

BOSHOFF WINS FNB-VITA PRIZE FOR ART WITH HIS 'HOT-HOUSE'

Last night Willem Boshoff was announced the winner of the FNB-Vita award for visual arts in the Sandton art-hall for the period January to December 1996.

His work "Garden of Words, 1982-1997 (work in progress)" was unanimously chosen by the four judges, Frank Ledimo (Wits Technikon) Bongi Dhlomo (AICA), Okwui Enwezor (Artistic Director of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale) and Kendell Geers.

Seven artists, nominated for the first time this year by the broader art community participated for the Vita-prize. They are Boshoff, Kay Hassan & Pat Mautloa (who were nominated together), Santu Mofokeng, Robin Orlin, Peet Pienaar and Tracey Rose.

Boshoff himself did not think he stood a chance to win the R20 000-00 prize money because he saw his work as looking to the future, belonging to the 21st century. "This was an age in which we tried to find political solutions for the world's problems. Problems dealing with the environment and the destruction of nature will only really come to the fore in the 21st century."

Those things that are being threatened, such as the plant species in his work for the Vita exhibition, are Boshoff's focus. For him the first step to preserve things is to remember them. That is why he began in 1982 to do research by carefully noting plant species in botanical gardens from London to Cape Town. This research is placed on clipboards in the gallery.

"In Kirstenbosch I saw the files of plants that had died out, filled with pressed cuttings that will never grow again," he said.

As an Adam of the 21st Century, Boshoff, to whom the world of thought is his gallery, wants to sow the names of plants metaphorically. For the Sandton Art Gallery he took 3 600 names, mounted on small wooden blocks from his filing cabinet and placed it on the floor, under glass, in twelve flower beds in a 'hot-house'. By the time the visitors become aware of this, the seed has, in a manner of speaking, already germinated, and are they looking at the work afresh.

Adam was ordered to name the things in paradise. He named in an archetypal diagnostic manner. The names that emanate from a person are ectypal. Abraham, in contrast to Adam, chose the names of his children prognostically, forecasting.

"I work with ectypes. I learn the names like a child and I plant the seeds or labels like a child."

This work, like other projects by Boshoff, is by no means completed. "I find the idea of a work that is made overnight foreign. My work will only be done when I die," he teases.

His making of 'dictionaries' began in 1977. He is about to begin a new task and: "I think we shall now befriend Latin because Latin words are being crucified and disqualified. When we lose these, we become disorientated and we lose also a great deal of culture that comes with the language."

The Vita-exhibition continues until 22 November 1997.

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