and too often struggling with institutions that seem indifferent to their needs. Access to facilities and resources as well as to opportunities to participate in arts activities is often limited to those who are already well-known or to those who live and work in close proximity to the centres.

VAN is a totally inclusive membership-based organisation; all visual artists may become

members. No matter what age you are, what training you have received or are receiving, or what media you work in, or how long you have practised as a visual artist, you are welcome to join the organisation! Fees are N\$60,00 per year (N\$ 40,00 students and pensioners).

Our triumphs so far have been many: we have over 100 members from all over Namibia; we have published two full-colour catalogues of members’ work, held four annual members’ exhibitions, facilitated 20 regional art workshops all over Namibia, and distributed countless exhibition, workshop and residency opportunities via our email network.

Donor funds are always easier to access when applied for as a group, and this is one of the great successes of the existence of VAN. Members with ideas for projects are assisted by the executive committee (which is elected each year at an AGM) to write proposals and various arts agencies and other organisations in Namibia have been happy to supply funds for our exciting projects. These include the Bank Windhoek Arts Fund, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Goethe Centre as well as others who have supported our organisation generously over the past four years.

The result is: where there was no community before, there is one now. An organisation that puts artists first, and in so doing provides creative space to a nation.

Nicky Marais is an exhibiting painter who teaches in the Visual Arts and Crafts Departments of the College of the Arts and at UNAM. She is a founder member of Visual Artists – Namibia and also serves on the board of trustees of Tuipamwe Arts Trust and the National Arts Council.

Meet the People

JOE MADISIA

A trailblazer and artist of renown, Joe Madisia has been the Director of the National Gallery of Namibia since 2005. He is the first black Namibian to hold this position.

Born in Lüderitz in 1954, his work experience has included working as an apprentice cabinet maker, being an assistant glass cutter, glazer and windscreen fitter, a forklift driver, canning operator and Senior Operator Instructor Supervisor at Rössing Uranium Mine close to Swakopmund, where he was later promoted to shift supervisor.

A move to Windhoek in 1983 meant that Joe was able to further his education in visual arts at the Academy for Tertiary Education. He attended evening classes whilst working during the day in an advertising and public relations agency where he was responsible for the reprographic and photographic section of the company, Namib Advertising and Public Relations.

In 1987 he was appointed as Media Technician at the Academy for Tertiary Education and in 1991 was appointed as Art Workshop Coordinator when the Franco Namibian Cultural Centre was established in Windhoek. Here talented young artists were given the opportunity to study art informally for the first time, benefiting such artists such as Papa Shikongeni, Max Shimbi and Peter Mwalukange. This informal art education led to the establishment of the John Muafangejo Art Centre in 1994, where today Papa Shikongeni is the Chief Administrator.

Joe operated as a freelance artist between 1994 and 1995, holding both solo and group exhibitions both locally and abroad in India, Brazil, Germany, Norway and Switzerland. He was also involved in the publication field during this time.

The years 1996 to 1999 saw Joe studying at UNAM for a Bachelor of Arts Degree. He was invited by Standard Bank, South Africa whilst a final year student, to participate in the Grahamstown Arts Festival as Guest Artist.

Since graduating Joe has held a number of prominent positions, these include spearheading the establishment of the National Standard Setting Body for Arts and

Culture in 2000, setting up and developing the Katutura Community Art Centre (when the centre started as a campus of the College of the Arts in 2002) and being involved in the establishment and running of the first ever art gallery in Katutura, the John Muafangejo Art Gallery in 2003.

Joe thus brings years of experience, participation and involvement on a regional, national, continental and international level to bear on his current position at the National Art Gallery of Namibia.



A man of many parts, he shares some ideas from a work in progress, an (as yet) unpublished paper titled “The Role of Artists in the Conception of Progress: Perspective of a Namibian Artist.”

Here are some excerpts:

“While focusing on the concept of progress in Namibian art and culture development, one has to consider the background of past German and South African (apartheid’s regime) colonial effects, as well as the experience since 1990. Namibia is currently going through a challenging process of nation-building that needs to be based on a cultural self-understanding of ‘unity in diversity’.

These challenges actually originate from the fact that the current multi-cultural society of Namibia comes from an historical situation of having been artificially segregated during the colonial and apartheid eras. It is against such a background that artists – with their

multicultural exchanges, varied expressions and experiences and their conscious fermentation of cultural traditions, blended with current lifestyles, can play a pivotal role in a sustainable and peaceful national development process for the country.

...In many societies the world over, artists anticipate, strive to achieve and articulate new spaces of freedom, as freedom is the innermost essence of their mission. They not only need freedom as a precondition for their own creative accomplishments, but also they expand horizons of freedom for everybody. That is why in post-independence Namibia they encounter many opportunities brought about by newly acquired freedoms, but also challenges due to the fact that freedom needs to be preserved and cultivated in order to be able to sing. Such ideals and aspirations would democratize, decentralize, diversify and possibly transform the current art market-based industry (the monopoly of a few) ultimately ensuring real progress in national self-understanding of identity and unity-in-diversity for the Namibian arts and culture fraternity and in all regions of the country.

...To achieve what has been said, would require artistic and social commitment that is concentrated around balancing artistic and cultural economics with commitment for cultural equity and empowerment through decentralization among the diversity of the Namibian population. Only then, in my view, can we talk about a true concept of progress that is nationally collective conscious.

To be immersed only in one's own culture and not being aware of the intricacies of other cultures results in cultural relativism becoming diametrically opposite to cultural stereotypes. Both are collective mental constructs – i.e. they do germinate in the minds of certain humans. But while the former leads to understanding, compassion and cooperation, the latter leads to misunderstanding, hatred and conflict.

Such a situation also results in artists living in exciting times today. But it is also a dangerous time. Many human conflicts arise from a failure to recognize cultural complexities or from perceived threats to cultural values. The road to security and prosperity for artists, politicians, technocrats, decision-makers of cultural policies and social structures requires that we celebrate and encourage our cultural differences, instead of negating one another.

The perception of cultural stereotypes also leads to formula-bound thinking that imprisons the imagination and leads to tokenism. It stops us from using what we know to be the great assets of our species – human versatility. Especially is one considers such a small population in a large country with more than thirteen different indigenous language groups, even the textual values of its flora and fauna are diverse from agricultural to marine/fisheries, to mining to tourism etc. Thus, if we are to free ourselves from such formulas our imagination needs many sorts of nourishment and stimuli. Among them it certainly needs arts.

...Art can be transforming and educational or even entertaining, but it can also be revolutionary. Huge numbers of misfortunes like HIV/AIDS, crime, rape, gender abuse, corruption, ethnicity and nepotism exist in Namibia. That's when one needs the artists who are conscious of such social miseries, who can use their art in such a way that it transforms society."

Making things happen is the trademark of this humble man. "He is among the first Namibian artists who made a shift from representation to meaning – an understanding that radicalized the whole art environment in the country", the late Olja Dzuverovic, archaeologist, woman activist and art historian has written concerning Joe Madisia's work.

Cardboard printing, a technique that has become his signature, is Joe's original contribution to the Namibian visual arts spectrum. His work explores the themes of tradition and modernity, morality and hypocrisy, society and politics, cultural identity and change and one of his latest works is titled "Politics, Perks & Power".

He has been invited to exhibit at the 2010 Dakar Biennale and will show a totem begun in Walvis Bay in 1994 and completed in 2009. "I now see though that it can be made into a moveable art work", says Joe. The work depicts the depth of the African soul.

Joe's networking skills have secured funding from Bank Windhoek for a monthly exhibition of works by Namibian artists. There is also a triennial exhibition sponsored by the bank.

On Joe's initiative a mobile art exhibition,

Book Review

Mbeki, M. *Architects of Poverty. Why African Capitalism Need Changing* (2009) Picador, AfricaKnowles Publishing, Randburg.

Mbeki, a political analyst for Nedcor Bank and the Deputy Chairperson of the South African Institute for International Affairs, an independent think tank based at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, analyses the plight of Africa where millions of people are trapped in a cycle of grinding poverty.

He concentrates mainly on South Africa, his country of birth and Zimbabwe, his home when he was in exile.

The central theme of the book is mercantile capitalism, the earliest form of capitalism, with its modus operandi that of buying cheap and selling dear.

Capitalism in the West, claims Mbeki, has moved on from mercantile capitalism and Western countries are now referred to as post-

industrial societies, while Africa, on the other hand, is still locked into the mercantile stage of capitalism. The challenge facing Africa therefore is how to modernise capitalism from mercantilism to industrialism.

The crux of the problem, Mbeki feels, lies with those elites who keep a stranglehold on political power and contrive to keep their fellow citizens poor while enriching themselves.

He concludes that in order to progress Africa needs new rulers, the people themselves who "understand that the path to a prosperous future lies in hard work, creativity, knowledge and equity." (p1)

This book provides a topical and interesting read.

BvH

Quiz - Do you know?

Questions

1. What is an oshigadhi?
2. What does NTN stand for?
3. Where would you find the Omba Gallery?
4. What famous Namibian artist has an art centre named after him?
5. Which famous Namibian landscape artist died in 2008?
6. What is the traditional Oshierero headdress called?
7. Which is the oldest building in Windhoek?
8. Which is the fourth largest museum in Africa?
9. What does NAGN stand for?
10. What is "potjiekos"?

Answers

1. An Oshiwambo grain basket.
2. National Theatre of Namibia
3. At the Namibia Crafts Centre in Tal Street, Windhoek.
4. John Mufangetyo
5. Nico Oswald Roos
6. Ojikaiva
7. The Alte Feste fort
8. The National Museum in Windhoek
9. The National Art Gallery of Namibia
10. Food slow-cooked in a cast iron three-legged pot

Newsflash

Liberation Heritage Route

Work is in progress in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa to construct a Liberation Heritage Route and the Chris Hani District Municipality (CHDM) takes pride in being a trail blazer in implementing this idea.

When discussions began in 2006, CHDM had already identified heritage as one of its priorities and saw heritage as having the potential to make a significant contribution towards economic development. The CHDM therefore decided to initiate and implement the Liberation Heritage Route within its area of jurisdiction.

To date the CHDM has published a "Liberation Heritage Resource Handbook" as well as a "Liberation Heritage Route Icon Site Guide".

The CHDM is named after Chris Hani (born in the district) who was Chief of Staff of Umkhonto Wesizwe and a leader of the armed

struggle (but also a leader who was involved in negotiation and national reconciliation).

CHDM has supplied its share of famous people – Walter Sisulu was born here, Nelson Mandela was educated here and the past president of the ANC from 1940-1949, Dr A. B. Xuma and Secretary-General, Rev. James Calata, lived here.

The icons of the struggle, "those individuals and physical and spiritual beacons which marked the route to freedom, identified by the people themselves, compose the Chris Hani Municipality Liberation Heritage Route (LHR)" (LHR Icon Site Guide p1).

The icon sites have been arranged along three routes, the Calata Route, Sisulu Route and Ndondo Route and each route can be travelled in a single day.

POETS TOWARDS MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

By Cathal Lagan

Poetry is a living word that comes right out of an oral tradition and tied to rituals and Liturgies. And because it is a living word it is held in a network of tensions in community through its living tradition.

I have vivid memories from 60 years ago listening to a street ballad singer in a town called Dungannon in Northern Ireland. His song began with a call to his preferential/potential listeners/customers:

Come all ye lads and lassies
And listen to me awhile
For I'll sing to you
A verse or two
That will cause you all to smile...

Having called them away from their private preoccupations, and around him, creating a sizable crowd, which in turn created even more attention, he continued the narrative of his ballad, which just happens to have a rousing chorus which everyone sang encouraged by a generous consumption of Guinness. Yes, poetry is in its very beginnings a commu-

nal exercise and one that creates community. When his ballad was over, he sold (for a penny each) a ballad-sheet of the song just heard, creating continuity and a tradition that would persist.

Today the ballad singer (poet) does not stand in the market place but through internet, face book, twiffer, blogs etc. calls people around him in a way that reaches strongly into the hearts and minds of readers.

Poetry is part of our heritage and creates its own particular values in reforms and national expressions. The (13th) Rumi is enjoying a world-wide readership as a mystic whose insights and imagery constitute a unique contribution to what Ken Wilbur calls the Perennial Philosophy. The integral power of the Wisdom traditions reflected in all the sacred texts of those aspects of the great religions is finally teaching us the unifying power of (spiritual) truth.

"Poetry makes nothing happen / it survives in the valley of its saying", Andean remarked. In a special sense this is true. But poetry does cel-

celebrate in every culture what Thomas Hardy celebrated in his poem "In time of "The Breaking of Nations"

Only a man harrowing clods
In slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk.

Only thin smoke without flame
From heaps of couch grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
Through/though? Dynasties pass.

Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die

(1915)

Poetry celebrates the perennial values of one's safety, life, love, death, marriage. It also has a prophetic role in society.

- It tells the Explorer he's naked
- Exposes through satire the excesses of political leaders
- With the Cartoonist, ridicules pomposity
- Celebrates the freedom of democracy with the voice of EVERYMAN
- And affirms concerns for the poor
- Condemns corruption
- Keeps watch for the coming of the Barbarian
- Cries out against injustice

Cathal Lagan is a published poet who hails from Northern Ireland. He has lived and worked in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, since 1962.

makes reproductions from the national permanent art exhibition available to a wider audience. To date the exhibition has travelled to the Oshikhoto and Erongo regions and also visited the south of Namibia.

Joe also hopes to make the work at the National Art Gallery more available to the blind by having notices in Braille and producing art works with raised lines which can would create a tactile experience.

Influenced by the Dallas and San Diego women's museums he hopes to have a hall of fame for women at the gallery.

Amongst Joe's many duties he still finds time to give talks at schools. "I want to open children's minds. I want to make myself available to youth", he says.

Joe's dream is to establish an artists in residence lodge where Namibian artists, through sponsorship, can work alongside international artists. "Visual arts is an international language. Nothing is a barrier", says Joe

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in Discourse are those of the writers in their personal capacities and not the official view of either the Hanns Seidel Foundation or the Institute for Management and Leadership Training.



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