

Arts and Africa

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SIGNATURE TUNE

LOUIS MAHONEY:

Hello everybody and welcome to "Arts and Africa". And today there's music from Zambia; a potter explains why he prefers making traditional pottery; and there's poetry and photographs from South Africa.

SIGNATURE TUNE

Photographs on a radio programme? Well, at least we'll be talking about them and hoping that you can see them in your mind's eye. Perhaps a bird in flight, or perched on a tree, singing away. There's a Zambian song that imitates the song of a particular bird - "Ile wolowolo" - and it goes like this:

MUSIC

Mary Nambo and Edwin Sandala with "Ile wolowolo".

When people begin discussing South African literature and drama and poetry, the name of Cosmo Pieterse seems bound to crop up. He's been involved in so many literary ventures, he's given lectures on the subject, and written so much himself that it's no surprise to see his name (amongst several others) on the jacket of a book that's just come out - a book with the expressive (but tricky) title "Present Lives, Future Becoming". It's a mixture of various sorts of writing, together with lots of photographs.

COSMO PIETERSE:

The photographs in the book were taken by four photographers all from Cape Town in South Africa. My main interest in this was putting together a lot of the things that I had written over the last ten, fifteen to twenty years. And the book has developed into what seems to be an exciting little combination of pictures which sometimes say what the words say - little bits of poetry; a few sketches; short stories; little essays - and sometimes to go against what is said by the text.

MAHONEY: Cosmo Pieterse. And when Cosmo came along to the "Arts and Africa" studio to talk to Elaine Caulker, naturally, she not only asked him what the book was about, but she also wanted an explanation about that title.

ELAINE CAULKER:

Cosmo, you've just been involved in this book that has come out "Present Lives, Future Becoming", What does this mean?

PIETERSE: Well it means, Elaine, briefly, that two writers - I and somebody else who has to be anonymous - did a number of things over a long period of time about ten years and luckily we came in contact with some photographers. We had been writing about South African lives - how they were - we also tried to depict what might come out of South Africa, out of this mix that is there. We thought this whole idea of a mix could be an exciting one if it's presented in book form.

CAULKER: Can we go straight to, perhaps, a picture and a poem that best depicts this idea of the blending of South Africa to get the richness out of the culture?

PIETERSE: The poem is called "Co-mingling". Can I read it and then we'll talk about the picture and the poem?

READS POEM "CO-MINGLING"

Luckily the picture just opposite it shows a little boy - a black boy, an African boy - perched on the shoulders of somebody who has his arms stretched out who is light-skinned and has straight hair and is 'coloured', I think, in the South African sense of the word (meaning of mixed origin). And just below him is somebody who is very light-skinned and is probably 'white' or 'European' in the South African sense of the word and a number of young people mainly around the ages of 8, 9, 10 - most of them black. And it seems to me to show three or four things. Number one - the racial coming together: people of all races in South Africa, possibly coming to a single place and enjoying together, probably, a musical concert. I think this was a jazz concert - township jazz - probably done at Langa which is a black ghetto near Cape Town and only blacks may live there but at this juncture, I think, for this musical presentation, blacks and whites were allowed to go. The idea that the poem has "Now we are noon" wants to say that: now in this future - the future becoming - we can all enjoy the richness of the sun - bask in its glory and be energised by it. And then at the end of the poem when it says: "No one now's noon" I think it says that because of oppression at the moment full expression has been made impossible. But it also wants to say that in the future no-one should be "noon" in the sense that no-one should be supreme, be superior, should enjoy exclusively the richness that life in South Africa can offer.

CAULKER: So many people have this idea that the oppression is, in fact the catalyst for the richness for the art coming out of South Africa. You would say not?

PIETERSE: I'd say almost certainly not. I'd say it has helped to bring some kind of art to the South African scene - or from the South African scene - but I think without the oppression one would have a much richer, a much fuller expression of the tremendous amount of ability and the tremendous richness in the environment that there is in South Africa. I'd say that if a person is ill he may write good works - music or poetry or plays - but if he's in good health he may write even better. I think this is the South African situation.

CAULKER: Thank you Cosmo.

PIETERSE: Thank you Elaine.

MAHONEY: Now, that title; let's have it once more, "Present Lives Future Becoming"; it's edited by Cosmo Pieterse and published in London by the Hickey Press.

MUSIC

Joseph Chinya, a drummer of the National Troupe of Zambia playing the kachacha rhythm. This drumbeat, the kachacha, has its home up in the North Western Province and, as you can hear, it's a real skill with up to seven drums being played all at the same time.

In the capital of Zambia, in Lusaka, you'll find Tubaye Dube working away in his artist's studio making pottery and some sculpture. Although he's been living in Zambia for some time he grew up in Rhodesia and that's where he found his feet as an artist. Anthony Delius called in to see him at his studio, and after looking around for a while he asked Tubaye Dube about those early days.

TUBAYE DUBE:

I discovered that, well, after I had done my education at secondary school I thought that I should do something being an African, if I could. Luckily then I happened to meet the Reverend Kenneth E. Patterson in Salisbury. He was keen to take me as an evening student in art. Then I was involved - I thought that I should carve something in the African way, the traditional way, of how we live in Rhodesia. I found that, being too much involved in the western way, I should just think about what my grandparents used to tell me about it.

ANTHONY DELIUS:

And your grandparents did tell you a great deal, did they?

DUBE: Yes, they did very much. Traditionally we didn't use these modern dinner plates or anything like that. We have our meal in a special carved tray, carved dinner plates and also for the relish a small bowl like that made of wood.

- DELIUS: Now the change is not really that you have moved very far away from traditional stuff but that you are using a western glaze. Is that it?
- DUBE: You are right. We're a little bit involved in the western way of life because we have modern way of living but still I don't think that down in the villages they still want to change very much to the society we are having. They may, but I'm not sure about it.
- MAHONEY: Mm. I'd like to think that people prefer using what to me is the 'real thing' instead of the plastic and all that enamel that you can see everywhere nowadays. But I'm interrupting. So let's return to Anthony Delius and his visit to Tubaye Dube's studio.
- DELIUS: Well, of course, I'm sitting here looking around at all these various pots in front of me; small pots, large pots, pots that I've never seen in my life before; with little knobs on them all the way up and down; little serrated edges all the way round them; ridges made at various angles; some of them looking almost like large screws, with a kind of screw-type ridge going all the way round them. All these pots that I'm seeing around me here, including that large one at the back of your head there, Tubaye, with four spouts coming out of it. That one, for instance, is it a very traditional type of pottery? What is it for?
- DUBE: Traditionally, it is made for a ceremony in the north-western province in Kasama - they call it 'mundu', that pot.
- DELIUS: Now what is it for? What is the actual tradition, the ceremony that they use it for?
- DUBE: They do say that there is a ceremony where a married man should blow through this this to make his voice thick, like a lion, while the women are singing a very soft song. That's why they call this 'mundu' - as far as I've been told. The voice should be like a lion's voice because everybody fears the lion.
- DELIUS: These other pots that I see laying around here on the racks all round us, with the ridges and the knobs in various African forms. These, I presume, are all traditional pots which have been used for thousands of years in this area?
- DUBE: I suppose so, because, you see, traditionally if they made a beer pot I don't think they should have all these knobs like that. Some of these small one are just for water containers and some for beer drinking - but the cooking pot, it hasn't got any knobs.
- MAHONEY: Now, Tubaye isn't only a potter, he's well-known for his carvings, and for his subjects he's again turned his attention to the traditional way of life - a woman doing leather work or a man tilling the ground. But a good number of his carvings are not of the human form.
- DELIUS: Looking around, also I see the great sculptures that you've got there. You seem to be particularly fond, for instance, of doing large tortoises in wood. And then, over there, there

is a magnificent statue of an eagle. Are you fond, particularly of animal sculptures? Or is this much in the tradition? Or would you prefer to do male or female figures, or something like that?

DUBE: What I am doing now....well, I do heads - stone heads - and birds. With the birds and lions and snakes it is something which is Nature which is found around Africa and something which you are living with. So that is the reason why I make objects from these things rather than look for the materials away from Africa. Yet we've got Nature in Africa which is why some potters should do something about it.

DELIUS: And, generally, does this pottery and the sculpting provide you with a fairly good living?

DUBE: At this stage, really I think I am quite O.K. I find that when I am enjoying the job I am also getting a bit of a living out of it.

DELIUS: Well I hope your living gets better and better as I'm sure your sculpture and your pottery will.

MAHONEY: Anthony Delius paying a compliment to Tubaye Dube in Lusaka. And we'll pay a compliment to the drums of the National Troupe of Zambia by listening to a little more of the kachacha as I say: goodbye, see you next week for another edition of "Arts and Africa".

MUSIC

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