

BUSINESS DAY, June 2006

traditional media, as well as conceptual content and social commentary.

. The artists represent a diverse cross-

section of contemporary art. Their proposals promise an extraordinary exhibition by some of SA's most prominent contemporary artists.

Sasol Art curator Teresa Lizamore notes that the five finalists chosen by a very sound and thorough panel of adjudicators for the Sasol Wax Art Award are all established artists who deserved the nomination as finalists. Their proposals were of a very high standard and the contents very diverse and exciting.

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The exhibition promises to showcase works that will intrigue and excite visitors to the exhibition.

Now the work begins for the finalists. But they aren't the only ones who will be busy preparing for August 29. The so-called Basement Gallery is in reality the Sasol executive car park, and converting it into a gallery for the exhibition poses logistical and creative challenges.

Lizamore is undeterred. This offered the most dynamic possibilities,

she says, and the announcement of the finalists took place there. Lizamore reckons it will take another three months to prepare the site fully for the finalists' artworks.

At the same time as Sasol was

introducing its new award, it announced the latest edition of its New

Signatures Competition, presented by the Association of Arts Pretoria.

This long-running event, sponsored by Sasol for the past 17 years, offers a prize fund of R100 000, made up of a first prize of R60 000, a runner-up award of R15 000 and five merit awards of R5 000 each. Winners will be announced at the opening of the exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum on August 16.

Geared towards young and up-and-coming artists aged 18 years and older, the competition aims to provide a platform for them to exhibit their works and enter the professional art world. Over the years it has proved an invaluable incubator and stimulant for the arts world, as a glimpse at past winners and merit award winners reveals: Candice Breitz, Kathryn Smith, Diane Victor, Minette Vari, Luan Nel, Wim Botha and Sean Slemon are among names who have made it big since first appearing on the New Signatures Competition.

The legacy of Sasol New Signatures has often been to create significant signatures. As art critic Hazel Friedman put it: "If Sasol wanted to introduce a new pay-off line for one of its marketing drives, it might use the phrase 'Sasol: Fuelling creativity' or 'Pumping the visual arts'."

That energising process continues at grassroots level. Both the Sasol Wax Art Award and the Sasol New Signatures Competition have outreach development programmes. The former has a trainee curator, walkabouts, an educational supplement/catalogue and an art development workshop programme. The latter offers a catalogue as well as one-day outreach workshops in Bloemfontein, Durban, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and Stellenbosch, covering the history and logistics of the competition, concepts and titles of works, presentation techniques and installations.

Darryl Accone

The Sasol Wax Art Award finalists on stage at the launch of the award, from left: Jeremy Wafer, Diane Victor, Sasol Wax MD Deodatus Schrenk, Kim

Berman and David Koloane. Koloane, director of Fordsburg Artists Studios, represented Pat Mautloa and Andrew Tshabangu of the Fordsburg Studios, who were out of the country taking part in community workshops when the launch took place

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Sasol New Signatures joint winner 2005 Sean Slemon, Maquette (the mountain premises), laser-cut mild steel

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oe artist's life:

: - Johann van der Schijff's recent exhibition

is reminiscent of Swiss |

- kinetic sculptor Jean Tinguely

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JOHANN van der Schijff was a rotten student in an unusually talented class while under my brief tutorage at the University of Pretoria, where his father was deputy vice-chancellor. He responded with lazy listlessness and uncooperative apathy, emphasised by a slow-motion drawl. But all the while there was a bigger picture computing in his head that would set him off on a blazing trail of academic distinctions, including two Masters degrees.

When Swiss kinetic sculptor Jean Tinguely visited SA in my own student days, I found myself unwittingly assigned as his lowly assistant, while he built a wacky motorised contraption from scrap metal, gears, hosepipes and a feather duster, in our sculpture department.

Tinguely's Cyclograeur (1960) was an elaborate pedal-driven artwork that drew arbitrary lines on a screen. It has uncanny similarities to Lazy Suzan (2006), Van Der Schijff's most audacious and intelligent work on his recent solo show at Bell-Roberts Gallery, Cape Town, while it simultaneously demonstrates the vast advances made in art during 50 years.

New media (aka multimedia) art has become neurotically computerised in its hi-tech manufacture and design, as mirrored in space-age rockets, missiles, aircraft and all manner of warfare paraphernalia, that in peacetime it spills over in almost flawless electronic gadgetry and motor vehicles, which Virginia Mackenney calls 'the enduring romance between man and machine' in her Toys for Boys essay in this exhibition's catalogue.

Sculptor Gavin Young, in his introduction, recognises the comical contradiction in Van der Schijff's

works: On the one hand they mirror issues of purpose-built, highly specialised military technology, and on the other they possess an almost 18th century arcane quality, that of belt-driven potato peelers, which equally applies to Tinguely's playful nonsense-art.

Van Der Schijff is refreshingly unassuming about his almost innocent aims and reasons for doing this body of work, in admitting he found a legitimate career of never-ending play and tinkering. Consider he has a profound comprehension of computer technology, philosophy and its elitist vernacular after all,

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Johann van der Schijff, Lazy Susan (2006), from his recent exhibition, Power Play, at the Bell-Roberts Contemporary Art Gallery in Cape Town

he set up new media faculties and courses, first at the University of Johannesburg and now at Michaelis School of Fine Art, where he lectures.

The meticulous manufacturing, precision crafting, brand new bolts and nuts, rubber wheels, leather, gleaming chrome, steel and factory-finished painting on his new sculptures is an unblushing commemoration of his childhood indulgences in Lego, Meccano and self-build plastic aircraft kits, as revealed in the catalogue, where the orderly layout

of the components is organised with the fascinating logic of snap-off model kits.

HOWEVER, it is a shame not to

share the entire process with

us, like US conceptual artist

Dennis Oppenheimer's blue-prints, exhibited with his metal structures in Paris in the early 1980s.

As Van Der Schijffs works stand,  
there is little evidence that they went  
through the hi-tech rigmarole of  
new media at all; they may as well  
have originated as drawings in the  
sand, for all we care.

The human scale is critical to his  
artworks, making the viewer the  
missing component â\200\224 some wick-  
edly inviting their participation, like  
Hangbal (2006), Slaansak (2005) and  
Hemelbesem (2005), not unlike Man  
Rayâ\200\231s interactive art piece Object to  
be Destroyed (1923).

Studies, he calls his most recent  
small bronzes. But they are belated  
studies at most, of where heâ\200\231s  
already been. They lack entirely the  
honest charm of Dinky Toys and tin

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aeroplanes. They smack of the  
stodgy cast carriages and ships of  
Capetonian sculptor David Brown,  
though he spares us Brownâ\200\231s mass-  
produced Mad Max bronze poppies.

I return to my favourite piece,  
Lazy Susan, because it echoes all the  
fabulousness of new media, 3D  
animation, computer technology  
and space-age industry, and is  
possessed by that magical bonus  
hovering over most heavy art â\200\224  
ominous presence. Here the viewer  
becomes the unwary activator,  
detected by and locked on to by a  
scanning device that sets the whole  
cadenza into mocking motion.

He prematurely calls this exhibi-  
tion his comeback (after nine years).

Until we can believe in his arrival  
first, grateful as we are for his con-  
tribution to a whole new generation  
of South African multimedia artists,  
it remains to be seen if he can over-  
ride the perks of academic lazy-life  
and practise what he preaches.

Braam Kruger

Healthy gains  
are cherry on  
top for JSE

HE Johannesburg Stock  
Exchange (JSE) has for the  
past few years been trans-  
forming from a mutual to a  
corporate entity, following  
a set of initiatives imple-  
mented in December 2000.  
This process is shortly to culminate  
in the JSE's listing as a public com-  
pany this month.

A parallel set of developments  
has created an investment story of  
an alternative sort: a contemporary  
art collection that in five short years  
has shown healthy returns.

It began in 2000 when the bourse  
relocated from Diagonal Street to its  
Sandton premises. The new glass  
building in Sandton rejuvenated  
interest in its décor and a subse-  
quent review of artworks to inhabit  
the new space. The bourse has ever  
since been quietly building up an  
impressive collection of contempo-  
rary art under the keen eye of Monna  
Mokoena of Gallery Momo.

Deputy CEO Nicky Newton-King  
says the JSE never approached its art

collection as a purely financial  
investment. That said, the collection  
was recently re-evaluated for capital  
gains purposes and has appreciated  
enormously over the past five years.

If we were looking at it from an  
investment perspective, the returns

have been handsome, says New-  
ton-King. Given that the acquisition  
budget is limited, the idea for the  
collection is to combine quality  
works with financial nous. The po-  
tential appreciation of art is a rele-  
vant issue but we are more interest-  
ed in getting good pieces at afford-  
able prices, says Newton-King.

The history of the JSE's art col-  
lection is a potted, rather eclectic  
one. It had never had a formal col-  
lection; artworks had been accrued  
through gifts, donations and pur-  
chases. It began buying contempo-  
rary works after its relocation, and  
there is no overarching theme.

The old and newly acquired are



being carefully integrated. In some cases, this has been quite literal: beautiful stained glass windows reflecting various aspects of history that were part of its Diagonal Street premises were not left behind. Instead, they were incorporated into wooden panels that swivel at staggered angles near the entrance to the function room.

The works are exhibited in different parts of the building, primarily on the ground and uppermost floor where guests are received. Visitors cannot fail to notice the impressive commissioned tapestries in the foyer hanging, fittingly enough, below a

Above: Jackson Hlungwane's sculpture, Christa Prays (1990)

Left: Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi (1998), Do Not Run Away From The Truth, acrylic on canvas

ticker line of share prices. These include a mohair tapestry called Office Love designed by William Kentridge and woven under the guidance of Marguerite Stephens.

Other artists in the collection include Sam Nhlengethwa, Zwelethu Mthethwa and Deborah Bell. One of the most recent acquisitions is Volt of Breath by Paul Emmanuel.

Newton-King says photography is gaining popularity as a fine art form and is relatively affordable. The JSE decided this year to buy photography for the first time, and these images are exhibited together in an office space. The idea is to encourage interesting juxtapositions and more unity in reading the works.

Art consultant Les Cohn is working with the JSE on this photographic extension. Cohn says the idea was to look at the identity and history of the company and let the images reflect that. The photographic images she suggested all linked somehow with the city of Johannesburg, from a Stephen Hobbs image

of a billboard to works by Jiirgen

Schadeberg and Ruphin Coudyzer. Cohn says any company consid-

ering an art collection should look at

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what message it portrays about the company itself. â\200\234The collection is also very influenced by what talks most to (the selectors) and what will speak to the staff.â\200\235

Cohn says photographs by staff members will be exhibited alongside more esteemed names.

And talks by artists to the staff are in the pipeline. She thinks this kind of engagement with the collection is important because corporations are, in a sense, the custodians of artworks and must make them as accessible as possible.

Newton-King says that as a national exchange, it is important to support South African entrepreneurship wherever possible â\200\224 and contemporary art is an example of this.

She is enthusiastic about the quality of work to be found in SA and the way artworks challenge perceptions: â\200\234Ideally, I would like to have artworks in all the (JSE) spaces.â\200\235

Kim Gurney

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Above: Elmarie Costandius, 11 Official Languages (detail), 11 glass bubbles. Joint winner of the Sasol New Signatures Competition 2005

Right and opposite page: Richard Penn, Mirror

4, lambda prints. Winner of the Sasol New Signatures Competition 2004

Words alone don't fill galleries. They cannot be delicately crafted with an artist's chisel, nor come to life with a single brushstroke. They aren't able to capture  
aiment with colour, nor be understood by the Miterate. Words alone aren't nearly enough. That's why we're doing things like searching for new artists, displaying their work as well as actively participating in exhibitions and festivals. Because we'd far rather do something about it, than just talk about it,

HE magic numbers in the story of Sasol's visual arts sponsorship are 21, 17, R230 000 and R100 000. It was in 2004 that Sasol celebrated its coming of age as an arts sponsor, with 21 years of solid support for the visual arts. To mark its majority, the company reconceptualised its highly successful Sasol Wax in Art Competition, and this year unveiled

the Sasol Wax Art Award. The award is a striking mirror image: the sponsor has established its track record, credentials and maturity, and wishes to support similarly mature and established artists. The careers of these artists, says Sasol, â\200\234represent the realisation of the vision for the industry that Sasol has invested in and loyally supportedâ\200\235.

Valuably, the award fills a gap in the arts spectrum. Other art competitions, such as Sasolâ\200\231s annual New Signatures, now in its 17th year, are geared towards younger, emerging artists. Mid-career artists of proven excellence have limited opportunities, creating a dangerous imbalance: growth is encouraged at one end, but not sustained at the other. The first Sasol Wax Art Award points the way to recognition and reward for established artists.

Sasol CE Pat Davies says: â\200\234The visual arts play an important role in recording, communicating and commenting on our rich social and cultural heritage. For more than two

decades Sasol has been a committed -

sponsor of the visual arts, not only through our corporate collection, but also through the sponsorship of competitions and awards.â\200\235

There is more: Sasol is the worldâ\200\231s largest producer of wax worldwide and believes the award â\200\234is an exciting and innovative manner in which to profile one of Sasolâ\200\231s many products ... whilst rewarding creative excellence at the same timeâ\200\231.

A substantial reward of R130 000 awaits the winning artist, who will be chosen from five finalists: Kim

Berman, Andrew Tshabangu, Jeremy Wafer, Diane Victor and Kagiso Pat Mautloa. Each finalist will receive R20 000 to produce a body of work, to be displayed in a group exhibition installed at the Sasol Basement Gallery in Rosebank, Johannesburg, and later in Potchefstroom at the annual Aardklop Arts Festival.

The winner will be announced at a gala evening on August 29, which doubles as the opening of the exhibition. With sponsorship of R230 000 â\200\224 the R13( 000 prize and R100 000 to create work â\200\224 the award is arguably the ; ~emier acco-

lude for professional, mid-career artists in SA.

The five finalists were selected after a rigorous process. A judging panel, chaired by Johanneburg Art Gallery director Clive Kellner, first listed 10 semifinalists from artists whose names had been put forward in an open nominations process (in a sensible innovation, artists were allowed to propose themselves). Nominees had, however, to fulfil strict criteria, one being a minimum of four years as a practising professional artist, and at least two solo shows and four group shows.

Semifinalists were asked to present proposals for a body of work, with wax as a key component. Artists were required to use wax in any of the following ways:

As part of the process (for instance, etching or bronze casting);

@ As part of the medium (as in traditional applications where wax is mixed with oils paints, for example), or as the main ingredient of the work; or

As the concept of the work itself. This last, notes award originator and organiser Carola Ross of Carola Ross & Associates, "is a really broad area. In a previous competition we received an animated video where molten wax and wax blocks were used to animate figures."

Kellner says of the five artists: "The finalists' proposals reflect a diversity of practice that includes