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INSTITUUT VIR EIETJDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat

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WEEKLY MAIL

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THE ARTS

Black art

IN THE ajo WarkShop

exhibition painters such as Fikile, Kay Hassan,
Garth Erasmus and David Koloane showed non-
figurative works of a new vigour and
expansiveness.

Over the two-week period of the workshop |
Peter Bradley had introduced the painters to.

:glowin

How do local artists best tap their Africanness and draw on international influences? New York gphic Peter Bradley examined the problem at a two-week workshop for black artists near Johannesburg. LIONEL MURCOTT reports

new materials and strategies and acrylics and gel, | ~

and working on large, unstretched canvases on horizontal painting platforms on the floor; and the sculptors to steel and welding equipment. There was ample working space and the artists were able to work together and share common problems. The workshop was primarily an exercise in finding new possibilities. The extent of its impact will have to be assessed once its

implications have been worked through. The exhibition was, in a sense, an interim report. However, David Koloane's paintings currently showing at Fuba (in a two-man show with Ben Nsusha) are those of a mature artist who has found his voice. The works were done over two years, during which time Koloane was studying and painting in the US and Britain. Most of the works are relatively small, usually dark and with little tonal contrast. Most are non-figurative, though several depict runners, heads, night scenes. They are clearly related to contemporary American or International modernism (during this time Koloane was accepted for participation in the Triangle Workshop.) The key to these initially -

unassuming paintings lies perhaps in the artist's touch. Varied and alert, it registers a range of :

The all-over compositions of Koloane's work and the eye is not drawn to a particular point, but is rather allowed to move through a field of colour relate to the work of contemporary painters such as Larry Poons, whom Koloane met in New York. Its beginnings lie earlier, though: In painting light, Turner and the Impressionists found that chiaroscuro and tonal contrasts a key to the achievement of the illusion of volumes since Leonardo, had to be dropped. And further, that the all-pervading unity of light provided a unifying principle for a painting (Koloane found Turner's to be the most significant paintings of all that he saw in his time overseas).

Showing currently at the newly-opened

gallery of the Johannesburg Art Foundation is

an exhibition by a group of eight painters who

have taught or studied there. Again, contact with current work in the US and Europe has helped extend the ambitions and clarify the direction of these painters. They all show a concern with the qualities of the medium; the meaning of many of the paintings arise from the actual wrestling with the materials. This concern with process and materiality has been a feature of modernism from its beginnings in Europe. The

experience and sensation. Lines journey around } light, were forced to work fast and directly.

the page, circle obsessively, slice across, gouge

with tracks and blobs of gel; spots of pure colour sputter or dance in dark webs of paint. What happens on the page, rather than what is represented, gives them their life.

3 : i ' | Cezanne, too, insisted on the importance of the into the paper; surfaces are built up with collage, |

explicit handling of the medium: "One has to be a painter through the very qualities of painting. One has to use coarse materials."

Impressionists, attempting to record changing |

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Bill Ainslie's large, light-filled painting "Serengeti", in its breadth of handling, represents a new phase in his work informed by TREFWOORDE the emphasis on speed and directness emphasised by the Triangle Workshop. | 14 Peter Bradley was once asked how he, a black j | ' }man, could paint Clement Greenberg-type â\200\230Jabstract paintings. "No conflict," he said. "Modern art is African." The injection of non-Western values fundamentally changed European art: Japanese woodblock prints had a ; 2 decisive influence on Manet, Degas and Van Gogh; the experience of living in Oceania on Gauguin's work; and African masks led to the decisive breakthrough in Picasso's work, in 1907, to Cubism, which is probably the most important movement of the Twentieth Century, 3 in that it has established a visual language for almost all subsequent painting. :

Ilona Anderson, William KentridgÃ© and Simon Stone, the three figurative painters in the Art Foundation show, can perhaps best be seen in relation to a different branch of the modernist 4 movement â\200\224 that of Neo-expressionism, the chief challenge, in the late 70's and the 80's, to the dominance of the postwar American abstractionists. Its roots lie, particularly in German art. The German Expressionists were influenced particularly by the colour, and the emotional and symbolic content of Van Gogh's. " and Gauguin's paintings and by Gauguin's â\200\235 explorations of graphic processes...

Simon Stone's paintings were, for this viewer, . [Jf | BEB eee eee ee eens
an exciting discovery â\200\224 references from a |
range. of different historical.periods_are: held.
together, and in works such as â\200\234In the shadow of 6
the fountain" he achieves â\200\230a poised, enigmatic:

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Ultimately, 4 work of.art must come from Mee ee Fe oD ee UR Ry he Ti Ce a ee ae
attlist's experience, his own life and. immediate.
social context. â\200\230Paradoxically, however, this.
transmutation of experience can occur only in.
relation â\200\230to what has been done, to works that :
show-.what is possible, and reveal what â\200\230is,
â\200\230common across diverse situations...
â\200\230 â\200\234So, while Koloaneâ\200\231s work, for exa shows ;
{ that he has confronted and internalised ctirrent ;
| developments in American and English painting, -
â\200\230 his paintings remiain.very African. The darkness: |

in them, though very. alive, gtows in and-from |
the darkness â\200\234of .the current. South. African |
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