

INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



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Sunday Times

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TELLING YOU WHO ... TELLING YOU

Portrait of the artists in transition

THE Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town has always produced artists that have affected hearts and minds. DI PAICE looks at the young artists destined to help shape the future of art

THEY walk in illustrious footsteps at the Michaelis. Former students currently working overseas include sculptors Richard Wake in Germany, Merle Freund in London and printmaker Vivienne Koorland in the US.

Painter Henry Symonds and sculptor Nina Romm graduated from the school, as did the flamboyant head of the Wits Art School, Alan Crump.

The teachers at the school are all well-known artists: Kevin Atkinson, Bruce Arnott, Pippa Skotnes and Helmut Starcke.

The new generation is now around 30. The artists featured here — with comment from their teachers — all passed their exams with distinction.

They have already successfully exhibited and sold work.

Zwelethu Mthethwa, 31, Advanced Diploma, 1985, photographer.

Zwelethu's first art encounter was at Abangane Open School in Durban. He learnt drawing, painting and print-making, and then did a diploma in fine art at Michaelis, followed by an advanced diploma in photography.

In 1987 he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and went to the Rochester Institute of Technology.

He says: "I needed help. In 1984 I did a photo essay on Crossroads, and for my advanced diploma I did 'night shelters' around Cape Town."

"In America, I combined different media — painting or drawing over photographic images. I also used unconventional sizes."

"I specialise in people — their living conditions and my interaction with them. Sometimes what I portray is not pleasant to look at. So, after a period of using charcoal, I've started to use colour because it has more aesthetic appeal."

"Once people look, I hope my work will make them question what they see."

Zwelethu defines himself as a full-time image-maker.

Supervisor Geoffrey Grundlingh says: "His photographic essay on the Crossroads women was exceptionally insightful and sensitive."

Nadine Brajtman, 27, Advanced Diploma, 1989, graphic design.

Nadine studied computer graphics and desktop publishing at the School of Visual Arts in New York before doing her advanced diploma at Michaelis.

She created two portfolios of lithographs during this time, based on research and extensive field trips to Zululand. Twelve of these images were selected by the specialist reproduction house Hirt and Carter for their 1990 calendar.

Nadine says: "My two portfolios encompass a variety of key symbolic themes ranging from insects, bewitchment, sangomas, and ancestors."

"The bold primary colours, an influence from vibrant beadwork and cloth, also illuminate

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the rich and diverse spiritual character of the Zulu people."

NADINE and her sister Michelle run the Nadine Brajtmann Design Studio in Cape Town.

Supervisor Helmut Starcke says: "In her Advanced Diploma, Nadine's intention was to work with computer-aided design. Her work deals with manifestations of customs and myths — on reflection a perfect choice, if one can appreciate a certain amount of the "supernatural" in computer technology."

Jo Ractliffe, 30, MFA (1988), printmaking.

After matric, Jo majored in painting at the Ruth Prowse School of Art, then proceeded to Michaelis where she majored in photography.

She says: "What interests me in photography is what happens before and after the image is frozen."

"Paintings are interpretations, but viewers expect photographs to depict reality. I started making collages, placing the image in a different context and

recreating reality."

Jo recently took up a post at Wits.

Supervisor Pippa Skotnes says: "Her prints are technically innovative. Her photographs combined with screenprinted hand-made stencils produce images which are evocative and often powerful."

Janet Purcell, 29, MFA (1990) painting.

Janet did a BA majoring in art at the University of Stellenbosch before studying for an advanced diploma and finally an MFA at Michaelis.

She says: "My work is figurative and as I gained confidence, I developed my own symbolic representations. What excites me about painting is the possibilities for ambiguities."

"It is a potentially illusionistic medium and peoples' response to it is part of the work. There are different readings of the same painting, depending on what the viewer brings to the picture."

JANET teaches at the Cape Town Technikon. Supervisor Peggy Delpont says: "It is interesting that many of the great European painters like Manet, Pissarro and Roualt were prolific producers of social commentary on the times in which they lived in the form of drawings and prints."

"There is an important potential role in this field for many South African artists, among them painters like Purcell."

Louise Linder, 31, MFA (1986) sculpture.

Louise did her BA, then an Advanced Diploma in Fine Art and an MFA at Michaelis. She recently completed a major 15m by 6m sculpture for the Department of Environmental and Geographical studies at UCT.

She says: "I was drawn to making sculptures because of the discipline involved in the medium. I use metal for its clean, neutral qualities and because the work has to be manufactured, I have to organise my ideas. My work makes reference to the 'real' world, but I work with abstractions. It is fulfilling to invent 'new objects'."

Supervisor Bruce Arnott says: "Her work is technically accomplished, intelligent and witty."

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TRAILBLAZERS: Nadine Brajtman with lithograph of Zulu woman with cows entitled 'Wellbeing — Umikahle'; photographer **Zwelethu Mthethwa**; Janet Purcell with picture of two dogs on cart titled 'Canine Afternoon'; Louise Linder holds a rectangular maquette called 'Noah's Ark'; and Jo Ractliffe with her offset lithograph of two dogs in landscape entitled 'Nadir No 15'
Picture: TERRY SHEAN



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