

Artists criticise media

By Stephen K. Effah

MEMBERS of Art in Social Structures (AISS), an NGO have criticised the Ghanaian media for the little attention being given art and artists in the country leading to low interest in art among the people.

They explained that art is fundamental to civil societies and important that a community's creative resources are preserved and nurtured for its own growth and for future generations.

The members indicated that the situation has made it difficult for people to take up art and or take artists seriously in the country.

The group made the remarks at a "Journalists Art Criticism Workshop" in Accra designed to whip up the interest of journalists with little or no art

training to become engaged with visual culture.

Conceptualised by Dr. Joe Nkrumah, a former Director of the National Museum of Ghana, the workshop

created a platform for the journalist participants to discuss and evaluate some art work after they were taken through the elements of art and key ingredients in critiquing art work.

Senam Okudzeto, President of the AISS said due to the absence of art critique in the country, "the people don't feel their relationship with art.

Through the media every will be able to see, share and appreciate art".

She observed that although Ghana abounds in visual art, most Ghanaians do not appreciate it and its media too has not done enough to promote it," adding "the newspapers are saturated with politics"

She said that there are a number of popular musicians, artists, writers, authors and architects whose work abroad advertise Ghana as a site of cultural excellence and are internationally lauded as global leaders in culture, yet are virtually known in their own country.

Ms.Okudzeto who is an international artists, said that local artists such as Agblade Glover, Victor Butler and Kofi Settojee who are in the country receive little media attention, though they are very respected abroad.

She said it is important that Ghanaians are made aware of the achievements of their artists both locally and internationally.

She said the AISS is much committed in encouraging a creative and practical discourse about art and contemporary life in the country.

Contributing, Dr. Audrey Gadzekpo, Ag. Director of the School of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana said art is intrinsic to us as people, saying "we wear art in our daily lives."

She said it is the responsibility of the media to bring the meaning of art to the people in order for them to have interest in art. "You should write in such a way that will interest them," adding "We should not say people are not interested"

It is important that journalists critically look at what art is in our culture and tell it to their readers and listeners, she said, noting that Ghanaian journalists have left the stories of the country's culture to be told by "outsiders".

Dr. Gadzekpo urged journalists to promote the beautiful things in the country's culture most of which she noted are fundamental to art.

She indicated that art and artefacts within our society tells us that civilisation was there long before the Europeans came to Africa.

On his part, Godfried Donkor, a Ghanaian international artist, urged the Ghanaian media to look critically at the country's culture and create wealth out of it through art. He said historical sites like James Town in Accra should be designated as heritage sites.



Ms Okudzeto (left) speaking to some visitors at an AISS exhibition last week

MIXED BAG

NORWAY has opened the world's first ecological jail.

Bastøy Prison, situated on an island 50 miles south of Oslo grows its own organic food and is entirely self-sufficient. Inmates tend to chickens, sheep and cows and supplement their diets with locally caught fish.

Surplus produce is sold to other prisons. "It's part of our way to make inmates take responsibility," deputy governor Per Eirik Lund told *The Independent*.

The prisoners have also helped install solar panel on the buildings, reducing the electricity bill by around 70 per cent.

Norway has one of the world's most liberal prison regimes. Inmates on the island are not locked up at night, and the maximum sentence for any crime is 21 years.

"You can either make prison pure punishment, or you can try and make inmates into good neighbours, to do something positive," Lund explained.

GERMANY Army is having to reject almost half of its yearly intake of conscripts in the grounds that they are too fat and too unfit.

In 2002, 19 per cent of those called up for the obligatory nine-month period of military service were rejected for medical reasons.

Last year that figure leapt to 45 per cent. While poor diet and sedentary lifestyles may be partly to blame, the

Central Office of Conscientious Objectors (KDV) claims that in some cases, sympathetic doctors are colluding with unwilling but otherwise healthy recruits to pronounce them unfit for service.

The issue of national service is highly emotive in Germany. Its supporters say that an army of "citizens" is a guarantee against extremism.

Its detractors say that in the modern age, a fully professional army would be much more effective.

USA A MAN who was accused for a murder even the authorities admit he did not commit has won a last-minute reprieve.

Kenneth Foster was with a gang that went on a robbing spree in San Antonio in 1996.

He was at the wheel of the getaway car when fellow gang member Mauriceo Brown accosted another man, Michael LaHood, on the pavement some 80ft away.

When LaHood failed to hand over his wallet Brown shot him dead, a crime for which he was executed last year.

But Foster was also found guilty of murder under a Texan law which holds that an accomplice can be held responsible if he could have "anticipated" that a killing might take place.

Foster was reprieved just seven hours before his planned execution after the Texan Board of Pardon voted in favour of clemency by 6-1.

CHINA LONG stretches of China's Great Wall are in danger of crumbling into the

desert, owing to the effects of sandstorms and erosion.

The wall once stretched for nearly 4,000 miles, but today only about 1,550 miles still stand.

It is disappearing most rapidly in the northwestern Gansu Province, where 25 miles have been worn away in the past 20 years by the encroaching Badain Jaran desert.

Other sections have crumbled from a height of five metres to just two metres in the same period.

Since the fifties, sources of underground water have dried up (due, in part, to poor farming practices), and as a result the desert has expanded.

Conservationists in Gansu are trying to cover the threatened parts of the wall with a layer of sand and dirt in a bid to protect it from further damage.

A police forensics expert from Michigan has been sacked for using lab facilities to test her husband's underpants for DNA.

Ann Chamberlain, 33, admitted during divorce proceedings that she had run forensic tests on her husband's underwear at the State Police laboratory because she suspected he was cheating on her.

Asked what the results showed, she replied: "Another female. It wasn't me."

LATVIA A MAN from Latvia tried to save money on a seven-hour ferry ride by hiding his 66-year-old father and two children in the boot of his car.

The 37-year-old miser was arrested

while en route from Palma to Barcelona.

UK WHAT with traffic on the roads, jet planes passing overhead, party-loving neighbours, and boom-box blaring drivers, noise has become one of the great menaces of modern life, says *The Guardian*.

But according to the World Health Organisation, "environmental noise" is not just a nuisance; it's also a potential killer that is ultimately responsible for three per cent of all cases of coronary heart disease in Europe. In the UK that equates to 3,000 deaths each year.

The figure was reached by examining the links between noise and health in a number of European countries, and comparing death rates in households with high levels of noise exposure to those in quiet areas.

In addition to the effects on coronary health, the study found that two per cent of Europeans have their sleep severely disrupted by noise, and 15 per cent suffer from severe annoyance.

Earlier studies have shown that noise can increase the levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, in the body - even when we are sleeping.

All this is happening imperceptibly," said Professor Deepak Prasher of University College London.

Excerpts from *The Week Magazine*.

THIS AND THAT

By Akosua Kesewa Gyampo

Dongome!

I SWITCHED on the radio, hoping to catch the evening news. Instead, I caught what turned out to be the last sentence of a speaker which went something like this: "GBC is not for sale!" There was an applause, a rather prolonged one. My husband came into the room to hear the tail end of the applause.

"What's going on?" he asked. "I don't know but it appears someone wants to sell GBC."

"Oh that," Kwame said, rather dismissively. "But who wants to sell the place?" I asked. "Don't ask me Akos, but it looks like we want to flog every public institution in this country. Just what's the matter with us?" the man sounded frustrated.

I did not answer the question because I did not know what the matter was with us. But the man went on to lament on the causes of his frustration.

He mentioned the sale of the public hotels like the Continental, the Ambassador, the Star and so on. He also cited the Bonsaso Tyre Factory and the Rubber Plantation which used to produce car tyres for the local market and for export.

"But Kwame they were not sold, they were divested," I pointed out.

"That's just another word for dongome, we just put a bell on our national inheritance and sell them because we are not able to run them efficiently."

"But GBC is not a tyre producing factory," I hinted.

"No it's not, it is a national heritage which should not be flogged like second-hand clothing."

That place was fashioned after the BBC in the UK to play an important national role. It should stand tall over all other private radio stations and stand independent from all ideological or their partisan considerations.

"Variety is the spice of life and the other radio stations put a lot of spice on the airwaves, I say," I said.

"A lot of spice if only they would work within the code of ethics demanded by the industry. Some of these radio stations are notorious for putting oblique reportage in their news cast," he said.

I reminded him that every FM station should have its own policy on content and orientation. But the man was not impressed. He wanted to know what stations' policy or orientation has to do with flogging GBC.

"Behaving like ostriches is not the best way to get public institutions to get their act right. Putting dongome on Ghana Water is not the best way to get water flowing through our pipes. Putting dongome on the Agricultural Development Bank is a complete misjudgement."

"Why this?" I wanted to know. Kwame explained that the ADB was originally established to serve the specified needs of the farming community of the country and that so far it had been serving this purpose.

As an economist, he was aware of the expertise available at the ADB and the human face with which the bank operates its business. He said that he was aware of many people changing from their current bankers to ADB. "Now we want to sell it...why?"

I did not have an answer to the question so I decided to ask one myself: "So what would you do to GBC?"

"First, I will find out why anybody wants to sell the organisation. If it's due to underperformance, I will find out the cause and correct it."

"I know that the private radio and television stations operate on scant staff who are well paid and therefore produce the quality programmes that meet the competition in the market."

"Then what?" I asked.

Kwame laughed and said that if he had his way, he would put on the divestiture whoever mooted the idea of selling GBC. He said he could even do better by putting this person in the market place, grab a bell, ring it several times and shout: "Dongome...dongome!"

"Then what?"

"Sell him off for cheap. What else?"

"Well, I would rather ring a bell and shout GBC is not for sale!"

"You've changed your mind then?" he asked.

"Yes Kwame, I have considered all that you've said about this and that," I said.