

Van Rensburg, W. SA ART HIGHLIGHTS, in South African Art Times newspaper, Global Art Information, Johannesburg, South Africa, December

The SA Art Times asks Wilhelm van Rensburg for his highlights of the year.

The highlight on the art scene this year was undoubtedly the launch of the phenomenal, four-volume *Visual Century; South African Art in context 1907 – 2007*, a book project directed by Gavin Jantjes and published by Wits University Press. Not since Steven Sack's eponymous *The Neglected Tradition* of 1988 have South Africans seen such a comprehensive, revisionist approach to the history of our art.

It posits, through a multitude of essays by prominent South African scholars and art historians, a radically new interpretation of the history of twentieth century visual art in South Africa against the backdrop of momentous social and political events. This is going to be the standard reference work for years to come.

Exhibition highlights of 2011 include Peter Clarke's retrospective, *Listening to Distant Thunder* at the Standard Bank Gallery in May/June (one got a very good sense of his painting style and the vast range of his prints); *Transcode; Dialogues Around Intermedia Practice* at Unisa Art Gallery in September (the show was made by Nathaniel Stern's *Stuttering*, a brilliant conceptual work, executed in innovative electronic media); Clive van den Berg's *Soundings, In Passage* at Goodman Gallery in October (when last did one get to see such good abstract painting?); and William Kentridge's new video work; *Other Faces*, also at Goodman, in November/December. At the Johannesburg Art Fair, the best work was undoubtedly featured artist, Paul Emmanuel's video *3SAI: A Rite of Passage*. Individual masterpieces at the Fair included paintings by Serge Alain Nitegeka at Stevenson, and Gunther Herbst at Gallery AOP, and drawings by Catherine Boyer at Galerie Beatrice Binoche.

The recession certainly impacted on the art market in 2011, the psychological glass ceiling for prices paid for contemporary art seemingly ranging between R20 000 and R30 000.. Anything beyond that seemed to be difficult to move - just check out the sales records of the auction houses this year. Or the prices were extremely high, with, for example, the latest Kentridge drawings going for a couple of million rand. There will always be buyers for good art.

The best way through the recession is simply to buy more art! There is the story about a famous Los Angeles collector, who, upon request to consign a Rothko painting to a well-known auction house, with a guarantee of US\$50 000 000 000, simply answered, 'What would I do with the money?'. There is also the story of the artist, who, upon returning from Europe, lowered her prices by 40%. And the story of the artist, who, upon returning from the USA, put up his prices by 40%! The trick is to identify tomorrow's Kentridges today. Many reputable galleries mount excellent shows by young artists, such as the April 2011 exhibition by newcomer Jaco van Schalkwyk at Gallery AOP. He also designed the elegant on-line catalogue of the exhibition.

The shows one should not miss next year are the Candice Breitz retrospective at Standard Bank Gallery in February 2012; the opening of the Wits Art Museum; and the exhibition of abstract expressionist work at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, which will include rare drawings by the Japanese Gutai group and paintings by Christo Coetzee, also in February 2012.