

# Prison hasn't extinguished fiery convictions



"Orunmila"

Many of Mondo's sculptures and paintings have been shown throughout the state.

**Aunt Ruthie**  
by Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa

*the shutters on the window clatter  
the hail dash against the pane  
a spider do a funky butt dance on the sill  
while a cockeyed sparrow duck his head  
under one wing  
wishing the hail was rain*

*the old sofa dip like a swayback horse  
years done wore away the flowers  
roses made out of thread  
rubbed down to the cotton stuffing  
and grease spots mark the places  
where many a folks laid their heads*

*an old face squint toward the window  
a gnarled finger give the spider a tap  
send the spider trapezing 'cross the glass  
it fall when the silk rope snap*

*photos of loved ones on the coffee table  
entombed beneath the spotless glass  
aunt ruthie can't recall the names too good  
so many years gone past*

*the teapot whistle in an otherwise silent place  
aunt ruthie's bones to tired to creak  
things aunt ruthie'd like to say  
her mouth is too tired to speak*

*the door bell  
the telephone  
neither rings  
the mailbox stands empty outside  
its door dropped open like a sagging lip  
inside aunt ruthie shifts her aching body  
to ease the pain in her hip*

*night falls  
the hail subsides  
aunt ruthie drops her face  
her lashes tangle in the dark  
to hurry sleep along  
as a mouse crouch down in front of the stove  
to listen to the teapot song.*

## Mondo

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"What we do is a reflection of our beliefs. We can't keep that from happening."

Artists waste their time when they restrict themselves to subjects such as mud-covered leaves and little girls' tennis shoes, he says.

"There is value in talking about snow and wagon wheels and dust all over everything. There are things we need poets to interpret for us," he says. "But I can't conceive of being a poet or a painter or another kind of writer and to actually ignore real things, real significant things that are happening to people.

"It's rare to find in poetry coming out of Nebraska something about what is happening in Central America or what is happening with the homeless in this country or that addresses racism."

Artists have an important responsibility, Mondo says, because a poem or a painting can touch people in a way nothing else can.

"Art is something that penetrates into a person's spirit and allows the person to feel," he says. "So if you have this kind of power... art power... then it seems to me that in a way, you're betraying people by not making some use of that power."

Mondo thinks someone who is both political and spiritual is all the better for the mix.

"A person who is political but doesn't have the artist's vision can only go so far and then a wall grows up around the person," he says. "The brain can only take you so far or so high, but the spirit can take you other places."

Art and radical politics are actually one and the same, he says.

"Revolution automatically involves two things, destruction and construction. It seems to me that an artist is involved in exactly the same process."

Dick Herman, editorial page editor of the Lincoln Journal, says Mondo gives readers the viewpoint of the "articulate, angry black American."

**Some**  
by Wopashitwe Mondo  
Eyen we Langa  
*some africans in america born  
know african selves not  
no  
collar leash theyselves  
yes  
to white america  
hard and tight  
no can break away  
like tiny dog not break away  
from big master with monkey grip  
these more pets than pets  
master confident to know  
he let leash go  
these ones move not  
no  
but stand with timid eyes  
and feet stuck to concrete good  
move not 'til master say they should  
second guess him sometime awhile  
fetch the slippers  
put eyes to ground 'til master smile  
by some magic they black faces blush  
and feet shuffle fast to rush  
to the white mayor they trust  
give them keys to the city  
unlocking nothing at all for us.*

"I think he provides a perspective that our readers wouldn't get anywhere else, couldn't get anywhere else," Herman says.

Mondo doesn't consider himself an angry person, though. He says anger is like an acid that eats its container as well as its target.

"I'm just not that type of person."

Mondo likes to tease and is quick with one-liners. His piercing dark eyes sparkle when he laughs.

"I know peace," he says. "I am a happy person in spite of this place."

State Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha has known Mondo for about 20 years. He says Mondo sees the world differently than most.

"He is a visionary in the sense of being able to look beyond the present and see the big picture," Chambers says.

Mondo still wants his freedom, but on his terms. He says he seeks release on the basis of his innocence. As a result, he has neither tried to have his life sentence commuted nor sought a pardon.

He is convinced he won't spend the rest of his life in prison but wonders how he will fit into a world so different from the one he left.

"I feel like a f----- dinosaur sometimes," he says.

In a way, he is a relic. Other radicals from the 1960s and early 1970s went on to raise families and work full-time jobs. Along the way, many of them lost, or at least buried, their convictions.

"There was a sense that we really could overcome," he says. "Today it sounds so phony."

Yet he hasn't lost hope that others will again find the fervor and passion that possessed them.

Mondo says he feels a sense of urgency but doesn't allow this emotion to consume him. He could be compared to a hurricane.

Inside the gyre lies an immense calm.

"When you're doing things you believe in and you're true to yourself, there's a sense of peace -- regardless of how much turmoil is going on around you."

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