

fortnightly

MODERN GUYANA OF THE FUTURE  
WILFRED DAVID & GARNET JAMES

COMMENT: POST ELECTION SITUATION  
RICKY SINGH

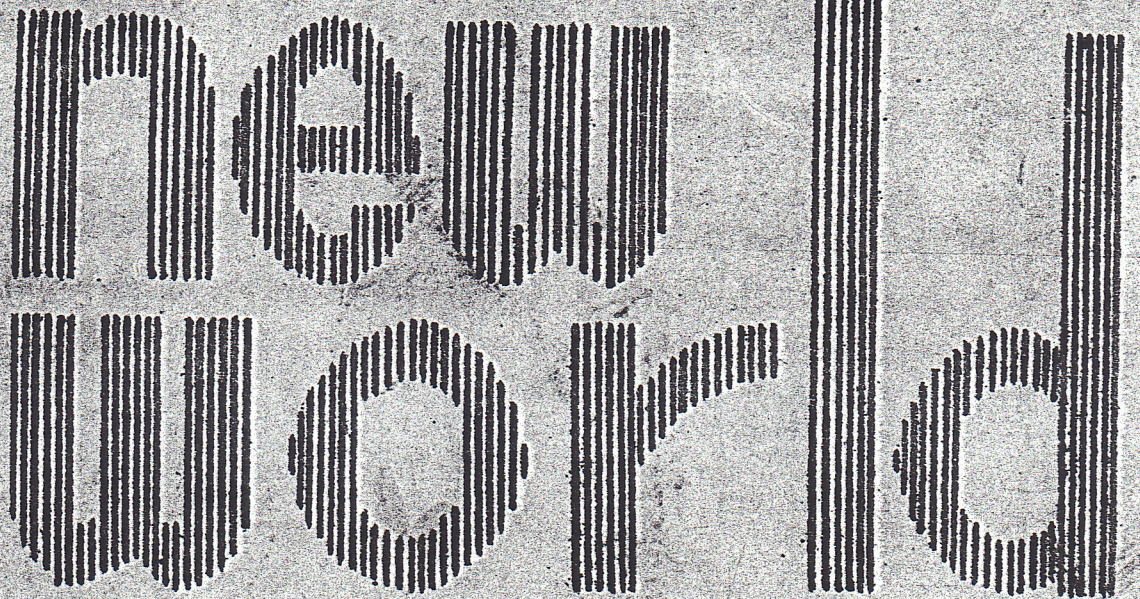
MUSIC: NATIONAL COMPOSITIONS  
HUGH SAM

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST  
NANCY GRAHAM

18 Jan. 1965.

NO. 6

25 Cents





## PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

Donald Locke who is the art master at Queen's College is bringing a new and different approach to the teaching of art. He returned from training in Great Britain in August and took over from Mr. E.R. Burrowes who retired this year. Some of his work, both paintings and pottery, was exhibited at the History and Culture Week Exhibition last year.

Locke was born in 1930 in Stewartville, W.C.D., and in 1938, he, his parents and two brothers moved to Georgetown. After finishing high school, he became a pupil-teacher at the age of 17 in Broad Street Government School. It was at this time that his interest in art began to grow, because art was compulsory for the teachers' examinations and he decided to get as much tuition in art as possible.

Upon his brother's enthusiastic recommendation of the Working People's Art Class, immediately after its inception in 1948, Locke joined the class. It was there that he became vitally interested in art and later won the W.P.A.C. gold award for his abstract picture The Happy Family. The class as a whole showed tremendous keenness. Burrowes, the founder of the class, had three sections: still life, live models and landscape drawing. The classes filled a need for artistic expression and the people were intense and inspired. Sometimes there would be over one hundred people in the small, badly lit, poorly furnished rooms. Gradually, however, the class began to dissolve. Possibly the reason for this was that it depended to a large extent on Burrowes' personality and when he left on a scholarship for two years, it began to die. It was later revitalized by his return, but resumed its decline gradually and never regained intensity as a movement in art.

Locke feels that Burrowes showed him the importance of art and where his career lay. Now he cannot imagine himself doing anything else, but if he had not attended the Working People's Art Class, his interest might never have been awakened to the same extent.



In the meantime, in 1954, Locke received a British Council Scholarship and went to Bath Academy at Corsham in England. He feels that he was very fortunate to have gone to this Academy for three years as it is a school with a very high standard of art education.

He returned to B.G. with a new outlook, enthusiastic and ready to work like many others, but there was no job available for one of his training, so he went back to teaching at Broad Street Gov't School. He conducted a very successful teachers' art class for one term. Their work was exhibited, and favourably reviewed by Martin Carter. However, there was still no official recognition of Locke's abilities.

During this time he married, after a year's separation, Leila Chaplin, who had also attended Bath Academy. They now have three children. Before Locke received a government scholarship in 1959 (which took him to Edinburgh, where after five years he received his M.A. with honours in Fine Art), he became increasingly aware of how different - as a result of his training and experience at Corsham - were his views toward art and art education from the other art teachers in B.G. This difference of viewpoint was transferred to his experience at Edinburgh University, where he found himself in conflict with ideas directly opposed to what he had learned and fully accepted at Corsham. The conflict was very basic, each institution embodying a totally different approach to art. For example, Edinburgh would state that the artist is a special person, while Corsham, with whom Locke agrees, would say that everyone is a special kind of artist. In sending people up for examinations, Edinburgh chooses those who are to compete, and has 100% successes; Corsham sends up everyone who is interested, and has 100% successes. Edinburgh accepts that the artist must be trained, accepts the existence of absolute standards and principles of education. Locke takes the opposite point of view: a person is not necessarily an artist just because he has spent much time and money on training. He also says that one never knows who the artist really is. Some are better than others; yes, but this difference is not always intrinsic but more often conventional and temporal - a difference which changes as a society changes. The discovery and current appreciation of prim-



itive and native artists illustrates this point. Locke feels that there are principles in art, but they cannot be enunciated, because they belong to the personality and the personal vision of each artist. For example, whether you can prove by optical exercises that red is opposite green, has no significance at all. This is science, not art.

In discussing art education here in B.G., Locke said that although the ground is fertile, there is little art teaching in his sense, "The Organic Method" being done. Even in Europe, art teachers are often inefficient because they do not understand or grasp the implications of the statement - "there are no rules in art, yet works of art can be judged" - the implications of which are very wide. He feels that in the teaching of art, it is not of primary importance that the pupils develop into great artists. In fact he is certain that the best artists as children usually end up doing anything but art. What is essential is that the activity should be an art activity, and the direction of the vision is that of the artist rather than the dramatist or scientist. Thus, the same material used for Geography lessons or History lessons could be used for Art lessons, but the resulting work and the viewpoint will be different in each case. The class is taught as a whole, not as individual artists - guided through activities such as making linocuts, book jacket designs, or doing pencil or pastel drawings. The pupil who thinks, observes, uses his initiative and intelligence, he and not necessarily the most competent artist, would get the best mark.

When I asked Donald Locke about his present work, he said that he plans to paint a little, but wants to continue his pottery work seriously. He had a pottery exhibition in Edinburgh and eventually sold all of the twenty-five pots on show. Although an individualistic style of pottery finds a ready-made market in Britain and an even larger one in the U.S., the encouraging spurt of pottery sales during the last History and Culture Council Exhibition cannot gloss over the fact that there is as yet no steady market here. Guyanese as a whole have yet to come to an appreciation of art sufficient to support a market.



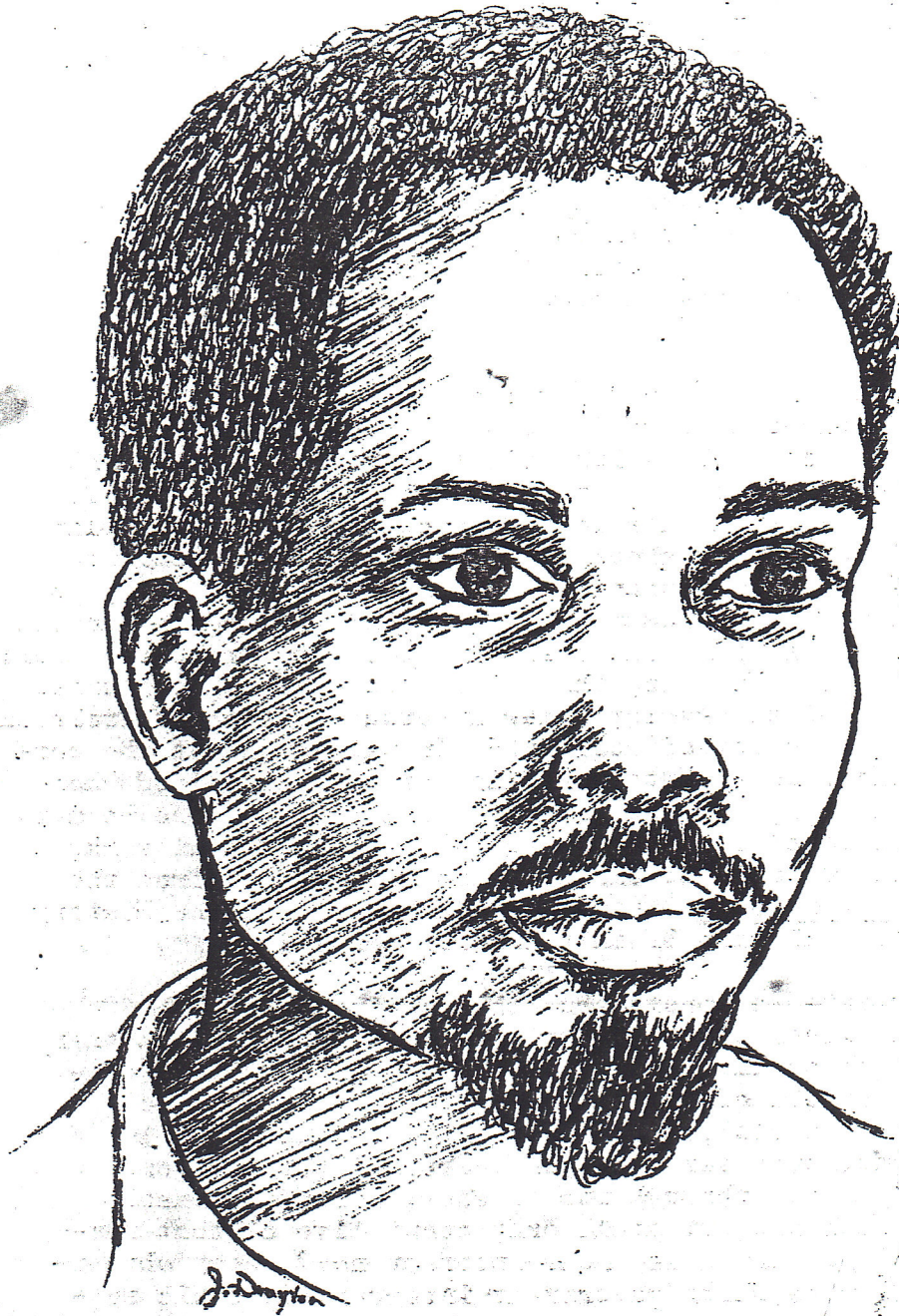
Some of his friends insist that Locke's pots are actually sculpture. He agrees that they have aesthetic rather than utilitarian value, though he intends to produce a range of jugs which can be utilized for practical purposes.

One major problem to be overcome in doing pottery in B.G. is how to obtain materials which are here but have not yet been exploited. The clay materials must be dug for, but you must first have permission to dig on someone's property, then you have to refill the hole so that it doesn't constitute a hazard. In Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad, there are pottery industries and you can buy the clay from chem. The kiln is not such a problem as it can be made from ordinary firebricks or a new brick called Mullinite which Demba is soon to produce and which can stand heat without expanding. All this, however, needs to be investigated, possibly by a governing institution interested in promoting the pottery industry in B.G.

In discussing Guyanese painters today, Locke said that he suspects that many are not painters, but writers, or something else. Burrowes recounts a friend of his saying that his (Burrowes) painting is terrible, but his writing, superb. Aubrey Williams, well-known and respected as an artist, has an intensely vivid, extremely effective writing style. Denis Williams now no longer paints, but is a writer. As to other artists: Leila is now doing architecture; Basil Hinds is now interested in art education; although Moshett, now retired from the B.G. Lithographic Co., has returned to painting. Why is there this lack of dedication? Because of lack of encouragement and recognition? Ron Savory, who teaches art at the Guyana Centre of Arts, whose work has improved greatly in the past four years, would improve immeasurably more if he were to quit his job and devote all his time to painting. Samuels, on the other hand, Locke feels, has lost a lot of his old quality and fire.

These examples lead to the very real question of directionless art in B.G. There is no real movement. Things are static, despite the intense interest a few individuals have in single aspects of art, i.e. sculpture or pottery, but there is on the whole, a terrific hunger for art and cultural activities. Yet, sadly, pro-





DONALD LOCKE



jects tend to die with the originator. For example, there is little evidence that there was once a symphony orchestra in B.G., for when the leader and organizer, Mrs. Taitt, died, so did the orchestra, though surely she was not the only person interested in it. This, I feel, is a reflection of the heritage of the colonial system which is not conducive to creating and expressing qualities of leadership. Thus, when the few outstanding exceptions leave the scene, a vacuum is left.

"The work of artists in B.G. at the moment" Locke said, "is of a very low standard compared to work in other parts of the world, but the standard will rise once the volume of activity increases. The government should be the primary patron and set up an Institute for Cultural Development and Documentation in which artists should play a large part. Activity in art should be part of a larger activity - development of national consciousness. In the institute, top priority should be given to making comprehensive catalogues and collections of sketches and paintings of Guyanese artists past and present as well as biographies of these. In doing this, a heritage would be secured for the people, who need to develop a new attitude towards the role of the artist in the advancement of society." In talking about the conservation of paintings, Locke cited examples of what he called "horrors committed on paintings in the National Collection." One he mentioned was Denis Williams' early self-portrait, an important work, which is torn, crinkled, and the oil paint is coming away from the canvas. Williams' Human World, in the 'gentle' hands of the History and Culture Council, will soon be in a similar condition.

There has been private patronage, but this has only scratched the surface in providing incentives for artists to work, and to further their interest through contact with each other. This must be continued and extended by official patronage. The Working People's Art Class proved that it could contribute but it could not solve the problem. It functioned for over ten years and perhaps some five hundred people passed through its classes; this increased their familiarity with art but still only about five of that number are painting today. Where is their interest now? They obviously needed something more, which government intervention could supply.



Locke has expressed some of the complexities facing art in British Guiana and his approach to the solution of some of these. We have also seen his ideas on art education. His philosophy of art is summed up in his own words: "For the developing countries, the sociological and nationalistic value of Art is incalculable. The activity of our artists is a sure indication of the quality of our civilisation. If we want to step out independently into the world, then, among other things, the work of our artists must also be able to bear the scrutiny of the 'World Outside'."

SUSAN GRAHAM