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South Africa's turbulent history and the year in
which the United Democratic Front was formed.
To exiled activists and human-rights agencies
around the world, South Africa's political and
cultural liberation seemed close at hand. And to
international artists sympathetic to the cause,
this exhibition would serve both to denounce
apartheid's crime against culture, as well as to
celebrate the imminent birth of a new, non-
racial democracy.

Since then, the show and comprising works by

, as well as contributions by internationally acclaimed poets, writers and philosophers has been exhibited in over 100 countries worldwide. Last year, its penultimate destination was the Zimbabwe National Gallery in Harare. Today it sits in the Mayibuye Centre in Cape Town, and from February 9 it will adorn the walls of Parliament before hitting the road

as a travelling exhibition around South Africa.

And after that? Well, this is the subject of some debate. The organisers of Art Against Apartheid envisaged the exhibition as forming the foundation of South Africa's first international museum of modern art. But Parliament, it seems, has other plans.

According to the Zimbabwe National Gallery, the exhibition was initially destined for the South African National Gallery (SANG). But before it was due to arrive, SANG says the SANG's Hayden Proud, we received notification from

the president's office to say that it should hang in

Parliament instead. This shift in arrangements is evidently

designed to make both the exhibition and government more accessible to the people. To this end the choice of Parliament as a temporary display venue is logical. But the exhibition area dedicated to South Africa is neither a

no local artist is featured on this show.

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But if Parliament perceives itself as a people's place, it must use its space to house works by South African artists and help set up a separate and permanent site to accommodate Art Against Apartheid. That was the purpose for which the exhibition was intended, and ultimately that is where it belongs.

The incredible balancing act

FINE ART: Hazel Friedman

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cratically elected government. Now, 13 years after its official launch, Art Against Apartheid has finally reached its destination â\200\224 but not without its fair share of controversy.

The brainchild of Spanish artist Antonio Saura and his French counterpart Ernest Pignon-Emest, Art Against A \partheid was conceived in Paris in 1983, at a seminal point in South Africaâ\200\231s turbulent history â\200\224 the year in which the United Democratic Front was formed. To exiled activists and human-rights agencies around the world, South Africaâ\200\231s political and cultural liberation seemed close at hand. And to international artists sympathetic to the cause,

â\200\230 this exhibition would serve both to denounce racial democracy.

Recalls Saura: â\200\234We hoped that once apartheid had been abolished, the works would be offered to the first free government of South Africa. At the time, we couldnâ\200\231t anticipate it would take so long.â\200\235

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OUR Young Artists, at the Newtown

Galleries, is more than a showcase for

new kids on the block. Consisting of

works by artists with little prior exhibition experience, it successfully creates a series of correspondences and juxtapositions based â\200\224 refreshingly â\200\224 as much on serendipity as on artistic intention.

And the fact that the artists hail from different art institutions generates a fascinating discourse between the regional influences informing their work.

Brendhan Dickersonâ\200\231s wittily executed sculptures â\200\224 with their stringent formal and intertextual preoccupations â\200\224 bear the Michaelis art-school imprint, while the predilection for conceptualism on the part of Wits University and the Wits Technikon achieves cogent expression in the works of Hentie van der Merwe (a university graduate) and Alex Trapani, who is technikon-trained.

Conversely, the slightly anachronistic abstract paintings and sculptures produced by James Reed from Port Elizabeth Technikon communicate a sensibility which â\200\224 at the risk

ough dedicated to South Africa â\200\224 is neither by nor about South Africa, Apart from a work by exiled South African artist Gavin Jantjes commemorating the 1976 riots, and a piece in the catalogue by South African author Andr   Brink, no local artist is represented on this show.

The organisers of Art Against Apartheid envisaged the exhibition as forming the foundation of South Africaâ\200\231s first international museum of modern art

In fact, there are few references to South Africa at all, and these are in the broadest possible terms. They include Pignon-Emest's Intervention, which conflates images of Nice and Cape Town; Robert Rauschenbergâ\200\231s World

Against Apartheid collage; Tom Phillips's Oh Miss South Africa lithograph; Fluoman's tribute to Steve Biko; not to mention written condemnations of apartheid by French philosopher Jacques Derrida and other literary luminaries.

The exhibition reads more effectively as an

of making unfair generalisations - is unmistakably Eastern Cape in origin.

With the exception of Reed, who is more preoccupied with form than content, each artist focuses on issues permeating an angst-filled and traumatised Society: sex, death and faith.

Trapani, for example, explores the rituals of sacrifice and salvation through scriptural numerology, everyday objects such as flour bags (metaphors for the body of Christ) and vessels of religious consumption such as church chalices filled with wine (symbolising Christ's blood).

Of particular note is an impromptu installation of wine-filled glasses representing communion, neatly displayed along the gallery stairwell. Each ascending level ingeniously lit by a trinity of gallery lights overhead signifies another step along the stairway to heaven. The meaning of this work is both enhanced and transformed by its placement within the gallery and its relationship to the rest of Trapani's works.

Although verging on the esoteric in places, Van der Merwe's Insatiable Series also conveys
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Representatives of popular international art
ments of the late 1970s and 1980s to
either a monument to South Africa's liberation
struggle or as a collection of works by
artists. Included in the unashamedly
line-up are examples of conceptualism
France's Christian Boltanski, in the form
photographs of children framed in glass; c
works by Venezuelan artists Carlos Cruz
and Jesus Raphael Soto; examples of ab
expressionism by Robert Motherwell and
Joan Miro; and English artist Joe Tilson's
art homage (4 la Warhol) to Che Guevara.
There's an original gouache by Roy Lichtenstein,
as well as lithographs by James R. Quinn,
a mixed media work by Claes Olden
and a figurative oil painting by Richard Hamilton.
And these names represent but a fraction
the international Signatures on the credit])
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epitaphs to Leo, Johan and Bruce. Resemb|
tombstones, with dates of birth and deat
inscribed on each headstone, they are vir
ally devoid of figurative expression except
the outlines made from pin-holes tracj
the torso of each deceased. ;
Although rather twee in places, Dickerso
work stands out in terms of its formal sophis
tication. Constructed from wrought iron, wo:
and found objects, they are literally laden wi
references to surrealism (the Magritte bir
Cage), the genre of 17th-century still-life (var
tas symbols) and theatre of the absurd. Th
speak of a European existentialist sensibilit
yet are equally reminiscent of totems ar
shrines to pagan gods.
But what strikes one most about this show
the incredible balancing act to use the tit!
of a work by Dickerson between artists an
material, medium and message. This make
Four Young Artists worth much more than
passing glance.

Four Young Artists is at the Newtown Gallancl