

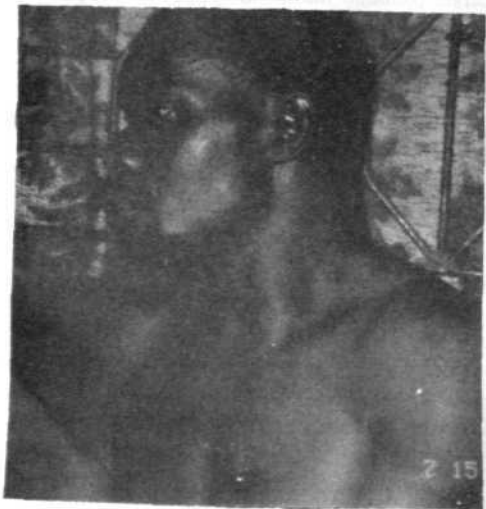
1989 to N5 in 1994, may not be the same because of rising costs. When times were better, he says, the newsletter was published with N2,500, but the situation has changed considerably.

'It wasn't initially designed as a profitable venture but to stand on its own and to be circulated free of charge. If for instance we got a little assistance from advertisers in terms of improved advertising support, that could cover the overheads and we could afford to circulate free. But the assistance has to be appropriate; it should not be the proverbial gift horse with pre-conditions,' Shitta says.

Publishing *Arts Illustrated Weekly* has been an outgrowth of Shitta's career as a dedicated photographer of the arts and artists. He started devoting exclusive attention to cultural photography in 1983 and declares the performer to be the primary focus of his photography, 'because performing is a transient art form. A painting is permanent and can always be admired after it has been exhibited, but a concert is something that is not always there. That's why I give performers emphasis. When I attend exhibitions, it is as an event, to photograph the personalities who will be present, and not the works.'

His larger purpose, however, is to have a photo-library on every Nigerian artist and performer of contemporary times so that anybody from any part of the world can tap into an on-line computer network and get the information he needs on any artist or visual. This documentation which he started a long time ago is continuous.

'Anything may happen to me, but if I have this information where others can reach it and use it for the benefit of all then it won't have been a wasted effort.'



Hakeem Shitta

AFRICA CENTRE,

LONDON

Sets New Goals

ADOTEY BING

On January 18 after about two years of planning, the Africa Centre played host to a group of invited business people, diplomats, members of the British arts establishment, journalists and well-wishers who were treated to a twenty minute slide presentation of the Centre's plans to become a flagship for Africa in Europe.

The presentation, given by myself and Ms Elizabeth Biggin (its development officer for public relations and fund-raising), was preceded by a short but powerful speech by the High Commissioner for Uganda, Professor George Kirya, who is on the Council of Management for the Africa Centre as one of the three representatives of African High Commissioners and Ambassadors to Great Britain.

The presentation consisted of a brief history of the Centre, an introduction to the building, an overview of its events, an outline of the redevelopment plan, the support received to date and the fund raising strategy.

The Africa Centre was established in 1961, and formally opened in 1964 by Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, then President of Zambia. In 1968 it purchased 38 King Street, in London's Covent Garden, which at the time was the site of London's main fruit and vegetable market. Today Covent Garden is one of London's major tourist attractions.

The Centre is a stone's throw from the Royal Opera, and is close to Bush House from which the BBC's Africa service is broadcast, the Savoy Hotel, Trafalgar Square with its famous Nelson's Column and the National Gallery. Four Africa High Commissions - those of Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa - are within four

minute's walking distance.

The list of Africans that have spoken or performed at the Centre over the past three decades reads like a roll call of Africa's

brightest. They include Wole Soyinka, Mahtar m'Bow, Presidents Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and Yoweri Museveni, OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Right Reverend Desmond Tutu, Gracia Machel, Chinua Achebe, Bernard Chidzero, Sally Mugabe, Ousman Sembene and Ben Okri. Among British politicians that have spoken at the Centre are Malcolm Rifkind, Baroness Chalker and David Steel.

The Centre's exhibition of Zimbabwean stone sculptures at the Barbican in 1988 was opened by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales. Artists such as Malagatana and Ablade Glover have exhibited there.

The Centre's present building, which is of considerable historic interest, houses a restaurant, bar, book shop, craft centre, meeting rooms, a gallery and resource room. Over 160,000 people visit it each year. From 1776 when the doors first opened, it has served a number of different purposes. For the bulk of the time it was the Stephens Auction Rooms.

The purpose of the plan is to provide an attractive, functional and inviting building, inform and educate people about Africa through high profile events about African arts, culture and opinion, and - last but by no means least - make the Centre's building financially self-sustaining.

The plan will involve re-designing the Centre's programmes and extensively redevelop-

ing the building, as well as improving the Centre's links with African institutions and African organisations in Europe.

The Centre's programmes have been divided into two broad categories, one dealing with African people, beliefs, art and culture and the other with African society, economics, politics and modern thought. All methods including talks, exhibitions, fairs, festivals, seasons, conferences and workshops, will be employed.

While their general purpose is to inform and educate people about Africa and African affairs, they are intended to provide an opportunity for Africans to speak to and be heard by the rest of the world on any issue, our goal thereby being to encourage dialogue between those with influence in both societies.

When the redevelopment has been completed, the basement will house a lecture and conference theatre with 1,400 square feet of multimedia space for about 90 people. This space, which will be excavated, will also be utilised as a cinema to show films about and from Africa. The space will spill over into seminar rooms and classrooms. At the front, the bar will be extended to provide a more pleasant space.

On the ground floor, there will be a triple height space at the front with access into the building over a ramp. The ground floor reception desk will be the first port of call for all visitors to the building. The proposed glass frontage will allow people to see the activities taking place within the building. Alongside the reception will be the entrance to the craft centre and shop and further down will be the entrance to the 100 seat restaurant, which will be visible from the street.

The restaurant will be open from morning to late at night seven days a week and will be a venue buzzing with movement and life. It will be a magnet for the estimated 12 million visitors a year to the Covent Garden area. All Africa Centre staff will be relocated to a new administrative block which will be built at the rear of the building. A business plan has been prepared and shows that these objectives are complementary, realisable and sus-

tainable.

In June last year these proposals were placed before the OAU Council of Ministers who issued a resolution on the Africa Centre, which was subsequently endorsed by the Summit of Heads of State. The resolution welcomed the Africa Centre's initiative in putting together its redevelopment plan, called for support from African governments, busi-

nesses and cultural institutions, and appealed to the international community to help the centre achieve its objectives.

The Centre is hoping that it will be able to secure funding from the proceeds of the recently started National Lottery, which sets aside twenty-five per cent of its income to support cultural, sports, heritage, charities and other organisations. In addition, it is looking to companies with interest in Africa, the European Union and the ACP, as well as to Africa governments to help raise the estimated £2.7m required to implement the capi-

tal project.

About four years ago action by a number of African governments in particular Nigeria, Uganda and Botswana helped to save the Centre from having to sell its building and relocate. It is hoped that Africa will play its part in helping to realise the plan.

Some success has already been scored in raising money for its new roof and urgently needed repairs. The Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the Baring Foundation have between them donated £200,000. However, the terms of their contribution means that an additional £50,000 has to be raised from other sources before the work can proceed. The Centre is therefore attempting to raise the remaining £50,000 and to carry out these works in time for **africa 95**, the major season of African art that will be held in Britain from August to December this year.

Anyone who helps will be acknowledged and those who do so to a substantial degree, for example by sponsoring the restaurant, conference centre, cinema, or gallery, will have that part of the building named after them.

An Africa Centre acting as a flagship for Africa could provide insight into African world views through exhibitions of both traditional and contemporary art. It could also inform people of what Africans think about the con-

temporary world.

Africans in business, the arts, the media, government and academia should come to regard the centre as a place from which they can speak to their counterparts in Europe on any issue of human interest. By the same token it would come to be regarded by Europeans as the place from which to learn about African ideas on any matter. In short, it could be a place for ideas as well as images. With assistance from those mentioned, we hope to be able to open the doors to the new Africa Centre early in 1997. **GR**

