

Press release: Visual poetry

An exhibition of Ben Nsusha's most recent paintings opens at Coppin Johnson, 150 West Street, Durban on Thursday, 29 October 1992.

Although Nsusha is known to many art lovers as a sculptor he also excels in printmaking, painting and photography. This exhibition will enable Durban gallery-goers to acquaint themselves with the visual poetry of the painter Nsusha.

His paintings -- collage, acrylic, soil and gel on canvas, paper or wood -- evoke memories of a man-hunt (*Wanted, Dead or Alive, Wanted, Alive*), the soaring of birds (*Birds*), conflict and shielding (*The African Helmet series*) and love (*Lovers and Musician*).

Each painting reveals a vocabulary that is rich in textures. Slight hints of Louis Maghubela's and Lucky Sibiya's styles may be discerned in Nsusha's use of palimpsest evocations and carved lines. His application of these features in combination with collage shows that his departure from their styles is definite. In this creative process Nsusha acknowledges the impact of both these artists on his visual imagery. He also demonstrates that a "collaged" line is just as evocative as a carved or a scratched one. In *Lovers* he applies tissue-thin contours. Thus contributing to the linear vocabulary of South African painting.

Ben Nsusha is currently teaching photography at Fuba Academy in Johannesburg. He received his formal training in art at Rorke's Drift, Birmingham School of Art, Slade College of Art, Chelsea School of Art and London University. He also qualified as a television technician.

Elza Miles.



and principal contributor was Van Doesburg (he also used two other pen names, Bonset and Camini; his real name, Kùpper, he never used). Other contributors were Mondrian and Van der Leek. Apart from this literary beginning, the group was also working in architecture (J P P Oud built two important houses at this time) and furniture (Rietveld was the designer).

In the following year the group published its first manifesto. It begins as follows: 'There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world war as well as in the art of the present day.' One is reminded here of the whole classic attitude, of order and organisation.

The manifesto was intended as a call to other artists outside Holland, and after the Armistice of 1918 they responded. French, Italian, Belgian and German artists began to contribute to the magazine.

In 1920 Mondrian published his pamphlet NEO PLASTICISM in Paris, where he was at that time working, and an essay in the form of a dialogue, NATURAL REALITY AND ABSTRACT REALITY. Both these difficult documents are explanations of Mondrian's attitude. In 1921 the centre of De Stijl activity was in Germany where Van Doesburg had made contact with Walter Gropius, the recently appointed head of the Bauhaus at Weimar. Of the period he says, 'At Weimar I have radically overturned everything. This is the famous academy, which now had the most modern teachers. I have talked to the pupils every evening and have infused the poison of the new spirit everywhere.'

In 1925 Van Doesburg developed a new theory which he called 'Elementarism', and this became the characteristic of the group. It happened that Van Doesburg soon after received a commission to restyle the interior of the Aubette at Strasbourg and he was able to make this a public expression of Elementarism. The mural in the cinema dance hall was the most striking part.

Mondrian, after leaving the movement in 1925, remained in Paris until 1938 when he came to England where he was bombed out in 1940. Thereafter he lived in New York until his death in 1944.

Van Doesburg and Mondrian both had a following in America which has had some influence on recent American developments.

### The nature of De Stijl and Neo Plasticism:

Initially at least, these two terms may be considered together, Neo Plasticism being preferred by Mondrian to describe his work, while De Stijl describes the group.

Of all modern movements this is the one which probably proves the most difficult of comprehension to the widest section of the public and which is for them the least attractive. The reason is not, I think, far to seek.

The mature De Stijl work arrives at its abstract form not by a process of removes from a given subject but from an intellectual idea of the attainability of the expression of universal order, that order being imminent in nature. De Stijl artists were thus not concerned with the incidental aspects of nature or with the individual interpretation of them. Mondrian has written:

Man is enabled by abstract aesthetic contemplation to achieve conscious unity with the universal.

The deepest purpose in painting has always been to give concrete existence, though line and colour, to the universal which appears in contemplation.

Real life is the mutual interaction of two oppositions of the same value but of a different aspect and nature. Its plastic expression is universal beauty.

Cesar Domela, in a lecture about abstract art and De Stijl, says:

Lines, surfaces and colours are units with which the artist creates forces that enable him to organise the picture. For these forces to achieve their maximum intensity, it is necessary to simplify forms. The composition forms a whole and nothing can be added or taken away from it. Colour is used for its dynamic effect and not for its prettiness.

And Mondrian again:

Unconsciously every true artist has always been moved by beauty of line, colour and relationship for their own sake and not by what they may represent.

Abstract-real painting is capable of mathematically aesthetic expression, because it possesses an exact, mathematical means of expression.