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A WORD WITH THE READER

One often hears serious Africanist intellectuals and politicians debating over the priorities of the continent. One feature of these debates is that nobody appears to win because each specialist considers himself indispensable to national well-being, progress and happiness. We cannot agree more.

This issue on the fine arts in contemporary Africa is being offered to our readers with the conviction that knowledge of this side of the humanities in the continent is indispensable to the total understanding of the African image. The articles have been selected because of the special problems they tackle or the issues they raise with regard to the fine arts in Africa. Not long ago two members of the Serpent Players, a Black theater group from South Africa played in nearly all the capitals of the Western world. *Ufahamu* believes that the implications of their tour surpass mere entertainment, and that it is a commentary on the predicament of Blacks in South Africa. Thus, the artistic perspectives of the articles included here provide different angles of the complex dialectical relationships between the fine arts and contemporary African politics, society or economics. Both the childhood and adulthood of African art are periods of commitment for social order, happiness and progress.

We have not neglected the critical outlook of Western scholars towards the fine arts in Africa or their artists' use of the African and his environment to create a variety of art concepts which dehumanize and mystify his background and image. We believe that a systematic demystification of these is both necessary and urgent because they are symptomatic of the neo-colonialist methodology of dominating Africa intellectually, psychologically and economically. The invidious exploitation of the mass media to perpetrate the doctrine that the African is no less than the "savage" with nothing short of animal desires, and that the westerner came as his saviour and thinker, still rages. Nor is the Black man credited with capacity for art except in his "savage rituals." In this issue we have included articles which not only challenge these views of the African but provide other fresh interpretations in their proper contexts. The Black man, whatever his professional specialty or political persuasion, cannot perform with dignity if the very bedrock on which his world-view is founded continues to be eroded by alien value systems or dissipated by his own divisive approach to contemporary realities.

Finally, this issue has been late in coming. We apologize for the delay and the anxiety this may have caused. If, however, you find it provocative and worthwhile enough, then your satisfaction compensates for our tardiness.