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## GOVERNING COUNCIL:

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Lionel Murcott is Minutes Secretary

DIRECTOR: Bill Ainslie

## TEACHING STAFF:

Bill Ainslie  
Lisa Roetger  
Lynda Ballen  
Lionel Murcott

Judy Shear  
Jill Cargill  
Simon Ford  
Liz Castle  
Jo Smail - visiting lecturer.

## NEWS LETTER:

Editor : Franka Severin  
Secretary : Marge Carroll  
With the co-operation of:

Lady Star Naylor Leyland

The foundation has enjoyed an unprecedented growth during the last three months and for the first time since its formation it is possible to envisage the fulfillment of the originating ambitions of the venture. The Council has taken transfer of the property and a remarkably successful programme of expansion has been launched involving new classes, new activities and new staff. The new programme was planned by Lynda Ballen, the promotion was guided by Neil Lloyd and implemented by Jill Cargill, with co-operative back up from staff and students.

Student numbers have been maintained more successfully than in the past and the new staff members have provided and added strength to the enterprise through their dedication and imagination.

Anthusa Sotriades and Dubie Braunstien have joined the administrative staff in part time capacities, and are being trained to run the office when Fieke withdraws. They have both inspired confidence amongst those that work with them; and Anthusa who has been here longer, has helped with teaching and planning as well.

A bursary committee consisting of Haddasah Cohen, Lady Star Naylor Leyland and myself has been established. The aim is to raise and disburse money to those with talent but without the means to develop it.

I was invited to give a talk to the Open School by Colin Smuts, and to lead a seminar on developing a workshop programme at Funda by Matsinela Manaka.

Sandy Summerfield arranged a meeting between Mr. Wilby Baqua, the chairman of the new African Institute of Art, herself and me to prepare the way for cooperation between the respective organisations, and I have presented a statement to the symposium on Funding and Representation in the Arts organised by Unisa.

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3  
The amount of activity in the school has increased considerably. The newsletter has consequently expanded and Franka Severin is to be thanked for ensuring its continuing appearance. A larger staff for it begins to seem necessary.

#### ISAAC WITKIN

Over ten years ago, on meeting Isaac Witkin while he was on a visit to this country, it occurred to me that it was important that his work be shown in this country.

It seemed to me that it was important for artists here to have a chance to directly encounter and assess his work. He has participated in a very intimate way in certain crucial developments in twentieth century art. He has worked with Henry Moore; he helped to change the direction of sculpture during the 60's when he was involved in the group headed by Caro; he chose to meet the challenges of New York and in his success there he has probably succeeded in establishing a more significant place for himself in contemporary art history than any other S.A. artist. Although he is now an American citizen, he still considers his growing up in this country an indelible influence on his development.

During the last ten years we have met several times and each time the possibility of an exhibition has edged closer. Over the last year things have accelerated and Franka Severin, who has been directing this last and crucial phase on behalf of the Art Foundation, has now reported that she is confident the exhibition will take place.

Bill Ainslie

#### THE INTERVIEW OF THIS MONTH.

##### NEL ERASMUS

F.S. Nel Erasmus, who are you really?

N.E. I am a child of the Highveld. Born in Bethal in 1928 on a farm, which explains my sense of freedom and openness, I think. Then four years at Wits. An interesting time because it was immediately after the war and the University expanded. The art department had just started. I studied at the same time as :-

1945 - Wim Blom  
1946 - Larry Scully  
Cecil Skotness  
Gordon Vorster  
1948 - Christo Coetzee

One year of Art Teachers certificate (today - Technikon) enabled me to teach at Johannesburg High School for girls.

I left for England and France in January 1953 where I stayed for three years.

F.S. When did you come back to South Africa and when did you become the director of the J.A.G.\*?

N.E. I came back in 1956. I worked for one year for the SABC in the editorial section of the Radio Bulletin. In 1957 I entered the world of the J.A.G. I had to make a living, but wanted to remain in an inspiring atmosphere. I found there an intellectual honesty. It took the Director Anton Hendriks about one year before he decided to accept me. He was a unique person, everyday you could learn something from him.

\* Johannesburg Art Gallery.



F.S. Amongst the people you met were some important personalities like Clement Greenberg. What influence has Clement Greenberg had on the choice of the latest acquisitions you made for the J.A.G.?

N.E. Clement Greenberg assisted me to contact Antony Caro and Olitski.

F.S. What was your impression of Greenberg's visit to South Africa in 1974?

N.E. His visit to South Africa was controversial. Some people knew his reputation even though they may not have read any of his publications like, for instance, "Art and Culture". On the whole I want to say South Africa was not ready for his contribution. The opposition he provoked was generally based on a lack of knowledge and therefore frequently not justified.

F.S. I have heard it said that the Johannesburg City Council is a source of embarrassment for the J.A.G. Do you find its attitude unreasonably restrictive and conservative towards acquisitions, particularly of modern art?

N.E. It was a battle. It was a tremendous battle; a battle to buy with a limited budget on the international market and then to have it accepted by the Council. It is regrettable because the Art Gallery Committee is supposed to be composed of knowledgeable and influential people. There are four permanent and three ambulant members - 2 of these 3 represent the City Council of Jhb. and the 3rd is appointed by the Government.

Especially amongst artists, the Johannesburg City Council has a bad reputation for its support of the Arts. New York, Paris etc. as major international cities, find it worthwhile to give strong support to modern art while the Johannesburg City Council treats it as though it is an embarrassment.!

F.S. What do you consider to be the main acquisitions which you have made for the J.A.G?

N.E. There were several. Amongst them, I think the two Henry Moore's sculpture, the painting of Olitsky and Frankenthaler, the Picasso and perhaps the bronzes of Emilio Greco and Georges Gard.

F.S. How did you make the contact with Moore and Picasso. Did you meet them?

N.E. A friend in London introduced me to Moore and I went to visit him in his studio. He had just finished the two sketch models for "The Elephant Skull". At the time they were to be assembled in one work - I expressed a serious interest in one of the final casts and in fact, provisionally booked it for the J.A.G. After some correspondence we received "Torso and Architectural Project" about two year later - his original intention of 1 combined sculpture "The Elephant Skull" became two separate entities.

I unfortunately never met Picasso but bought the "Harlequin" from a spanish friend of his who is also an art dealer. It was indeed lucky for the J.A.G. that this picture was acquired six months before his death as you know what happens to prices after death, especially of an artist of this calibre.

F.S. A new director has recently been appointed to the Gallery - Mr. Christopher Till. Have you met him? Are there developments you would like to see him undertake?

N.E. Yes, I met Mr. Till. He is a charming person. I imagine that he will attempt to build the collections in accordance with the policy of the Gallery as laid down at its inception. It means to represent as far as possible modern tendencies in western art.

F.S. The Johannesburg City Council is enlarging the Gallery. What do you think of this development?



N.E. I am not, and never was in favour of adding to the existing building. The location on the railway line and surrounding area is most unfortunate. The Joubert Park severely restricts and dictates any additions. The result cannot be ideal and certainly not suitable for the metropolis of the Republic. I am on the building committee and I have much respect for what is being done under these restricting conditions and severely limited funds. Special space for temporary & Travelling exhibitions and for educational activities on the spot with original works of art at hand are of great importance. In my time the necessary staff could not at all be accommodated, but it was all planned for in the long report that the chief architect and I published in early 1970, soon after our return from an extended study tour of museum buildings in Europe and America.

The correct approach in my view, would have been to take the present collection which is a small modern collection to an entirely new building. The building to be designed around this collection, its projected future growth and the desired temporary exhibition and educational activities. The land in the Pieter Roos Park, which had been bought for the purpose would have given this freedom of design, and this should not have been beyond the financial means of the largest city in this country.

F.S. Nel, I would like to talk more of Nel Erasmus as a painter as this is by far the most important side of you. Do you mind if I start with a few references?

#### Main Exhibitions:

- 1955 Paris, 10th Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Museum of Modern Art.
- 1955 Paris, Galerie Bogroff.
- 1957 Paris, "50 Years of Abstract Painting", Galerie Creuze.
- 1957 Johannesburg, Lidchi Gallery.
- 1959 Johannesburg, Lidchi Gallery.
- 1959 Pretoria, S.A.A.A.

- 1961 Paris, 2nd Biennale, Museum of Modern Art.
- 1961 Johannesburg, Gallery 101.
- 1962 Pretoria, S.A.A.A.
- 1965 Sao Paulo, Biennale.
- 1972 Johannesburg, R.A.U.
- 1972 Johannesburg, 1st Prestige Exhibition Gertrude Posel Gallery, Wits.
- 1977 Cape Town, Die Kunsamer.
- 1979 Johannesburg, Goodman Gallery & Guest artist of J.A.G.
- 1981 Johannesburg, R.A.U. Retrospective Exhibition since leaving post of director of J.A.G.
- 1981 Pretoria, Studio De Jongh.
- 1982 Johannesburg, Cassirer Fine Art.
- 1983 Johannesburg, Cassirer Fine Art.

#### Represented at:

- \* S.A. National Gallery, Cape Town
- \* Johannesburg Art Gallery
- \* Pretoria Art Museum
- \* Sanlam Art Collection, Cape Town
- \* Rembrandt Art Foundation Collection, Stellenbosch
- \* Hester Rupert Collection, Graaf Reinet.
- \* Sasol Collection, Johannesburg

You are referred to in some four South African and six overseas reference books. I had the pleasure to admire your paintings in the following two books:-

- 1957 Book of Michel Seuphor entitled "Abstract Painters"
- 1974 "Modern Abstract Painting" edited by Maeght (Maeght Gallery, St. Paul De Vence)

F.S. What did you get out of Wits and how was this affected by your stay in Paris?

N.E. At Wits there was a tremendous lack of direct contact with original and modern work. Moreover, we were not encouraged to use what we had in the J.A.G. particularly its 19th century French collection. It was shortly after the



war and the J.A.G.'s collections were even more limited than they are today. So, in Paris, one could virtually start from scratch and believe me, I was eager to look and to learn.

My time at Ecole Des Beaux Arts and more particularly Sorbonne and Academie Ranson has had and, I think, still has an influence on my work.

I had now a live contact with the important works of art, monuments, museums, serious painters etc.... all the things one only had heard and read about previously.

At Academie Ranson we rubbed shoulders with the past. In the attic there was still a large canvas of Maurice Denis, (the Nabi) who stressed the how of painting rather than the what. We felt him to be present with his famous words to the effect that: "before being a horse, a woman or an apple, a picture is a surface covered with paint in a specific way, stressing particular relationships of tones, shapes and colours." Plato claimed that the archetypal forms were the circle and the square. Visually he was thinking two dimensionally. Cezanne reduced nature to the cube, cylinder and cone set in a three dimensional space. The cubists liberated the object further and set it in a cubist space which was one step removed from the two dimensional space of the abstract painters, and the 50's were the heyday of abstract painting. So when Singier stressed one Friday morning during one of his crits that we are all descendants of Cezanne it made immediate sense for me.

Naturally approaching prominent painters like Selim, Manessier, Bazaine and Singier must have had a formative influence on me.

F.S. You left the J.A.G. in 1977 after having spent about twenty years there. What did this time mean for your painting?

N.E. I was every day exposed to and handled top quality works but at the same time this was demanding on one's.

energy. I left because it was time to leave. The Council did not wish to hear my pleas for more Professional and Administrative staff. The load became too heavy. My departure seems to have alerted the appropriate department and the staff situation improved several hundred percent soon after. It was time to leave because I was a painter before becoming a museologist. I worked during the day and painted at night, burning the candle at both ends. I wanted to continue painting and drawing more in this fashion. But when I took full charge of the J.A.G. in 1964, it became more and more difficult to give time and energy to painting.

I remained with the Gallery so long because I felt responsible for the building of the new Gallery in Parktown. I am now able to concentrate on my own work.

F.S. When did you start painting and what motivated you to do so?

N.E. Does one know? I can't say. For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to draw. I got the first real opportunity when I finished school. Many people think that to paint is just to have fun. Sometimes one feels as a painter, that one would rather do anything than sweat over a canvas. You have to be able to struggle. My involvement with the F.A.G. did not keep me away from these depressions, I know them too well. But still I need to paint.

Picasso said: "I don't search I find." I did find ..... but, hell, I am searching!

Thank you Nel Erasmus.



SPECIAL COURSES

CHILDRENS PROGRAMME

The children's programme, one of the most demanding teaching challenges, has taken time to settle down. Lynda, Judy and Jill have provided a much needed continuity this year and with the development of a settled programme the classes are now beginning to look very good. We have again invited Gail Behrman to help us with the children's holiday course.

CALLIGRAPHIC ILLUMINATION

An advanced course in Calligraphic Illumination taught by Lynda Ballen, both mornings and evenings, has opened up a new sphere of interest. The courses have proved enormously popular and we are launching an introductory course in basic calligraphy by Judy Clare as a result. After completing her final art degree at Wits, Judy Clare did a Book-binding course at Camberwell in the U.K., at this time she made a special study of Calligraphy and has been involved in it ever since.

SIMON FORD

We are fortunate to have recently been joined by Simon Ford from Michaelis where he had acquired a master degree in printmaking with distinction. He has just held a successful exhibition at the market gallery and enjoys the distinction of having other, had a series of his work acquired by the National Gallery in Cape Town. Students stand to benefit enormously from his contribution to the school and new classes in printmaking on Monday morning and afternoon are to be made available on a parttime basis.

JO SMAIL

Back from America Jo Smail is teaching the independent group of fulltimers.

LIZ CASTLE

Liz Castle is a teacher who started her art training at this centre and furthered it through UNISA. Her experience is a great asset and her joining us coincides with a new commitment to her own painting.

LIESA ROETGER

Liesa Roetger has tackled the supervision of models for portrait and life classes and has presented us with a lively internal communications scheme with her calender, notice board and posters.

CULTURAL SURVEY

Lionel Murcott has drawn in a new group interested in a Cultural Survey offering an understanding of major modern developments through the form of slide lectures. This course is available in mornings and evenings.

SOUP LUNCH LECTURES

The soup lunch lectures on Fridays from 12h00 to 14h00 have drawn full audiences. We have had talks from Franco Fresura, Sophie Mcinga and Robert Schweitzer. These talks dealing with architecture, the life of a singer, and the place of dream in indigenous culture have all illuminated an aspect of life in Southern Africa. Illona Anderson was the first artist to speak to us, she is to be followed by Nel Erasmus and Dirk Meerkotter.

Dirk is due to go to Paris to spend time in the S.A. Association Studio there. The charge is R4.00 per time and includes a light lunch. We would like to broaden the audience for these talks and plan to launch them in the evenings as well.



VIDEOS AND FILMS ON ART

Lynda has also made video films on art and artists available for lunch time showings. Judy Shear and Haddassah are arranging to make this a regular event on Thursdays at 12 noon. Everyone will be welcome and there will be no charge. Haddassah and Judy have investigated the implications of arranging Saturday afternoon picnic concerts. The idea came from Darius Brubeck who has spoken of the population of these ventures in the States, he has offered to play for us as a contribution to our fundraising campaign. These will take place in the winter when the weather is more predictable.

GALLERY

We expect work to begin on preparing the gallery within the next few weeks. Daphne Rosendorff and Lynda have investigated design and restructuring costs.

INTERNAL EXHIBITION

The first week in April has ushered in our first "work in progress" exhibition. This is intended to provide staff and students with an opportunity to see other work being done in the school.

LIBRARY

Clare Brown and Clare Rossouw have given us the benefit of their time in sorting out the demanding job of organising our library, which is slowly taking shape.

POETRY

Lionel continues to enrich the programme with additional offerings in the form of poetry readings and we spend a riveting hour listening to a recording he brought us of Tibetan Sacred instruments. Jill Cargill presented a recording T.S. Eliot's Family Re-union.

PROMOTIONS TEAM

Jill has been joined by Liz Castle and Haddassah Cohen on the promotions team.

STORY TELLING

Pat Williams has arrived from London to spend some time painting in the studios.

She wrote lyrics for the production of King Kong, and is now the director of the College of Story Tellers in England.

She has helped us to arrange our first story telling evening to test whether there might be a sufficient response to develop the activity here.

\* \* \* \* \*

OUR MODELS CAN WRITE

Sitting and Thinking in a poetic way.

T H E M O D E L

By: Mrs. Gordon

I heard that Art was all the rage!  
When I was nearing my dotage  
So my mind was made up to try  
And to the Art School I did hic!





I asked how I could be given a start?  
 Don't make me laugh, to model shall be your part.  
 Young Judy was delighted, when my physiogmony she sighted:  
 "Just the model I need for a mask"  
 So students were given the formidable task.  
 Just draw a deepline here and another there  
 The mask for children it is to scare!  
 Of expression this face is totally bare  
 "Here for you we prepared a place  
 Just as always stare into space"  
 Judging by the hoots and squeals of fun  
 Not much to be done to my face of fun  
 That ended the lesson  
 And also my first session!  
 Next Lionel had to take a hand  
 He took a very determined stand  
 Before you can be taught to paint  
 You learn to sit without complaint  
 Your face is not exactly that good  
 On canvas to be depicted  
 Don't look so surprised  
 Your face must be analysed  
 The way I am treated a disgrace  
 Seems I am in need of a new face  
 Its' look this way don't turn your head  
 You may be old but are you dead?  
 Was I taught to paint them?  
 Don't be daft!  
 Young Simon had to get in his shaft!  
 He didn't even hold out bait  
 But shouldered will you sit upstraight!  
 The silence had to be unbroken  
 Only by him were words to be spoken  
 When I tried to put in my oar.  
 "Shut up your face!" came his loud roar.  
 As a model you are a hell of a disgrace  
 No dance step you can execute  
 That is a fact you can't dispute!  
 I don't want to cut up too rough  
 But as a model you are a bluff!  
 Jill was the next on the agenda



Up the wall I nearly sent her  
 when the only complaint  
 uttered in restraint  
 "This position I cannot hold"  
 "You old Hussy you are too bold!"  
 First one and then the second session:  
 But nary a sign of my first lesson!  
 Jill needed some support  
 Lisa was called to help hold the fort  
 This remark I overheard, and my ire was stirred!  
 "How could you do a face like that  
 It's much too young on the old cat!  
 Liz and Lynda are very clever  
 Of my a sight they avoid ever!  
 So this is my valid complaint  
 If I want to learn to paint, I'll need the patience of  
 a Saint  
 I am given absolutely no leisure  
 Bill I don't soo to voice my displeasure !!!

\* \* \* \* \*

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 Abrahams. Copies may be obtained from bookshops or  
 from the Editor 1a Fifth Street, Orange Grove, at  
 R2.00 per copy.

\* \* \* \* \*

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