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ACTION AGAINST RACISM IN THE ARTS

Dear Action member:

In your immediate, concerned and very active response to the "nigger drawings" incident, you not only expressed your outrage at racism in all its forms, but you also signaled your commitment along with several others to struggle for the eradication of racism from the human experience. In our earlier meetings, we seemed to agree that although the requirements for our struggle would be personally sacrificial, often demanding more time and more creative, intellectual and material resources than each of us would normally wish to give, we must nevertheless share a moral responsibility to confront, expose and combat racism whenever and wherever it is found.

However, in spite of our original, enthusiastically stated, commitment to that task, and the fervor with which we demonstrated our indignation as we confronted Artists Space and the art establishment, a recession of our collective will and energy appears evident. While our attendance and input at important organizing and planning meetings wane, cross burnings symbolizing mounting hostility toward Afro-American and Jewish-American people, brutality-chic symbols such as the Patti Smith "Rock 'n' Roll Nigger" button, and other blatant forms of racism and anti-semitism of which we are all well-informed, flourish and gain intensity, nationally and internationally.

Rudolph Baranick, who while in England last summer, discovered a London artists' organization which has taken up the task of combating racism in the arts and elsewhere, wrote in an article for "Art Monthly" in London:

"The sordid little Donald affair can now be forgotten. The Coalition Against Racism in the Arts is attempting to clarify the disease of which this affair was one small symptom. Because of a decade of the anti-war movement, because of the Black artists movement and because of feminism in the arts, we had grown to believe that the arts remain essentially liberal. True, we knew better than that, but the general aura lingered. Then our own small version of the 'Deer Hunter' came to remind us...."

But how many of our own small versions of "The Deer Hunter" do we need to keep us reminded, to keep us thinking, to keep us creatively active, to keep us fighting to prevent our being overtaken by yet another "Deer Hunter", larger and more devastating than any we have known.

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One of my most meaningful, most hopeful and most gratifying experiences has been getting to know and to work with the many creative people who came together to form Action Against Racism in the Arts. Somehow it is extremely difficult for me to believe or to accept that we would deny each other the opportunity to share a more serious relationship in the struggle for equal justice and respect for all people. That is why I look forward to Wednesday, October 17, 1979 at 7:30 pm as a time of re-grouping and commitment to the job that needs to be done.

Yours in the struggle,

Cliff Joseph / *ham*
Cliff Joseph

GENERAL MEETING

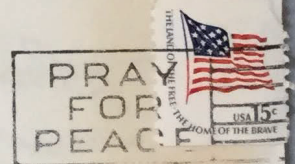
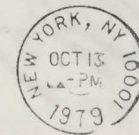
Wednesday
October 17, 1979
7:30 pm
at
Westbeth Community Space
151 Bank Street
Manhattan

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RACISM
IN THE ARTS



Joan Mathews
49 Eighth Ave.
NY NY 10014

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ACTION AGAINST RACISM IN THE ARTS

MEETING

June 13, 1979
Wednesday

97 Wooster Street (near Spring Street)
6th Floor (Rudolf Baranik)

7:30 pm

Agenda: Committee Reports (Exhibition, Alternative Space,
and Funding Committees)
Discussion of Arts Magazine and Artworkers News
articles

Recent articles for or against protest:

"Art," by Lawrence Alloway, The Nation, May 26, 1979, p. 608

"Art World Apartheid," by Elizabeth Hess, Seven Days, May 18, 1979
p. 27-28

"Donald, 'The Nigger Drawings'," by Peter von Brandenburg, Arts
Magazine, June 1979, p. 125-127

Artworkers News, June, 1979 issue

"Artful Dodger," by Gerald Marzorati, Soho News, May 31, 1979

Lucy Lippard has directed an exhibition, Art from the British Left, which will be on view at Artists Space, June 16-July 14, 1979. This is the first in a series of no-budget, social awareness shows Lucy Lippard hopes to see organized in the next year.

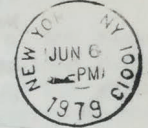
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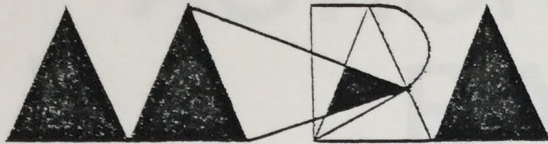
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**ACTION
AGAINST RACISM
IN THE ARTS**

463 West Street B942 New York, N.Y. 10014 923-2437 691-1426

EXHIBITION
COMMITTEE

Chairman:
Cliff Joseph

Lowiss Kagan
Barbara McPhail
Charles Mingus III
Susan Ortega
Francine Tyler

STATEMENT

In February 1979 an exhibition called "Nigger Drawings" opened at the NYSCA-funded Artists Space. A recent study of NYSCA funding by Action Against Racism in the Arts found that this space received \$77,343 for the fiscal year 1978/79. The amount of NYSCA grants to Afro-American, Hispanic, Asian-American and Native American Alternative Exhibition spaces for the same fiscal year ranged from \$1,500 to \$7,500.

On June 11, 1980 the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened its American Wing. The new space houses a large collection of American painting, sculpture, and decorative art ranging from pre-Revolutionary to the present time. Native American and Afro-American artists are grossly underrepresented in the wing. A museum spokesperson has gone so far as to state publicly on a network news broadcast that nineteenth century Afro-American art is "not what we consider fine art."

These incidents are not accidents. They are part of the pattern of racism in the United States. The misrepresentation of the multinational character of American art grows from and serves racist attitudes. The same ideology that denies the validity of a multiracial culture justifies the economic and social oppression of non-white people in the United States. The Boards of Directors of major cultural institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art are the same people who run the banks and multinational corporations. These banks and corporations also control the music and publishing industries. They redline our urban neighborhoods at the same time that they grant loans to support the apartheid regime of South Africa. Their representatives in government drastically curtail and close needed public facilities such as Sydenham and other hospitals and our public schools. They exploit the national resources, labor, and culture of Black, Asian, and Latin peoples as they seek cheap labor abroad, closing United States factories and adding to the mass unemployment at home.

As American artists of various national backgrounds and racial identities, we seek to express the multinational, multiracial character of American culture-- a rich heritage which has enhanced and deepened our art. Our work has been denied appropriate recognition.

As visual artists we add our voices to the outcry against all forms of racism. We must build a powerful multiracial cultural apparatus to combat the distorted presentation of what is promoted as American art. We must insist on our rightful inclusion in the history of American visual arts by demanding retrospectives in our major cultural institutions of Afro-American, Hispanic, Asian-American and Native American artists. We must demand affirmative action employment practices in the cultural field. We can act through our art in unity.

We see the exhibition "VOICES EXPRESSING WHAT IS" as both a creative statement against racism and an affirmation of the quality of art which represents the vast majority of American people, rather than the privileged minority.

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ACTION AGAINST RACISM IN THE ARTS

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"Action Against..."

Nov-1980

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ACTION AGAINST RACISM IN THE ARTS

“Almost at once, the stench of southern jails, cocked guns, dog bites, and the ever present red-screaming cries of “nigger” were around me. The time was not 1962, however, as a child caught between the desegregation of Columbus, Ohio schools; it wasn’t my life’s experience in Georgia, the Carolinas, Mississippi, or Alabama, but it was New York City, 1979, challenging the very existence of myself and other Blacks: challenging my very existence as a human being.”

The Event: a white male artist exhibits a series of charcoal drawings. The work is abstract, consistent with work shown in established, prestigious galleries. The artist calls his work, “The Nigger Drawings”. The gallery sponsoring him is Artists Space, an “alternative” space designed for young artists who do not have galleries. Artists Space receives the majority of its funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

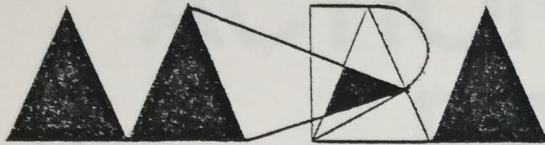
This exhibition was unique only in its open expression of racism. Racial discrimination pervades the whole of the art world, including publicly funded “alternative” spaces. Even those spaces created especially for minority artists are discriminated against by being drastically underfunded. The exhibition “The Nigger Drawings” points up this discrimination: while this artist gets support for his show the art world fails to provide minority artists the opportunity to express and define themselves.

It should not be surprising that a prestigious art institution sponsors an overt racist gesture at this time. The efforts initiated in the 1960’s to draw Blacks and other minority groups into the “mainstream”—the programs for better education, housing, health services and job training—are now judged inessential. When the economy is slow and jobs are scarce, Black health and well-being become dispensable. This trend has been accompanied by a resurgence of both covert and explicit racism. “The Nigger Drawings” introduces to the art world a new form of racism: brutality chic.

In brutality chic, social pathologies masquerade as new-found virtues. Racism, sexism, poverty, social violence and repression emerge in glamorized form. Brutality chic is the cultural front of today’s backlash. “The Nigger Drawings” not only reflects that backlash but also strengthens it.

As individuals in the arts, it is our responsibility to oppose racism as it confronts and divides us.

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ACTION AGAINST RACISM IN THE ARTS

MEETING

May 10, 1979
Thursday

476 Broadway (between Broome and Grand)
6th floor (Ronnie Tendler)

7pm

Agenda: To discuss goals and activate task forces:

Committee for Meeting with Artists Space Board and Staff
Committee for Meeting Other Alternative Spaces and Other Art World Spaces Staff
Committee for Producing Visual Material
New York State Council and Other Funding Bodies Committee
Exhibition Against Art World Racism Committee
Artists as Educators Committee
Information Distribution Committee
Legal Committee

Important: There will be a conference sponsored by Carol Bellamy which will be held Saturday, May 19 at City Hall. The conference is titled Brushing up on the Arts and will include a panel Special Problems of Women in Minorities. Although it is free, reservations are necessary. For reservations and information call 964-2595 or contact the organizer, Debbi Edison at 566-3890. It is important to attend the conference in order to direct questions to the various participants who will include Carol Bellamy, Henry Geldzahler, Bob Mayer (NYSCA), Doris Freedman and Mayor Koch. Registration will be at City Hall at 9am. on the 19th.