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HUMAN & ROUSSEAU (EDMS) BPK

Reg. No. 07/00348/07

STATEGEBOU, ROOSSTRAAT 3-9
POSBUS 5050, KAAPSTAD, 8000
E-pos humanhk@nbh.naspers.co.za
TELEFOON 021 25-1280 · FAKS 021 419-2619

Nuwe adres: DESIGNSENTRUM, LOOPSTRAAT 179, KAAPSTAD 8001
Posbus 5050, Kaapstad 8000
TEL: (021) 423-3911
FAKS (021) 426-5744

6 Augustus 1999

Mev. Elza Miles
Mainweg-oos 3A
Melville
2092

Geagte mev. Miles

i.s. Resensies

Ingesluit vind u afskrifte van 'n resensies/s oor LAND AND LIVES

Met vriendelike groete,

Lilian Eyssen
RESENSIES

African Art

Elza Miles

Land and Lives: A Story of Early Black Artists.

Cape Town and Johannesburg: Human and Rousseau, and the Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1997.

191 pp. R160.00 cased ISBN 0798136588

This is a book about black South African artists born before 1930. Elza Miles refers to them as "abandoned artists", and in terms of many of their life histories this is accurate. However, the book is also part of a now well-established movement, in tune with the changes of recent years, retrospectively and currently to establish its black artists, writers and others in the mainstream, or perhaps as the new mainstream, of South African life.

The book is an attractive, well-illustrated and well-researched account of the black artists that it discusses. It is essentially a listing of nearly 50 artists, with details in each case of their lives, art and, when this information is available, where their works can be found. There is much fascinating detail that helps greatly towards an appreciation of the work of artists who laboured often in conditions of extraordinary difficulty. While some met genuine and disinterested assistance, others encountered a distinctly patronising attitude from the dominant white artistic and critical worlds of the time. Some lived, and died, in poverty. Others left South Africa. From this unpromising environment, like the sunflowers and pumpkins in John Koenakeefke Mohl's 'These Grew out of an Ashpit', came some remarkable works of art by black artists.

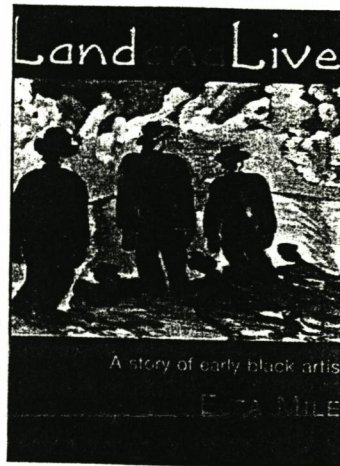
Yet the book left this reader dissatisfied. There is no overall narrative, and while individuals are contextualized to some extent, the manner in which the book is structured perhaps inevitably leads to a disjointed and fractured approach. These are "stories", not "a story" of early black artists, and, while useful for reference, read consecutively the accounts are indigestible, and, in general, uncritical. Nevertheless, this book is a useful addition to the growing literature on black South African artists. It is recommended for purchase by academic and general libraries in South Africa and elsewhere.

Séan Morrow
University of Fort Hare

The African Book Publishing Record

ABPR Book Reviews
11 May 1999

Land And Lives: A Story Of Early Black Artists (Human & Rousseau, R160.00) is a thorough and unique account of pioneer South African Black artists born in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The work of these artists unfold in the context of an African upbringing, which encounters new religious disciplines and



literacy, introduced through mission and government schools. It is an invaluable contribution to the art of the country and pays homage to the artists creative power, by Elza Miles.

Ebony
April 1999