

B L A C K   U M B R E L L A

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A PROPOSAL FOR MULTICULTURAL  
RESOURCE & ART CENTRE  
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PAST HISTORY & ACHIEVEMENTS

BLACK UMBRELLA (BU) was conceived in 1984 in order to rationalise and put together the research and publication works of PROJECT MRB and KALA PRESS under one organisation. Although BU was never formally established, for reasons beyond our control, we managed to carry out some of the most important works as listed in its original programme of 1984 (see the document BU/MRB/KP/GP-002). However, the need for such an organisation today is greater than before. There is now a tremendous public interest in what we have so far achieved in terms of initiating various projects, doing research work, curating exhibitions (*The Other Story* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery attracted 25,000 people in spite of bad publicity it received from the press) and undertaking publications. We have now accumulated unique resources (knowledge, expertise and experience) which we are now unable to put to full use, because we do not have an organisation through which they can be made accessible to public, both at general level and/or to fulfil the specific multicultural educational needs of the art community. The need for such an organisation or centre is now even greater after the fiasco of The Rounhouse (which we had predicted in its early stage).

PROJECT MRB was established in 1982, with initial funding by GLA (£2000), followed by a support from GLC (£4000), to do preliminary research into the history of Black Artists in Britain. The idea was to establish an Archive and Information Centre. After the preliminary work was completed, which was considerable, we did not receive any more support or funding to do the remaining work, to set up and run the archive. However, the research work was continued voluntarily, and it was in fact the result of this work that we were able to organise both *The Essential Black Art* and *The Other Story* exhibitions. (Our original idea of the archive was taken up by Eddie Chambers a few years ago and he now runs the archive AAVAA from Bristol).

KALA PRESS One of the important aspect of PROJECT MRB was to publish the researched material in the form of reports, leaflets, books, catalogues, etc., and to run a regular publication dealing with the issues concerning black/Third World artists. We in fact published as early as in 1978 *Black Phoenix*, which was the first art magazine of its kind in Britain. After three issues it was shelved, due to lack of support and funding. In 1987 we decided to resume publication of *Black Phoenix* or start a new theoretical journal. After having considered the change of

circumstances we decided for the latter and with a new title. *Third Text* is now internationally established and is one of the few art journals which deals with the issues of art, theory and criticism in some depth. In fact *Third Text* is the only international art journal which not only questions the dominant discourse on art but also gives priority to Black/third world artists and attempts to evaluate their work critically.

The catalogue of *The Essential Black Art* was also published by us in conjunction with the Chisenhale Gallery.

### FUTURE PROGRAMME

At present we are publishing *Third Text*, which is the only serious art journal in Britain dealing with the work of black artists and their contribution to British culture. It may seem a miracle that one could establish and run a journal like *Third Text* with a skeletal staff costing only £14000 per year, but this does not take into account the dedication, hard work (I have worked 5 days a week with only a part-time salary of £6000 per year) and efficiency that underlie its success. But one cannot go on forever like this. Things must improve materially in order to keep up the momentum. It is now necessary to put *Third Text* on sound commercial footings, which would require a properly paid professional staff and considerable money to promote and market the journal both nationally and internationally. Given the serious nature of the journal, both theoretical and ideological, this may not be feasible at the moment, and may make the whole project very expensive (and perhaps beyond public funding). The only alternative seems to be to have a backup organisation which is also involved in other activities directly beneficial to the public, so that one can justify a larger staff and expenditure.

It is in this context that we feel BLACK UMBRELLA as an organisation must now be established, with following aims and objectives:

### PUBLICATIONS

We have now enough expertise and experience - particularly in design, layout and pasteup work - to undertake other publications and produce them very economically. Following are the areas for expansion:

1. Monographs of individual artists.
2. Theoretical books.
3. Leaflets and catalogues.
4. Poetry and literature.
5. Plan and undertake productions of small publications for other organisations.

## PRODUCTION

1. Production of films/video on individual black artists, as well as about specific themes or exhibitions, etc.
2. Production of tape/slides lectures, which will be available to art institutions as well as individuals.

## EDUCATION

We have now enough accumulation of information and knowledge, as a result of research and curatorial work mentioned above to establish and offer the following:

1. Art History Courses: comprising 10 lectures about the multi-cultural history of art in postwar Britain, to be regularly held in the proposed centre, open to both general public as well as to art students. This course will also be offered to art schools, polytechnics and universities, to be held in their own premises as part of art history courses.
2. Talks and Lectures: to be regularly held at the proposed BU Centre, which will include talks by specialists (art critics/historians) as well as artists themselves, and which will be open to both general public and art students.
3. Visiting critics, art historians and artists from Third World particularly from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. We have now enough contacts in this respect. People regularly come to London, and one should be able to make use of these visits and organise talks or get-togethers, even on a short notice.
4. Showing of Video/Films about black/Third World artists, accompanied by discussions or workshops.
5. Seminars and Conferences: either held in the BU premises or/and to be organised in collaboration with and held in other institutions.
6. Advice & Information for individual (black) art students. In spite of all the work done recently, art schools are still unable to deal with this problem. We often have phone calls from art students (both white and black) asking for private consultations. We should be able to provide this service on regular basis.
7. Various Art Groups should also be able to make use of the BU centre and its facilities for holding meetings and discussions within its premises.
8. Publications/Printing: we can undertake comprehensive training courses or workshops in publications - from initial

planning, costing, typesetting, editing/proofreading, design, layout,..... to the final product.

9. Community Workshops: Depending upon the resources available, various kind of workshops (photography, printing, painting, etc.) can also be held, both for adults and children.

#### RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

After having done considerable research work, and having organised two major exhibitions (mentioned above), we would like to extend our work to EEC. Our recent visits to and enquiries in Europe has shown that no such work has yet been done there, and non-European artists in Europe face similar problems to what we have been encountering in Britain. We would like to initiate and undertake:

1. Research Work vis-a-vis non-European artists in EEC countries and establish a central archive in London as part of the BLACK UMBRELLA Centre.
2. Initiate, Develop and Propose Projects in the EEC, in order to raise the profile of non-European artists, and to make art community in the EEC aware of the problems facing non-European artists
3. Establish Contacts and exchange information between non-European artists living in various countries of the EEC.
4. Undertake Publications in other European languages.
5. Publication of Third Text in one more European language, and its promotion in the EEC.
6. Development of an Archive containing slides and other material vis-a-vis artists working in their own countries in Third World, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.

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