

ASCENT



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CAP —

Art for all

ASCENT spoke to Community Arts Project organiser, Derek Joubert, about his own involvement in the project and the aims and objectives of CAP.

Derek, to begin on a personal note; could you tell us how and why you got involved in CAP?

Well, I trained as a school teacher and I taught in Bridgetown for several years. I then stopped teaching and soon afterwards came across CAP. I found it easy to identify with the place because it stood for two things I have always firmly believed. One is that all people can be artists and dramatists. The arts aren't exclusive to a few special people. The second thing I liked about CAP is that it is completely non-racial. The job of organiser went vacant and I applied for it and was lucky enough to get it.

What does your job actually entail?

I'm doing fundraising and general organising and administration. I also do a bit of teaching. I help with the drama programme and I also teach yoga — I'm the yoga instructor.

Why is it called Community Arts Project?

Well it all started after the uprisings in 1976. A group of people got together and I think they were concerned about arts facilities. They felt that most art facilities in town were not open to everybody. Either they were only open to whites or the fees or entrance qualifications were such that, in fact, they excluded a lot of people. The pity was that there were a lot of people who had interests and were talented in a lot of art forms or discipline who were, in fact, being excluded. They didn't have any access to training and the people who started CAP were trying to tackle that situation. They called it CAP because it was to serve the community without any restrictions.

The Arts aren't exclusive to a few special people.



So, are you offering training or are you offering an outlet for individual creativity?

By now we work on quite a few different levels. On the one hand we are working at grassroots level where we're offering arts activities to people who may not even have held a pencil before. This is part of our "Outreach Programme" which operates in Guguletu, Langa, Bishop Lavis and Mitchells Plain. On another level we invite people in here who are just interested in pottery for fun, or drawing for fun. Then on a third level we are also trying to provide some kind of training for people who are seriously interested in making some kind of career. We have got a full-time sculpture studio going and we had two exhibitions last year — professional exhibitions done in town at the Gowlett Gallery. Well, this wasn't an exhibition of students' work as such. For the gallery exhibition we selected work from about ten people, whom we felt had reached exhibition level, a high enough standard for that kind of exposure.

How was the exhibition received?

The work was of a high standard and most of it was sold.



Does CAP, being short of funds, take a percentage of the students' earnings made at an exhibition?

Well, our artists live in dire poverty and they sell so seldom that we really don't feel justified in taking any slice of what they get. We take a small percentage to cover costs of materials and firing of clay sculpture so we don't try to make a profit.

There were indications at one stage that you might get a grant from the City Council. Has anything come of that?

Not yet. We're still negotiating. We've been negotiating with the City Council for several years for a very small grant of R2 000 a year and they have a lot of problems with that. We went to see the mayor and it took them 18 months to think about it and they said no. They're considering us for their 1985 financial year.

Did the City Council give any reasons for their refusal?

Well no, the City Councillors are very supportive but they do have a lot of requests for financial assistance and their funds are limited.

Where do you draw your teachers from: Do you have any specific qualifications for teachers or do you mainly accept people who are prepared to volunteer their services?

We're quite limited in both funds and staff at the moment. When I started, the place had been going for about two years and a lot of things were folding up. One of the problems was that everything was free. No-one paid anything except R1,00 a year. The people who taught weren't paid anything either. They were doing it out of interest. That sort of situation was unsatisfactory because people, both students and staff, did not necessarily feel permanently committed to CAP.

"The absurd situation is that most of our financial support comes from outside SA."

And now do you manage to pay your teachers a salary?

Yes. We have six full-time staff and twenty part-time people and they receive a salary which amounts to R4 000. Sometimes I think we're exploiting the people who work here by paying them such low salaries, but on the other hand, it is very difficult to get money. The absurd situation is that most of our financial support comes from outside South Africa. Grants have been coming from the Evangelical Churches in Germany, from Dutch churches and Swiss churches have just promised us a grant. Local businesses just aren't interested in cultural projects.

How many professional Artists do you have teaching here?

Well, Cecil Skotnes comes in twice a week and he's a very committed and dedicated man, and of course Skotnes does it completely voluntarily. He guides the whole Art department and it's because of his influence that we've been able to have professional exhibitions. Alice Goldin has also been coming for about a year and we're very pleased to have her. Then there are other people like Mavis Taylor, Associate Professor of Drama at UCT. She's an accomplished director. She's actually chairperson of our Board of Trustees. She's also very committed to social change.

