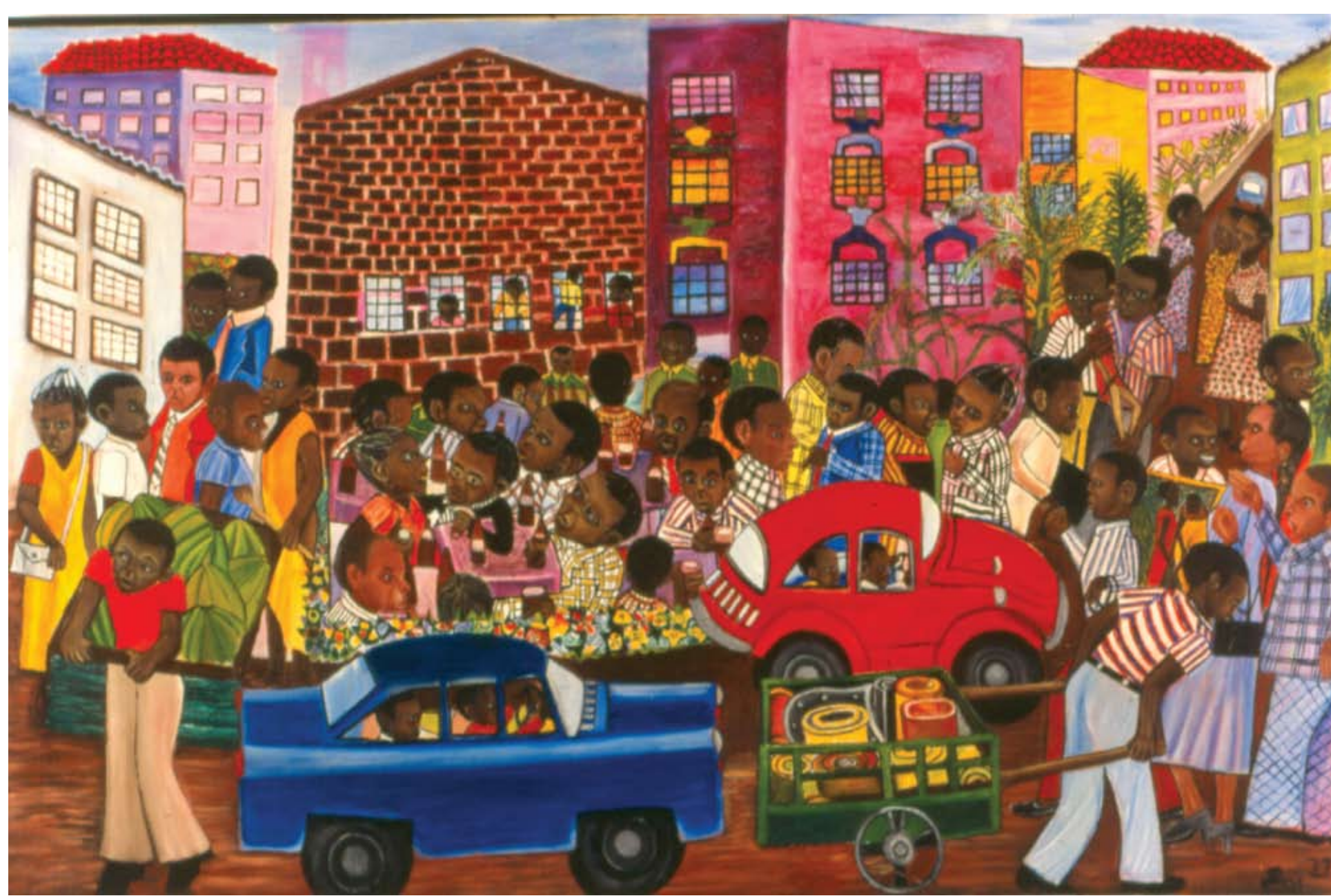
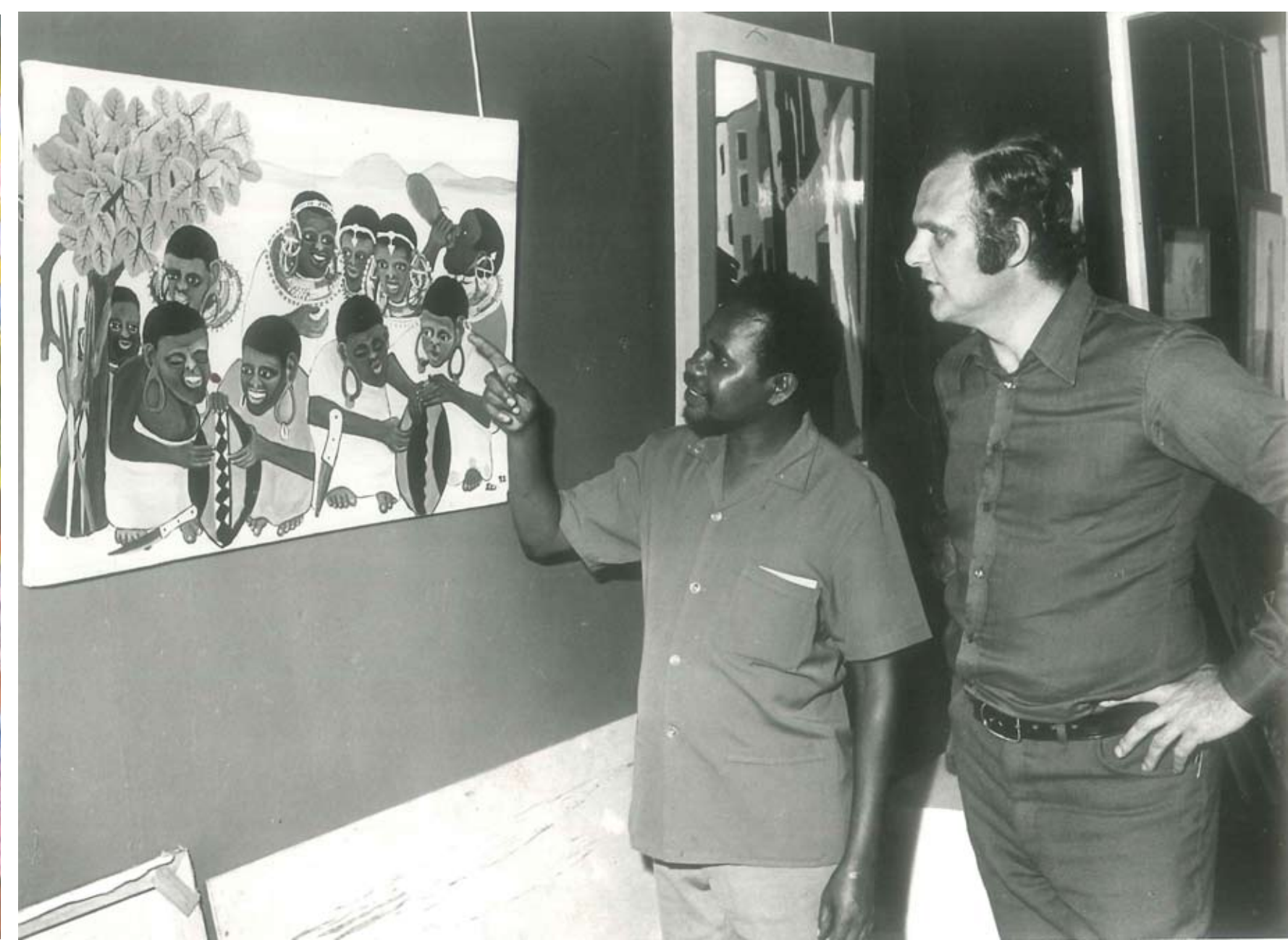




Ancent Soi



The Thorn Tree Cafe at the New Stanley Hotel by Ancent Soi, 1970's



Ancent Soi after receiving his prize from the Olympic Games, 1970's

ANCENT SOI

Kenya's Maestro - "a man of the people"

Ancent Soi was born in 1937 in Mbiuni Kwa Mutula Village, Machakos County. His parents were farmers and he used to help them take care of the cattle. He used to sell cows in order to get fees because he wanted to become a teacher. He joined standard one and was the youngest and the brightest. He was told to stop attending class and take care of sheep because the young ones were being eaten by the secretary birds, he accepted but later went to stay with his aunt for two years who lived far from their home.

In 1954, a friend told him he would go back to school and encouraged him to also go with him; he agreed and went back home and joined school in 1955. He did KAPE exams and never passed. He repeated in 1958 and passed and continued until standard 8. He came to Nairobi in 1965 and stayed with friends who gave him everything he needed. He later joined college to do sales and was taught by a teacher called Mr. Walker whose English he could not understand but he struggled and managed to get grade B. He was number two in the whole college.

He got a job at the city market stall no. 1 to sell woodcarving for the then MP for Machakos, Hon. Nthenge, who used to buy and sell paintings together with a Congolese man called Banto. Banto had gone to art school and was said to be the best artist in Kenya. Soi bought art materials and painted four water color paintings which were displayed and were bought by an Italian who still has a hotel in Lamu to date. This motivated him to paint more.

He decided to concentrate on oil paintings, he painted four more and displayed them and a student at the University of Nairobi called Gard Okelo from Uganda saw them and asked him to see him in the university. He introduced him to the Head of Design called Gregory Maloba and they decided that some paintings should be displayed in the university and others in the shop; Okello later decided that all the paintings should be kept in the university and he stopped taking them to the shop. He bought 8 and his colleague bought ten.

In the 1960's, Soi entered a painting in the ESSO calendar competition that was judged by Joseph Murumbi, and he won first prize; his work was included in the calendar.

In 1971, the chairman of the Olympics, Mr. Willy Daome, decided that an African should make the Olympic poster and asked artists to send painting to Germany via the embassies. Soi sent his work which won 1st prize but his name and address got lost and since his name was written on the back it appeared in the Sunday Post and was identified by Mr Okelo. However, he was finally recognized as being the painter and he went to Germany and was given a gold medal and 6000 Deutch Mark in 1971. With this he won world wide acclaim as one of Kenya's and Africa's most talented artists. He sold 16 of the 20 paintings that he had gone with and the other 4 were sold later.

He won another 1st prize in French Cultural centre competition.

It was reported after winning the poster competition organized for the Munich Olympic Games that: "Soi has learned to be patient and to take trouble, but as yet, the sin of sophistication has not afflicted him. He paints what he sees. He reports on the village life of an Africa that is fast changing. He gives no message. He points no moral. Yet in their very simplicity and unfettered way, his paintings have a power and beauty that I have not seen equaled in Africa".

Ancent Soi says of himself:

"I paint to please myself. If other people like them, I am flattered but it is not very important. I do not want to change my way of life. I am very happy working in the market nine months a year. I find painting very exhausting and after a month, it is good to go back to the stall where I can relax before starting again. ..Going to Munich to receive my prize was the greatest thrill of my life but I was glad to be back."