

Either 1977 or 1980
Cecil Skotness moved to Cape Town
in 1977 and has been in Cape Town
for two years in this article
Furthermore CAP moved out of Mowbray
March 1982.

ART

by Rose Korber

ONE of the major problems besetting the fine arts in this country is the parochialism which continues to exist between the main centres, so that the work of many well-known black artists from the Transvaal, for example, seldom gets to be seen in Cape Town.

Fortunately, there are exceptions to this rule, and, at the moment, there is a substantial exhibition of some 60 works (including sculpture, paintings, drawings, etchings and assemblages) by 11 black artists — five from the Transvaal and six 'new names' from the Cape — being shown to great advantage at the recently opened Gowlett Gallery, at 94 Long Street.

Particularly instructive is the work of the established professionals — Sydney Kumalo, Ezrom Legae, Leonard Matsoso, Cyprian Shilakoe and Lucas Seage — juxtaposed with some extremely vital sculpture by a promising, but as yet unknown, group of young Cape artists — Bongani Shange, the brothers Patrick

Black art in the doldrums?

and Sidney Hollow, Hamilton Budaza, Robert Solomons and Alan Bruyns.

The exhibition was partly organised and opened by master South African artist, Cecil Skotnes, who, more than anyone else has been the catalyst in putting black art on the map in this country, originally, through his deep involvement with the celebrated Polly Street Art Centre, in Johannesburg (where from 1950 to 1962, he played a major role in the artistic development of Kumalo, Legae and Matsoso in particular), and now again, since settling in Cape Town two years ago, with his active encouragement of a new generation of black artists at the Nyanga and Mowbray Community Arts Centres.

I asked Cecil whether he could foresee the possibility of another Polly Street-type situation being established in Cape Town?

His sceptical response would seem to be based on his bitter disappointment at the loss of impetus which followed the closing of the Polly Street Centre in the '60s.

'Once the Government boards took over the centre

from the council and moved it to Soweto, they simply killed off everything,' he maintains. 'They had no understanding, and they were barbaric in their treatment of organised cultural activities. When I was invited recently to Soweto to open an exhibition, I was appalled to see that, apart from work of artists whom I had trained in the '50s and '60s, there was almost no new blood, and virtually nothing going on there at all.'

While the Mowbray Community Arts Centre has managed to survive by raising small grants from various sources, he says, the Nyanga Centre has no money at all, apart from occasional donations from friends and well-wishers.

'It's a continuing battle,' he adds. 'What we need is a real grant, so as to enable us to purchase two big kilns — to fire sculpture as well as pottery — and to buy a printing press and other essential equipment. We also need money for serious training, and for bursaries for those, who have reached the necessary standard, to be able to do higher degree courses at university level.'