

Editorial

The South African Journal of Art History has now truly come of age. Not only is this issue Number Two of Volume Twenty-two - representing more than twenty-one years of uninterrupted publication - but the new layout and typography that have been on trail since last year have been well-received and the format is now 'official'. Also, illustrations can now be reproduced in colour, a feature that will unquestionably enhance its standing and competitiveness. International contributions have increased dramatically over the last few years, and no less than fourteen academics now serve on its international advisory board.

As an independent peer-reviewed journal - with no institutional affiliations - its role and status as a forum for putting original research on the visual arts in the public domain can only grow, considering incentives by the Department of Education to enhance the quality and quantity of peer-reviewed outputs, combined with pressure from tertiary institutions that are now increasingly demanding outputs as an important criterion in performance assessment.

Readers might have noticed that half the articles in Volume 21 Number 1 were architecture-orientated, and in this issue the proportion is even larger. A third of the members of the editorial board hold architectural qualifications, including the editor, Professor Estelle Mare, who has a doctorate in architecture as well as two in the arts! This is not indicative of a 'takeover', but rather evidence of a growing need amongst scholars of architecture to contribute to issues shared with the visual arts. Countless international conferences have demonstrated how meaningfully the various art forms can collectively interrogate focussed themes.

This emerging architectural dimension justifies some clarification. Pevsner's classic comment that "A bicycle shed is a building, Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture", is patently obsolete and simply too exclusive, while Egenter's proposition that architecture includes everything built by man and "possibly also by his precursors" is maybe somewhat extreme. But even Vitruvius recognised mud huts as part of the genealogy of architecture in his manifesto of ca. AD 200. Bartuska and Young, however, offer a working definition of architecture as "the art and science of designing and building open areas, communities and other artificial constructions or environments, usually with some regard to aesthetic effects". And the agenda of *The South African Journal of Art History* allows the 'art' in architecture to be celebrated and explored. Its editorial philosophy encourages architectural research to advance from the traditional, rigidly scientific (positivist) analytical method to a more holistic, theoretical, creative and even speculative (postpositivist) position.

The theory and practice of art have always reflected the current aspirations and anxieties of a society. At this point ours is in transition; from authoritarianism to democracy, from a Eurocentric to an Afrocentric orientation, from being excluded from international discourse to being welcomed. While the arts are locally being transformed into an inclusive, accessible and socially sensitive discipline, they must also be aligned to the tenets of the global agenda. This issue pursues the theme of complexity in the South African context, with specific reference to art, architecture, aesthetics, craft and the environment, and I can think of no better framework within which to examine the underlying layering of histories and opposing social forces. The arts share an inherent complexity, not only in terms of diverse geographic, climatic, cultural and socio-economic contexts, but also in imagining, purpose and production.

For many decades prior to 1994 research in South Africa was in some cases tainted with separatist ideology, in others sympathetic to the struggle. The challenge now is not only to recover those lost decades of research into indigenous and revolutionary art, as well as into

vernacular artefacts, including the built environment, but also to question how we are currently perceiving the role of art and to set the stage for a democratic culture.

The contributions featured in this issue have all been reviewed according to accreditation requirements. Leoni Schmidt explores the dynamics that induce complexity when art is migrated, and alludes to the impact of the Diaspora on the transformation of concepts. A number of them address various aspects of local historical significance including Karel Bakker's discussion of policies that impact on South African heritage places, Fisher and Clarke's speculation on the origins and use of corbelled stone structures that fuses architecture and archaeology, and Nico Botes' analysis of 19th century Boer chairs. The robustness of our built environment is evident in Schalk le Roux's description of how a Dutch Reformed Church in Pretoria was "converted" into a mosque. My own taxonomic work attempts to illustrate the richness and diversity of the architectural and settlement heritage south of the Sahara. And Nic Coetzer describes provocatively how the Cape Dutch revival was envisaged as a bridge between English and Afrikaans South Africans to - in the spirit of the *Zeitgeist* - help "forge a new white nation".

Barbara Jekot's investigation of the synthesis of industrial and pre-industrial building technologies, Anike Grobler's analysis of the materiality of the Constitutional Court, and Estelle Mare's narrative on complexity in the meaning of our monuments all address contemporary issues that span from the pragmatic to the symbolic. John Steele's article on the work of rural potters is an intimate report that includes artistic as well as socio-economic commentary ... of great current relevance in the quest to alleviate poverty.

Last but not least, the article by Russel Viljoen deals with a significant and relevant theme. Representation of the Khoisan is a growing and hotly contested field of cultural studies, to which this detailed study is a significant contribution.

While the topics might seem disparate at first glance, reading them reveals a consistent thread: the complexity involved in conceptualising, making and perceiving art. And rather than disparate, the narratives are interrelated and overlapping. This is the tentative beginning of a 'themed' approach, and readers and contributors of *The South African Journal of Art History* can look forward to more symbiotic engagement with common concerns and interests in the future.

Gerald Steyn (Guest Editor)