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An old converted church on the outskirts of Woodstock is a ferment now for the art of the people. The Community Arts Project has about 300 part-time and full-time students attending classes in various art disciplines. Weekend Argus reporter DALE LAUTENBACH visited CAP to find out just how the present strife is being reflected in art — traditionally a barometer of any society's anguish. Artists at work there are tuned in to the turmoil and what they are doing — be it painting or theatrical presentation — is sounding the warning.

# Giving expression to the nightmare

"PREVIOUSLY our work would have been happier — but there's too much tension now. Before, what was happening was happening far away, in Sebokeng and places like that. We knew about it and we cared but now its happening right here — to us — and it's changed, our lives."

Cameron Voyiya is a young artist in his first year of full-time study at the Community Arts Project (CAP). His words explain a new edge to the concerns of the small group who travel from the townships each day to study painting, drawing and sculpture at the community centre in Woodstock.

## "Solution to the nightmare"

This is the first year CAP has offered a full-time art course. Each day the six students bring their "township experience" into the classroom. It is an experience reflected in their work as brutally as in a large banner showing Casspir, flames and street violence and as gently as in Cameron's self-portrait where he is playing the flute in a dream environment.

He explains another flute portrait, this one a linocut showing the sun rising.

"For me the coming of morning means a solution to the nightmare, the bringing of light."

Another project the group has tackled this year was building a cardboard Casspir.

"The idea came out of a hell of a lot of talking

about everything that is going on and how everyone was feeling about the situation. Our sculpture lecturer Lucy Alexander said we didn't have to do a realistic Casspir but one which showed how we felt about Casspirs — the menace."

Cameron's CAP colleague Billy Mandindi won a prize at the SA Association of Arts exhibition in Durban for his Casspir.

Most of the people who attend CAP (and the project caters for all ages including children who gather for drawing groups in the townships) do so on a part-time basis, but a drama group of nine students is reaching the conclusion of two-year full-time study period.

They speak with one voice when they say their production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, a work by two Kenyan playwrights, was one with which they related most.

"We felt good and strong about it," they say.

## "Peculiar interpretation"

Its presentation to the public was limited though — by order of the Publications Board — to two weeks at the Arena Theatre on the UCT campus. CAP's usual custom is to tour the townships with all their productions but *The Trial* was banned from this.

CAP project organiser Derek Joubert comments on the restriction: "The board said the play would incite black youth to acts of violence which I thought was a peculiar interpretation. I wondered



whether they'd heard of catharsis. We felt the play would cause people to reflect and this was proved because we bussed people in from the townships to see it and they left the theatre with shining faces. I didn't see any of them running out and reaching for rocks."

It was after another theatre group production, *The Great South African Circus*, which they expanded upon and workshopped with Mavis Taylor's direction, that CAP was first visited by the security police.

"I was asked whether I was a member of the ANC," says Derek. "They've been back four times since and are holding over a 1 000 items of work done here."

The CAP drama group will present *The Great South African Circus* at the UCT Arena Theatre soon. Clockwise from left: Andile Nyembezi, Paul Savage, Nomkhita Bavuma, Itumeleng Lehulere, S'manga Nhlelela, Xolani September, Thobeka Makqutyana, Denise Williams, John Jacobs.