

FORUM PROPOSAL

JOHANNESBURG

A two day forum on contemporary South African art will be held in Johannesburg on 28 February and 1 March. The aim of this forum is to inform the international curators on contemporary South African art. The forum will simultaneously advance discourse on South African art within this country.

It was decided at a provisional committee meeting that a consultant be appointed to facilitate local participation in the forum. Colin Richards has agreed to do the job having set specific conditions for his participation.

VENUE

Johannesburg Art Gallery, Africana Museum Auditorium or Wits.

DURATION

One and a half days.

TO ATTEND

International curators and trainee curators.

The forum is to be advertised in selected venues and publications so that interested artists, curators, students, dealers, critics, historians and members of the public might attend. It is essential that the parameters of this audience are more decisively established, a venue could then be chosen which would best serve audience dynamics. Those who attend would determine the tone of the forum and the register that the speakers would use.

STRUCTURE

The forum would have an introductory speech by the Biennale Director. The forum would also need an MC to introduce speakers and issues to the audience. This person should have good PR skills and should not enjoy too high a profile in the S.A art world.

It was agreed at a provisional committee meeting held on 12-01-94 that the forum could most usefully be conceptualised as an arena which allowed for two-way discussion, rather than a more traditional conference at which speakers present long monologues. An introductory session was proposed during which one person would present as

comprehensive an overview of S.A art as was possible. Thereafter the forum would be structured as a series of panel discussions with ample time set aside afterwards for audience response and participation. Key issues within S.A. art would need to be identified by the committee and each of these sessions would focus on one of these issues. A group of five panelists and one chairperson would be chosen by committee. Each panelist would be asked to prepare a short (5-10 min) response to the issue identified. It is hoped that this would force panelists into delivering succinct, focused responses which would otherwise ramble on. The chairperson would retrieve the identified issue should discussion become too tangential. Each session would last 1½ hours, a length which may allow for in-depth discussion without breaking audience stamina. There would be a maximum of 5 panels.

It was also agreed that it was important to include a lot of images in the panel discussions, ideally each speaker selecting images which would illustrate their particular responses. To this end, Artists' A-Z resources (the video and images sent in) will be utilised as well as the slide collections of institutions such as Wits and J.A.G.

PANELISTS

The provisional committee agreed on 15-01-94 that the selection process for the panels should be sensitive to race and gender in terms of composition and that each panel should contain at least two speakers who do not work from or reside in Johannesburg. Some international curators may be included in the panels.

THEMES - ISSUES

PROPOSED: 5 sessions- the themes are broadly outlined here , but the titles that they will be given are not yet final. Issues will be suggested by the visual imagery shown at the beginning of the session. During each session, the chairperson will have a list of pertinent issues in front of him/her which will enable him/her to intervene if the discussion is either going in circles, or becoming excessively repetitive. The topics have been set so as to allow broad discussion.

DAY 1

9:00 *Arrival of trainee curators and curators- registration.*

9:30 *Welcome and Opening of Forum: Christopher Till opens the forum.*

9:45 *Introductory Session:*

A very general introductory talk about South African art, by someone as yet to be nominated. While it will be impossible to encapsulate the complexity of contemporary South African art in the limited time available, this talk will make use of extensive visual material, and will suggest a number of themes and issues to be broached at later stages in the forum.

10:30- 11:00 *Tea Break*

11:00- 12:30 -Session 1: The Geography of Production

Possible issues to be discussed:

- *Different spaces of production ranging from Funda/Fuba to the bag factory.*
- *Artschools- what is their function in a South African creative community that is divided on so many levels.*
- *Trained artists as opposed to artists with no formal art education*
- *Facilities- what is available and who is it available to?*
- *Access to art materials and art literature.*
- *Producing in rural communities as opposed to urban production.*

12:30-2:00 *Lunch*

2:00-3:30- Session 2: The Geography of Mediation

Possible issues to be discussed:

- *Role and rights of critics*
- *Role and rights of art historians*
- *The state of critical writing in South Africa*
- *The impact that artwriters have on the success or failure of exhibitions*
- *What actions could artists take in response to artwriters*
- *Effect of political correctness on artwriting.*

DAY 2

9:00 Tea

9:30 - 11:00- Session 3: The Geography of Consumption

Possible issues to be discussed:

- *What objects are exhibited and sold in galleries.
- *Role of art institutions.
- *Public spaces as opposed to the space of the gallery or museum. (Peoples' parks)
- * Patronage-who buys what?- why?
- *Why are there so few patrons of South African visual art.
- *How do dealers influence the production of art?
- *What rights do dealers have in relation to artists
- *Should commercial dealers get involved with biennales of this nature?
- * What are the pros and cons of commercial and public spaces?

11:00-11:30 Tea Break

11:30-1:00- Session 4: Internationalism/Nationalism

Possible issues to be discussed:

- *Marginality with regard to race, gender, class.
- *Eurocentrism/Afrocentrism
- *Is there a South African avant-garde- is it important to have an avant-garde- how is the label exclusive- what are its implications
- *Is there an 'African Art'?
- *Consequences and implications of South Africa's re-entry into the international art community.
- *Art as opposed to craft.

1:00-2:30 Lunch

2:30-4:00- Session 5: Watershed South African Exhibitions

Possible issues to be discussed:

- *Includes curators of shows like 'The Neglected Tradition', 'Tributaries', the re-entry of South Africa into the Venice Biennale
- * What did these shows accomplish?
- *What have the consequences of these shows been?
- * An opportunity for discussion of 'Africus'
- *An opportunity for a lot of visual material to be shown.