

## INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



Bron nr.
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Datum
9   10   66 15   15 6

Onderwerp nr.

Knipsel nr.

Bk  
Nik

The Star

Jg..... Nr..... P.//..... Dat..... 5 JUN 1990

## ART

# Linda believes in quality artwork - not just content

## TREFWOORDE

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*Tonight 11 Bk*

The Goodman Gallery first opened its doors to the public on November 25, 1966. Since then Linda Givon, the gallery's director, has consistently demonstrated her commitment to South African art, by not only attaining a 90:10 ratio of South African to international art, but also through her primary involvement in such exhibitions as the DPSC exhibition at the Market Theatre Gallery, the Human Rights show in Durban and the Peace Ribbon. She has actively promoted South African art abroad, in cultural centres like New York as well as being an annual participant at the Basel Art Fair. KENDELL GEERS asked her why she feels so committed to South African art.

Linda: I am part of this country and therefore am passionately interested in what's going on around me. When I arrived here in 1965 there was literally nothing going on in the visual arts scene. It was dreary, dead and nobody seemed really interested in changing it. I like challenges and that seemed like a particularly interesting challenge.

Kendell: Do you think that contemporary South African art is as good as its international counterparts?

L: Yes. I think South African art can now hold its own and is making its own statements. I'm much more interested in the statement that we are making than in the rather dreary statements that I see in Europe and America.

K: Your gallery has often been accused of being undemocratic because of its overtly commercial concerns.

L: I don't see how you could be democratic if you're a commercial gallery. One tries to be

as objective as possible but in the end yes, it's always my choice. But then I'm not forcing anyone to exhibit here. In fact I'm begging people not to because we're so over subscribed.

K: Why is that?

L: Purely because there's a shortage of galleries who want to exhibit South African art. If a gallery is not oversubscribed it is simply because there is a lack of the kind of art they promote. Artists today are not that passionate about painting

flower pieces or wildlife anymore. It's becoming fairly passe, thank heavens.

K: Although Wildlife Art must be the most self-preserving of all art-forms, somehow remaining unaffected by social or cultural developments.

L: And interestingly it doesn't really matter how bad it is. Give it a pair of horns and it sells, and if you can stuff it and stick it on a wall, it sells even faster and that's absolutely horrendous.

K: Do you think all

wildlife art is bad?

L: That would be a stupid thing to say. But it is easier to fall into traps when you're painting zebra than when you're painting riots or cripples.

K: Riot paintings can become just as cliched and formulaised.

L: Actually yes, there are too many riot paintings that look like herds of buffalo.

K: What governs your decision about which of the many artists that approach you get to exhibit?

L: I choose artists whom I feel are making an interesting statement and are sincerely trying to contribute something towards the society in which they

live. I'm very sticky about quality and that's where I think I will have problems in a new South Africa. I honestly believe that quality is important. It's not enough to just have content. Art is not about a slick fabrication of an idea that passed through one's head in the middle of the night. We all have those but we're not all good artists. I think that's why people like Hockney won't last. A lot of his ideas are about 4 in the morning and they don't survive beyond 6 am.

K: Quality can be a very difficult thing to determine though.

L: If you look at enough art and read enough books and listen to

enough music, you can develop an eye or an ear for what is good and what is bad. And by bad I don't mean "slapgat" or dashed off, I mean insincere. South African art is riding on a crest at the moment and that means there is a lot of insincerity about.

K: The current art boom may be accredited to the renewed interest in art on the part of both the corporations and institutions.

L: Yes but I wish that the institutions didn't get as much of a say as they do because often in the end they are working for us the public



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without actually doing anything. When you look at an exhibition which they so condescendingly put in their galleries like "Art Now", they wash it out and turn it into a hodge podge, bottom of the gutter dregs of what those exhibitions originally were. I'm not blaming the Vita Awards, I'm blaming the institutions.

**K:** What do you feel about the current proliferation of art competitions?

**L:** It is the worst exploitation of the art world that I have ever seen. I mean look at the Triennial Award. What do they spend on it? Peanuts. And look at the millions of rands worth of publicity they get for that thumbnail of money: The services of all the top museums, critics and academics around the country all for free. If the triennial fulfills all the things that are now being demanded of it then it

may be different, but it would certainly be the first.

**K:** At the moment the work of black artists seem particularly in vogue, at times even irrespective of its quality. What do you ascribe this to?

**L:** White guilt. It's what a lot of expatriate South Africans suffer from: they have never been to Soweto or Alex and feel that if they buy a black person's work, they can make it all go away.

**K:** What hopes do you have for the future of South African art?

**L:** When I was young my passion was the Soviet Union and I studied Soviet dissident art. It was probably the most boring art I have seen in my life because it was so ideological. With bated breath I wait and fear that the same may happen here. If ideology takes over and starts making demands on art, creativity and imagination will be stifled.