

## Collecting South African Art in the 1930s: The Role of Martin du Toit

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### Introduction

This article indicates the role Professor Marthinus (Martin) Lourens du Toit (1897-1938) played as a patron of South African visual art in the 1930s. During the time that he was head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture at the University of Pretoria between 1931 and 1938, Martin du Toit (**Figure 1**) initiated a series of art exhibitions in the Macfadyen Hall to display the work of contemporary, often contentious artists. The university wished to support artists and provided this exhibition space free of charge. As a token of appreciation, many artists donated an artwork at the end of the exhibition.<sup>1</sup> Du Toit used these exhibitions as a starting point in building up a representative collection of South African art, which he augmented with donations from artists and art collectors. This article suggests that Martin du Toit and the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture fulfilled an important role by attempting to instil an appreciation for art in Pretoria through regular exhibitions and by laying the foundations for an institutional art collection. This form of academic patronage of South African artists seems to have been rare in the 1930s, and took place during a decisive period regarding the politicised debates concerning ethnicity, modernism, nationalism, and national art, and their relation to cultural identity and artistic expression. In this article, I refer to relevant aspects of these issues and relate them to the discourse of art collecting in the 1930s where possible,<sup>2</sup> but do not engage in a discussion of the artworks as such. The context of South African art and the role played by Pretoria in its development is examined, after which I sketch the career of Du Toit at the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture. The article ends with the

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1. These exhibitions took place between 1931 and 1951. J. Joubert, "The Art Exhibitions Held in the Macfadyen Memorial Hall, 1931-1951." M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1989.
2. Where possible, I refer to the dialogue between modern art and national art in this article in terms of their critical reception at the Macfadyen Hall exhibitions.



**Figure 1: Martin du Toit.**  
**(*Castalia*, 2, November 1938, p 5).**

founding of the art collection and its place in the framework of art collecting in South Africa at that time.

### Background

The 1930s were of pivotal importance in the establishment of the Transvaal Highveld as the leader in cultural matters in South Africa,<sup>3</sup> the cultural hegemony that had been held by the Cape Province was contested and the arts flourished in the “North”.<sup>4</sup> This was primarily the result of the work of figures such as Gustav Preller, Hendrik Pierneef, P. Anton Hendriks<sup>5</sup> and Martin du Toit who, although they had been exposed to international contact and inspiration, were passionate believers in culture that reflected a South African (and sometimes a particularly Afrikaner) identity. Until the first decades of the twentieth century, a great deal of South African visual art was still under the normative sway of conventional British and Dutch ideas as propagated by figures such as Edward Roworth in the Cape. There were, moreover, very few art schools, illustrated art publications were rare, and there were

3. A significant event was the Empire Exhibition held in Johannesburg from 15 September 1936 to 15 January 1937. British, Canadian and South African art was exhibited and the South African art section was convened and curated by Martin du Toit. Although many of the 180 South African works on display were criticised for being too modern, national recognition was accorded to many contemporary artists. *Die Vaderland*, 23 September 1936, p 14 & *Die Vaderland*, 2 Oktober 1936, p 16; there is also extensive correspondence between M.L. du Toit and the exhibiting artists in the Art Archives, University of Pretoria.
4. The hostility between the intelligentsia in the Transvaal and the Western Cape centred on issues such as cultural provincialism and divergent views regarding race, nationalism and capitalism. H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), pp 415-420.
5. Dutch-born Hendricks, later Hendriks (1899-1975), was the Head of the Art School at the Pretoria Technical College from 1928 to 1931 and Director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery from 1937 to 1964. [E.L. Basson, “Die Bydrae van Erich Mayer tot die Vestiging van ’n Estetiese Bewussyn en die Bevordering van ’n Kunsidentiteit in Suid-Afrika tot aan die einde van die 1930’s”. DLitt et Phil tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 2003, p 171; J. Carman, “Acquisition Policy of the Johannesburg Art Gallery with Regard to the South African Collection, 1909-1987”, *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History*, 2, 3, July 1988, p 206]. Hendriks was a supporter of modernism and offered talks on the topic in Pretoria [*Die Vaderland*, 13 Februarie 1934 (Waardering van Moderne Kuns – Lesing deur A Hendriks Pretoriase Ouersvereniging Gisternmiddag)] and was a part-time lecturer at the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture for four years. [A. Lamprecht, “Florrie’s Dream: a History of the Johannesburg Art Gallery”, Diploma Museology, University of Pretoria, 1991, p 31].

only a handful of commercial art galleries that could offer exhibitions.<sup>6</sup> Given that the majority of the population could not afford to invest in fine art, and that South African artists were far more isolated from current trends than their European counterparts, it is understandable that art languished until a cluster of circumstances in the 1930s challenged entrenched ideas.

The taste of the majority of the public in South Africa, many of them reared on romantic Schweickerdt art prints, veered towards romantic realism, anecdotal realism and South African impressionism.<sup>7</sup> These art styles mimicked and idealised nature, valorised the role of heroic man, and propagated the idea of “the grandeur of art and the ennobling influence it should exert on the beholder”.<sup>8</sup> People were generally conservative and suspicious of new art movements, and in order to make a living, artists were constrained to use traditional styles and subject matter. The most popular artists of the first decades of the twentieth century, who generally did not challenge the conservative sensibilities of the public, included figures such as Frans Oerder, W.G. Wiles, W.H. Coetzer, Erich Mayer, J.E.A. Volschenk, Gwelo Goodman, Edward Roworth, Tinus de Jongh, Hugo Naudé, Pieter Wenning, Anton van Wouw, Fanie Eloff and Coert Steynberg.

Apart from the economic constraints imposed by the Depression in the 1930s, many so-called progressive artists had to overcome “popular derision and contempt”<sup>9</sup> and endured subtle forms of rejection and censorship by the public and traditionalist art critics. It may be true, as Martin du Toit maintained in 1933, that “Afrikanders [sic] have become passionately fond of Art”,<sup>10</sup> but this was primarily an art that looked backwards and denied the inclinations of the modern-minded artist. The unadventurous art taste of the public was also hampered by the production of inferior paintings in a sentimental romantic realist style that imitated the landscapes of Tinus de Jongh; this was believed to

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6. E. Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa. An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters and Graphic Artists since 1875* (Balkema, Cape Town, 1983), pp 7, 10.
  7. M. Hillhouse, “Painting in South Africa – 1954”, *Standpunte*, 9, 3, 1954, p 23.
  8. F. Harmsen, *Looking at South African Art* (Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1985), pp 199, 201.
  9. Berman, *Art and Artists*, pp 7-8.
  10. M.L. du Toit, “Art in Afrikaans Culture”, in W. Knox (ed), *The Arts in South Africa* (Knox, Durban, 1933), p 188.

inhibit the development of mature art and art appreciation in South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of all these negative factors, a more “modern” form of art became embedded in South Africa during the 1930s. According to Martin du Toit, the growth of art appreciation amongst Afrikaners in the twentieth century was the direct result of the work of Volschenk; Du Toit maintained that because he was an Afrikaner, people could identify with his outlook and furthermore that the “photographic character [of his art] was necessary to interest his people in oil-painting generally, something quite new to most of them”.<sup>12</sup> According to Professor Matthys Bokhorst, head of the Department of Dutch Cultural History at the University of Pretoria during the 1930s, the period between 1929 and 1954 witnessed the recognition of three significant streams in visual art: post-impressionism, monumental-decorative art and expressionism, each of which challenged entrenched notions of what constituted “art”.<sup>13</sup> By the third decade of the twentieth century, artists such as Maud Sumner, Enslin du Plessis, Anton Hendriks and Alice Tennant were forming their own styles that were essentially combinations of impressionism and post-impressionism, constituting the first stream. At the same time, the second stream was mainly represented by Pierneef, who started to experiment with the stylisation and simplification of form, combined with iconic representations of the South African landscape. The third stream, expressionism, was advocated by Maggie Laubser, Irma Stern and Wolf Kibel, who “stressed emotions rather than the appearance of things”.<sup>14</sup> With the expressionists, a new inner-consciousness and the use of colour and distortion to express subjective emotion came to the fore. Of these three streams, the first two gained the greatest initial acceptance, whilst the modernism and individuality of expressionism made its acceptance more problematic. As will be shown later in this article, the University of Pretoria’s small art collection in the 1930s represented all three of these streams and thereby offered a succinct overview of significant tendencies in South African visual art.

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11. “... die publiek se smaak ... [is] verpes deur die ‘skilderyfabrieke’ wat sommige ‘artiste’ opgerig het as ’n uitwas van die romantiese realisme. In sy populêrste vorm: ’n suikersoete landskappie van Tinus de Jongh en ander, het ... die ontwikkeling van ’n gesonde kunswaardering in die Unie belemmer”. M. Bokhorst, “Die Kuns van ’n Kwarteeu”, *Standpunte*, 9, 3, 1954, p 38.

12. Du Toit, “Art in Afrikaans Culture”, pp 187-188. Although this comment indicates the currency of the link between naturalism and conservative taste, for Du Toit this offered the potential for aesthetic education.

13. Bokhorst, “Die Kuns van ’n Kwarteeu”, pp 38-39.

14. Bokhorst, “Die Kuns van ’n Kwarteeu”, pp 38-40.

In 1933, Martin du Toit remarked that the “love of paintings is one of the finest expressions of the character of modern Afrikaans culture and is *especially fostered in Pretoria and Stellenbosch*”.<sup>15</sup> In the early 1930s, Pretoria had a white population of less than 60 000, and was suffering grave economic depression, drought and unemployment, yet despite this, it grew in political, cultural and economic importance. Thorough research into the cultural history of Pretoria at that time still needs to be done, but clearly there was interest in art and culture. The focus of art moved from the Cape to Johannesburg and Pretoria in the 1930s, coinciding with an intellectual awakening encouraged by artists, critics and writers in the North. Pretoria was the home of leading figures such as Gustav Preller, Anton van Wouw, Frans Oerder, Hendrik Pierneef, Erich Mayer, Anton Hendriks and Martin du Toit. Interest in art, at least by a limited number of people, was demonstrated by the founding of a number of art societies in Pretoria, the earliest of which took place in 1902.<sup>16</sup> Martin du Toit founded the *Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging* (Afrikaans Art Association) in Pretoria in 1931 and the cultural society Castalides at the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture in the following year, and both bodies made significant contributions to the cultural life of Pretoria.<sup>17</sup>

There were thus a number of artists in Pretoria, but virtually no commercial galleries in the 1930s. Exhibitions were hosted by the art dealer Emil Schweickerdt and De Bussy’s store, but most artists still depended on Johannesburg galleries for the display of their works.<sup>18</sup> As well as the scarcity of commercial art galleries and public

15. Du Toit, “Art in Afrikaans Culture”, p 188 [emphasis added].
16. A. du Preez, “Die Pretoria Art Association en die *Pretoria News*: Georganiseerde Kunsaktiwiteite in Pretoria, 1902-1906”, *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History*, 3, 1-4, 1993, pp 44-58.
17. According to the constitution of the *Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging*, its aims were: promoting Afrikaans art; collecting Afrikaans art and cultural artefacts; hosting art exhibitions; and encouraging artists by means of personal contact with them [*Ons Vaderland*, 23 October 1931, p 1 (Kunsvereniging Word in Pretoria Gestig): “*Bevordering veral van ’n eie Afrikaanse kuns in al sy vertakkinge; om ’n groot versameling van Afrikaanse kuns- en kulturele voorwerpe op te bou deur sistematiese versameling van sulke voorwerpe of in eiendom of in leen vir die Afrikaanse Kultuurstoel aan U.P.; Afrikaanse kunstenaars aantemoedig deur belangstelling, deur tentoonstellings vir hulle te hou of ondersteun en om ware kunslewe te kweek deur persoonlike kontak met hulle*”]. Martin du Toit was elected as permanent president in his capacity as head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture.
18. Basson, “Die Bydrae van Erich Mayer”, pp 32, 38.

exhibition halls, the absence of an art museum was detrimental to the fostering of an appreciation of the visual arts in Pretoria. Pleas for the founding of an art museum escalated after the Lady Michaelis bequest of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings was received by Pretoria in 1932, and a small municipal collection was begun at that time.<sup>19</sup> The contributions made by Martin du Toit and the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture in terms of regular art exhibitions and building up a representative collection of South African art, were therefore considerable.

### **Martin du Toit and the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture**

Martin du Toit was born in Tulbagh in the Cape Province on 12 December 1897.<sup>20</sup> His parents were Stephan George du Toit, one of the founder members of the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* (Society of True Afrikaners) in 1875, and Anna Alletta du Toit (née Smith).<sup>21</sup> Du Toit completed his MA degree in German at the University of Stellenbosch in 1920, and in 1921, he enrolled at the University of Berlin, where he studied German Language and Literature, Philosophy, Scandinavian Languages and Literature. From 1922 to 1925, he studied German Language and Literature, Philosophy, History of Art and

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19. As early as 1906, the Pretoria Town Council commissioned artworks from Frans Oerder and Anton van Wouw to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Pretoria. In December 1911, the Town Council donated £100 to buy paintings to form the nucleus of an art collection [*Pretoria News*, 4 April 1911, p 3]. This small collection was housed in the Town Hall and expanded by the addition of the Michaelis Bequest in 1932. According to the Mayor of Pretoria, Ivan Solomon, a special room was to be set aside for this collection in the new Town Hall in Paul Kruger Street, which was inaugurated in 1935 [*Die Vaderland*, 25 February 1933, p 6 (Kunsgalery vir Pretoria?)]. In June 1935, Irma Stern gave a lecture in Pretoria entitled “The relativity of colour and form in art”, which she illustrated with examples from the Michaelis collection and the Town Clerk, M.G. Nicholson, “appealed to those present to do all they could towards the establishment of an art gallery” [*Pretoria News*, 14 June 1935, p 5 (Municipal Art Gallery)]. On occasion the Town Council bought artworks at the Macfadyen Hall exhibitions; for example in 1933 it acquired *Pondo Woman* and *Fishing Boats, Kalk Bay* by Irma Stern, and in 1935 Pierneef’s *Rustenburg Kloof*.
  20. National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA), Transvaal Archives (hereafter TAB), Pretoria: Estate of M.L. du Toit, volume 3537/38; the family home “Palmyra” was in Tulbagh. See also: J. Joubert, “M.L. du Toit’s Contribution to Artistic Activities at the University of Pretoria, 1931 to 1938”. BA Honours, University of Pretoria, 1986.
  21. P.G. Nel, “Eerste Hoogleraar: Kuns en Kultuur”, *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 1, 2, 1984, p 31.

Ancient History at the University of Vienna, completing a doctoral thesis entitled “*Der Monolog und Andreas Gryphius*” in 1925. At this time, he became acquainted with the writings of the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905),<sup>22</sup> and the influence of this formalist is discernible in Du Toit’s writings. Du Toit’s exposure to German thinking is significant in terms of the influence this seems to have had on his notions regarding national identity and a metaphysical conception of culture.<sup>23</sup> On his return to South Africa in 1926, Du Toit was appointed lecturer in German at the University of Cape Town. In 1927, he became Acting Head of the Department German at the Transvaal University College (TUK) and senior lecturer in 1928.

The first classes of the Transvaal University College took place in 1908 and in 1930 it was renamed the University of Pretoria. In 1932, the University of Pretoria was converted into an Afrikaans language institution, signalling an important ideological victory for the recognition of Afrikaans in the North. The Department of Afrikaans

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22. Art Archives, University of Pretoria (hereafter AAUP): M.L. du Toit file, Curriculum Vitae, 25 October 1928, p 1.
  23. The affinities between leading Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals in the North and German doctrines regarding ethnicity and culture in the 1930s need further scrutiny [see, for example, Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp 416-419]. Martin du Toit and his colleagues at the University of Pretoria, Professors W.A. Willemsse, G. Cronjé and P.R. Skawran, were apparently under the influence of German fascism in the 1930s, and this has a bearing on how Du Toit’s ideas regarding art, nationalism and culture evolved. See a letter from Professor F.G.E. Nilant, a previous head of the Department History of Art at the University of Pretoria to Doctor A.E. Duffey, circa December 1986. The letter, in my possession, has a two-page commentary on Joubert’s research paper, “M.L. du Toit’s Contribution to Artistic Activities at the University of Pretoria, 1931 to 1938”. A comprehensive and critical unpacking of Martin du Toit’s role in the cultural, political and ideological context of the 1930s is overdue, but cannot be attempted within the scope of this article. Elizabeth Delmont, for instance, offers an intriguing view of Afrikaner nationalism’s cooption of the painter Maggie Laubser in the 1930s when figures such as Martin du Toit located her modernist work “at a pivotal point analogous to the position where Afrikaner culture brokers were constructing the Afrikaner culture, both forward-looking and progressive and yet also firmly rooted in a European heritage” [*De Arte*, 64, September 2001, p 14 (Laubser, Land and Labour: Image-making and Afrikaner Nationalism in the Late 1920s and Early 1930s)]. The tension between Du Toit’s Afrikaner nationalism and his relationship with Jews such as Irma Stern, also deserves to be teased out. It is possible that Du Toit’s friendship with Stern started when he and Stern’s husband, Johannes Prinz, taught in the Department of German at the University of Cape Town. Prinz was appointed Professor of German at the University of Cape Town in 1926 [M. Arnold, *Irma Stern. A Feast for the Eye* (Fernwood, Cape Town, 1995), p 19] and Martin du Toit lectured in the same Department from 1926 to 1927.



Art and Culture was founded in 1930 because of the desire of a group of 24 prominent Rand Afrikaners to stimulate interest in the culture of the Afrikaner.<sup>24</sup> Martin du Toit was appointed the first head and was determined to make this department, the only one of its kind in South Africa at the time, a success.<sup>25</sup> To this end, he undertook an extended study tour to Europe in 1931 to observe recent artistic trends, and lectures only started in 1932. Du Toit was constantly plagued by ill health and took long periods of sick leave in 1936, 1937 and 1938.<sup>26</sup> Doctor F.C.L. Bosman of the University of Cape Town was appointed Acting Head for the period 1 July 1937 to 30 June 1938. In May 1938, Du Toit went to Hamburg, Germany, to receive treatment, and died in the Institute for Naval and Tropical Diseases on 26 August 1938.<sup>27</sup> Du Toit's successor at the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture was Doctor H.M. van der Westhuysen, a lecturer in Afrikaans at the Heidelberg Normal College. The department was renamed Afrikaans Cultural History (*Afrikaanse Kultuurgeskiedenis*), but the history of art continued to constitute an important part of the syllabus.<sup>28</sup>

As has already been suggested, as an Afrikaner intellectual of the 1920s and 1930s, Martin du Toit was a complex product of contemporary ideological, political and cultural debates. The Afrikaner nationalism that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century was predicated on the recognition of Afrikaans, ethnic and religious ties, an engagement with the imperatives of urbanisation, industrialization and modernisation,

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24. C.H. Rautenbach (ed), *Ad Destinatum. Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria* (Voortrekkerpers, Johannesburg, 1960), pp 127-128. According to this source, the founding of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture was a direct result of the intervention of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* and the Union Afrikaans Language and Culture Conference that was held in Bloemfontein in December 1929, leading to the formation of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations); Martin du Toit was one of the 25 delegates sent from Pretoria to the conference.
  25. Anonymous, "Obituary of M.L. du Toit", *Trek*, 26, 34, 1938, p 11.
  26. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, Secretary of Board – M.L. du Toit, 10 October 1936. Most of the correspondence concerning Martin du Toit's health is in his file in the Central Archives, University of Pretoria (hereafter CAUP).
  27. NASA, TAB: Estate of M.L. du Toit, volume 3537/38, Death certificate. The cause of death was given as chronic enteritis and peritonitis, accompanied by cachexia and marasmus, both acute forms of emaciation and wasting away. He had also periodically suffered from amoebic dysentery and colitis. In his will, he left all his possessions to his sister in Tulbagh, but his brother A.E. du Toit and a few friends were each allowed to choose one of his paintings. See also: Anonymous, "Obituary of M.L. du Toit", p 11.
  28. For further details of the history of the Department, see: Rautenbach, *Ad Destinatum*, p 128.

and the tensions between English and Afrikaner capitalism.<sup>29</sup> Isabel Hofmeyr has pointed out that the cultural endeavour of Afrikaner nationalists at that time focused on establishing and legitimating Afrikaans history, language, and literature, and by extension, cultural products such as architecture, dress, monuments, handicrafts, interior decoration, and furniture.<sup>30</sup> It is important to see Du Toit's efforts at supporting and sustaining visual art and culture in this context as the playing out of an embryonic Afrikaner cultural consciousness at a crucial period in its inscription.

Martin du Toit's first official involvement with South African visual culture seems to have been when he was asked to organise an exhibition to coincide with the founding of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations) in Bloemfontein on 18 and 19 December 1929. Du Toit displayed the work of Maggie Laubser, Hendrik Pierneef, Anton van Wouw, Gerard Moerdyk and Gordon Leith at this important event.<sup>31</sup> Earlier in 1929, Martin du Toit established the journal *Die Nuwe Brandwag*, and was its chief editor until its closure in 1933. This journal regularly featured contributions by Hendriks and Pierneef and discussed the work of artists such as Fanie Eloff, Maggie Laubser, Moses Kottler, Gregoire Boonzaier and Enslin du Plessis.<sup>32</sup> Despite his strong connections to the Cape, Du Toit aligned himself with the cultural project of Northerners such as Gustav Preller (of *De Volkstem* newspaper), and publicised the work of his friends Hendriks, Pierneef, Eloff, Moerdyk, Sangiro (A.A. Pienaar), A.M. Amshewitz, Kottler, Maud Sumner, the Everard Group, Irma Stern and Wolf Kibel.<sup>33</sup> He was instrumental in introducing the work of many artists to the North, and personally sold a number of their works in Pretoria.<sup>34</sup> A friend recalls that Du Toit sold Pierneef's works for an

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29. S. Marks and S. Trapido, "The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism," in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-century South Africa* (Longman, London, 1987), p 10; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 419.
  30. I. Hofmeyr, "Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity, 1902-1924", in Marks and Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race*, pp 107, 109-111.
  31. E.J. Botha, "Die Lewe en Werk van Maggie Laubser". MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1964, p 4.
  32. A. Neethling-Pohl, "M.L. du Toit", *Castalia*, 2, 1938, p 4.
  33. Mrs K. Roodt-Coetzee, Personal communication, Pretoria, 7 April 1986. Coetzee was a student under Martin du Toit and later a temporary lecturer in the Department.
  34. In a letter to Laubser, Du Toit remarked: "let me know if your paintings that are packed up must stay here, I could probably have sold more than a few of

average price of £3.<sup>35</sup> Du Toit regularly took students to the studios of Kottler, Pierneef, Hendriks, Oerder and Van Wouw,<sup>36</sup> and his senior students were sometimes invited to his home in Anderson Street, Brooklyn, to meet artists and hold discussions.

Martin du Toit contributed to South African art history and art criticism by writing a monograph in Afrikaans on Anton van Wouw (1933), the first of a planned series that was to include Stern, Laubser and Kottler.<sup>37</sup> He wrote several articles on South African artists for *Die Vaderland*<sup>38</sup> and other newspapers, and short contributions such as “Art in Afrikaans Culture” (1933). Although in retrospect most of these writings seem to lack a strong theoretical or critical thrust, they offer useful descriptive passages and gave Du Toit an opportunity to express his views on art, modernism and nationalism.<sup>39</sup> Du Toit was a member of the South African Academy for Literature and Arts and convened the special art commission of this body in 1934 that recommended the annual medal of honour for painters, sculptors or architects whose work reflected an “*egte Suid-Afrikaanse stempel*”

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them”. AAUP: Maggie Laubser file, M.L. du Toit – M. Laubser 20 June 1933. To Wolf Kibel, he wrote: “Couldn’t you let me have a few new paintings which I could try to sell to one or other of my friends here. I think I have sold the two most attractive ones of the small collection I have here”. AAUP: Wolf Kibel file, M.L. du Toit – W Kibel, 2 August 1934.

35. Professor S.P. du Toit Viljoen, Personal communication, Pretoria, 30 August 1986.
36. Mrs H.C. Steyn, Personal communication, Pretoria, 16 April 1986; Mrs K. Roodt-Coetzee, Personal communication, Pretoria, 7 April 1986.
37. Anonymous, “Obituary of M.L. du Toit”, p 11. He was working on this series at the time of his death.
38. These articles sometimes comprised interviews with Martin du Toit; he also contributed to the Pretoria-based Afrikaans newspaper *De Volkstem*, using the pseudonym “P. Enseel”.
39. Du Toit’s formalist art criticism is obvious in a passage such as the following where he attempts to explain Stern’s representation of semi-naked Pondo and Zulu figures: “it is not true to say that she concentrates only on the portrayal of the coloured races. Especially in South Africa this type of statement does much damage since *we do not yet realise that the subject that is depicted, has very little to do with the intrinsic value of the artwork*”. M.L. du Toit, “Die Kunsontwikkeling van Irma Stern”, in P.J. Nienaber (red.), *Skone Kunste in Suid-Afrika* (Afrikaanse Pers, Johannesburg, 1951), p 194 [emphasis added and my translation of: “*maar dat sy haar slegs aan die skildering van die gekleurde rasse wy, is onwaar. Juis in Suid-Afrika doen so ’n bewering soveel skade waar ons nog nie besef nie dat die voorwerp, wat behandel word, so bloedweinig met die intrinsieke waarde van die kunswerk te doen het*”].

(genuine South African character).<sup>40</sup> He also served on numerous art committees and adjudication panels in Pretoria, was one of the founders of the *Volksteater* (People's Theatre) and the *Afrikaanse Kultuurraad* (Afrikaans Cultural Board), initiated a Film Society in 1932, and was responsible for reinstating a parade on Kruger Day (10 October).<sup>41</sup> Du Toit suggested a "*skoonheids-komitee*" (literally, a beautifying committee) to monitor the erection of public and semi-public buildings in Pretoria and believed that this body ought to offer advice regarding the layout of public parks and the purchase of artworks for the city's art museum.<sup>42</sup>

After Martin du Toit was appointed Head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture, he wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Board of the university wherein he requested a period of study leave in Europe in order to prepare for his new lectures in 1932.<sup>43</sup> On his return in August 1931, he submitted a report of his eight months' study trip, in which he noted the institutions he had visited and the newest tendencies in the arts he had encountered there.<sup>44</sup> He furthermore commented on the favourable reception accorded to South African artists living abroad, such as Kottler, Neville Lewis and Enslin du Plessis in London, and Fanie Eloff in Paris.<sup>45</sup> Du Toit also mentioned that he had visited Lagos, Nigeria, in order to observe, as he put it, the cultural and art production the black races could deliver under

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40. *Bulletin of the South African Academy for Literature and Arts*, November 1934, 3, 15, pp 14-15. The standing art commission of the Academy had originally suggested that £100 be awarded to the best painting of "*boerelewe*" (boer life) – the painting had to include figures and represent traditional agricultural scenes and farm life, but this narrow category was rejected by the special art commission convened by Du Toit.
41. Anonymous, "Obituary of M.L. du Toit", p 11; Joubert, "M.L. du Toit's Contribution", p 13.
42. *Die Vaderland*, 7 April 1936, p 6 (Skoonheidskomitees in ons Stede Nodig).
43. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – Secretary of the Board, University of Pretoria, 15 October 1930.
44. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "*Rapport oor Studiereis na Europa 1931*" (Report on Study Visit to Europe 1931), 19 August 1931. In particular, he mentions the British Museum, the British Royal Academy of Art, "The Modern London Group", the German Academy, current French art, the Rijksmuseum and modern Dutch architecture.
45. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "*Rapport oor Studiereis*", pp 1-2.

favourable circumstances.<sup>46</sup> After visiting leading indigenous artists such as the portraitist Onabulu, he had also visited Accra.

After reporting on his findings, Martin du Toit concluded that the new department could not hope to flourish unless it acquired a representative study collection of books, art objects, slides and pictures.<sup>47</sup>

He commented that a number of paintings had already been donated by the following artists: Pierneef (number unknown), Enslin du Plessis (one), Laubser (two), Hendriks (a series) and Mr Seabrooke of the "London Group of Modern Artists" (one).<sup>48</sup> Du Toit added that Fanie Eloff had promised to donate two of his sculptures (probably *Liefdesmart* and *Portretmasker*), on condition that they be accessible to the general public, which possibly indicates one of the origins of the idea of a permanent art collection.<sup>49</sup> Continuing his report, Martin du Toit noted with gratitude the gift of books about art history and cultural history received from the German Academy, and stressed the impossibility of lecturing without representative photographs and books about Afrikaans cultural history.<sup>50</sup> He ended his report with the names of people who would be lecturing in 1932, which included key figures such as A.S. Konya (Hungarian artist and architect), Leith, Moerdyk and Pierneef.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout 1931 and 1932, Martin du Toit was endeavouring to assemble a repository of documentation, works of art and cultural artefacts for the new department. He wrote to countless institutions, galleries and museums in Europe and South Africa to solicit prospectuses, catalogues and syllabi, and in return, he sent them copies of *Die Nuwe Brandwag*.<sup>52</sup> He wrote to the town clerks of South African towns and requested photographs and other information regarding the history of each town,<sup>53</sup> and laid the foundations of the Art Archives of the

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46. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "Rapport oor Studiereis", p 3: "om ... te sien wat die swart rasse in gunstige omstandighede op kultureel en kunstgebied [sic] kan voortbring".

47. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "Rapport oor Studiereis", p 3.

48. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "Rapport oor Studiereis", pp 3-4.

49. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "Rapport oor Studiereis", p 4.

50. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "Rapport oor Studiereis", p 4.

51. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, "Rapport oor Studiereis", p 5.

52. For example: AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – Director, Slade School of Arts, London, 20 August 1931; M.L. du Toit – E Schweickerdt, Pretoria, 28 September 1931.

53. Correspondence with the town clerks in the AAUP: M.L. du Toit file.

department by sending questionnaires to artists, asking them to send photographs, clippings and catalogues of their work.<sup>54</sup>

Du Toit was also interested in collecting examples of contemporary South African pottery and other applied arts. In his letters to the Pretoria Potteries and the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein, for instance, he wrote:

I have approached several artists in South Africa for examples of their arts and they have very obligingly presented this department with examples of their work which are open to be exhibited by students and the public. I wonder whether it would be possible for you to let this department also have examples of the work done at your potteries, work which will then be on permanent exhibition in a room specially set apart for this type of work.<sup>55</sup>

He corresponded with people such as his uncle, the philologist and lexicographer J.J. Smith, Professor of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch University, and asked him to donate some of his works “*om ons in hierdie Afrikaanse saak te help*” (to help us in this Afrikaans matter).<sup>56</sup> The success of Du Toit’s many entreaties can be gauged from a report written about the activities of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture in 1935 wherein he noted that the department already possessed a number of works by prominent South African painters and sculptors, as well as a collection of medals, documents and clothing.<sup>57</sup>

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54. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, undated, unaddressed covering letter.

55. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – Manager, Pretoria Potteries, 1 June 1934.

56. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – J.J. Smith, Stellenbosch, 21 August 1931. Between 1916 and 1923, Smith was the editor of the newly-founded Afrikaans family magazine, *De Huisgenoot*, which stimulated a consciousness of culture and history under its Afrikaans readership [Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp 375, 377], specifically by means of its so-called “Afrikaans” visual imagery [Hofmeyr, “Building a Nation”, pp 111, 122].

57. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit, “*Rapport oor Studiereis*”, pp 4-5: “*Die departement is besig om ’n kunsversameling op te bou, wat werke van al die vernaamste Suidafrikaanse [sic] kunstenaars wil bevat. Reeds is daar werke van groot skilders en beeldhouers, asook ’n versameling van oudhede, soos medaljes, dokumente, rokke, kappies e.d.m.*”. This collection of cultural artefacts and memorabilia was part of the larger project of establishing and valorising Afrikaner culture. The rediscovery of folk cultures in Europe was an important means of establishing cultural links with the past and forging national identity. [M. Crang, *Cultural Geography* (Routledge, London, 1998), pp 166-167]. People such as Martin du Toit and Gustav Preller seem to have embraced similar ideological agendas.

As previously mentioned, one of Du Toit's contributions to artistic life in Pretoria was the initiation of art exhibitions in the Macfadyen Memorial Hall in the extra-mural building of the university in Vermeulen Street. The idea for these exhibitions was possibly planted by J.J. Pienaar, Administrator of the Transvaal, when he suggested in 1932 that annual national art exhibitions should be held in South Africa and that the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture should organise them. He stated that by fulfilling this ideal, the department would be providing a valuable service to South Africa, but more particularly to the Transvaal.<sup>58</sup>

Du Toit did not limit his department to the organisation of annual exhibitions – in 1933 and 1935, for example, there were at least seven such events. He wrote to artists he knew and invited them to exhibit in the Macfadyen Hall: "I still hope that you [Lippy Lipshitz] and Mr Kibel will some time find the opportunity and the time to exhibit in Pretoria as well".<sup>59</sup> He gave the artists the assurance that their works would be exhibited in a special hall, which "would be open to students and the public".<sup>60</sup> In a letter from Du Toit to his friend Fanie Eloff, he pointed out that the Macfadyen Hall exhibitions succeeded in making artists known to the public in Pretoria and that some, such as Kottler, had subsequently received important commissions.<sup>61</sup>

As Head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture, Martin du Toit encouraged his students to play an active part in the promotion of the arts, and was instrumental in founding Castalides, a society for the arts and culture.<sup>62</sup> Castalides organised art exhibitions, musical performances and lectures, primarily related to aspects of

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58. *Die Vaderland*, 19 November 1932, p 13 (Jaarlikse Kunstentoonstelling vir Suid-Afrika?): "Hier is genoeg sale wat vir die doel ingerig kan word, en ek voel oortuig daarvan dat die Universiteit hiermee 'n groot diens aan Suid-Afrika en veral aan Transvaal sal bewys as hulle begin organiseer vir die verwesenliking van hierdie groot ideaal."
59. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – I.L. Lipshitz, Cape Town, 30 May 1934.
60. CAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – A. Elliott, Cape Town, 24 March 1933.
61. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – F. Eloff, 7 April 1933.
62. Anonymous, "Obituary of M.L. du Toit", p 11. The word Castalides is derived from Greek mythology, designating the fountain called Castalia at Delphi that was sacred to the Muses. Castalides published its own journal, *Castalia, Tydskrif vir Kuns en Kultuur* (Castalia, Journal for Art and Culture), which contained contributions by leading figures such as Hendriks, Moerdyk, R.M. Titlestad and Gerrit Bon. The first issue appeared in 1933 and the second in 1938; thereafter it was incorporated into the annual journal *Trek*. Rautenbach, *Ad Destinatum*, p 334.

Afrikaans culture. One of its aims was to obtain artworks for the university, either by means of donations or purchase.<sup>63</sup> There are two examples on record of this occurring: in 1933, the students bought a charcoal portrait of J.F.E. Cilliers by Maggie Laubser for two guineas and a landscape by Volschenk for £5 10shillings.<sup>64</sup> In 1933, Castalides and the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture collaborated in the organisation of several art exhibitions, including those of Irma Stern, Maud Sumner, J.A. Smith and Anton Hendriks.

Martin du Toit and the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture thus played an important part in the cultural life of Pretoria during the 1930s.<sup>65</sup> The founding of the Art Archives and the ongoing documentation of Afrikaans art and culture were important, but it was the organisation of regular art exhibitions that augmented the small art collection of the department. It is to this topic that this article now turns.

### **The Macfadyen Memorial Hall art exhibitions in the 1930s: modernism and national art**

The Transvaal University College started to offer extra-mural classes from 1918 onwards in temporary venues such as the Erasmus Building on Church Square;<sup>66</sup> the first permanent extra-mural building at 239 Vermeulen Street<sup>67</sup> was inaugurated on 17 April 1926 by the Administrator of the Transvaal, J.H. Hofmeyer. The main hall, the Macfadyen Memorial Hall, became the site for meetings, concerts, lectures, theatrical performances, and art and other exhibitions from about

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63. “Die Geskiedenis van Castalia, ons Kunsvereniging”, *Castalia*, 1938, p 15. “*In die verlede het ons reeds tentoonstellings van groot kunstenaars gereël, vooraanstaande kunstenaars gevra om toesprake te hou, ’n groot kunsand gehou en verskillende uitstappies gedoen, w.o. een na die Johannesburgse kunsgalery. Ons doel is om elke jaar ’n goeie skilderstuk of beeldhouwerk aan te koop en ook om ’n kunsblad uit te gee*”. *Trek*, 21, 29, 1933, p 58.

64. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – J.E.A. Volschenk, 15 November 1933; the original cost of the painting was £10, but owing to Du Toit’s influence, Volschenk brought down the price.

65. For more information about the general cultural activities of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture and Castalia, see Joubert, “M.L. du Toit’s Contribution”.

66. Rautenbach, *Ad Destinatum*, pp 249-254.

67. This building was taken over by the State Library in 1960, when the extra-mural section of the University moved to Proes Street.



1926 to 1948.<sup>68</sup> The interior of the 1 000 square metres Macfadyen Hall was modest, with three sets of windows set high in the eastern and western walls, and a stage at the southern end. The original crest of the TUK hung above the proscenium.

Arrangements for booking the Macfadyen Hall were usually made through the Registrar, who forwarded the requests to Walter Abernethy (1881-1952), the extra-mural Clerk-in-Charge, Librarian and Caretaker from 1926 to 1946. Fees to cover lighting costs in the event of a meeting or lecture were paid to him directly, in advance.<sup>69</sup> The charge per evening for a lecture or meeting started with 5 shillings in 1926 and rose to 1 or 2 guineas from 1931 onwards.<sup>70</sup> These tariffs are important because if artists were allowed to use the Macfadyen Hall free of charge, it is interesting to compare the amount they could have been asked to pay, namely about 1 guinea per day, with the value of the artwork they donated instead.

As has been noted previously, the Macfadyen Hall art exhibitions were invariably offered under the auspices of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture. It has usually been contended that the university allowed artists to exhibit free of charge and that they donated an artwork to the university's collection instead of financial payment.<sup>71</sup> This unwritten agreement was not always honoured, however, since artworks were not necessarily donated after an exhibition. Between 1931 and 1939, at least 25 exhibitions were offered in the Macfadyen Hall: one in 1931, one in 1932, seven in 1933, one in 1934, seven in 1935, one in 1937, two in 1938 and five in 1939, but it seems that only twelve artworks were donated. It is possible that a fee may sometimes have been paid, but no definite record of such a transaction has been found. When Walter Wiles wrote to the university asking to exhibit in November 1935, the Registrar quoted him a

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68. CAUP: 7-1.2, Buitemuurse Afdeling Pamflette 1955-1970, "Iets oor Buitemuurs 1955", p 5.
  69. CAUP: Extra-mural correspondence files for 1932, Registrar – Honorary Secretary, South African Biological Society, 1 June 1932.
  70. CAUP: Extra-mural correspondence files for 1932, Registrar – Girls High School Pretoria, 19 March 1926; Registrar – YMCA, 4 August 1926; Registrar – Reverend S.N. Bishop, 9 September 1926; Registrar – SPCA, 15 October 1928; Registrar – Public Servant's Association, 24 March 1931; Registrar – Nature Cure Centre, 13 April 1931; W Abernethy – Miss Alice Burney, 14 May 1934.
  71. AAUP: Art Collection of the University of Pretoria file, A.E. Duffey and F.G.E. Nilant, "n Keur uit die Kunsbesit van die Universiteit van Pretoria", 1980, unpaginated.

fee of 1 guinea per day,<sup>72</sup> whereas in the previous year Martin du Toit promised Gregoire Boonzaier that he would “arrange a free hall and other facilities”.<sup>73</sup>

Once artists had agreed to exhibit in the Macfadyen Hall, they had to make all their own arrangements regarding publicity, catalogues and invitations, though Martin du Toit often helped them. They also had to hang the pictures themselves and had to organise the supervision and selling of the works; if this could not be managed, students from the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture or Du Toit helped.<sup>74</sup> Since these exhibitions were part of the students’ training, where possible they met the artists and held discussions with them.<sup>75</sup> Martin du Toit encouraged these exhibitions since they coincided with his desires to build up a representative study collection, and to promote contemporary, often unfamiliar artists. Many artists held their Pretoria debut exhibitions in the 1930s in the Macfadyen Hall: Maggie Laubser (1931), Irma Stern (1933), Maud Sumner (1933), Johannes Antonie Smith (1933), Anton Hendriks (1933), Jeanette Fincken (1933), Gregoire Boonzaier (1934), Gwelo Goodman (1935) and Manya de Moor (1936). The exhibitions were frequently opened by influential figures from the university or government, such as General Jan Smuts, or the Mayor of Pretoria, and judging from contemporary newspaper accounts, appear to have been well attended.

In effect, Martin du Toit tried to introduce the Pretoria public to examples of contemporary, mostly modern art by means of the Macfadyen Hall exhibitions. The low standard of exhibitions at that time by inferior imitators of Volschenk and Pierneef compelled him to comment in 1932 that he was weary of hackneyed art,<sup>76</sup> and in 1935 he remarked despairingly on Pretoria’s reputation as a centre for sentimental jacaranda painters.<sup>77</sup> Du Toit seems to have focused deliberately on

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72. CAUP: Extra-mural correspondence file, W. Abernethy – W. Wiles, 21 October 1935.

73. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – G. Boonzaier, 1 June 1934.

74. Mrs K. Roodt-Coetzee, Personal communication, Pretoria, 7 April 1986.

75. Mrs H.C. Steyn, Personal communication, Pretoria, 16 April 1986.

76. Du Toit commented in a newspaper: “*in die laaste tye word ons oorlaai van tentoonstellinge, daaronder wel erkende kunstenaars soos Pierneef, Volschenk, ens, maar veral van kunstenaars’ wat navolginge is van genoemde persone. Ons is siek van hierdie on-kuns*”. *Die Vaderland*, 17 September 1932, p 6 (Moses Kottler).

77. Commenting on the work of E.L.M. King, Du Toit remarked: “*Haar werk is eger nie van die gewone soetsappige soort waarvan ons al so gewoond geraak het by Suid-Afrikaanse skilders en waarmee Pretoria so ryklik geseën is nie, nl. die werk van die Jakaranda skilders*”. *Die Vaderland*, 11 Oktober 1935, p 11 (Kunsuistalling op 17 Desember in Macfadyensaal).

displaying artists who were perceived to be comparatively “modern” by their contemporaries: Laubser (1931, 1933, 1939), Kottler (1932), Stern (1933, 1938), Modern German Graphic Artists<sup>78</sup> (1935), Pierneef (1935), the Everard Group (1935), and Manya de Moor (1935). At the opening of Laubser’s exhibition in 1933, Ralph Totten, Minister of the United States of America in South Africa, commented appreciatively that the Macfadyen Hall exhibitions were part of a “splendid plan to encourage contemporary art”.<sup>79</sup> Du Toit’s affinity for modern art was confirmed in October 1937, when he and Jan Juta judged an exhibition of South African art in the new City Hall in Pretoria. The range of work, from conservative to progressive, was deemed to be representative of contemporary South African art,<sup>80</sup> and Walter Battiss observed at the time: “Martin du Toit was crazy on avant garde art”.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, together with these more “modern” artists, some Macfadyen Hall exhibitions during the 1930s were perceived to be more “conservative”: J.A. Smith (1933), Hendriks (1933), J. Fincken (1933), M. Sumner (1933, 1937), G. Boonzaier (1934), W. Kuhnert (1935), G. Goodman (1935), T. Goedvriend (1938) and F. Oerder (1939). Though so-called “popular” artists such as W.G. Wiles, W.H. Coetzer, E. Mayer, J.E.A. Volschenk, H. Naudé, A. van Wouw and C. Steynberg were not invited to hold solo exhibitions in the Macfadyen Hall in the 1930s, the work of more conservative artists was included in the major exhibition of twenty South African artists held in the Macfadyen Hall in June 1935.<sup>82</sup>

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78. See J. Joubert, “Exhibition of Modern German Graphic Artists in Pretoria, 1935”, *South African Journal for Cultural and Art History*, 2, 3, 1988, pp 223-224.
79. *The Star*, 23 September 1933, p 15 (A S.A. Artist. Exhibition of Miss Maggie Laubser).
80. Hermes, “Van Kuns en Kunstenaars”, *Die Brandwag*, 1, 11, 15 Oktober 1937, p 16.
81. M.G. Schoonraad, “Die Lewe en Werk van Walter Battiss met Besondere Verwysing na sy Grafiese Werk”. MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1974, p 250.
82. Pierneef gave the opening speech at this exhibition. He congratulated Martin du Toit for the work he was doing in the North, and expressed the wish that this would inspire the whole Union and open the eyes of the Afrikaners regarding their own art treasures [*Die Volkstem*, 26 Junie 1935, p 5 (Afrikaners Wees Julle Self)]. The artists who exhibited were the so-called “modernists” Stern, Pierneef, Hendriks, Sumner, Laubser and Kibel, and the more conservative Mayer, Volschenk, Boonzaier, Florence Zerffi, Sidney Carter, Neville Lewis, Edward Roworth, Hugo Naudé, Oerder, Wenning, Enslin du Plessis, Nita Spilhaus, Gordon Pilkington and Francois Krige.

Since Martin du Toit and the university had no financial gain from these exhibitions, they were able to concentrate on familiarising the public with new styles of art. The Macfadyen Hall exhibitions seem to have offered a good reflection of the art scene in South Africa in the 1930s, in which the dialogue between modernism and conservatism, and by implication between modernism and so-called national art, was being played out. Many of the exhibitions, especially those by Laubser, Stern, Smith and Pierneef, elicited heated debates concerning the relationship between art, modernism, nationalism and a South African art. Art historian Marion Arnold points out that the process of modernisation in South Africa was much slower than in Europe and that consequently modernity in the art world was viewed with great suspicion.<sup>83</sup> Modern ideas regarding politics, culture, technology and economy were assimilated to various degrees in South Africa, but styles in visual culture were manipulated to express oppositional ideologies (traditionalism/realism versus modernism/stylisation, for instance).<sup>84</sup> The fact that Johannesburg symbolised modernisation and industrialization in South Africa is significant, because it is clear that modernity came to be associated primarily with the “North”.

The ideology and visual style of modernism still generated scorn during the 1930s. Modernism stood in direct opposition to romantic realism, impressionism and sentimental patriotism, but apologists tried to demonstrate that it was not necessarily “synonymous with decadence and degradation”.<sup>85</sup> The influential Cape Town art critic Bernard Lewis (“Brander”) wrote a series of articles in the early 1930s in which he accused artists such as Stern and Laubser of distorting and deforming nature in their attempt at self-expression, and he considered their manifest ideal, “let us get as far away from nature as possible”, perverse and decadent.<sup>86</sup> Whereas realistic art was concerned with an idealisation of

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83. M. Arnold, “Visual Culture in Context: The Implications of Union and Liberation”, in M. Arnold and B. Schmahmann (eds), *Between Union and Liberation. Women Artists in South Africa 1910-1994* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005), p 11.

84. Arnold, “Visual Culture in Context”, p 12.

85. J. van Rooyen, *Maggie Laubser* (Struik, Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1974), p 7.

86. Brander, “Kwaksalwery Onder die Dekmantel van ‘Moderne Kuns’”, *Die Vaderland*, 29 Oktober 1932, p 13; Brander, “Die Wispelturige Mode in die ‘Moderne Kuns’”, *Die Vaderland*, 25 Maart 1933, p 13. Arnold points out that in South Africa, white, mainly English-speaking female artists embraced modernism as it offered them the space for self-assertion and the opportunity to work against the grain of nationalism and patriarchy. Hence, artists such as Mary Stainbank, Bertha Everard and Irma Stern rejected the conservative art canon and adopted so-called transgressive forms of female behaviour. Arnold, “Visual Culture in Context”, p 16.

nature and a heroic ideal, modern art was perceived to be anti-nature because it distorted observable reality. The individuality, emotionality and subjectivism of modern art led to the creation of art that was challenging and controversial, demanding more of the viewer. Whilst modern art may have been bewildering to most spectators, defenders such as Martin du Toit championed its dismissal of the sentimental and obvious, and educated the public in realising that “there is a definite, if subtle, sense of meaning behind each picture”.<sup>87</sup> By the end of the 1930s, the appreciation of modern art was growing, doubtless aided by an exhibition of 150 colour reproductions of modern European art held at the Pretoria Technical College in June 1938.<sup>88</sup>

Much of the politics of the 1930s centred on the recognition of Afrikaner culture; hence, a specific South African (or even Afrikaans) style, content and character for art were cited as the ideal by many influential figures. Afrikaans was increasingly invoked to identify the group that wished to separate itself from the hegemony of the English-speaking sector. In 1924 the National/Labour Party alliance won the general election, and in 1925 General Hertzog made Afrikaans an official language of the Union. In 1929, the same year that Hertzog’s National Party won the general election again, the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations / FAK) was founded in Bloemfontein and Martin du Toit founded *Die Nuwe Brandwag*. The battle for the recognition of Afrikaans culture was largely based on the acceptance of Afrikaans, “*ons waardevolste enkele stuk kultuurbesit*” (our single most valuable cultural possession).<sup>89</sup> Martin du Toit was a staunch supporter of the nationalist D.F. Malan, but also said that he believed in the universal character of art, stating that one

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87. *The Star*, 20 April 1933, p 11 (Brilliant Work by Miss Irma Stern). Two years previously, Laubser had been categorised as an exponent of the modern school of art, which she characterised by its “honesty of expression” and belief in “individual expression”. *Pretoria News*, 27 November 1931, p 8 (Artistic Event); *Die Vaderland*, 13 Februarie 1934, p 11 (Waardering van Moderne Kuns – Lesing deur A. Hendriks Pretoriase Ouersvereniging Gistermiddag).
88. The artists included Gauguin, Van Gogh, Degas, Manet and Cézanne. The exhibition was opened by Irma Stern, and was called “the most representative exhibition of modern art ever shown in South Africa”. *Pretoria News*, 11 June 1938, p 7 (Irma Stern’s Art Exhibition in Technical College).
89. P. de V. Pienaar (red.), *Die Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*, p 324, quoted in N. Coetzee, “Pierneef en die Noordelike Romantiese Tradisie,” *Historia*, 31, 1, 1986, p 11.

ought not to distinguish between Afrikaner, Englishman or Jew, because art is the terrain where they meet on an equally footing.<sup>90</sup>

The debates during the 1930s concerned with encouraging uniquely “South African/Afrikaans” art often used terms such as “national art identity”, folk art and Afrikaner art interchangeably, making it difficult to separate the ideological strands. Whereas modernism was regarded suspiciously because of its international origins, the movement for a national art focused on nurturing that which was believed to be characteristically South African. Nevertheless, not all “foreign” art was necessarily modern: so, for instance, (conservative) British art was believed to hinder the evolution of a genuine South African art style and identity, engendering the political struggle between English and Afrikaans artists that lasted many years.<sup>91</sup> As has already been noted, the Administrator of the Transvaal expressed the wish in 1932 that annual exhibitions of South African, but more particularly *Afrikaans* art should be held in Pretoria, and proposed that Martin du Toit should lead the initiative. Many exhibitions during the 1930s used an emotive rhetoric to promote a national/Afrikaans art. So, for example, at the opening of an exhibition in the Macfadyen Hall in 1935, Pierneef stated: “We must avoid the sickly sentimental and concentrate on the greatness of our country, and

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90. Du Toit’s words were: “*Gelukkig is kuns die terrein waar ons nóg van Afrikaner, nóg van Engelsman, nóg van Jood praat want kuns is die terrein waarop alle seksies van die bevolking mekaar op gelyke voet kan ontmoet*”. [*Die Vaderland*, 13 Oktober 1933, p 5 (Republiek Nodig vir Toekoms van Afrikaanse Kultuur, Malaniet-Professor se Gevolgtrekking); *Die Vaderland*, 23 September 1936, p 14 (Empire Exhibition)]. It is possible, within the political climate of the 1930s, that Du Toit was more concerned with stressing the parity between Afrikaans and English-speaking artists rather than emphasising the affinity between Afrikaner and Jew. Pierneef seems to have been more outspoken regarding the Jews and remarked in the Academy for Literature and Arts that British imperialism and Jewish artists had a negative influence on the development of Afrikaans visual art. [*Bulletin of The South African Academy for Literature and Arts*, November 1934, 3, 15, p 6; also see footnote 91 of this article].

91. See Basson, “Die Bydrae van Erich Mayer”, p 188. In discussions of art exhibitions, the press frequently differentiated between Afrikaans and English-speaking artists, for example at the exhibition of twenty South African artists held in the Madfadyen Hall in June 1935, see: *Die Vaderland*, 28 June 1935, p 11 (Groot Tentoonstelling van Suid-Afrikaanse Skilder-kuns).

teach our people that art is also a religion ... Let us be ourselves, and portray our *Afrikaans* nature honestly.”<sup>92</sup>

Although Erich Mayer (1876-1960) was concerned with establishing an aesthetic consciousness and a (Afrikaans) “national art identity” in the early decades of the twentieth century, his outsider status as a German-Jew led to heated debates with Pierneef and Hendriks.<sup>93</sup> Attempts at a “national imagery” that could be used to invoke a national art consciousness were pursued by artists such as W.H. Coetzer for his historic scenes of the Great Trek and Pierneef in his Johannesburg Station Panels, completed in 1932.<sup>94</sup> The precise constitution of “national imagery” was not necessarily clear. Many people felt that the combination of local subject matter with a style adapted to South African circumstances was sufficient: typical motifs included flowers, animals, the San people, historical themes and the landscape.<sup>95</sup> The FAK executive endorsed so-called “cultural self-sufficiency” and to this end declared in 1934: “We must express an authentic Afrikaans spirit in the houses in which we live, the furniture we use, the *paintings on our walls*, the books on our shelves, the naming of

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92. According to Pierneef, “*Ons moet die sieklike sentimentele vermy en alleen die grootsheid van ons land weergee, en ons volk leer dat kuns ook 'n godsdiens is ... laat ons onself wees, en ons eie Afrikaanse stempel weergee om 'n eerlike opregtheid te openbaar*”. [*Die Volkstem*, 29 Junie 1935, p 5 (Afrikaners Wees Julle Self)]. Already in 1927, S.C. Lezard spoke at the Pretoria Technical College re “inculcation of South African National Art into the minds of the rising generation”, and said he knew people like Pierneef, Mayer and Van Wouw were sympathetic to this cause. *Pretoria News*, 27 August 1927, p 6 (Pretoria’s Technical College).
93. Basson, “Die Bydrae van Erich Mayer”, pp 1-2, 172, 183. Art training was one of the issues about which these men had many ideological differences. Hence the series of articles by Mayer about national art in the *Brandwag* and *Huisgenoot*, and his lectures about the applied arts in which he pleaded for national art schools in order to save the disappearing tradition of Afrikaans folk-art. *Die Vaderland*, 19 Augustus 1933, p 6 (Lesing deur Erich Mayer ‘Die Toegepaste Kunste in Suid-Afrika’).
94. Basson, “Die Bydrae van Erich Mayer”, p 14.
95. F.L. Alexander, *Art in South Africa. Painting Sculpture and Graphic Art since 1900* (Balkema, Cape Town, 1962), pp 38-46. According to Alexander it was these motifs that distinguished South African art from the art of other countries. See also: J.F.W. Grosskopf, *Hendrik Pierneef die Man en sy Werk* (Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1945), p 18. Pierneef remarked that “the South African public is only really prepared to buy landscapes” (*die Suid-Afrikaanse publiek [is] in hoofsaak eintlik net bereid om landskappe te koop*). Martin du Toit similarly remarked in 1936 that Afrikaner artists felt attracted to the land and its inhabitants, and despite their strong feeling regarding colour, the coloured peoples played a leading role in their motifs. *Die Vaderland*, 23 September 1936, p 14 (Empire Exhibition).

our places – in short our outlook, frame of mind and spiritual inclination”.<sup>96</sup>

The search for a national art was unfortunately often misinterpreted to justify hackneyed scenes of jacarandas, blue gum trees and bushveld sunsets as “genuinely national”. Astute critics of the 1930s realised that a South African style did not reside in its subject matter; rather it had to result from a search for the soul of the South African. Martin du Toit identified the essential character of Afrikaner art as sober, reflective and melancholic, which he believed resulted from this people’s loss of freedom.<sup>97</sup> He argued that the *Leitmotiv* of paintings by Afrikaner artists was essentially tragic, and that this inherent pessimism and melancholia were evident in the works of artists as diverse as Volschenk, Laubser and Pierneef.<sup>98</sup> Both Moerdyk and Pierneef felt that a national art could not afford to merely copy the art of Europe, and Pierneef in particular struggled for the recognition of a *nasionaal-eie vorm* (own national form).<sup>99</sup> Pierneef believed that true national art could only be engendered by means of an intimate interaction with one’s own environment,<sup>100</sup> and other critics who remarked on the organic synergy between the artist, and the South African native soil and culture, echoed this sentiment.<sup>101</sup>

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96. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 402 [emphasis added].

97. According to Du Toit, “*die verlies van sy vryheid [is] die oorwegende faktor in die weemoed en droefheid van die Afrikaner se kultuur*”. *Die Vaderland*, 13 Oktober 1933, p 5 (Republiek Nodig).

98. According to Du Toit, “*in die hedendaagse skilderkuns van die Afrikaner is die Leitmotief... tragies; in sy kern is selfs die gesellige, vrolike Pierneef se kuns tragies, byna droefgeestig en bevange van ’n eensaamheid wat in essensie pessimisties en swarmoedig is, ewe as in die werk van Volschenk, Maggie Loubser [sic] en ander Afrikaanse kunstenaars*”. *Die Vaderland*, 13 Oktober 1933, p 5 (Republiek Nodig).

99. *Die Volkstem*, 7 Junie 1935, p 2 (n Besitting van Pretoria, J H Pierneef se Tentoonstelling); *Die Vaderland*, 28 Mei 1935, p 6 (Pierneef Slaan Nuwe Weg in. *Metamorfose na sy Reis*). In the early part of the twentieth century, it was held that Dutch painting constituted a reminder of the cultural links between the Netherlands and South Africa, but this tenuous link was invoked as a “rallying cry for a national [Afrikaner] identity” with little real success. J. Carman, “17th Century Dutch and Flemish Painting in South Africa”. Paper presented at the 10th Annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians, 14-16 July 1994, University of Stellenbosch, p 158. This is significant in terms of Pierneef’s idea that the art of Europe should not just be copied by South Africans.

100. Grosskopf, *Hendrik Pierneef*, p 22: “*Ware nasionale kuns moet uit jou eie omgewing en uit jou eie grond gebore word*”.

101. For example: “*ons [moet] die skildery voel as ’n skepping en ’n produk wat op die bodem van Suid-Afrikaanse tradisies organies gegroei het en gevoed is deur die*



Only a few artists in the 1930s succeeded in merging South African/Afrikaans subject matter with a modernistic idiom. Commenting on Laubser's exhibition in the Macfadyen Hall in 1931, for example, Martin du Toit drew attention to the fact that she was the first Afrikaans-speaking artist, of pure Afrikaner descent, who had immersed herself in modernism.<sup>102</sup> Art historian Elizabeth Delmont has examined Laubser's iconography, particularly her familial and pastoral tropes set in dehistoricised natural contexts, and has demonstrated the connections to both Afrikaner nationalism and modernism in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>103</sup> Delmont shows compellingly how Laubser's art aligned with the discourse of burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism at the precise time when figures such as Martin du Toit were concerned with Afrikaner aspirations.<sup>104</sup> In his comments concerning Maggie Laubser's exhibition in the Macfadyen Hall in 1933, Martin du Toit suggested that she had succeeded in synthesising style and subject matter to convey a uniquely South African atmosphere, and in 1936 he commended her for her *eg-nasionaal* (genuinely national) farm scenes.<sup>105</sup> Her combination of soul and atmosphere conveyed the sobriety and serious outlook on life that

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*Suid-Afrikaanse kultuur*". H. Posthumus, "Nie Nuwigheid Nie, Maar Slegs Vernuwung van Belang in Kuns", *Die Vaderland*, 2 Oktober 1936, p 11. In order to produce a successful national art, artists had to reflect their environment and adapt their colours and subject matter accordingly: "Pierneef, Volschenk, Mayer ... Loubser [sic], Boonzaier, staan met albei voete op Afrikaanse bodem ondanks die feit dat hulle dikwels motiewe behandel waarteenoor die Afrikaner vreemd staan". S.I. Mocke, "Nasionale Rigting by Ons Jongere Skilders en Digters," *Die Vaderland*, 12 Junie 1936, p 11.

102. P. Enseel [pseudonym of M.L. du Toit], "Maggie Laubser Haar Tentoonstelling", *Die Volkstem*, 24 November 1931, p 1. See J. Joubert, "Maggie Laubser's First Art Exhibition in Pretoria, 1931", *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History*, 1, 3, September 1987, pp 258-262. The reviewer of Irma Stern exhibition in the Macfadyen Hall in 1933 remarked that she too combined the techniques of European modernism "with an inspiration that was peculiarly South African". *Pretoria News*, 20 April 1933, p 6 (Exhibition of Paintings by Miss Irma Stern).
103. Delmont, "Laubser, Land and Labour", pp 6-7.
104. Delmont, "Laubser, Land and Labour", pp 6-7. In this regard, it is puzzling why Du Toit seems to have collected so few of Laubser's works that aligned with his ideological beliefs: *Arum Lilies*, *J.F.E. Celliers* and *Flamingos*, acquired for the University of Pretoria in the 1930s, are relatively limited in their representation of Laubser's modernism, both stylistically and iconographically.
105. *Die Vaderland*, 23 September 1933, p 13 (Opgewektheid Vervang die Tragiese in Maggie Loubser [sic] se Kuns); *Die Vaderland*, 23 September 1936, p 14 (Empire Exhibition).

were considered *eg-Afrikaans* (genuinely Afrikaans), qualities that were also remarked upon by Doctor S.N. Gie, Secretary of Union Education, in relation to J.A. Smith's exhibition in the Macfadyen Hall in 1933.<sup>106</sup>

### The University of Pretoria's art collection in the 1930s

As has already been pointed out, the University of Pretoria's art collection originated in the 1930s, in part by means of donations that were occasionally, but not always, related to exhibitions in the Macfadyen Hall. The first works in the collection were for the most part obtained by Du Toit from artists he knew personally; thus by 1931 there were already works by Mayer, Pierneef, Enslin du Plessis, Laubser, Eloff and Hendriks in the collection, some of which can be seen in a photograph of the Afrikaans Art and Culture classroom (**Figure 2**). Martin du Toit wanted to collect representative artworks by South African artists, but in his letters to possible donors, he stressed that the university could not afford to pay for them.<sup>107</sup> In response to this request, Erich Mayer, for example, wrote to Du Toit in September 1931 and stated that because of his own financial constraints, he was only able to donate a "humble watercolour study".<sup>108</sup> As early as April 1929, Du Toit notified the university that an over-life size bronze statue by Fanie Eloff, called *Die Gees van Sport* (The Spirit of Sport), was for sale for £1 500 and wondered whether the authorities would consider buying it.<sup>109</sup> One of the few purchases Du Toit was apparently able to motivate, was for a series of 37 sketches of the Second Anglo-Boer War by Frans Oerder in 1938. He also tried to collect representative works by Pieter Wenning, who had spent a number of years in Pretoria, and wanted to document his complete *oeuvre*.<sup>110</sup> Du Toit felt that a study collection of South African art was essential for the students in the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture, but also wanted it to be accessible to the public. Many artworks were displayed in the Afrikaans Art and

106. *Die Volkstem*, 24 Junie 1933, p 5 (Dr Gie oor 'Eg-Afrikaanse Kuns, Open Tentoonstelling van J Smith).

107. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – J. Giliam, Pretoria, 21 August 1931. Giliam was Wenning's son-in-law.

108. Basson, "Die Bydrae van Erich Mayer", p 204. This work was possibly *Willow trees* or *Landscape*, which were both early additions to the collection of the University of Pretoria.

109. CAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – Rector, University of Pretoria, 26 April 1929. The reply stated that the Board could not finance such a project since there were hardly sufficient funds for general purposes.

110. AAUP: M.L. du Toit file, M.L. du Toit – J. Giliam, Pretoria, 31 September 1931.

Culture lecture room in the Old Arts Building (**Figure 2**), others were hung in the corridors of the Merensky Library building, designed by Moerdyk.



**Figure 2: Photograph of Afrikaans Art and Culture classroom, 1932.**  
(Art Archives, University of Pretoria).

During the 1930s, there were evidently no specific policies regarding the art collection, which was essentially the product of the personal vision and endeavours of Martin du Toit. Because he followed his own taste and inclinations, he was able to avoid the type of collection that could have resulted from committee decisions. An art collection fund and art committee only came into being during the 1940s, and from that time onwards, many more works were bought directly from artists, allowing the authorities to make specific choices.

Collections need to have some type of identity, and the University of Pretoria's current collection has generally followed Du Toit's efforts to assemble a reasonably representative collection of South African art. Du Toit's initial collection succeeded in being illustrative of contemporary South African art by including examples of the post-impressionism, monumental-decorative art and expressionism referred to earlier in this article, but he also collected romantic realism and South African impressionism from "older" artists such as Wenning. The University of Pretoria held the first exhibition of its art collection in the Macfadyen Hall in February 1950, and displayed about 80 artworks. The *Pretoria News* explained that the collection "had been

built up in a novel way. From time to time various artists have exhibited their works at the Extra-mural Buildings. The university authorities have lent the buildings free of charge, but on condition that they should be allowed to select one picture from the exhibition to add to their collection".<sup>111</sup>

Of the approximately 25 Macfadyen Hall exhibitions between 1931 and 1939, the university obtained 12 works: Laubser's *Arum Lilies* (**Figure 3**), J.F.E. Celliers and *Flamingos*; Kottler's *Head of a Woman*; Hendriks' *Chrysanthemums and Asters* (**Figure 4**); Fincken's *Nude Figure*; Boonzaier's *Torres de Molines*; Pechstein's *Still Life with Figurine* (**Figure 5**); Pierneef's *Rustenburg*, B. Everard's *Delville Wood, Bomb Crater* (**Figure 6**); Sumner's *Fruit with Flowers*; and T. Goedvriend's *Landscape*. Between 1940 and 1951, a further 55 or so exhibitions were offered in the Macfadyen Hall, leading to about 33 more donations.<sup>112</sup> The artist Bettie Cilliers-Barnard in fact maintains that the university was more set upon encouraging art than in trying to build up its own collection.<sup>113</sup>

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111. *Pretoria News*, 18 February 1950 (Varsity art collection exhibited). This arrangement was not always honoured. Accounts like this contributed to myths about the origins of the collection, and have only recently been revised.
  112. Joubert, "The Art Exhibitions Held in the Macfadyen", pp 62-146. Although there are major works in the collection, there were also omissions, possibly resulting from the random nature of donations. No exhibitions by black artists took place in the Macfadyen Hall. Works by artists such as Lucas Malemale were added to the collection in the late 1970s, and only from about 1991 was there a policy dedicated to collecting works by black artists.
  113. B. Cilliers-Barnard, Personal communication, Pretoria, 19 August 1986. A comparison between the exhibitions held in the 1930s and the 1940s suggests that in the earlier decade more contentious exhibitors were selected, whereas in the 1940s most of the displays seem to have taken the conservative taste of the public into account.

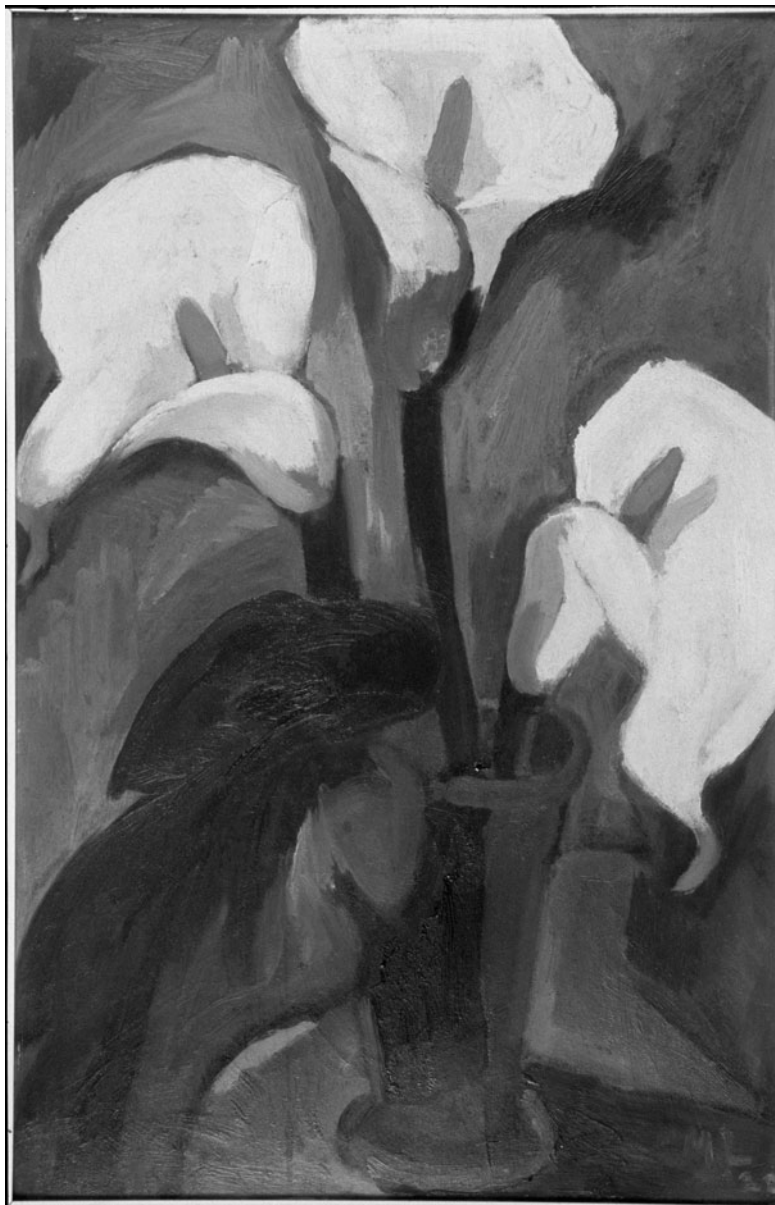


Figure 3: M. Laubser, *Arum Lilies*, 1922.  
Oil on board - 474 x 324 mm.  
(Art Collection, University of Pretoria).



Figure 4: A. Hendriks, *Chrysanthemums and Asters*, 1932.  
Oil on canvas - 245 x 350 mm.  
(Art Collection, University of Pretoria).



Figure 5: M. Pechstein, *Still Life with Figurine*, 1923.  
Polychrome lithograph - 500 x 374 mm.  
(Art Collection, University of Pretoria).

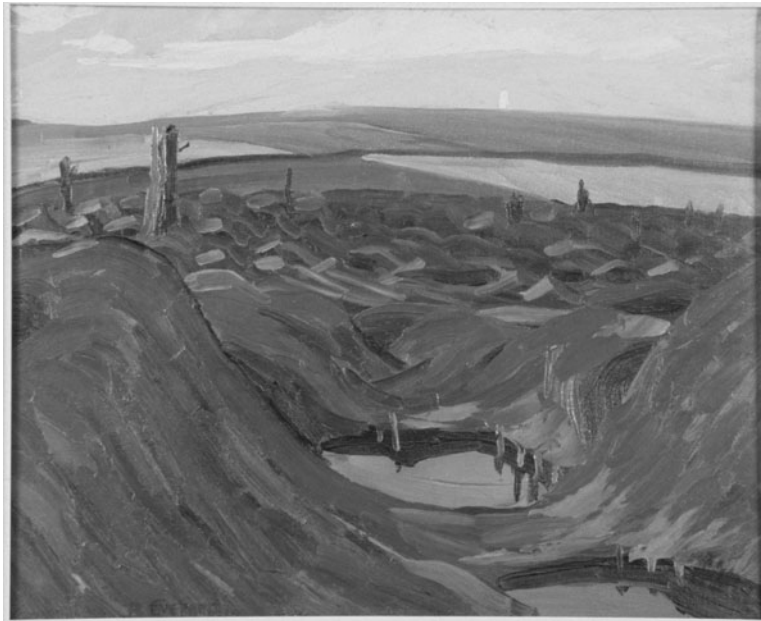


Figure 6: B. Everard, *Deville Wood, Bomb Crater*, circa 1935.  
Oil on board - 370 x 450 mm.  
Art Collection, University of Pretoria.

In retrospect, it is clear that not all of the art works secured by Martin du Toit were “modern”, but it is the fact that he deliberately collected *South African* art that made the university’s collection exceptional during the 1930s. This is evident when the University of Pretoria’s collection is compared to public art collections at the time. By the twentieth century, public art collections existed in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Durban, which were all still considered to be colonial outposts.<sup>114</sup> These early enterprises frequently reflected the vision and ideological inclination of a specific person. A good example is the art collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery,

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114. Carman, “17th Century Dutch and Flemish”, p 158; J. Carman, “Florence Phillips, Patronage and the Arts at the Time of Union”, in Arnold and Schmahmann (eds), *Between Union and Liberation*, p 35. The art collection of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town profited from the gifts, mainly of so-called “modern” art, made by Alfred de Pass between 1926 and 1949. A. Tietze, “The Benefactor and the Gallery: Alfred de Pass and the South African National Gallery in the Years 1926 to 1949”. Paper presented at the 10th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians, 14-16 July 1994, University of Stellenbosch, pp 134-139.

which was shaped by its founder, Lady Florence Phillips, and its first director, the Anglo-Irish art dealer, Hugh Lane.<sup>115</sup> At its inception in 1910, the Gallery's core collection comprised "the best of British and European modern art and the traditions on which it drew".<sup>116</sup> The Johannesburg Art Gallery focused almost exclusively on British and French art and promoted British cultural values; its collecting policy, curatorship and patronage reflected an imperialistic vision of culture and "civilisation".<sup>117</sup> This had a profound impact on who was represented in the collection, leading, for instance, to the virtual exclusion of women artists; the so-called South African Section comprised only five sculptures by the Dutch-born sculptor Anton van Wouw.<sup>118</sup> It was felt that a competent South African school of art did not yet exist, and that collections such as these should inspire local artists to emulate the art of the great "masters" so that, according to Lady Phillips, "our South African School of Art [could] begin to produce work worthy to appear side by side with the best examples of other countries."<sup>119</sup> This normative and canonic attitude meant that for many years, no works by South African artists were acquired. During the 1930s, however, the Johannesburg Art Gallery obtained eighteen paintings by South African artists, eleven of them under the guidance of Anton Hendriks, who was director of the Gallery from 1937 to 1964.<sup>120</sup> This offers an interesting parallel with the developments in Pretoria, and confirms how unusual Martin du Toit's concentration on South African art was.

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115. Carman, "17th Century Dutch and Flemish", p 159. Sir Hugh Lane was also responsible for the curatorial vision of the Michaelis Collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings, which was donated to the Union of South Africa in 1913 and was divided between two locations, namely the Michaelis Collection in Cape Town and the Pretoria Municipality.

116. Carman, "Florence Phillips," p 39.

117. Arnold, "Visual Culture in Context", p 20.

118. Carman, "Acquisition Policy", p 204; J. Carman, *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine Florence Phillips and the Making of the Johannesburg Art Gallery* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2006), pp 180, 190. The Johannesburg Art Gallery bought its first work by a black artist, Gerard Sekoto's (1913-1993) *Yellow Houses a Street in Sophiatown* (1940) in 1940. Carman, "Acquisition Policy", p 207.

119. Quoted in Carman, "17th Century Dutch and Flemish", p 158.

120. In January 1939, Hendriks selected eight paintings by South African artists such as Wenning, Pierneef and Oerder from the Engelenburg estate. The collection policy of the Johannesburg Art Gallery formulated in 1946 specified that although representative examples of the best of South African painting had occasionally been collected, the Gallery was primarily seeking examples of English and European art from after 1910. Lamprecht, "Florrie's Dream", pp 32, 40-41.



## Conclusion

In evaluating the contribution made by Martin du Toit in founding a university art collection, it is clear that he was not just concerned with establishing a representative study collection, but also wanted to confront the visually naïve public of Pretoria with art that challenged their complacent preconceptions. Art historian Jillian Carman argues that in the early twentieth century, the Johannesburg Art Gallery “provided an opportunity for certain powerful British mine owners, the Randlords, to reaffirm the superiority of the British way of life and construct a civil society that would attract suitable immigrant families to service the mines and their community”.<sup>121</sup> In the same way that the promotion of imperialistic ideals at the Johannesburg Art Gallery implicitly highlighted the perceived differences in quality between European and so-called colonial art, Du Toit’s efforts served to mitigate the notion that South African art was insignificant or somehow inferior. The fact that the Town Council of Pretoria was also starting to bring together a small collection of artworks by South African artists in the 1930s, undoubtedly indicates the influence of Du Toit.<sup>122</sup> Carman argues that a collector of contemporary art usually deals with all manner of risks and qualitative decisions, but has the responsibility to take leadership in the “assessment of the avant-garde”.<sup>123</sup> As has already been pointed out, the early art collection at the University of Pretoria was the exclusive product of Martin du Toit’s ideas, and this charged the collection with a potentially powerful institutional role that had the capacity to render a paradigmatic theory of visual culture.<sup>124</sup>

It is clear from an examination of the reception of the art exhibitions in the Macfadyen Hall that Martin du Toit’s insightful understanding of contemporary South African art was recognised and respected. His campaign of cultural stimulation in the 1930s focused on

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121. J. Carman, “Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Urban Future”, in R. Tomlinson, R.A. Beauregard, L. Bremmer and X. Mangcu (eds), *Emerging Johannesburg. Perspectives on the Postapartheid City* (Routledge, London, 2003), p 231.

122. Apart from the Michaelis bequest, the earliest pieces in the collection of the Town Council of Pretoria comprised artworks by Pierneef, Wenning, Oerder, Van Wouw and Stern (<http://www.pretoriaartmuseum.co.za/history.htm>), offering an interesting analogy with Du Toit’s contemporary endeavors at the University of Pretoria. Although there is no conclusive evidence that Du Toit was involved in the selection of artworks for the Town Council of Pretoria, it is likely that he was consulted since he was considered one of the leading figures in the Pretoria art community. See also footnote 19 of this article.

123. Carman, “Acquisition Policy”, pp 203-204.

124. Arnold, “Visual Culture in Context”, p 20.

supporting young or relatively unknown artists and increasing the public's awareness of a broader spectrum of art. The majority of the most significant exhibitions in Pretoria were held in the Macfadyen Hall; in 1933 and 1935, for example. Virtually all the leading exponents of modern art in South Africa exhibited there. The fact that the exhibitions were endorsed by the University of Pretoria undoubtedly lent authority, and it is noteworthy that the outstanding quality of the exhibitions was consistently commended by the critics. I have indicated that Du Toit consciously sanctioned artists whose work stimulated debates (sometimes mutually exclusive) regarding modernism and the need for a distinctive South African art, and thus succeeded in making the north of South Africa the seat of ideological and stylistic deliberations. Above all, Martin du Toit fought to sustain a still tenuous artistic tradition in difficult economic, social and political circumstances. His opinion that "art is ... very popular amongst a large percentage of the Afrikaans-speaking people; many a young man spends his whole salary on a 'Wenning' or a 'Pierneef', and nearly every householder of the Afrikaans intellectual section is the proud possessor of some original painting",<sup>125</sup> was possibly optimistic and certainly poignant in light of the relative impoverishment of the Afrikaners at that time. Nonetheless, his statement indicates a shift in aesthetic sensibilities in the 1930s that reflected the mobilisation of Afrikaner culture under the guidance of figures such as Martin du Toit.

#### **Abstract**

The first head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture at the University of Pretoria in the 1930s was Professor Martin du Toit, a well-known figure in Afrikaner cultural circles. His vision for the new department included the ideal of exposing students to the work of South African artists. He believed passionately in the future of the arts in South Africa and was enthusiastic in establishing them in the so-called "North", particularly in Pretoria. Martin du Toit was involved in many cultural bodies and activities and instituted regular art exhibitions under the auspices of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture in the Macfadyen Memorial Hall in Pretoria. These exhibitions focused on contemporary South African artists and brought the work of groundbreaking painters such as Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser to the attention of the public. Du Toit also wanted to build up a representative collection of Afrikaner material culture and visual art at the university. This article examines this endeavour, contextualises it in relation to aspects of public art collecting in South Africa during the

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125. Du Toit, "Art in Afrikaans Culture", p 188.

1930s, and shows how Du Toit laid the foundation for the current art collection of the University of Pretoria.

### **Opsomming**

#### **Die Versameling van Suid-Afrikaanse Kuns in die 1930's: Die Rol van Martin du Toit**

Die eerste hoof van die Departement Afrikaanse Kuns en Kultuur aan die Universiteit van Pretoria in die 1930's was professor Martin du Toit, 'n bekende figuur in Afrikanerkultuurkringe. Deel van sy visie vir die nuwe departement het die gedagte ingesluit om studente aan die werk van Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars bloot te stel. Hy het hartstogtelik geglo in die toekoms van die kunste in Suid-Afrika en was ywerig om hulle in die so genoemde "Noorde", en spesifiek in Pretoria, te vestig. Martin du Toit was by vele kultuurliggame en aktiwiteite betrokke en het gereelde kunsuitstallings onder die vaandel van die Departement Afrikaanse Kuns en Kultuur in die Macfadyen Memorial Hall in Pretoria gereël. Hierdie tentoonstellings het op kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars gefokus en die werk van innoverende skilders soos Irma Stern en Maggie Laubser aan die publiek bekendgestel. Du Toit wou ook 'n verteenwoordigende versameling van Afrikaner materiële kultuur en visuele kuns by die Universiteit saamstel. Hierdie artikel ondersoek dié poging en kontekstualiseer dit teen die agtergrond van aspekte van openbare kunsversameling in Suid-Afrika gedurende die 1930's. Dit dui ook aan hoe Du Toit hierdeur die grondslag vir die huidige kunsversameling van die Universiteit van Pretoria gelê het.

#### **Key words**

Afrikaner; Anton Hendriks; art collecting; Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture; Johannesburg Art Gallery; Macfadyen Memorial Hall; Martin du Toit; modernism; national art; nationalism; Pretoria; South African art; University of Pretoria.

#### **Sleutelwoorde**

Afrikaner; Anton Hendriks; Departement Afrikaanse Kuns en Kultuur; Johannesburg Art Gallery; kuns versameling; Macfadyen Memorial Hall; Martin du Toit; modernisme; nasionale kuns; nasionalisme; Pretoria; Suid-Afrikaanse kuns; Universiteit van Pretoria.