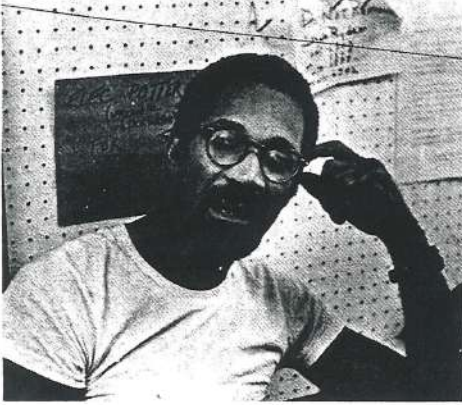


Perspective in Blacks

Clarence Overton —
Involved With Life

Editorial

(Cont'd from Page 1)

we've lacked in the past has been the motivation and most important, the cooperation.

To those who don't feel they have enough time to take an active part in the changes coming, we say, you can be effective and helpful. How? Simply by responding to the opinion polls that will appear in every issue. The polls are very important because only through them can we know for certain the thinking and ideas of the community. Your answers to the poll and your letters to the paper will be the strongest way to make our collective voices heard in the political arena.

The Staff

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patch-work jumpsuits, liberation buttons,
sunstreaked tie dye fabric,
aztec wall hangings, AND NUMEROUS
other objects d'art. Sherry Ladner
Maurice Phillips.

Clarence Overton, a tall man of about 6 feet 3 inches, with large hands and a body that moves expressively when he talks, born and raised on Staten Island, admits that he has been running most of his life.

He operates the Richmond Potters and Art Center in Port Richmond. One of ten children, he says he is the only non-conformist in the family. "My mother says to be so creative is a curse."

Leaving high school at 17, "I wanted to get me a uniform and go over and kill me a German and be a hero." He was sent to the Pacific. "I signed up for the E.T.O. and Sam sent me to the P.T.O., and my education began with that first lie from the man." Returning to Staten Island and trouble, his brother got him his first job in a shipyard. "My first real job was to break the job discrimination bit. We won that." After getting an equivalency diploma, he tried a number of schools. "I even tried dancing." Then came marriage, two children, and an eventual divorce.

QUESTION: You have a lot of things happening at your shop: Pottery, Dance, and Sculpturing. Do you consider yourself an artist?

OVERTON: No. I don't even know how you make that distinction. I know people who are machinists, and when I see them

work, they are to me artists.

QUESTION: Then what is an Artist?

OVERTON: I really don't know, a creative person, maybe, a weird person? I think I could make some kind of distinction, but it would only be revelant to me. I could say that because I work with many people who consider themselves artists, that most artists are continually trying to make a statement of some kind, in their own medium. It's like when you become, let's say, a photographer, you can put your camera in an A & P bag, and go do your thing. But when I see some one who keeps it on his belly with the phallic lens sticking out in front, I usually look at this type as one who has to grow.

QUES.: How did you start all this?

OVERTON: I didn't. It takes people. I never dreamed of a thing like this. Sherry Ladner teaches the dance groups; Natalie Surving teaches the kids pottery. Gene Arnold is not an artist, if I can use that word; but he is indispensable to the shop. But, he is an artist in his own way; as a matter of fact, we call him a genius. No one in his right mind would want to get into this if he was not insane.

QUES.: Do you consider yourself insane?

OVERTON: Well, it says in the Bible that the Lord knelt down and scooped up a handful of clay and made man. Well, I do feel that I may improve on Genesis. Wow, what a statement! I am in clay now, but I have been into so many mediums. I just had to go that way.

QUES.: Are you religious?

OVERTON: No, not in a formal sense, but I have my fantasies.

QUES.: Explain.

OVERTON: Well if I may disgress a moment. That artist person we talked about. Can you imagine that he might just be looking for that New Religion? I have often thought that the artist sees into the future and tries to let you know what he sees. Most artists have followings, like collectors, etc. Writers, poets, painters just try and do a political thing and see the reaction. It's because the artist has in some way let you in on whats up ahead or where you have been.

QUES.: What do you see?

OVERTON: Repression, man, repression. If you bought the American dream, you see one side. If you question that dream,

you see another side; but both sides will feel the repression. More and more people are beginning to question and find the structure cancerous. Democracy American style is malignant. Like, soon we have to go into Cambodia, to kill, to save lives in South Viet Nam. People just ain't buying that no more.

QUES.: What do you see as Black man or a Black artist?

OVERTON: Well, on the latter part, I tried being a Black artist and that's a trap bag. I think that my life style suggests that I would rather be out than in. If I had wanted that other thing, I would have gotten on the sanitation department, that's security and income, hospitalization, lifetime job, etc. But as a black man I still have to deal with the establishment. I don't like to, but to keep this thing together I have to. It's a cop-out, but I need the bread.

QUES.: What about your pet project?

OVERTON: The Black Man on Staten Island Project? Well, it's in sort of the same bag. It needs bread. And we have to go to the man and con him out of a few coins. We are currently trying to get some sort of a grant.

QUES.: We?

OVERTON: Yeh, a few people here in the studio — Black and White. We got together and put out an audio-visual presentation. It cost us, out of our own pockets, about a thousand dollars, in time and cash. We showed it to the community in the Museum, inviting all the dignitaries and organizations we could. We got one hundred and thirty five dollars back, and as far as the community is concerned, I guess it can just die there in the files. But, as long as I can, it will live. Some day, some black kid will be able to answer the question of what his forefathers did to get this Island gig going. The information we dug up is dynamite. It will be a great thing if we can do it. The need is so great for black as well as white.

QUES.: What does all of it mean to you? What is your statement?

OVERTON: I'm involved with life... still growing... getting my head together. My consciousness is only real to me... Hey that's it... an involvement with life. Just do your thing. You see, I'm lucky. I found it.