Great Gaberone get-together

THE lunch time mime put on by the Cape Arts Project group kept hungry crowds riveted for an hour.

Photograph by Bruce Gordon

ARTISTS should work together for an alternative society in South Africa and not leave decisions for South Africa's future in the hands of politicians. This was the basis for the recent festival of symposium on Culture and Resistance in Botswana.

More than 500 artists from Africa and overseas met in Gaberone to discuss their role in resisting oppression and exploitation.

Throughout the symposium artists were referred to as cultural workers, rejecting the 19th and early 20th century idea of artists as detached observers. Instead, they favored a superior insight and misunderstanding of their communities.

Morning and afternoon sessions on literature, drama, dance, photography, film and fine art art handed to artists to work closely with their communities and use their skills to fight against the struggle for liberation.

For too long the culture of the black people had been dominated and suppressed by that of the whites and a new order could only operate as a cultural respect.

"We are fighting against a culture that dominates and denies the United South Africa," a professor of literature from the University of Natal.

Natalist Nadine Gordimer admitted that as a writer, she had never known that the sound of beating drums, the stamping of feet and singing coming from the miners' compound was music. She had always thought it was the painful little piece she played for her music teacher each week.

Representing five black female writers in the discussion on novels and poetry, exiled Lindswa Mahila was surprised by the diversity of the audience. She said, "I was seeing the writer as outside of the world." A photographer involved in theatre in Durban had said this relationship between the culture and the community should be emphasized and should ensure the process rather than the final product. He also said that theatre for the artist should be changed.

In another explainer, a mime put on by the Cape Arts Project group kept hungry crowds riveted for an hour.

The night Moff Anderson, author of Music in the Mix, and Barry Gold, exiled folk-singer, came late to listen to the traditional African music of the Amampondo group from Cape Town. The group later played on the same bill as Dollar Brand and Hugh Masekela.

The evening's performance was given by Sancias, pupil and colleague of Andrew Tracy, the world-renowned specialist in African music, and the Amampondo group from Johannesburg.

The festival in Pretoria was a success. The words of the acoustic mbira — made by Pedro with a calabash enclosing various lengths of metal prongs which are plucked by the thumbs — were sung in a car towards to: "The symposium was an amazing, and some of the blacks (traditional artists) who tried to sing thumb piano) had made. "Can you feel it?"

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