

ART

WOMAN'S
PAGE

Nine months ago, the Mowbray Art Centre was launched — its aim was to provide a meeting place for all races and to stimulate interaction between the arts. Now it is a humming centre of activity and enthusiasm. Keri Swift spoke to Dimitri Nicolas-Fanourakis, the driving force behind it.

DIMITRI, director of plays and photography lecturer is keen but impatient:

'Everything has to be done for nothing and voluntarily. It took us two months to search for a filing cabinet, for instance. The centre is not a commercial venture and we rely on donations.'

The centre boasts 600 paid up members and 150 to 200 active members. There are eight trustees and two people, Dimitri and Donald Parenzee, are employed on a regular basis.

Wandering through the building is something like sliding between the pages

of a brightly illustrated children's book. Murals shine from the walls — country scenes, geometric patterns — all of them vivid and cheerful.

As we talked, a piano competed with a play rehearsal for attention. The Sechaba group (The First South African) are working on a play due to begin in 2½ weeks' time.

Dimitri calls it People's Theatre or Poor Theatre. There is free access to the theatre as long as a South African text is used. 'Basically theatre is for people who want to speak — it's a forum created from the participants' own experiences.

Am Dram, as such, is destructive and we're avoiding that,' he said.

Two other plays are in the pipeline; That's Enough will deal with racial attitudes of coloureds to blacks while Lulu, a musical by the women who belong to the Domestic Workers' Association is taking their point of view and putting it on the stage for others.

Sculpture — Gavin Young takes care of that; Pat Atkinson has children on Saturday mornings and teenagers in the evening; Peggy Delpert and John Samson are starting a graphics workshop with an old press; Gregory Davis teaches guitar; Sue

Barry is involved with the Harlem Street Jazz group from Langa; Ethel Mittag does weaving; there's a poetry workshop; Gordon Render is involved with people from the Flats on a Super 8 film Workshop — they're working as a production team on a scripted drama; Dimitri and Debbie May are starting a darkroom. There are lunch hour films for the local workers . . . and there's more.

'We're open to new ideas,' said Dimitri. 'If you want to paint, we'll start an adult paint group, and as an aside, we have just awarded R100 a month grant to Livingston Gocini of Rourkes Drift who'll be

working here as a resident artist. And on December 18 we'll be exhibiting graphics for a month — it'll be open to the public.'

Coming back to essentials: 'The idea is to create as much stimulation, opportunity and access for people.

'But we do have problems. There's a vast segment of the population that is incredibly underprivileged financially. Although it hasn't stopped people coming, it is an obstacle. Most people rely on public transport. To return to certain areas late at night and have to walk two miles to get home is pure foolishness.

We'd like to have access to a vehicle in the evenings.

'In a way we are like a litmus test of the social situation. For instance, I have had to direct someone who lives in Kensington to Mowbray. It's like a foreign country to him.

'Another problem is that we are not offering any degrees and a lot of people want concrete results.

Finally; 'Often self perception is negative. In many cases, it takes an act of imagination to recognise possibilities in oneself in a situation which doesn't promote or develop potential.'