

**Art Criticism and Africa
Conference**

Programme & Abstracts

**23 November 1996
Courtauld Institute of Art**

**Organisers: British Section of
AICA**

assist any new section in establishing such benefits in their own country by offering letters of support for national accreditation.

- place their name and contact address in the international directory produced by IAAC/AICA every year.

The international directory is an important source of contact with art critics in every national section. It is distributed widely as a resource for both critics and curators to establish international exchanges.

- vote at meetings,
- receive a copy of the rules of the national section

Organisational Structure

a) Offices -

- The membership must elect a President and a Treasurer/Secretary.
- The treasurer's post may be held by either the President or the Secretary.
- Secret ballot should be the method of election.
- These posts are elected on an annual basis at a general meeting for all members.
- The President may be re-elected but shall not hold office for more than three consecutive years without a break of at least three years.

b) Executive Committee

- The section should establish an executive committee of the President, Treasurer/Secretary and up to five subscribing members to formulate and implement the policy of the section.
- This committee should meet quarterly in quorum.

c) Annual General Meeting

- The section must meet annually and record the decisions (including elections) and discussions of the meeting in formal minutes.
- Annual accounts of the sections finances must be circulated to all members.
- All decisions are decided by a majority vote of those present.

Subscription Fees

The national section must raise an annual fee from its membership to cover its payments to the international office and to cover the administrative costs of its own activities.

Payments to the international office are set at three levels and subject to negotiation :-

- 1) \$ 25 per member
- 2) \$ 10 per member
- 3) payment suspended initially for a founding section, although subscription fees must be raised internally by the section.

Relationship to International IAAC

Each national section while independent in its activities, must inform the Secretary-General of IAAC of any changes to its offices, of the payment of subscription fees, of the admission of new members. The President of each section is responsible to IAAC for the admission of new members.

A list of all members must be sent every year to the Secretary-General. (These names are listed in the annual Directory).

Rules and Criteria for National IAAC Sections

IAAC's administrative structure is composed of the union of national sections and a free section. The national sections establish their own rules, which must agree with the Statutes of IAAC and be approved by their directing committee. The sections are administered according to the laws and customs of their several countries.

This document outlines the minimum criteria and regulations necessary to found a national section of IAAC/AICA. If these criteria are fulfilled, the British Section of AICA will then sponsor the founding of a national section at the next IAAC international congress.

A draft constitution, based on the British section model, can be supplied.

A constitution fulfilling the following international requirements is necessary.

Membership

There are three categories of membership within AICA sections : Associate, Full and Honorary.

1. All new members are initially Associate members.
2. On approval by the International Board of Directors, they may become full members. Only full members have the right to vote at the international congresses.
3. Honorary/Emeritus members can be nominated, but have no voting rights within IAAC.

- Each section must have a minimum number of 11 members.
- Members should live and work in the nation state where they are nominated for election. (Nationality or citizenship is not a criteria for membership - membership may be transferred to other national sections should a member's permanent residence change).
- All members must fulfil the criteria of consistent activity, separately or simultaneously in :
 - a) the daily,periodical press,radio or television for the last three years at least,
 - b) the publication of works on art history or criticism
 - c) teaching art history or aesthetics at a senior level
 - d) museum keepership and the organisation of art exhibitions.
- All full and associate members must pay their annual fee.

Membership Benefits

Members are entitled to:-

- an annually renewable international press card.

This press card is internationally recognised in art museums, art libraries and galleries of countries which have IAAC/ AICA sections.

The level of benefits offered to IAAC/AICA members is dependent on the negotiations made by each national section for particular benefits from national institutions, e.g. free entrance to exhibitions. IAAC/AICA in the UK would

A Tribute to Stephen Williams (1948-1996)

One of the invited speakers to the conference was Stephen Williams who tragically died this year as a result of injuries after a motorbike accident in Zimbabwe. He was 48 years old. Last year he spoke at the SOAS conference in the Africa '95 season about his plans to set up and develop a regional art school for Southern Africa. Stephen Williams had just been appointed as Director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo. He had formerly been head of the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Center. He was an artist, art educator and curator.

We reproduce here his abstract for the conference which he sent in May 1996 and a tribute from Barbara Murray.

Art Criticism and Zimbabwean Society

Rhodesian society was regimented, austere and conservative. In 1965, Ian Smith and his right-wing Rhodesian Front declared unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) from Britain heralding fifteen years of sanctions, isolation and warfare. Free thought and criticism was not tolerated and the media was severely censored. The press, TV and radio was controlled by the regime and utilised for propaganda purposes against the 'communist onslaught'.

Zimbabwe's independence came about on April 18 1980 and the new era was heralded with optimism and jubilation. The fighting had stopped, the 'boys' were coming in from the bush, the exiles were returning and change was tangible and real. The people were victorious, the revolution won and an exceptionally good rainy season was seen as a sign of approval from the gods themselves.

The first decade of the era of economic liberalisation in Zimbabwe in the 1990s had the effect of forcing open other hitherto restrained aspects of society. The abandonment of command style, state controlled economic policies has brought about important by-products such as a freer and more outspoken press which has in turn nurtured an enhanced level of publicly expressed opinions and criticism. The ability to speak openly and freely is a crucial phase on the rocky road to genuine democracy and a development which signals to ordinary citizens that the government and official media do not have a monopoly on truth.

Criticism until recently was not part of Zimbabwean vocabulary, reflecting a culture of unquestioning acceptance of authority and pertaining patterns of patronage. Artists have historically always been counted amongst the avantgarde of society and on the cutting edge of acceptable societal norms and perceptions. Paradoxically, the crucial function of art criticism, the way in which art is articulated through the media, has been conspicuously absent amidst the flurry of new frankness.

With few exceptions art criticism in Zimbabwe has consisted of prosaic descriptions of exhibitions, executed in a disengaged, non-objective manner with a few notes from the exhibition catalogue tagged on as padding. Little attempt was made to analyse the work on show, to place it within an historical or social context or to plainly express an honest gut-felt opinion. The relatively new publications *Gallery* and the *Zimbabwean Review* have recently activated fresh dialogue and brought about a more public debate concerning cultural issues.

A Tribute from Barbara Murray.

Art in Africa has lost one of its most able and passionate protagonists. Stephen Williams was a rare individual, an artist with personal experience of the processes of creativity and of the difficulties faced by artists in Africa: a humanitarian and a sociologist with a deep respect for all people and a hard-won appreciation community; a teacher with the generous spirit to share his knowledge and the warm personality to draw out, nurture and support the less-confident; an administrator with management and business skills as well as a talent for motivating colleagues and encouraging participation; and a committed socialist with a sensitive understanding of the racial, economic and political contexts of Southern Africa.

These tributes could all have remained theoretical but not with Stephen. He was down-to-earth, practical and disciplined, a methodical organiser, a careful researcher and a committed activist. If he saw something to be done, he didn't just talk about it, he did it in his quiet and unassuming way.

Perhaps, above all, Stephen's great gift was an ability to understand and reconcile opposing points of view and differing needs, to bring people together for a greater good. He was a catalyst and an innovator. He carried art and ideas across boundaries of many sorts. Stephen Williams dedicated himself, with love, energy, intelligence and hard work, to art in Africa; to creating environments in which people could find their place and develop their talents; to a supranational community in which art and artists could flourish. He leaves a gift in many hearts. Hamba Khate.

About the Conference Organisers :

This conference has been organised by British Section of the International Art Critics Association. The International Association of Art Critics, which was created following two international congresses (1948, 1949) held at UNESCO headquarters, comprises art critics who are anxious to improve international co-operation in the fields of artistic creativity, circulation and endeavour.

AICA / IAAC's aims are:

- **to promote** the different branches of critical knowledge in the visual arts field and to ensure their having sound methodological bases,
- **to protect** the ethical and professional interests of the art critics and to defend all its member's rights equally,
- **to ensure** permanent communication between its members by encouraging international meetings,
- **to simplify and improve** information and international exchanges in the field of the visual arts,
- **to contribute** to the better knowledge and closer understanding of differing cultures,
- **and to collaborate** with developing countries.

The Association can collaborate with any organisation pursuing basically cultural aims. IAAC sections can raise funds on their own behalf as a non-governmental organisation from national / international institutions or agencies or under the auspices of UNESCO. The IAAC was granted the status of NGO in 1951 by UNESCO (international non-governmental organisation, category B, information and consultation relations). There are currently 65 national sections within AICA plus a free-standing section.

AICA's head office is 11 rue Berryer - 75008 Paris, France
tel. (33) 01 42 56 17 53 fax. (33) 01 42 56 08 42
The current international President is Kim Levin, (USA)

The British Section President is Mark Gisbourne, First Floor Flat, Lansfield Terrace, 201 South Lambeth Road, London SW18 1XP (tel. 0171-735 5848)

The committee for the Africa conference in London included: Katy Deepwell (Chair), Jane Norrie (~~Sandray~~), Clementine Deliss, Sarah Wilson, Sajid Rizvi, James Hyman and Mark Gisbourne (current President, British Section, AICA).

The committee would like to thank the members of AICA who generously contributed accommodation for the speakers, the Director of the Courtauld Institute and his staff for their assistance, and those who contributed to shaping the ideas for this event and making those ideas a working reality. A special thanks also to Marie Claude Wolfin for her work at the International Office of AICA with UNESCO.

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David Koloane - The South African situation

This paper will provide a socio-political background on how various communities exist and the effects of apartheid legislation on the living conditions of different racial groups. A brief survey of art education will determine how discriminatory legislation has denied black communities the opportunity of enhancing their creative potential. The paper will also examine how art education influences art practice vis-a-vis untutored ability. Non-formal structures in the form of art centres will be examined.

The influence of the apartheid system on art reviews, discourse and related activities will also be examined through examples of reviews written during the apartheid decades. Is art reviewing and art discourse a myth or reality in South Africa today?

The paper will also examine what available forms of dialogue exist amongst black artists with a view to determining the mode of aesthetic assessment they employ. Is dialogue possible between black and white artists?

In a post-apartheid South Africa, there is a need for a common sensibility to tackle the problems confronting both black and white artists.

Toyin Akinoshu has worked as an art journalist in Nigeria. He is currently employed as an Explorationist with Chevron Nigeria Limited.

Toyin Akinoshu - Nigeria : Art Criticism for Whom?

By the turn of the last decade, the amount of space devoted to the reporting of art events and evaluation of the quality of work in Nigerian Newspapers was almost nil. The most generous newspapers gave it a full page a week. There is validity, however, in the argument that much of the material is not rigorous. Music as a form of entertainment, not as an art form, got several pages. The lifestyles of musicians, and their nuisance value were more important than the quality of work they produced.

By the mid-eighties, a group of art writers emerged whose object was to promote art and campaign for an increase in the pages devoted to the arts. They were enthusiastic that art reporting - at least - must be part of mainstream Nigerian journalism and they sought to report cultural matters as front page news.

The 1980s were also the period in which the Nigerian public began collecting art works on a wider scale. However today, while the arts pages have proliferated, the art boom has fizzled out and many of the art writers who spearheaded the promotion of arts pages have departed to do other things.

Plenary Session Chairpersons

Sajid Rizvi, born in Lucknow, India (1949) is the Founding Publisher and Managing Editor of the London-based international visual arts magazine, *Eastern Art Report* (founded in 1989) and writer and editor for United Press International (UPI) since 1977. His writing on a wide range of subjects has been translated and published world-wide. He has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Journalism and presented with the Overseas Press Club of America's Hal Boyle Award for excellence in journalism. His art publications include 'Reaching Out' a catalogue on the Libyan artist Ali Omar Ermes and a two-part monograph, *Myths and Mothballs: African Art in the 1990's*, which is currently under preparation.

James Hyman

However it was not until the 1970s that real academic and intellectual art criticism emerged to prepare fertile ground for the germination of well sustained and rich art critical experiences in Nigeria. But very unfortunately these important developments in art criticism in Nigeria have not been seriously recognized and appreciated through lack of a much-needed academic discourse and appreciable intellectual evaluative study.

For this reason, therefore, relying heavily on newspapers and magazines, art exhibitions and journals, this paper intends to examine the contributions and problems of art criticism in the popular press and in academic and scholarly publications in Nigeria since 1976. The work of art critics will be classified, the audience position is looked into, and the problems of professionalism presented in detail in order to examine some of the constraints on the realisation of a full art critical culture.

The paper, without trying to parameterize the culture of art criticism will discuss the importance of an indigenous art-critical culture or the need for internationalist inside-out and not outside-in critical attitude that can help bring art-critical legitimacy and undistorted understanding to modern Nigeria art experiences.

In summary, art criticism in Nigeria has steadily grown with the growth of Modern Nigerian art. And despite the fact that it has not yet acquired the stylistic, developmental large infrastructures of the West, and in spite of the same problems of professionalisation, the tradition can be considered very dynamic and promising.

Fatima Ismail Afifi is General Secretary of the Egyptian Section of AICA and Director of Museum of Contemporary Arts in Cairo. She is currently working on the Cairo Biennale.

Third Panel : Art Criticism for Whom?

Chair: **Brandon Taylor** lectures at Winchester School of Art. He is an art critic.

Barbara Murray is founding editor of Gallery, the art magazine from Gallery Delta. She was formerly exhibitions officer at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe and assistant at the Tengenenge Gallery. She now works as a freelance editor and writer in Harare. Her articles on art have been published widely in ZED, Insight, Africa Calls, The Herald and The Independent.

Barbara Murray - On Promoting and Disseminating Art Criticism in Zimbabwe

In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, art played a limited and largely decorative role (except for the San paintings). Colonial cultural policy viewed art as entirely superfluous and post-independence policy is little better. In a situation in which there is little art education, almost no state support for the visual arts, disinterested media and an as yet unenlightened public, art criticism must be for everybody. Art criticism in its broadest definition exists to elucidate art and in the face of no alternative it can fulfil multiple roles as education, promoter, supporter and catalyst for art. The aim of Gallery is to reach as many levels and corners of society within Zimbabwe as possible - school children and academics, artists and patrons, journalists, art teachers, arts administrators, media personnel, government officials, the general public in both urban and rural areas. There is also a great need for dialogue and exchange with neighbouring countries and those further away on other continents. With the establishment of a new local degree course for art education and the magazine's survival for two years plus new forthcoming and generous sponsorship, specifically to get art criticism to a broad range of people, we appear to be on the threshold of a breakthrough.

David Koloane is a painter, writer and curator, from Johannesburg, South Africa. He curated the section on modern art in South Africa in the 'Seven Stories' exhibition, held at the Whitechapel Gallery as part of the Africa '95 season. He was the co-founder, along with the late Bill Ainslie, of the workshop programme developed in South Africa from 1985. The concept has since been adopted by most Southern African countries, including Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and was also the model for the first one held in Senegal, East Africa in 1995. He also co-founded the Fordsburg Artists Studios in Johannesburg, popularly known as 'The Bag Factory' from the building's former function, manufacturing and repairing hessian bags.

Second Panel : Institutional Issues & Administrative Culture: relations between Africa and Europe, popular and academic, in the generation and location of art criticism

Chair : Katy Deepwell is an artist, critic and lecturer in art theory and history. Her PhD was 'Women Artists working in Britain between the Two World Wars' (Birkbeck College, 1991) from which she curated 'Ten Decades: The Careers of Ten Women Artists born 1897-1906' (Norwich, 1992). She recently edited *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies* (Manchester University Press, 1995) and is working on a second anthology on Women and Modernism. She is founder and editor of the first international feminist online visual arts journal, *n.paradoxa* (starting Dec 1996) : <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/members/n.paradoxa/index.html>

Colin Richards lectures in the Department of Fine Arts, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. He has presented numerous conference papers, taught and published on South African art locally and abroad, most recently in *Triquarterly* (Chicago, forthcoming) and *Atlantica* (New York, 1995). He has been an advisor for a number of local and international exhibitions, co-curating 'Taking Liberties: The Body Politic', *Africus Johannesburg Biennale* (1995) and 'Siyawela: Love, Loss and Liberation in Art from South Africa' (Africa '95, Birmingham City Art Gallery, 1995). With Mmamatlakeng Makhoana, in 1989, he established the Mokhele Art Therapy and Education Project (MATEP) in Soweto. He is also a practicing artist, whose work has been shown in South Africa, England and the USA. His work was recently shown in 'Faultlines: Inquiries into Truth and Reconciliation' (Cape Town Castle, 1996).

Peripheral Vision : Art Criticism in South Africa

Art Criticism, like art theory but unlike art history, does not have a secure institutional base in arts education in South Africa. This, coupled with the fact that there is no specialist art journal in the country, has serious implications for the writing and reception of South African art criticism. Art-critical discourse remains at once quite rarefied and underdeveloped. Its languages and orientations are by and large borrowed from elsewhere. In order to better understand the local situation, the paper will attempt to identify and address a number of questions concerning the material and intellectual resources currently conditioning the production and reception of art criticism. These questions reflect changing relations between art criticism and other more broadly social critical orientations in local culture.

To help focus my discussion I will review the national controversy which surrounded the showing of art student Kaolin Thomson's 'Useful Object'. This controversy brought important racial, gender and aesthetic issues to the surface, issues which give some indication of the state of current art criticism in the country. I will also examine a piece of critical writing on a student show by Ivor Powell, which raises important questions on the problematic relation between art production and critical discourse. Finally I will consider recent writing by Bongiwe Dhlomo, David Koloane and others which, with the material already mentioned suggests that while the field of art criticism is fractured and complex, it remains fundamentally structured and to some degree limited by shifting relations between art and politics, practice and theory, the local and the global. There is a clear need to deepen and broaden the range of local art criticism and to actively seek new more independent forms of production, dissemination and reception. A significant part of this project would involve the development of a more differentiated critical language and culture, one more emphatically responsive to the peculiarities of place and politics (art and otherwise) in South Africa.

Dr Ola Oloidi lectures in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. He is an art historian and art critic.

Mediarization, Academization and Professionalism: Art Critics and Criticism in Nigeria 1976-1996.

After a graphic examination of the historical implantation of art criticism in Nigeria, this paper focuses on the period between 1976-1996, being the era of serious professional engagement in art criticism. Art Criticism as an important formalised part of modern Nigerian art experience takes its source from the 1920s and from the monolithic critical attitude of Aina Onabolu. But by the early 1930s, Kenneth Murray, an English expatriate tried to de-monolithise the emerging art critical standard with his challenging culturalistic and critical discourse. From the 1940s to the 1950s, other Nigerian and expatriate critics gave elements to the critical convictions of both Onabolu and Murray.

First Panel : Art Critic as Advocate

Chair: Everlyn Nicodemus is an artist and writer from Tanzania, who has been living in Belgium since 1989. She has shown widely in Tanzania, Scandinavia and Europe, including 'Vessels of Silence' (Kanaal Art Foundation in Kortrijk, 1992). Her current exhibition is at Carte Blanche Gallery, Siegersveld 12, 3500 Hasselt, Belgium (26 Oct-15 Dec 1996). She has contributed several articles to 'Third Text'.

Chika Okeke is an artist, curator and critic, who lectures at the Dept of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. During the Africa '95 season, he was an artist in residence at Delfina Studios and exhibited in the 'On the Road' exhibition there (Oct-Nov 1995). He curated the section on modern art in Nigeria as part of the 'Seven Stories' exhibition, held at the Whitechapel Gallery as part of the Africa '95 season. He is currently organising an exhibition of his works in Lagos.

Chika Okeke - Beyond Either/Or: Toward an Art Criticism of Accommodation

This paper argues that there really is no opposition between academic and popular (media) criticism. That the knowledge that predicates the tension between the two modes is faulty, inadequate and inappropriate for art criticism in Africa and indeed elsewhere. Western knowledge is replete with what Helen Cixous calls 'hierarchical oppositions' through which all phenomena are articulated. There are such binaries as male/female, culture/nature, form/content, democracy/dictatorship, West/Other etc. In each instance one is favoured, the other not. These same strategies appear to be employed in pitching academic against popular (media) criticism. The argument here is that it is deficient to articulate phenomena through polarized hierarchical binaries. These binaries can be shifted from an oppositional to an accommodative relationship especially when both are seen as facets of one and the same thing, each validating the other, and the appreciation of both being requisite for the better comprehension of the given phenomenon. But what is the theoretical basis for this argument?

This can be located in Olu Oguibe's Masquerade Theory for African Art. The theory posits that art is like Igbo Ijele masquerade that can not be fully appreciated from a singular fixed position. The Ijele's splendour becomes more meaningful through a 'multiplicity of frames' registered by the viewer who watches the dance from various angles. When this theory is applied to art criticism, we see that all critical enterprise in whatever mode or medium aim at virtually the same goal - a fuller articulation and appreciation of art. We also evidence that academic, and popular media criticism are but part of the 'multiplicity of frames' through which art criticism can become more meaningful and while each is 'different', none is truer or better, rather each contributes towards a fuller appreciation of the vast territory of art criticism.

Equally important here is that Igbo philosophy favours accommodation of differences by searching for synergistic relationships rather than oppositional tensions. This is aptly encoded in the Aka Wela principle which when applied to art criticism collapses the academic/popular oppositional binaries and also questions the knowledge that set up a battle not only between formalistic and instrumental art criticism but also between other types and modes of criticism.

Tony Mhonda is an artist, critic and curator. He works at the Ziso Sculpture Studio in Zimbabwe.

Tony Mhonda will address the role of the art critic in Zimbabwe.

Murray McCartney, a former deputy director of London's Africa Centre, is a freelance consultant and writer in Harare, Zimbabwe, working mainly on media and cultural issues. He has lived in southern Africa since 1981, is a board member of several media NGOs, and is a regular contributor of arts features and criticism to a number of Zimbabwean magazines and newspapers.

Murray McCartney - 'The current state of media discourse in the visual arts in Zimbabwe: problems and prospects. How can the interests of artists be identified, and met, by the media?'

Art Criticism and Africa Conference, 23 November 1996

Speakers Biographies & Abstracts from Speakers

(where available)

Opening Session

Chair : Bisi Silva

John Picton lectures at Centre of African Studies, Department of Art and Archaeology, SOAS, University of London. For Africa '95, he was a curator of 'Technology, Tradition & Lurex: The Art of African Textiles' at the Barbican Gallery (Sept-Dec 1995); he also contributed to the catalogue of the exhibition 'Africa: The Art of a Continent (Royal Academy, Oct. 1995-Jan 1996) : organised African Artists: school, studio & society (SOAS conference, Sept. 1995) and spoke at Eastern Art Report's conference 'Myths and Mothballs' (Courtauld Institute, October 1995).

Art Criticism of Africa outside Africa

Chair : Gavin Jantjes is an artist, born in Cape Town, South Africa. He was educated at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Capetown and the Hochschule for Bildende Kunst, Hamburg. He is a Senior Lecturer at Chelsea College of Art, The London Institute. Since 1992, he has been a consultant for INIVA and co-ordinated their 'New Internationalism' symposium, (Tate Gallery, May 1994). From 1986-1990 he was a council member for the Arts Council, developing its policy on cultural diversity and chairing the Monitoring Committee which published the report 'Towards Cultural Diversity'. He is an adviser to the Tate Gallery, Liverpool, a Trustee at the Serpentine Gallery London and was a Trustee at the Whitechapel Gallery (1986-1994). He curated 'From Two Worlds' at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1986 and 'In Fusion: A New European Art', Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1993. He is currently preparing a book with Iniva on 'Internationalism in the Visual Art of Europe'.

Olu Oguibe is currently the Stuart Golding Chair in African Art at the University of South Florida, USA. He recently spoke at the 'Translating Technologies' conference, an Iniva event on 21st November. He is both an artist, lecturer and writer. For more information, check out Olu Oguibe's web pages on : <http://www.satic.arts.usf.edu/~ooguibe/>

Respondent: George Shire is Head of Media and Cultural Studies at Lambeth Adult Education Institute London. As part of this job, he teaches philosophy and history of art in Brixton Prison. George Shire spent his childhood and adolescence in Zimbabwe and has studied in Britain, Italy and the USA. He has published widely in the field of media, Fanonian psychoanalysis and black cultural studies. His first book, Hermeneutics and Politics is forthcoming with Lawrence and Wishart.