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SENDER

Ernest Mancoba

RECIPIENT

University of Western Cape

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Ernest Mancoba writes to accept the award of honorary doctoral degree from the University of Western Cape. During Ernest's time in South Africa and during apartheid, the University provided tertiary education to the so-called "coloured" community - the population whose descendants include those shipped to the Cape peninsula as slaves or indentured labourers from Java and the Malay Peninsula

TRANSCRIPTION

(transcription by W. Sze)

[sender: Ernest]

[addressed to: University of Western Cape, attention of Mr G.J. Gerwel, Rector and Vice-Chancellor]

[date: 23 June 1994]

Dear Mr Gerwel,

It was with a feeling of immense gratitude that I received your proposal for conferring on me the honour of this distinction from the University of Western Cape.

I regard it as a sign of advancement in the human relations in our country and a gesture bearing testimony to a new awareness of the importance of the spiritual expression as a necessary element for a mutual understanding between man and man.

To-day we have come to a point where the question of the relation between Art and Society has become unavoidable. We have become more conscient of and concerned about the rift dividing the artist from the community in modern society - all the more so in the context which was ours in South Africa until recently. Your decision, therefore, has been extremely important in my eyes, and very significant in a situation where, not so long ago, it was unthinkable that there could be a dialogue, man to man, between black and white in South Africa, within the rules of apartheid which separated human beings into categories as if there could be degrees in humanity.

This is why I consider the decision of the University as a vital step towards a truer vision of Man and his destiny. We have in our tradition the African concept of man as expressed in the well-known proverb: "Umuntu Ngu

Muntu Ngaba nye Abantu " (Man is a man, by and because of other men), a wisdom which corresponds with another part of our heritage, the Christian saying: "Do unto others as you would wish to be done unto you." And it was with this double heritage that I set out in my experience as an artist.

The impossibility for expressing myself as an integral human being, which was denied me in my own country contributed to my leaving South Africa, until this moment, when because of the fundamental evolution, brought about by the fact that the majority of our fellow-citizens have experienced the utter impossibility for all to live within a context of racial discrimination and thanks to the sacrifice of so many, I am able to establish contact again with my past and my people.

The very notion of Art and the artist requires as a sine qua non condition, the living principle that humanity is one and integral.

In order to preserve this basic need of his creation within a society in decay and a morally disintegrated historic context, the artist has the duty to protect his world vision which is in total opposition to the one any given society of oppression wishes to impose, and he is therefore nearly always forced into isolation; and this to such a degree that modern times have given birth to the concept of "Artiste Maudit", which has had its extremest expression in Antonin Artaud's vision of Van Gogh as "Le suicidé de la Société." A conception that would have been utterly unthinkable for the Africans of Ancient Africa or other members of the so-called primitive societies, as Art and the Spiritual Quest was for them associated with the experience of daily life.

Nevertheless the artist of today being isolated in spite of himself, because of his search for spiritual integrity within a society all devoted to the satisfaction of material needs, as its first priority, is in harmony beyond space and time with the Ancient World and artists, in his awareness that the spiritual and the material values have to be reconciled.

All artists, at all times have been alive to the idea that we must not lose the belief in the unity of mankind and when it is in danger, regain this spiritual integrity between the individual and the community.

It is in this hope of a new awareness and spiritual responsibility, helping us

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towards another "renaissance" which alone will make possible our survival as human beings ,that I accept the honour conferred upon me by the University of Western Cape,with all my heart.

Yours sincerely [signed Ernest Mancoba]

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DANSK
KUNSTHISTORIE

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(Please URGENT)

G.J. GERWEL
Rector and Vice-Chancellor
University of Western Cape

Ernest Mancoba
153 Rue du Chateau
75014 PARIS
FRANCE

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Yours sincerely

Ernest Mancoba