

INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



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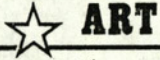
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The Daily News

Jg..... Nr..... P. 3 Dat. 1989. 6. - 5.



Mbatha: Invention and charm

Reviews by CAROL BROWN
Azaria Mbatha
(African Art Centre)

THE Rorke's Drift Art Centre, founded in 1962 by Swedish missionaries, was highly influential in nurturing black artists, particularly printmakers and craftsmen.

The crafts were an important part of the Centre and the printmakers

were encouraged to make works which could be translated into fabrics, illustrations, etc. That they produced some of the country's finest printmakers is now a well known fact and this year has seen the honouring of two of the foremost exponents of this technique.

John Muafangejo was honoured with a retrospective, which was shown at the Durban Art Museum, and this exhibition of Azaria Mbatha's work is also in the form of a retrospective as it shows work ranging from 1965 to the present.

It is fitting that it should be arranged by the African Art Centre, who first showed his work in Durban in 1965.

The early work shows the style which became associated with the school. The theme is biblical and strongly narrative. The story is told in a manner relating to medieval book illustrations, where one event follows another in strip form. This type of narrative demands a strong sense of patterning and repetition, which is a quality Mbatha has retained to the present.

The works are, however, now more sophisticated in the simplification of detail and concentration on the abstract qualities of pattern making as in *Building a Cross*.

Contrasts in these later works are stronger and there is more focus on this aspect than on the narrative. However the emphasis of his work is still strongly religious.

The linocuts, which are so typical of

the Rorke's Drift style, remain the strongest works and the ones where the artist has made the most impact.

The silkscreens form an interesting contrast and are often stylistically quite different from the black and white works. *Head 1* is one of the most powerful of the silkscreens, containing a brooding, expressionistic quality and using colours like stained glass, while at the same time retaining an influence of primitive art in its handling of

planes.

The *Self Portrait* is also a charming, inventive work, where the artist's signature grows out of his portrait, and the writing is skilfully handled to form a clear and decisive pattern.

Mbatha now lives in Sweden and has received international acclaim. Regrettably, the Fine Art Section of Rorke's Drift has closed down and that possibly means the end of the particular style of art practised by Mbatha and Muafangejo.

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Artificial: that fabulous life
(Elizabeth Gordon Gallery)

ANDRÉ Naudé's works, still on show until Wednesday, are almost like stills from films in their studied artificiality, frozen moments and specific situations.

His works extend the boundaries of pure painting in these references, also in the allusions of titles such as *Thoroughly bored with Bombay* and *the Cat Club, Mombasa Hashish can be very tiresome* and *Where is the Cabaret, my Dear?* His subjects are dissipated, decadent, and debauched colonials who are all having enormous fun and so are we, the viewers. While the works hark back to the German Expressionists, particularly to Otto Dix, this satire is not as biting.

Naudé injects a note of humour into

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The Daily News

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his work and also a sophisticated slickness. He is a polished artist with a sure and deft touch to his brush and a lively sense of colour.

Naudé is relatively new on the scene and he has distinguished himself by winning several awards. He brings a professionalism and underlying satire to his work and his confidence, boldness, wit and ability are like a breath of fresh air in a sometimes stiflingly serious society.

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