

1995-01-02

SENDER

Alex Laird

RECIPIENT

Ernest Mancoba

FACTS

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London

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Johannesburg

DOCUMENT CONTENT

Alex Laird writes to Ernest whilst he's in South Africa for his retrospective at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. She tells him if Bridget Thompson is making a film she would not be able to, due to funding. She tells him of someone who reminds her of Ernest, someone else living in African and Western culture who sees his role as bridging cultural division, enclosing information on Malidoma Patrice Some and his organisation Mosaic (some of which are uploaded).

TRANSCRIPTION

(Transcription: W.Sze)

[sender: Alexandra Laird]

[to: Ernest]

[date: 2 Jan 1995]

Dear Ernest,

I had been meaning to write to wish you and Wonga a very happy Christmas, but here is my love and warmest wishes for a very happy New Year instead. I hope that you are enjoying your homecoming, and would be fascinated to hear just how you have felt about it all. The experience of meeting old friends must have been heart-warming, and to be surrounded finally by fellow 'strugglers' who share your vision. But seeing so much change must have made an impression on you....

I am glad to hear that a film was finally made about you, especially that it should be made by a South African – Bridget Thompson sounds like a good spirit. Unfortunately it means for Ginny and I, however, that SABC no longer needs our film, which, in turn, means that a British broadcaster is unlikely to fund the whole project on its own. If this is the case, then Bridget may be able to sell her film here to a broadcaster to show during Africa '95. I look forward to seeing it very much, and hope that you were pleased by it...?

I met a therapist recently who counsels Asians and Afro-Caribbeans here in London, and is part of a US-based group called Mosaic which addresses issues like racial violence with a cross-cultural wisdom. Being

inspired, as you know, by your advocacy and umuntu, I was fascinated to hear about this group and the way the therapist, Ismail Asmall, works with his clients, drawing on both Shakespeare and the African spiritual tradition for imaginative ways into the psyche. I enclose some information about Mosaic which may interest you. One of the moving forces behind it is Malidoma Patrice Some from Burkina Faso, who also straddles both African and western cultures. He was 'stolen' by the Jesuits at the age of 5 and only returned to his village as a teenager, whereupon his family and the Dagara tribe rejected him as a 'westerner'. He seemed to belong nowhere, and it was only through his decision to undergo initiation that he finally gained acceptance in his own tribe. Malidoma's role was to become that of 'he who brings African wisdom to the west'. He has written books on Ritual and community, which echoes much of your experience, Ernest.

And talking of Burkina Faso, I am very excited, because I'm going to West Africa in late February for a month for the film festival in Ougadougou. It's a great opportunity to spend time in Africa at a moment of celebration of its culture, not just of film but, I hope, of music too. I'm planning to go with a couple of friends to Ghana, where a friend will meet us and we'll drive together to Ougadougou. I hope to visit Mali, too, where a friend of mine has begun a truly grass-roots 'green' revolution in his village in the Sahel, by planting vegetables and trees, with the help of the schoolchildren and the villagers, to help replace the vegetation lost through the drought and overgrazing. All his siblings deserted the village after education for city life, but Madou loved growing plants, and had the vision to see how his village could be re-invigorated through new, green growth – without imposing the co-operative system, which took any profit away from the growers themselves.

My Christmas was spent in Northern Ireland with 15 of us altogether! – children and adults. My father, step-mother and I flew out from London, and after four days I set off to fulfil my many years' ambition to visit the south of Ireland. The south – Eire – is a totally different way of life – thoroughly Celtic, where music, talking and drinking predominate, and life is taken much less seriously than in Anglo-Saxon England! Education standards are higher for a larger proportion of the population, though unemployment is also much higher. But the culture of Joyce and Yeats is palpably alive – and that sense of life abounds in the colourfully painted houses, the chatting on the streets, in the pubs, in the buses. I took a bus – a bone-shaker – from Galway city out to the wild and beautiful coast of

Connemara – two and a half hours of wind and rain hurling itself at the bus as we twisted and turned on a tiny road along the Atlantic, hardly a tree to be seen on the rocky hills inland. The bus stopped in the middle of nowhere for old men on their way for the pub in town an hour's drive away, for the women to buy food, and the odd drunk would stagger into a seat. The friendliness and the humour, the sense of fun that the Irish have, and their love of language, is what so sets them apart from the British. Their expression for fun, for good conversation is wonderful – it's called 'crack' – 'did you have good crack?' they ask. You'd enjoy the Irish, Ernest, I'm sure, and their music which is full of heart and a sense of joy in life.

When are you coming back to Paris, I wonder? If you are coming back via Heathrow, I would very much like to see you both between planes. Perhaps I could entice you and Wonga here for a meal? Do let me know – it would be great to see you after all your adventures.

Forgive skew-ing page of type – my printer doesn't take this size of page!

All best wishes and love to you & Wonga – [signed: Alex xx]

[post script:] P.S. Ernest, I'd be glad if you could show the enclosed information to Elza – thanks.

KILDER TIL
DANSK
KUNSTHISTORIE

NY CARLSBERGFONDET

ALEXANDRA LAIRD

68 HURLINGHAM ROAD
LONDON SW6 3RQ
Tel 071-736 8975
Fax 071-371 8450

2nd January 1995

Dear Ernest,

I had been meaning to write to wish you and Wonga a very happy Christmas, but here is my love and warmest wishes for a very happy New Year instead. I hope that you are enjoying your homecoming, and would be fascinated to hear just how you have felt about it all. The experience of meeting old friends must have been heart-warming, and to be surrounded finally by fellow 'strugglers' who share your vision. But seeing so much change must have made an impression on you....

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All best wishes and love to you & Wonga -

Dick xx

PS. Ernest, I'd be glad if you could
show the enclosed information to
Ella - thanks.



MALIDOMA PATRICE SOMÉ

Malidoma, whose name means "be friends with the stranger/enemy," was born under the shadow of French colonial rule in Upper Volta (now Burkino Faso), West Africa. When he was four years old, he was taken by a Jesuit father and "imprisoned" in a seminary built for training of a new generation of black Catholic priests. This was the beginning of fifteen years of isolation from his family, during which Malidoma was abused and intimidated into forgetting everything "tribal," and indoctrinated into seeing the world through the lens of French language, culture, and the white man's religion.

With the help of the spirit of his grandfather Bakhye, his teacher, guide, and constant companion in childhood, Malidoma resisted the brainwashing he and his fellow students were exposed to daily. Malidoma stubbornly refused to forget where he had come from or who he was.

Finally, a decade and a half later, Malidoma escaped from the seminary and walked 125 miles through the jungle, back to his own people, the Dagara. Once home, however, he received a mixed welcome. He could not remember enough Dagara to speak to his own mother and father. Many people in the tribe regarded him as a "white black," a person to be looked upon with suspicion and fear because he had been contaminated by the "sickness" of the colonial world. Malidoma had become an outsider, a man of two worlds, at home in neither.

Over the next year, he came to realize that his only hope of reconnecting with his people was to undergo the traditional Dagara initiation ritual, even though that meant risking death. During this amazing month-long initiation in a wilderness camp, Malidoma experienced a dramatic meeting with the forces of the supernatural, and his own personal power.

Today Malidoma is a medicine man, diviner, author, and teacher. He lives as a man of two worlds, flying the jetways and writing on his laptop computer, sharing his ancient wisdom of the Dagara with thousands of people around the globe and bringing an understanding of the Western perspective back to his village. Malidoma holds three master's degrees as well as Ph.D.'s from the Sorbonne and Brandeis, and has for three years taught literature at the University of Michigan. A popular speaker at Men's Movement gatherings, he discusses tribal customs and daily life, spiritual beliefs and the world of the ancestors, and—most important—the life-giving process of initiation. He is also the author of *Ritual: Power, Healing and Community*. He lives with his wife, Sobonfu, in Oakland, California.

Coming in May from Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam

Mosaic - A Multicultural Foundation

P.O. Box 364

Vashon, WA 98070

ph: (206) 463-9387, fax: (206) 463-9236

Project Description

The Condition

The radical dismantling of institutions, boundaries, beliefs and ecosystems that characterizes the end of the 20th Century has already increased the gaps and divisions between races, genders, generations and spiritual groups. Without a renewal of spiritual vision, a restoration of social structures and new ritual vehicles, there is bound to be an increase of individual and societal fragmentation. Mosaic Projects are an attempt to take existing ethnic, spiritual, psychological and political threads and weave from them new visions and alliances. Rather than seek a single unifying system, Mosaic seeks to preserve diversity while seeking that which is deeply human and unifying in each tradition. Within the experimental projects, that are the sole activity of Mosaic, is the conviction that we are participating in a world-wide winnowing of cultural beliefs, ideas and rituals. Whatever remains in the baskets of humanity will be carried across the threshold of the millennium and must serve as the seeds of the future. The best seeds contain local and culturally specific aspects as well as cross-cultural meanings that can grow in any soil.

While seeking viable, meaningful elements from the diversity of America it has become apparent that the places of enduring conflict and suffering are in fact the critical areas where healing can be practiced and where renewed spirit arises. As a result, Mosaic has begun to develop projects in urban areas of intense risk, danger and confusion – just where youth, violence, crime, poverty and racism collide. The result has been a series of projects and seminal events that expose the suffering souls and spirit behind the headlines and reveal surprising and encouraging signs of living seeds of healing and hopes of positive change.

Some History

The vision of Mosaic began in a prolonged, intense series of discussions between eight 'black' men and two 'white' men. The meetings were held in Washington, D.C., amidst the sirens and street turmoil but also within sight of the nation's capitol. The original question that drew the group together was: could a passage be made that would pull future generations through the dangers of violence, drugs, crime and alienation? And, could that passage be inclusive of all our children?

It was soon apparent that the adults present had to address their own personal, racial, political and spiritual conflicts before trusting each other's visions of such a passage. Soon the question was whether the well-intentioned group could survive its own pieces of inherited history, hatred and fear. Several more meetings brought the tortures of racism and classism fully present yet also touched old roots of healing and courage. A group decision was made to multiply members to one hundred and spend a week together struggling with the old wounds and vital questions.

Since then, the experiment has been repeated several times alternating coasts from Washington, D.C. to Los Angeles, CA. The groups have become increasingly inclusive, intentionally reaching out to embrace more Latino, Asian, and Native American people and recent immigrants from all areas of the earth. As greater diversity has been sought, all of the issues demanding change in our culture have also been embraced. What began in fear-filled meetings on troubled nights in the shadow of the nation's capitol continues to spread, now creating personal and spiritual alliances between diverse groups who rarely hear the anguished and beautiful voices inside each other. The conversation has grown into surprising forums that address violence, racism, sexism and spiritual alienation; face to face, eye to eye and from a multitude of ancient and fresh perspectives. The result is a series of crucibles in which the heat of conflict, the fear of exclusion and the agony of inherited wounds can be transformed into a new activism and alliances for healthy change.