



Ernest Cole (1940 – 1990) was probably the finest documentary photographer of his generation

Apartheid through the lens

Despite terrible discrimination during the apartheid era, some exceptional individuals managed to shine through.

Ernest Cole is one of them. His photographs show a wonderful talent, so much so that the Apartheid Museum has dedicated a hall to his pictures. On the next page is a small taste of their power.

One of the installations in the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg is an exhibition of Cole's works. A black photographer, he told the story of the hardships and humiliations of blacks living under apartheid in the 1960s.

For white South Africa the 1960s was a decade of unprecedented prosperity. For blacks the 1960s saw apartheid harden into its most dogmatic and racist form.

After experiencing police harassment in the mid 1960s, Cole went into exile. His photographs were published in America in his book *House of Bondage*, which was immediately banned in South Africa.

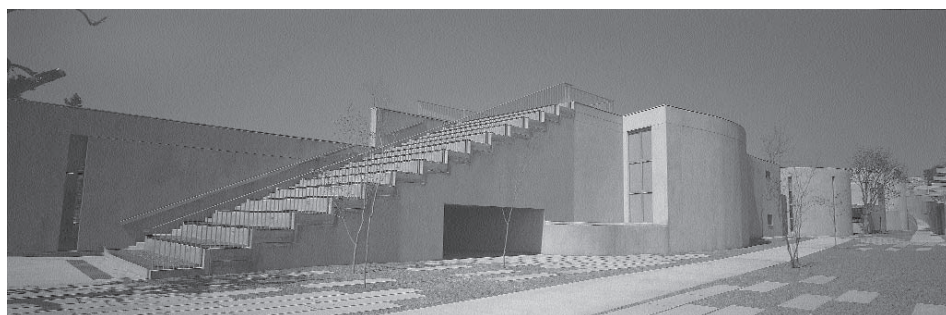
Struan Robertson, a colleague and friend, said of Cole: "When I knew him in the years we shared a studio, from 1964 to 1966, it seemed to me that he was lit from within by a flame. He glowed with dedication and purpose. In the end,

he died just before his 50th birthday, having spent half of his short life in exile. But from the time he worked in South Africa, he left an undying legacy: a picture of what it was like to be black and live in Verwoerd's white republic."

The Apartheid Museum has dedicated an entire hall to showing all the photos and text of *House of Bondage*. While the outside world was fortunate to see his powerful images, this exhibition provides South Africans with the first opportunity to see his work. *House of Bondage* is out of print.

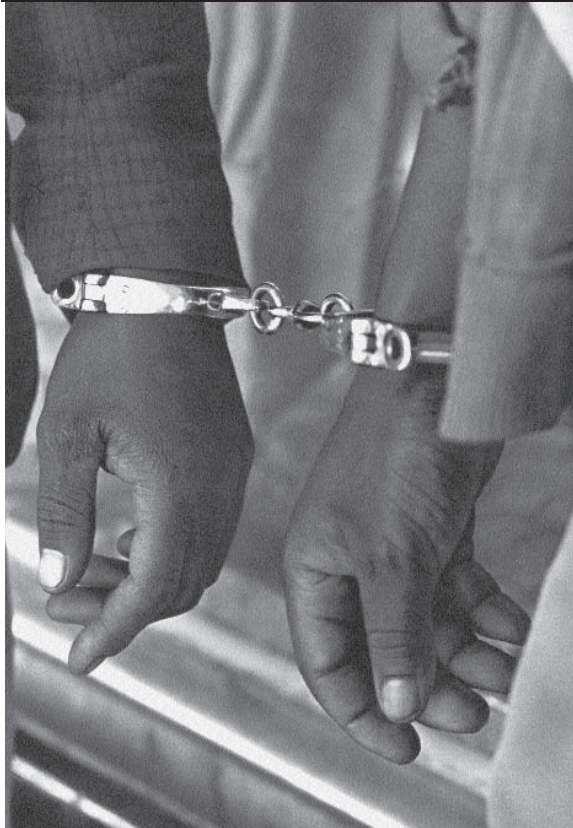


The Apartheid Museum (above & below)

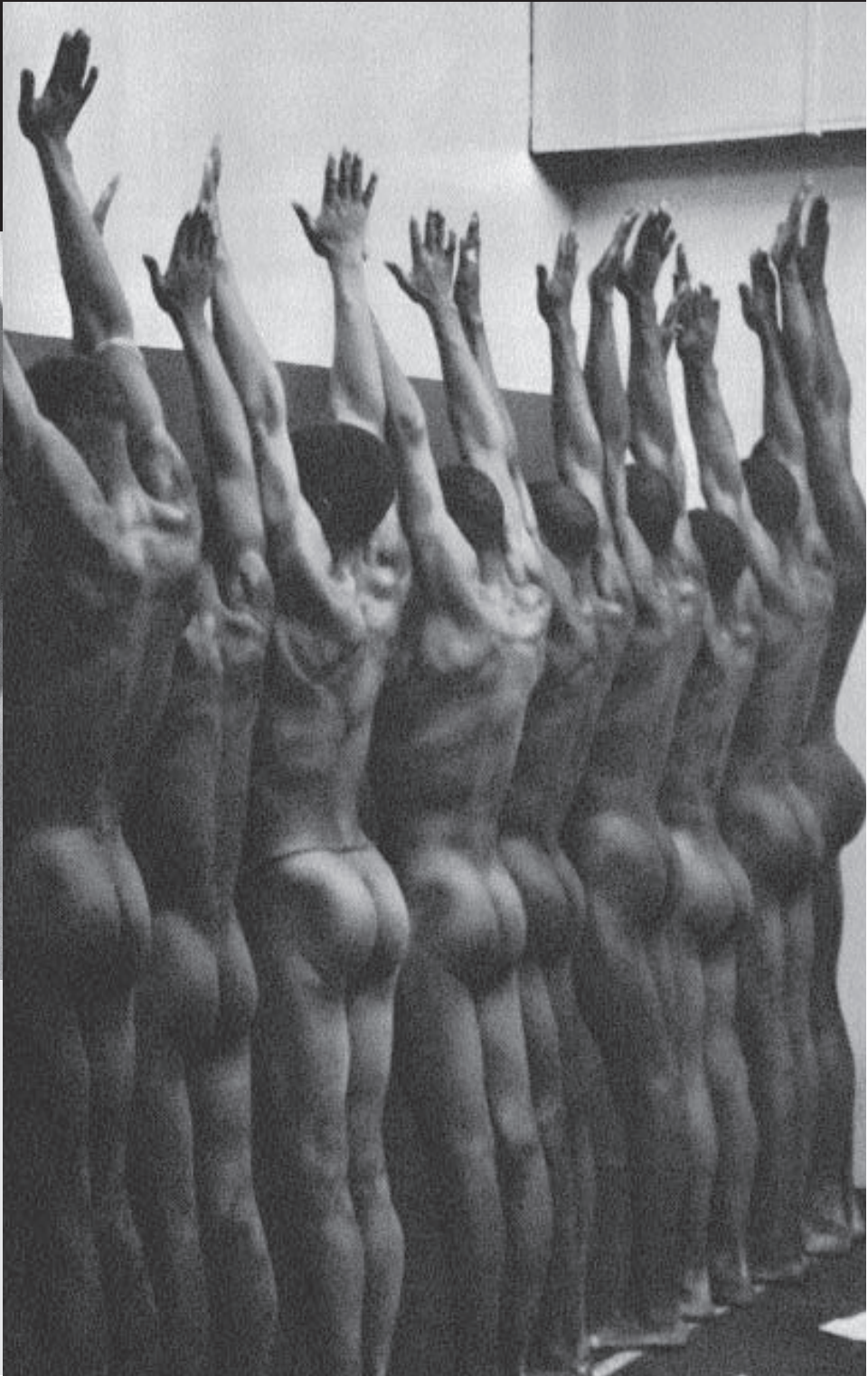


"The living conditions of the men who work on the mines of South Africa are miserable almost beyond imagining." (House of Bondage)

"The African must carry his pass-book with him religiously twenty-four hours a day. If he is caught without it the result is almost always a fast trip to jail." (House of Bondage)



Cole tried to convey the harshness of the pass laws, both through his photographs and his words. He said: "In 1964, some 2 200 000 crimes were reported in South Africa. One third of these were not crimes in any moral sense, but crimes that only a black person could commit – by being in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong papers."



This powerful photograph of miners undergoing a medical examination highlights the horrors of the migrant labour system. Cole captures the humiliating process of adult men, standing naked, and being subjected to inspection, rather like cattle at an auction.

***"Within minutes our neighbourhood was rubble,
our house a pile of bricks." (House of Bondage)***



***"Africans approach the clinic with
reluctance, the hospital with fear."
(House of Bondage)***



An infant suffering from advanced malnutrition. Like one in every four African children in South Africa in the 1960s, he died before his first birthday. His father had worked for 19 years for the railways.

Apartheid created an unequal society, in which most Africans lived lives of poverty and hardship. Africans were paid extremely low wages, and it was a constant struggle to pay rent and have enough money to buy food. A common saying of the time was: "We are paid as Africans, but we have to buy as white men."

When a forced removal took place, the residents were ordered out of their homes, their belongings piled on the pavements, and the bulldozers moved in, destroying the township within minutes.

Cole himself experienced the pain of forced removals. The place where he grew up, Eersterus, was a black freehold township, 16 kilometres east of Pretoria. It was judged a 'black spot'. Cole explains: "A 'black spot' is an African township marked for destruction because it occupies an area into which whites wish to expand."

Apartheid is where it belongs – in a museum. Visit The Apartheid Museum next to Gold Reef City, Northern Parkway & Gold Reef Rd, Ormonde
Tel: (011) 309 4700
info@apartheidmuseum.org;
www.apartheidmuseum.org

Opening hours: *Tuesday to Sunday,
10h00 to 17h00*
Entrance fee: *Adults R25.00*
Pensioners R12.00
Children R12.00