

Post-Task: Evolving your African and Jazz Poetry

For Lefifi, to create poems, you have to think like a poem and be the poem. Many think poetry is arranging words in stanzas, forging some rhyme, and standing up to explain the poem. How awful can that be? Poetry is rather the practice of one's ability to perceive.

Lefifi's training programme is called "Word Consciousness". He uses word consciousness to sensitize writers about words, about language and its many possible applications. Many would-be artists are word blind, or even word deaf. They fail to perceive the feeling, time and breath of a word, which is inherent in the African experience of the indigenous poetic renditions of the Praise singer-poet, the Imbongi, and of the participative performances of drums, hand-clapping and dance.

Writing, chanting and reciting in our mother tongues, allows one to navigate, to discover and re-create the depth and breadth of these languages. Lefifi writes in seTswana and sePedi. These are languages that are very rich in proverbs, metaphors, allegories, axioms and aphorisms. The cultural context, history, cosmology and vision of these languages is totally different from English. As Lefifi says, "The British perception is 'beauty is in the eyes of the beholder and the African is , 'Beauty beholds the elevated sense!'"

The most important colourists in South Africa

Lefifi is a very good painter. He was taught by Harvey Cropper in Stockholm, Sweden. Colour theory is one of the most basic teachings but it is crucial. Harvey told Lefifi, "If you want to be a good artist, 'my boy read, read, read.'"

Harvey had a unique style of writing letters. He had an incredible letter from his girlfriend based in Japan. The letter was 1 metre by 1 metre in size. And Lefifi adopted this style. The biggest letter he wrote was 20m by 1m in size. No one had written such a letter to other artists. Some of the letters Lefifi wrote were like books, 78 pages long. A beautiful and challenging letter he wrote was on the back of a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle. Lefifi put this puzzle together, turned it upside down and wrote a letter on the back. He then mixed the puzzle up again, put it into an envelope and sent it. To read the letter, the receiver had to first put the jigsaw puzzle together again, turn it upside down and then read.

The significance of documentation and archiving

Lefifi Tladi has developed a life-long habit to preserve, keep records, store his artworks properly and grow art libraries in Mabopane, Tshwane and in Stockholm, Sweden, with Arts Ubuntu in Cape Town and with Capital Arts Revolution in Pretoria.

What he has created and what he has collected, therefore, becomes a heritage tool. It exists in space and time so we may have pride in it, and be able to share it as a tool of education for emergent artists. Documentation and archiving keeps the memory alive.

"Why are our museums still like graveyards? Why do they remain so irrelevant in the history and artistic evolution of today? Why are they not borrowing from the memorialisation methods in our indigenous system?" These are some of the questions that still plague Lefifi. He wishes to re-introduce people's shrines in the heritage landscape. Shrines are spaces of respect, remembrance and ritual.

What makes us South African?

1. The name: All countries when they become independent adopt a name. South West Africa became Namibia. Bechuanaland became Botswana. Northern Rhodesia became Zambia, Southern Rhodesia became

Zimbabwe. Gold Coast became Ghana, Upper Volta became Burkina Faso but South Africa still refers to a location. Let us hope a proper name is still unfolding.

2. The flag: The South African flag today is a flag of national unity and includes the colours of the ANC and Nationalist Party cut and pasted together. It was meant to be transitional, that is, to function only for that 5 years when De Klerk was vice president to Mandela's Presidency. It is time now for young artists to design a new flag that represents the energy of the country.

3. The national anthem: *Nkosi Sikilele iAfrica* was written for the collective of Africa during colonial days and was sung in languages of Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The South African national anthem has cut and paste this with *Die stem van Suid Africa*. It is time for the poets to come together and write a national anthem that represents the spirit of the people.

4. The currency: All countries when they become independent give their currencies a name. Lesotho has Loti, eSwatini has Lilangeni, Botswana has Pula. Ethiopians have the Birr. And South Africa is still beholden to the Kruger Rand!

Post-task Questions

1. How has Lefifi's Word Consciousness started to change how you write, how you perceive and how you recite and present your poetry? Please re-work one of your poems following these teachings and share the outcome with us and other artists.

2. Emulate Lefifi in writing a letter as a creative product. Use differentiated calligraphies, fonts, collage, montage, and imagery to create a letter that is 1metre by 1metre. Share the letter with other poets and painters and send it to us too.

3. Imagine yourself standing in front of a Grade 12 arts class, and teaching the Matriculants about your process in creating a poem, a painting and music. Use the Afrocentric approach to bring the African experience to the centre of your lecture. Share with us the bullet points of your presentation.

4. Your project in documentation and archiving should be a scrap book with striking, attractive texts, photos, graphics, poems and drawings, that preserve some items from your poems and your visual art output. Please photograph the scrap book and share with us and other artists.