

The Significance of CAP in  
the lives of Sydney Holo and Lionel Davis



Hannah Schultz

gr 12

## Lionel Davis-Bibliography

Lionel Davis was born in 1936. As a teenager he loved drawing but, as he says, lacked the self-motivation to carry it further at his high school, Harold Cressy. He completed Standard nine at Harold Cressy. In 1964 he was sentenced to five years on Robben Island for political subversion under the Suppression of Communism Act.

After he was released from jail, he was put under house arrest. In this difficult time, his interest in Art was rekindled. In 1977, he followed an art student carrying art materials into CAP's old premises in Mowbray. Lionel says that CAP was his salvation. He says that doing something creative helped him to heal himself. It was also very therapeutic to teach other people and help them to heal themselves. He gave to the community received a lot in return.

He was unhappy about CAP receiving money from the Urban Foundation in 1978. He and many others thought that the Urban foundation wanted to create a black middle class to act as a buffer between the ruling class and the dissatisfied proletariat. He felt that CAP should not accept "dirty" money.

In 1980 Lionel left CAP with a scholarship to the Rorkes Drift (or the Evangelical Lutheran Art and Craft center). Rorkes Drift had a solid reputation and many fine black artists had studied there. Unfortunately Swedish funding had been withdrawn from the center. When Lionel arrived at Rorkes Drift, the emphasis was on craft rather than art. Lionel studied at Rorkes Drift for two years but was unhappy with the standard of tuition and had frequent arguments with the co-coordinators. He left Rorkes Drift in the first week of the academic year of 1982. Incidentally, Rorkes drift closed that year.

Lionel did learn something from his time at Rorkes Drift, though. He learnt new graphic techniques and also learnt the importance of silkscreen printing.

Back in Cape Town, Lionel still wanted to pursue art. The South African Business Trust gave Lionel money to go to smaller art schools in Cape Town.

In 1982, Lionel and a friend (Ismail Moss) decided to go back to CAP. They wanted to, in Lionel's own words, bring CAP back into the fold or rehabilitate it politically. They felt that CAP was a community resource and that CAP's image had improved.

There are two things that Lionel would like to be remembered about CAP: the way it helped youths to "find their feet" and the role it played in printing of posters and T-shirts.

The latter role started in 1983, when CAP got a printing screen. They printed posters, T-shirts and banners. Lionel feels that this is an important contribution to the liberation struggle since these posters, T-shirts and banners gave it visibility and helped to impart its message.

repetition  
(put this either  
in the intro or  
here - not both)

the fine art centre did, but the  
craft centre still exists  
today.

The young people who came to CAP, feels Lionel, were helped to find out who they were and what they wanted to do with themselves. Even if they didn't become artists, CAP helped them make up for the inferior quality of their education.

Lionel left CAP in 1991 and enrolled at UCT to do a degree in fine art. He found the course much more intense and with more structure than CAP. He learnt Xhosa at UCT and also learnt a bit about the history of art. He specialized in printmaking. While he was at UCT, he had gone to Joburg and had done a course that taught him to help educators teach art

After he had gained his degree, Lionel worked part time at CAP again. He worked in Langa and then in Mannenburg teaching unemployed youths. He also worked at the South African National gallery, applying what he had learnt in Jo-burg and "teaching teachers to teach art." (his words? - please reference)

In 1997, he started working on Robben Island as a tour guide. When he takes school groups, he often does an art workshop with them on the Island, helping them to express what they have learnt at the museum. He finds it hard to mix art and work since he needs a full chunk of time to create art. He is looking forward to retiring soon since that will enable him to devote himself to art. Becoming a professional artist is a dream of his.

At UCT, he specialized in printmaking. He also worked in the abstract. At the moment He works with concepts using found materials. One of the themes that he works with is the identity, or lack of identity, of the colored community. He probes such issues as the emphasis of European rather than African root. He also makes prison doors out of found materials and with them makes statements and commemorations.

He has taken part in group exhibitions around the world. On Robben Island, he has taken part in *thirty minutes*, a group exhibition about reactions to the island.

An example of his work done on the Island would be the untitled picture about the visiting booth. This picture deals with the many difficulties faced when communicating with family members. These include being forced to speak a language that the warders understood and having the subject of the conversation strictly curtailed.

And what is Lionel message for artists of today? Lionel feels that with ten years of democracy behind us, the artist can start looking into him or herself and dealing with internal issues. Lionel feels that art doesn't have to be overtly political anymore.

Lionel thinks that art students should realize that they cannot make a living by creating art alone. One can create an artwork a day but one can't sell an artwork a day. Art students should not close down other avenues of employment.

Lionel Davies deserves to be one of South Africa's foremost art figures. Not only for the high quality of his work or the obstacles he overcame but also because he has taught many people who would never otherwise had the chance to create.



little, date, media?

The illustration depicts a scene of daily life, likely in a rural or semi-rural setting. The central figure is engaged in the traditional task of hand-washing laundry in a large tub. The presence of a stone wall and a clothesline suggests an outdoor or semi-enclosed laundry area. The background shows a simple building and other figures, indicating a community or village environment. The overall scene conveys a sense of manual labor and traditional domestic practices.

The illustration is a black and white drawing, possibly a woodcut or a similar print. It captures a moment of everyday activity, emphasizing the physical nature of the work. The composition is simple, focusing on the central action and the surrounding environment.

The scene is set in a rural or semi-rural area, where such manual labor is still prevalent. The illustration serves as a visual record of a common domestic task, highlighting the traditional methods of laundry.

Economy pack, Lionel Davis, Linocut, 1979

### Description of Lino-cut

This is a linocut depicting a street scene. In the foreground, there is a shabbily dressed man foraging through two steel bins. Beside him is a wooden crate filled with fruit and vegetables. The most easily defined fruit is a pineapple.

In the middle ground, there is a transaction happening. A man who is dressed in a white coat with black pants is busy selling produce to a woman off his pull-cart.

In the background are two blocks of flats. There is a wall of a building and a rickety fence that occupies the top right quarter of the paper.

### Elements of Art in the Linocut

Because this is a linocut, it is in black and white. This adds to the very stark feel of the work.

Tone is used to describe some of the forms in the linocut. The squareness of the buildings in the background is emphasized because either the buildings are very dark in the shadow or they are very white in the light. It is also notable that the poor man is standing in the shadow while the two traders are standing in the light.

Linear perspective is used but not Ariel perspective. If one compares the height of the man rummaging in the bins with the height of the tenement block, one can see that Linear perspective has been used.

The tonal contrast in the tenement block is as strong as the tonal contrast in the rubbish bins. This means that Ariel perspective has not been used since the use of Ariel perspective entails a gradual fading of tonal contrasts.

Line is used very effectively to describe form. Uneven lines are used to describe the poor man's shirt. The woman's bottom is effectively described by lines. The woman's huge bottom is also symbolic, in the African culture, of wealth.

### Comment on the Artwork

I think the key to interpreting this painting is the name of the painting. Economy can refer to two things and here we see both meanings. An economy is a system of exchange. In the capitalist system it is usually an exchange with money; so a thriving economy means lots of people buying things.

Economy has a colloquial meaning as well. An economy is a Euphemism for having to do something to save money.

Here we see two kinds of economy: the transaction taking place and the man scrounging in the bin.

→ which would not be possible for a linocut of just black ink on white paper

linocut

It is important to remember that both the woman and the poor man are economizing. Neither of them could afford to go to the supermarket, even to buy their "economy packs". I think that this painting is also an indictment of the "buy more to save more" culture.

I think that this painting is also a metaphor for the situation of South Africa at the time. There was a thriving economy, which the ruling party enjoyed but most of the people of South Africa had to (had still have to) make "economies" because they were so poor.

Eastern Hill, Cleveland, Wash. D.C. (approx. 1901)

Painted by the artist



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Rorkes Drift, Lionel Davis, Watercolour on cardboard, approximately 1981

### Description of painting

This painting is a landscape. In the foreground is a natural rockery. The rockery is dominated by a large aloe to the right and a bush near the frame on the left.

The middle ground is on the next fold of the hill. It is dominated by two homesteads, one behind the other. On top of the hill is a kopie

Beyond the hill is another hill and then a far-distant mountain.

### Elements of art in this painting

The colour in this painting is natural. The painting uses earthy colours such as green on the hills and orangey brown on the rocks in the foreground and mud-brown on the homestead. The colours are realistic and the effect is harmonious. Interest is provided by the slight contrast between the green and the orange that is shown by the aloe on the rock that it grows.

Texture isn't used to describe form the way Sydney Holo sometimes uses it. There is some lovely texture on the fences of the first homestead and on the bushes surrounding it. There is also texture on the big bush in the left.

This painting uses Linear and Ariel Perspective. The use of linear perspective can be seen when one compares the sizes of the aloe and the homestead. In reality, the homestead would be much bigger than the aloe but, because the artist is using Linear perspective correctly, the aloe dwarfs the homestead.

The artist's use of Ariel Perspective can be seen in many ways. Intense colour is used at the front but this fades to a wash at the back of the painting. This can be seen if one compares the intensity of the green of the big bush in front with the wash of dark green on the mountain tip at the back. There are also colour contrasts in the front, which there aren't at the back of the painting. The contrast with the rocks at the front with the grass is intense. There is no such intense contrast in the background. The tonal contrast is also greater in the front than it is towards the back. The comparison between the tonal contrasts in the big rock at the front with the monotony (meaning one tone) of the mountain, one can see that the artist uses tonal contrast.

This painting uses very natural composition. There are no huge and obvious focal points but the aloe and the big bush cut-off by the frame provide subtle focus points.

### Comment on the artwork

I think that this was painted to express the beauty of nature; it has a peaceful and calm atmosphere, which I feel reflects the true atmosphere of the scene. I think this Painting shows skill and I am very lucky to own it.

Wow! you certainly are!



## Conclusion

In this project I have dealt with two artists who were Cultural workers rather than artists. They did political artworks. Both of them taught. Lionel went one step further when he facilitated the printing workshops. This gave organisations and the artists who designed the posters visibility to the masses.

I also think that Davis was more successful than Holo. Holo didn't realize that he didn't have the skills for running an art project. He had a beautiful vision but couldn't fulfill it. This is very sad. Davis, on the other hand, had a much bigger influence because he knew what his strengths were and worked with them.

Davis also took his art much further than Holo did. Davis moved beyond CAP to Michaelis art school. Davis also varied his style and developed it.

I think it would be really nice if CAP could have a retrospective exhibition of well-known CAP artists and lesser-known CAP artists. It would be very interesting to see the different styles of the artists and where they are now.

- Absolutely!

I have learnt a lot while doing this art project. I learnt how lucky I am to have the teachers and resources I have. I learnt a lot about our country's history and art history. I also learnt that analysis of art is really useful because it enables the artist to see how other artists do things. I also learnt that Google is the best search engine.

I want to thank Lionel Davis and Laura Schultz for giving me interviews.

I would love to see the transcripts of the questions for the interviews. You could attach these as an appendix (even the interviewees answers too).

Beautifully written -  
a lovely blend of  
fact and personal input.  
The analyses are detailed  
and relevant.

Well done.

$34/40 = 85\%$

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