

LAST week I visited CAP (Community Arts Project) in Woodstock to see their end-of-the-year students' exhibition.

I'm ashamed to say I expected all the work to look the same and have that irritating political slant that is characteristic of the worst kind of propaganda that masquerades as art.

I was surprised to find just the opposite: instead of blatant politicking, I found gentleness; irony and humour; instead of sloppy technical skills, I found incisive drawing, subtle use of colour and healthy experimentation.

Impressive

Most impressive was the fact that no two artists' work looked the same, a sure sign that learning has been taking place.

To find out more, I spoke to Lucy Alexander, one of CAP's facilitators. What came through most clearly in her speaking about the school was the fact that teachers are carefully addressing issues like content over skills, differences of ex-

CAP impresses

perience among students and teachers, and groupwork to balance too much working by oneself.

Until recently, a lot of emphasis has been placed on helping students learn the basic (and crucial) skills needed to make art of any kind. These include learning how to draw, mix paint, develop photographs, use wood-cutting tools and ink up a lino. The list could go on and on.

What is now being dealt with is the equally important issue of content: what the art is about. Is it a picture of a fist? Is it a sculpture of a starving child? And, more subtly, whose fist is it? The artist's own fist, or a fist that the artist has seen on numerous T-shirts, banners and charters and then simply copied without thinking?

The teachers at CAP believe each student brings his or her own unique experience to art classes and this unique experi-

"Our Art", by ANDREW PUTTER explores the roots, rhythm and range of South African art:



ence has to be recognised and used as subject matter for art. This is exactly what seems to have happened.

The art on exhibition is full of the contradictions, complexity and beauty of real lives lived by real people — not the boring work of artists who simply reproduce what they think is expected of them.

One of the biggest — and most exciting — problems facing people at CAP are the enormous

differences of teacher's and student's experiences. There are differences in age, gender and language.

Working things so that these differences become useful to creativity instead of being detrimental is a task that needs to be renewed daily.

Nevertheless, CAP's teachers are succeeding: the work on show is testimony to the way these differences can be positively exploited. Each piece of art communicates something of its maker's experience, with no group's work "better" than any other's.

Valuable

In the end, CAP's most valuable contributions to our turbulent society is its belief that each of us has something worth saying and that, with a little support and training, we will be able to access our creativity and live more meaningfully.

The "Talking About Art" workshops which were held throughout the year attracted a widely varied group of people and were an absolute pleasure to attend. What was most electrifying about them was the way in which those with no formal history of art training engaged in meaningful debates about art historical issues.



One of the art drawings on display at the Cap art exhibition

South 29 Nov 1990