

Adams: A Pathfinder to the soul of art

If there is any justice in the extravagant amounts of money that the rich spend on some artworks – like 57 million USD on a work from 1982 by Jean-Michel Basquiat at last week's Christie's auction in New York –one can only wonder at the worth of this gripping exhibition.

In an era where some much art has promised its soul to the art-market (even artists fresh out of art-school think that artistic merit is measured in monetary worth), the late Albert Adams is a leading example of how the soul blossoms in the creative process.

The fact that the art of Adams, who died in 2007 at the age of 77, hasn't become a big-ticket item on auction (such as Robert Hodgins and Stanley Pinker among others), possibly says more about the unsettling emotional power of his work than its artistic merit.

Because Adams was a typical artists artist: his visual understanding followed the currents of his time (it is for example enriching to draw the parallels between this body work and artists like Bacon and Auerbach, the Germans of the era) but with more of a moral leaning. In addition he continually honed and developed his technique and media, even though line and gesture was his instrument.

Faithful to the classical expressionistic maxims of art as an expression of social consciousness, each artwork is almost a moral question.

Again and again, over the many decades that this retrospective covers, the curators Marilyn Martin and Joe Dolby revisit the same themes. It is almost exclusively the 'human condition', anxious and unsure, that he addressed through his work. Portraits (self-portraits that record his development over the years) place the person, the character fully in the foreground. In other instances, apes and the circus serve as the metaphors.

The series and depictions relating to the Cape Minstrels, like the *Celebration Series*, embodies the social irony of a festival of atrocities as a relentless presence depicted in flamboyant costume. Excellent paintings. (But do the art auctions have the nerves for this?)

It is almost as if the viewer can read the passion in Adams' work - feel the force of his argument and the uncertainty of discontent in the painterly marks. The viewer is simultaneously aware of his careful composition and mastery of many mediums – paint, charcoal or etching - through his self-assured mark making.

In 1982, he produced *The Captive*, a clever composition where the paradoxes of authority, bureaucracy and violence are depicted. This was the same year that the 22 year old Basquiat, who died 6 years later, painted his 'wild' work that was sold for an absurd price.

For us people of the Cape, this retrospective of Adams work, is an unmissable chance to experience a glimpse at the soul of art.

**Translation of
Melvyn Minnaar
Adams 'n wegwysers na siel van kuns
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Visuele kuns

Adams 'n wegwysers na siel van kuns

Melvyn Minnaar

Albert Adams
Smac, Kaapstad
★★★★★

As daar enige regverdigheid is in die uitspattige bedrae geld wat rykes vir sommige kunswerke betaal – soos \$57,3 miljoen (sowat R868 miljoen) vir 'n 1982-skildery van Jean-Michel Basquiat by Christie's in New York verlede week – kan 'n mens maar net wonder oor die waarde van hierdie aangrypende tentoonstelling.

In 'n era waarin soveel kuns sy siel meesal aan die markte belowe het (selfs kunstenaars, nat-oor uit ons kunsskole, dink deesdae meriete word in geld gemeet), is wyle Albert Adams 'n regwyser op hoe die siel in skepping kan ontvou.

Die feit dat die kuns van Adams, wat in 2006 op 77 dood is, (nog) nie die geldgierige liefling (soos onder andere Robert Hodgins en Stanley Pinker) op kunsveulings geraak het nie, sê dalk meer van die onthutsende en emosionele trefkrag van sy werk as wat dit 'n oordeel van sy kunstenaarskap is.

Want Adams was 'n tipiese kunstenaar se kunstenaar: Sy visuele verkenning het die strome van sy tyd gevolg (dit is byvoorbeeld verrykend om in hierdie “oorsig” die parallel met kunstenaars soos Bacon en Auerbach, die Duitsers van die era, te trek), maar deurgaans met 'n morele lading. Daarbenewens



“Red Figure”, 1999, houtskool en pastel op papier, deur Albert Adams.

het hy voortdurend tegniek en media geslyp en beproef, al was lyn, streep en gebaar sy instrument.

Getrou aan die klassieke ekspressionistiese leuse van kuns as uitdrukking van sosiale bewustheid, is bykans elke kuns-

werk 'n morele stelling of vraag. Keer op keer, oor die meer as vyf dekades wat die kurators Marilyn Martin en Joe Dolby hier dek, kom dieselfde temas terug. Dit is byna uitsluitlik die “menslike situasie”, ongenaakbaar en onseker, wat hy visueel

aanspreek. Portrette (boeiende selfportrette kaart sy ontginning en ontwikkeling oor die jare) plaas die persoon, die karakters gewoonlik vol in die aangesig. Elders dien ape en die sirkus as metafore daarvoor.

Die reeks en uitbeeldings rondom die Kaapse Klopse soos in die *Celebration Series* vergestalt die sosiale ironie van die feestigheid in afskuwelikheid – 'n meedoënlose aanspraak op die kyker in flambojansie getooi. Voortreflike skilderye. (Maar het kunsveulings die se nuwees hiervoor?)

Dit is byna asof jy die forsheid van argument, onsekerheid en drif van misnoeë in die verfstrepe kan aanvoel, die passie kan lees. Dieselfde tyd deur die selfversekerde manier van uitbeelding oorrompel word – Adams het nie vir kleur of kwas, houtskool of ets, geskrik nie en tog bly die kyker immer bewus van sy strategiese komposisie.

In 1982 maak hy “The Captive”, 'n knap komposisie waarin die paradokse van outoriteit, burokrasie en geweld versinnebeeld word. Dit was dieselfde jaar waarin die 22-jarige Basquiat, wat ses jaar later dood is, sy “wilde” skildery skilder wat pas vir die verspotte prys verkoop is. Vir ons Kapenaars is die Adams-tentoonstelling 'n onmisbare kans om weer 'n kykie in die siel van kuns te ervaar.

■ Tot Saterdag. Skakel 021 422 5100 met navrae.