

ART AND PEACE (1966)

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The peace of diplomatists is not the only peace; spectacular and necessary, it does not necessarily last.

Real peace must spring from the heart of the people. When feelings are in harmony then you have real peace. In the history of society, the communities who have succeeded in understanding each other, through each going beyond the other's sensibility,¹ experience that deep peace which is the basis of a new common civilization, large or small according to the peoples of which it is made up.

That peace leads to the universal civilization for which Léopold Sédar Senghor has been hoping for many years.

But harmony between different sensibilities is the result of much fervor and patience, a delicate task at various different levels, because it is the peoples' royal task.

There is religulous sensibility (not to be confused with faith or dogma); it is not easy to acquire since only the proper authorities may take initiatives.

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1 Throughout Bagnières's translation, *sensibilité* is translated as "sensibility."

Paradoxically each is [a] trustee of its own orthodoxy and therefore finds it difficult to understand the others.² We must however admire the great work accomplished by Vatican II of which the positive effects will make themselves felt in the various human societies.

There is also moral sensibility, which is often after the pattern of a community's civilization.³ The misunderstandings, too numerous in this case, are often the cause of cruel conflicts. It is at this level that UNESCO works steadfastly to fight racism⁴ and ignorance, to organize cultural, artistic and intellectual exchanges and to knock down the barriers separating different cultures.

Finally there is artistic sensibility, in which understanding, when it occurs, brings the joys of friendship. Art calls up neither hidden motives nor hate, but love. Nations can be condemned for their beliefs or their customs, but never in the name of art.

That is why, after working for many years (and especially through the two International Congresses of Negro Writers and Artists) to arouse interest in African writers, thinkers and scientists, we have decided to turn our attention to the artists. They are little known. Generally speaking, they are not given their proper place, lost as they are in surroundings often indifferent or hostile to their talent or their problems. International opinion takes great interest in politicians, and more recently in intellectuals, but hardly ever in Negro artists.

The worst aspect is the isolation of these artists.⁵ Yet one imagines the amount they would benefit from exchanging their decisive, isolated experiences whose value—technical, psychological, and cultural—is indisputable. An extremely fruitful interdependence⁶ could be the result and this would strengthen our civilization through new connexions [*sic*] between works and between artists. For an artist a «dialogue» [*sic*] of this sort is a safeguard and also a step ahead.⁷

But the artist is not alone in the world. He is part of a community and as a rule his place in it has an influence on his creativity.

There is a regrettable paradox: on one hand the western public (to

2 *Paradoxalement, gardienne chacune de son orthodoxie, elles semblent chacune mal placée pour aider à comprendre les autres.*

3 *Il existe une sensibilité morale (qui coïncide aisément avec la civilisation d'une communauté).*

4 Here, I [Lauren Taylor] have slightly amended Bagnières's original text, which translated racism to racialism.

5 *Le plus grave est que ceux-ci se connaissent peu, entre eux.*

6 *solidarité*

7 *Une telle confrontation est une source d'assurance et de progrès pour chaque artiste.*

only have appreciated Negro art)⁸ does not understand the message of the traditional sculptor, and on the other hand the artist of today (like the modern poet, is better appreciated by the west than by his own fellow countrymen).

It remains for us, therefore, to help the artist and his people to understand each other, and to bring the African people up to date with the modern world. If there is sympathy between an artist and his fellow countrymen, the latter are then following their national vocation as a privileged public, a privileged audience, empowered to judge and eventually to honour the artist's works.⁹ Then the prestige these can gain in world opinion will vary according to the value given to them by the African community.

Such an understanding between artists and their African public presupposes, it is true, that the people have knowledge and understanding of themselves, that is their tradition, and that the stocktaking as it were of their heritage brings them face to face with the major problems of modern art. Nowadays the purpose of a work of art is not merely to arouse admiration, nor to integrate the individual in the security of his social world, nor to ensure his spiritual growth and maturity. In our day art is more likely to provoke anxiety, contesting tradition, calling the universe and social order in question, proclaiming and extolling the irreducible peculiarity¹⁰ of the author, in certain cases even his lack of balance. Modern times provide the means for a confrontation of all the metamorphosis of the great themes in art, facilitating the creation of Malraux's "musée imaginaire", thereby establishing a new scale of values, and stimulating creative imagination. Modern art fires our enthusiasm, inciting us to write the splendid history of humanity. . . . This is all very well, but has the African world reached this stage? Moreover, do we need to go through the same succession of experiences as the western world? Nothing is less sure.

What is certain is that we have to interpret our past in the light of modern knowledge. We must reinstate our artists, both modern and traditional, in the Negro community so that we may offer the world works which have gained in value through our common faith in an African

8 *(le seul qui ait internationalement valorisé l'art nègre)*

9 *Une volonté de dialogue entre l'artiste et son peuple doit restituer à celui-ci sa vocation naturelle de consommateur privilégié de ces œuvres et d'autorité culturelle légitime pour les juger et consacrer éventuellement.*

10 *singularité*

Negro civilization. In this task of creation and expression we shall then surely be playing our part in human civilization and bringing it what mankind silently awaits from us.

It was with the intention of opening the way towards these prospects, of discovering new vocations in African Negro art, that we have invited artists, critics, specialists and friends.¹¹

May this Festival be the Negro world's opportunity of bringing its own offering to the cause of peace.

So that all living peace may take root among all peoples, all cultures, races and religions, the deep peace which is nothing other than love.¹²

TRANSLATED BY ANGELA BAGNIÈRES

11 . . . *qui nous avons invité artistes, critiques, experts et amis de l'Afrique.*

12 Here I have changed the translation slightly; originally it read "the deep peace which nothing else than love."