

# Feeding the Hand that Bites: South African Art & the Valparaiso Biennial of 1987

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by Colin Richards

*my people, tell me:  
what does, what breaks the chains?  
(Mongane Wally Serote 'Time Has Run Out')*

*...with no other law but torture  
and the lashing hunger of the people  
(Pablo Neruda 'The Satraps')*

*"... so few artists or writers care about how their own work is used, or misused... Censorship, sexism, racism should be defined wherever possible. Even the most politically pointed work should be withheld from certain situations. Art's use as propaganda for the government abroad in... embassies and information agencies...; participation in international exhibitions held in countries where censorship, torture and political imprisonment are rampant – all these are factors we should be aware of. Once we start thinking, we realize how much responsibility for what we have made is actually within our own control. This applies not only to the object but to the artist as well. If art is indeed a committed and inseparable reflection of the artist's deepest concerns, it should not be used for any purpose or be present at any place that the artist her/himself would not be able to attend in all conscience." Lippard, 1984:31).*

Early in 1987 a number of prominent South African artists were invited to be part of the South African exhibition entry for the VIII Valparaiso Biennial, Chile. Five accepted while at least one formally declined. Judge-selectors included senior academics and well-known personalities in the 'formal' sector of the South African art-world. As in the past, the exhibition was funded by the Department of National Education (DNE), and organised by the South African Association of Arts (SAAA). This will be the fourth occasion of South African participation (the first being in 1979). The amount allocated this year is the most to date, R26,000.00 (Martin, 1987: interview).

Much controversy has surrounded this enterprise, with various arguments for and against participation being raised. While the debate has been characterised by a good deal of obscurantism and misunderstanding, it may be said to turn on a number of related issues. Perhaps primary amongst these is the fact that Chile is ruled by an undemocratic military dictatorship perceived by some to be cruelly repressive, that the South African apartheid regime actively cultivates relations with that government and vice versa, and that this exhibition is implicated in that relationship. The alternative view seems to suggest that these characterisations and relations, even if

they are valid, (and this some dispute) have little or nothing to do with either the artists or the production and reception of their artworks.

The potentially damaging effects of this controversy – to both personal reputations and the credibility of the SAAA (amongst others) – probably motivated the formulation and publication of the following ‘legitimizing’ statement by the artists –

*“We, the undersigned, would like it known that: Firstly, we reject politically oppressive systems wherever they occur and secondly, we have accepted to exhibit at the Eighth Valparaiso Biennale, subject to the following: We understand that we were selected on merit as practicing artists; We will exhibit as individual artists and not as representatives of the government; We support the right of all artists to make and exhibit art in any country; It has been agreed that our works and titles will be accepted in their entirety without any form of censorship.”* Signed: Marion Arnold, Keith Dietrich, Karel Nel, Henry Symonds, Margaret Vorster. (Cat.1987: 3).

If this statement is to be taken as more than a consoling fiction – just so many words – it must survive the scrutiny of certain historical realities in both South Africa and Chile. As indeed must the Association’s claim, in its recent front-page article on this Biennial, that it is a ‘non-political’ organisation. (SAAC, Aut. 1987: 3).

For all the heat generated by this controversial event, very little of the actual debate surfaced in the public arena. In the end this failure to debate openly and in good faith must count as one of the most serious casualties of the whole affair. For many it reveals the cavalier attitude of certain so-called spokespeople and institutions ‘representing’ South African artists towards their constituency. That ‘constituency’ is of course not homogeneous, and this debate owes much to that fact. The SAAA claims that its main objective is the promotion of art and artists nationwide. (SAAC, Aut. 1987: 3). One of the more persistent questions provoked by this affair remains – whose interests is the SAAA in fact promoting in this instance? And more broadly?

Some strategies defending participation are worth mentioning. Characteristically (for South Africa) the most common are claims for the whole arena being a ‘grey area’, of the situation not being ‘clear-cut’ and hence intractably undecideable. However some of us would hold that complexity does not necessarily mean undecideability. It simply calls for closer looking prior to decision making.

Added to these claims are assertions (but not arguments) for individual ‘autonomy’ and personal liberty made from clearly socially advantaged and protected class positions. Furthermore, a perhaps understandable ignorance in the local art-world of the larger context of the exhibition (both here and in Chile) appears to have been exploited by some defending participation. This involves the circulation of some questionable information about these respective contexts. The material presented in this paper seeks to question this (dis)information.

It is the purpose of this paper to sketch these contexts more fully, while at the same time responding directly to claims and objections that arose at various junctures in the debate. While this approach may seem tedious and complicates matters somewhat it is preferable to reducing a complex scenario to a falsely simple picture. The paper is organised as follows.

Section I – a brief introduction to the critical debate, the Valparaiso Biennial considered in the wider context of Chile's recent history and the current situation there. Certain points of contact or congruencies between the two States are suggested. Section II highlights the recent history of Chile. Section III- the focus shifts to South Africa with the relationship between the SAAA and the State being more fully engaged. Certain details of the contact between the two States, including culture and the military connection, are elaborated on. A conclusion follows.

## I

The larger critical debate involving the relation between art and politics is undoubtedly inscribed in this controversy. That debate is articulated very broadly in terms of two fundamental, arguably antagonistic or even irreconcilable 'recognitions'. One relates to the irreducibility of the practices (production and consumption) and the products of art to any given ostensibly extrinsic (usually ideological) 'determinants' arising in any given social formation. The other involves recognising the impossibility of extricating art (practices, objects, production and consumption) from the effects and consequences of both the relations and the forces that structure and mobilise the social world.

Articulating the relationship between art, culture and politics – or indeed between academic culture and politics – is undoubtedly a complex and intricate task. That there is a relation, though, appears beyond dispute. (See inter alia Wolff, 1981 & 1983; Jameson, 1981; Nichols, 1981; Tagg, 1987).

The argument for anything more than a carefully qualified 'autonomy' for any cultural practice is bankrupt, intellectually and (for many of us) morally. And any claim that intellectuals, teachers or artists operate in some rare enclave of 'objectivity' free of political interests or effects is either naïve or, as is more often the case, a calculated move.

The ramifications of the art-politics debate are familiar to those informed about artculture, which presumably includes those involved as selector-judges and artists in the Valparaiso exhibition. As educators, and most of them are (see SAAC, Aut. 1987: 3), being informed is a responsibility, not an option. From this we must infer that their actions are considered and well informed. Few of those involved would disagree with these points, particularly those regarding a qualified or 'relative autonomy' for art.

But not all. Confining ourselves to those involved in the exhibition, (past and present), we still find individuals disputing any inevitable relation between art and politics. For example, Prof. Nico Roos (Pretoria University) and D. Albert Werth (Pretoria Art Museum) argue (politically) for the 'apoliticality' of art, for the radical separation, and essential separateness of politics and art.

Many (including some defenders of participation) would find this view quite untenable – as simple mystification. However this presumed consensus among critics of the position upholding an essential or unqualified autonomy for art confuses the picture as far as the Valparaiso Biennial concerned. That consensus is, in fact, clearly

superficial and soon breaks down under scrutiny. Here it is in substantive detail and not abstract principle (the ground of the consensus) that the real dispute lies.

Ms. Marilyn Martin (commissioner of the exhibition, then National Vice-President of the SAAA, since elected National President, accompanied the exhibition to Chile on the last two occasions and – in 1985 – served on the panel of judges in Chile) while arguing for some essential ‘aesthetic autonomy’ nevertheless recognises that political factors have a bearing on art. This tends to set her view against the extreme autonomy espoused by Roos, Werth and their sympathisers.

However, the precise nature of this ‘bearing’ is, as the argument goes, shy of elaboration. Unwillingness to be drawn on this crucial question of substance and detail with regard to the Valparaiso Biennial renders the argument for qualified autonomy so vague as to undercut any criticality it may otherwise have had. A divergence of ‘principle’ is effaced by a material convergence in action. In the Valparaiso Biennial such ‘differences’ of principle become meaningless, as the actions they motivate serve political ends consonant with those of Roos and Werth.

On this point, the observations of Dr. Raymund van Niekerk, director of the South African National Gallery, are significant. Dr. van Niekerk, far from calling for the separation of art and politics, cites the neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse in stressing that the tension between the aesthetic and the political must be actively cultivated in the interests of arts ‘truth’. (van Niekerk, 1987:13). Again, in principle (i.e. in abstract, without the embarrassment of revealing details) this point of view is eminently acceptable to most of us who range ourselves against the mystifications of the (a)political ‘autonomists’. However, when forced into focus the specific Chile/South African cultivar that Dr. van Niekerk in fact (implicitly) defends, reveals a distinctly unpalatable ‘truth’.

The Valparaiso Biennial Exhibition was initiated by the officials of the state of Chile after the military coup of 11 September, 1973. (We can assume this by process of deduction from the dates available). It is organized by the municipality of Valparaiso. Like so many of the organs of the military state the municipality is not an elected body. (Martin, 1987).

A recent entry in Chile Today, a journal issued by the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, boasts that “This art competition, well known throughout the international art world” has become “one of the elite encounters of avant-garde art”, linking the organizer “to the most important cultural and artistic institutions around the world.” (Chile Today, 1987:22).

Even a cursory glance at the membership of the exhibitions’ ‘Comite De Honor’ makes the nature of these ‘links’ clear and concrete. This applies to both South Africa and Chile. The list includes high-ranking government officials, notably the Chilean Minister of External Relations, the Minister of Education, and, significantly, the South African Ambassador to Chile, Lt.-Gen. A. M. Muller (SSAS). A military man, as befits a country ruled by military junta.

The following gloss appears in an earlier edition of Chile Today. “...*there is a high standard of education... and culture in Valparaiso. It is not by mere chance that*

*painters, writers and poets are attracted ... by the port and its people... Valparaiso is a town as active as any human or urban conglomerate on earth; what makes it different is the fact that it knows how to fuse the past with the present. An example of this fusion is the Antiques Market and the Art Biennial, a competition that attracts the avant-garde of painting, sculpture and engraving and that is entered by the world's foremost artists". (Chile Today, 1986:7).*

As is usual with such public-relation glosses, we might legitimately query some of its claims. What order of 'fusion' of whose past and present is being referred to here? What kind of education and culture? And what avant-garde, which foremost painters? And, more importantly, what is being glossed over in this 'official' view?

Answers are not too difficult to find. We might, for instance, cite the observations of one Chilean writer in exile after the coup, who speaks of *"the emergence of a policy of state control and surveillance over all spheres of public and private life, including... the intellectual professions, which were specifically singled out as helping to create a subversive climate. To communicate became a crime... Persecution therefore went beyond the usual sectors... to embrace students, professionals, artists... on a mass scale"* (Dorfman, 1983:71-72). Dorfman continues, *"the junta is out to dismember the country into drifting and disjointed bits and fragments linked neither with each other nor with the past."* (Ibid: 77). This does not quite square with the official view. Matters do not improve the closer we look.

## II

Some details of the recent history of Chile will bring the picture into sharper focus. This is necessary as it is here that several distortions are committed by local apologists wishing to 'legitimate' participation.

### **BEFORE THE COUP: ALLENDE'S SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT**

Salvador Allende's Popular Unity (Unidad Popular) government was a broad heterogeneous coalition with a left, or socialist orientation. His first cabinet consisted of Socialists (4 seats), Communists (3), Radicals (3), Social Democrats (2), MAPU (1), Independent (1). (Total 15 seats) (Roxborough et al, 1977:82).

Much was, and has been made of the fact that Allende failed to gain an overall majority. His party's apparent 'radicality' has been cited as a contributing factor. It has, however been pointed out that the Christian Democrats, who gained 27.8 of the vote (National Party 34.9%, PU 36.2%) "had a programme almost as radical as the PU's, in the short term." (Henfrey et al 1977:11). Allende himself enjoyed considerable support and in fact came close to being elected president in the 1958 Presidential elections, losing only to Jorge Alessandri by 3% of the vote. (Roxborough et al 1977:37,69). Because of Allende's failure to win a majority in the election, presidential confirmation was moved to the Chilean congress. Allende's presidency was, properly and in due course, confirmed by Congress on October, 24. (See Wynia, 1984: 169-189).

It is noteworthy that "The 1970 victory of Salvador Allende was the first and only instance of the democratic election of a Marxist as chief of state of a nation in the

western hemisphere.” (Fischer, 1979:59-60). Fischer makes the point that Allende’s success was not the aberration in Chilean politics it is sometimes made out to be. (Ibid). Indeed, as will become clear, if anything was an aberration unique in Chilean history it was the military coup, not Allende’s election.

## THE MILITARY COUP

On 11 September, 1973, the coalition government was overthrown in a bloody military coup. The coup was led by the three commanders of the armed forces, including Gen. Augusto Pinochet Ugarta (Army) and Adm. Jose Toribio Merino (Navy). (Roxborough et al, 1977:228). Reliable estimates put the death toll amongst Chileans at as high as 30,000. (O’Brien et al, 1983:110).

This tragic event brought an end to forty-one years of uninterrupted constitutional government in Chile. (Wynia, 1984:171) As one of the West’s oldest democracies, it enjoyed a strong parliamentary history. This fact combined with an almost uninterrupted pattern of quiet presidential succession based on free and open elections set her apart from her Latin-American neighbours. (Constable et al, 1986:75). The overthrow marked a violent rupture in this long tradition of peaceful, democratic rule, and extinguished the very qualities that spared her some of the more tragic moments that stain the history of that subcontinent. It brought Chile into line with the less palatable traditions of her neighbours.

The coup *“was unique in several respects. Not only did it represent an instance of infrequent military intervention, but in the Chilean context its level of brutality and violence were shocking. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the military regime that installed itself in power has endured, and, at the time of this writing, shows little sign of freely relinquishing its claim to leadership in the foreseeable future.”* (Fischer, 1979:121). At the time of this writing (1987) little seems to have changed.

In 1980 Pinochet forced an undemocratic and virtually unamendable new constitution on the country. (Boeninger, 1986:812). It provided “the framework for the general to succeed himself into the next century should he so choose”. (Time, 1986:15). That constitution remains in effect to this day... “it envisions a highly undemocratic future regime with a toothless congress, military veto power over many decisions and the outlawing of all Marxist parties.” (Constable et al, 1986: 70). This attitude to the communist (and the left generally), which had a tradition of respecting democratic procedures in Chile, is quite unjustified, as we will see later. (see Boeninger, 1986:821-828).

There have apparently been two moments of hope for the restoration of democracy in recent times. These have been enthusiastically cited by the better informed of local supporters of participation. They do not tell the full story, however.

The first occurred in the formation of the ideologically moderate, conciliatory Democratic Alliance (AD) in mid-1983. Much was made of this event in the local art-world, as it occasioned the return of a number of exiles. It ended with Pinochet declaring a state of siege, with Chile becoming “an occupied country.” (Constable et al, 1986: 63).

The second occurred in the spring of 1985, when Juan Francisco Cardinal Fresno, Archbishop of Santiago, made a call for national reconciliation. Centre-left and centre-right (11 Chilean parties) signed a 'National Accord for Transition to Full Democracy' in August 1985. The only abstentions were government supporters and the radicalized left. (Boeninger, 1986:824). *"Pinochet's response was uncompromising. Dismissing the accord as a product of inconsequential opportunists, he stepped up anticommunist warnings, jailed student and labour leaders, and refused to speed up the transition by a day."* (Constable et al, 1986: 59). Both moments, it seems, ended in frustration and failure for the forces of democracy.

## THE PRESENT SITUATION

Now in 1987, Pinochet's military junta is still very much in power. Parliament remains in 'indefinite recess'. The government rules by decree. By 1983 repression had already become firmly institutionalised. (O'Brien 1983: 5,8,112). Political parties have been banned from normal activity since the coup. National and party elections are barred. Even so certain groups have managed to survive underground and retain credibility and some limited room to manoeuvre. (See O'Brien, 1983: 88-96). Still Pinochet's "authoritarian rule has crippled the ability of democratic parties to function aboveground." (Constable et al, 1986: 67).

Pinochet's ambitions are clear, as is his style of leadership. "There is clear evidence of Pinochet's absolute intransigence." (Boeninger, 1986:827). His express desire is "to succeed himself for another eight years after 1989, when Chileans are scheduled to vote in a yes-no plebiscite on a presidential candidate chosen by the military junta." (Time, 1986:14). In fact "former close aides suggest that he will do everything possible to remain president for life." (Constable et al, 1986:69). Some local defenders of participation see this yes-no plebiscite as a fully-fledged, free, democratic election. It is clearly nothing of the sort.

In one of the more recent displays of repression, in September 1986, Pinochet (after an assassination attempt), *"declared a state of siege... that permitted the government to arrest, banish or exile individuals without charge, censor the press, ban public meetings and impose curfews. Compared to the state of siege that had been invoked between November, 1984, and June, 1985, the 1986 siege featured ominous new elements: resurgent paramilitary intimidation and execution not acknowledged by the government."* (Constable, 1987:17).

Late in 1986, the membership of the junta includes only two of the original group, Pinochet and Adm. Merino. Adm. Merino is apparently the closest to Pinochet, and conservative even within the military junta. (Newsweek, 1986:32). His visit to South Africa in 1981 will be discussed in due course. In the context of Latin American political life at present *"Chile has become a conspicuous and perplexing anomaly. Since 1980, military governments in 10 Latin American countries... have given way to some form of civilian rule. Today, Chile is the sole regional state with any democratic roots that is bucking the tide."* (Constable et al, 1986:58).

Lest we be in any doubt as to the scope or intent of Pinochet's power, we might recall one of his more memorable statements – "There is not a single leaf in this

country that I do not move.” (Time, 1986:18). Whatever liberties we take with the metaphor, official culture nestling ‘autonomously’ between the leaves is surely not one of them. Official culture is more likely intimately part and parcel of the ideological baggage of the state.

## **PARALLELS?**

Two things ‘official’ South Africa and Chile most definitely share is international isolation and a shocking history of human rights violations. (see Boeninger, 1986:823). ‘States of emergency concealing a range of human rights violations are also not infrequent in Chile, as the following entry in the 1986 Amnesty International report bears out. “Many violations of human rights took place in the context of states of exception. During the first half of 1985 there were three different states of exception in force, namely the ‘state of emergency’, the ‘state of danger of disturbance to internal peace’, and the ‘state of siege’, all of them provided for in the Constitution introduced in 1981.” (A.I. Report, 1986: 133). The South African entry in the same report is even longer. Both societies are clearly in a state of siege.

It is common (if unconvincingly contested) knowledge that certain communities within South Africa suffer brutal and widespread repression. Reading through Amnesty International’s various reports leaves one in no doubt as to the viciousness of repression in Chile as well. A.I published a full report on 18 May 1983 ‘Chile: Evidence of Torture’ (see A.I Newsletter, 1983:1,4,5,6). Its report of 1986 expresses concern at “the arbitrary detention, imprisonment and banishment of prisoners of conscience; judicial irregularities in political cases; widespread torture; and the lack of progress in investigating the majority of long-term ‘disappearances’. In addition, there was a steep increase in the number of violations of human rights by paramilitary squads believed to have links with the security forces, including abduction and at least one multiple execution” (A.I.Report, 1986:133).

A report of the Organisation of American States, published in September 1985, “found torture a ‘deliberate and systematic’ practice in Chile” (Constable et al, 1986:61,74). To date an estimated one million Chileans have left Chile, out of a total population of some eleven million. (On Chileans in exile in the United Kingdom, see Kay, 1987. See also a popular account by Denis Herbstein, ‘Living in Limbo’ London Illustrated News, Vol. 275 No.7063, Feb. 1987: 44-47). This makes a mockery of the junta’s wish “to inaugurate a new era in our history by planning a creative and stable political system for the future”. (Declaration, 1974:24).

As with the South African regime Pinochet is violently anti-marxist. On taking power the junta banned the Communist Party “and other leftist parties in Allende’s coalition government, and jailed and persecuted their members and suspected supporters.” (Boeninger, 1986:813). Yet the Marxist left is a strong and legitimate social force. “In no other Latin American democracy has the Marxist Left won power through elections; in no other, therefore, has the Right been so reluctant to permit democracy’s return.” (Constable et al 1986:63, 65,67).

Many of Pinochet’s remarks would indeed have a familiar ring to many South Africans. A sample “We are going to get tough. Those people talking about human rights and such things should be expelled from the country or put in prison.” (Time,

1986:12-13, and A.I. Newsletter, 1987:7). Or “It is sad to see certain religious groups confusing their pastoral mission with politics.” Pinochet has referred to the Vicaria de la Solidaridad, the legal and social assistance agency of the Roman Catholic church as “more Communistic than Communists.” (Time, 1986: 18,19). The Vicarate of Solidarity provided a haven for, amongst other things, the arpillera workgroups. (Agosin, 1987/88:45). This aspect of ‘peoples culture’ is perhaps best seen in counterpoint to the official art discourse of which the Biennial is clearly part, and will be discussed more fully later.

## **EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

On election, the Popular Unity coalition began promoting populist culture as an integral aspect of “participatory society... Participation in culture signified not only the enjoyment of art, music, dance and so on, but the opportunity to contribute to... social expression.” (Fischer, 1979:85. See also Gonzalez, 1976:106-127). The coalition also sought to liberate culture from ‘internationalist’ models. At the same time artists were encouraged to address politically sensitive national issues.

The poet Pablo Neruda, folk-singer Victor Jara and other community artists enjoyed widespread popularity. A series of murals was painted by the Juventud Comunista (Communist Youth) on the outside of buildings, on street fences, and along the banks of the Mapocho River in Santiago. These celebrated aspects of everyday life, cooperative creation and collective responsibility. On the wall at the Piscina La Granja, outside of Santiago, Surrealist Matta Echaurren worked with the collective Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP). (Cockroft, 1974:45-47).

After the military coup the junta set out to destroy the “participatory culture” which was the cornerstone of the coalition government’s educational policy. (See Fischer, 1979: Part II). To this end it attended to education and culture, once again conceived as set apart not only from one another (albeit in a qualified way), but more forcefully from the realm of politics. (See Fischer, 1979: Part III). This zealous ‘separatist’ mentality is also a familiar feature of the more ‘conservative’ reaches of the South African political landscape.

### *Education*

The junta appointed new military (di)rectors or chancellors in universities and schools throughout the country. It burnt books, purged ‘suspect’ academics and administrators from institutions, closed whole departments and effectively expelled thousands of students. ‘Denunciations’ of alleged extremists was encouraged, (see Roxborough et al, 1977:244-245 and Fischer, 1979:128-131).

Educational institutions had to refer all ideological, disciplinary, and security matters to the military directors. Any incidents, ranging from political discussions to jokes that ‘distorted’ national values or ideas had to be reported to the authorities. The Minister of Education, Vice Admiral Arturo Troncoso, ‘explained’ that “The state and all the taxpayers pay their taxes so that young Chileans can study. Their education is almost free and it ought to have a humanist and Christian concentration, free from politics.” (Fischer, *Ibid*).

In January 1976, following the appointment of a new military rector at the University of Chile, the resignations of three hundred high administrative and academic personnel were requested. The new rector, Jorge Tapia, 'explained' that the policy sought to establish the university's 'autonomy without politics' and to facilitate the rational reorganization and recuperation of the university to its proper role in scientific research and development. (Fischer, 1979:129-130).

This story, repeated throughout Chile, must have a sinister ring to many South Africans. We have recently heard similar 'explanations' on the local front. The same 'rationale' seems to underwrite the government's – through the offices of the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. F. W. De Klerk – most recent threats against the autonomy of the open universities. The day Minister de Klerk's 'draconian conditions' were imposed (October 19, 1987) has been called "a day of shame" by Professor R. W. Charlton, the then Vice-Chancellor Designate of the University of the Witwatersrand. (See inter alia *Wits World*, 1987:1-2, and reports *Weekly Mail*, 1987:12-13).

### *Culture*

After the coup the junta also sought to (ex)terminate the more obviously 'cultural' manifestations of 'participatory culture', which included visual image production. "Within the first week, all street murals and political graffiti had been removed from the banks of the Mapocho River and from the walls and fences in and around Santiago. Similar action was taken shortly thereafter in the provinces." (Fischer, 1979: 126-127).

In Santiago the city's two football stadia. The National Stadium and the Chile Stadium, became concentration camps and centres for interrogation. In the National Stadium "the well-known folk singer Victor Jara tried to raise the spirits of those who had been arrested with him by playing his guitar and singing to them. Guards moved in to take his guitar and break his fingers, and when he still refused to stop singing, to break his back and kill him." (Roxborough et al, 1977: 239). A left-wing ballet troupe was reported murdered. Pablo Neruda died of heart disease a few days after the coup, upon which his house and library were sacked and his books burned. (Cockroft, 1974:48).

There have been a number of responses to these events by artists outside of Chile. In New York, artists recreated a section of one of the murals destroyed by the junta, This was the mural painted on a stone wall running alongside the Mapocho River by some fifty Brigadistas. It took a week to complete, and was one of the most ambitious BRP projects. (Cockroft, 1974:47). Much closer to home, in Mozambique in the late seventies, a number of Chilean exiles (Maira Toha and others) collaborated with local artists (notably, in one project, with the well-known Mozambican artist Malangatana Ngwenya) in producing a number of public murals, (See Sachs, 1983:1-3).

American artist Nancy Spero was involved in the organisation of a benefit exhibition "the Chilean Emergency show" in 1974. (Lippard, 1976:25). She also produced a series images in which she "traces the history of torture and submission from ancient myth to the present" (Zucker, 1976:143). Titled 'The Torture of Women', and one

episode 'Torture in Chile', (fig.4) the series consisted of a collage scroll or paper frieze 20 inches by 125 feet. Extracts from Amnesty International reports, laws regarding torture and descriptions of its goals appear alongside three or four line stories of individual women who suffered, witnessed, and died under it. (Robins, 1976:11). Art critic Donald Kuspit calls these 'militant murals'. "Spero is haunted by the death of women – particular women, with their names and case histories – in the torture chambers of fascist countries like Chile, and the whole history of the torture of women." (Kuspit, 1976:144-145). In 1981 Spero produced an image titled 'South Africa' (1981). This image is part of the 'Torture of Women II' (1981) project, which further documents the torture of women political prisoners in other countries, including Chile, (see Lippard, 1984:128 and Sense, 1982).

More recently another artist, London-born Sue Coe, has also produced work in response to fascism in Chile and, not unexpectedly, in apartheid South Africa. She is currently involved in producing her second book – a response to Pinochet's Chile. Her first book was titled 'How to Commit Suicide in South Africa.' (Gill, 1987:113-114). Donald Kuspit sees her work as operating "somewhere between political cartoon and history painting." (quoted, Gill, 1987:112). These few examples recast and rearticulate the more orthodox or common sense of 'internationalism' in more dearly critically 'positioned' terms.

Within Chile itself forms of 'counterculture' have appeared. "Fascism is making people rediscover the value of culture, not only as a pretext to organize but also as an indispensable tool for the ambitious attempt by the great majority to think, express themselves, shape, and enjoy their country." (Dorfman, 1982:80-81).

One expression of this new culture is the making of arpilleras, or patchwork pictures. Arpilleras are created by collectives of women out of off-cuts and scraps of material collected from textile factories, balls of wool, and square pieces cut from flour sacks, (see Brett, 1986:29). Thousands of these images have been produced in the poorer areas in Chile. Their subject is daily life – "a complete and detailed chronicle could be made (from them) of the experiences of the Chilean working class since the brutal military coup of 1973" (Ibid). They are at once images of communal and personal resistance, catharsis, self-affirmation and solidarity. One pro-government newspaper has called them 'The Tapestries of Defamation', and on occasion batches of them have been seized by the authorities. Lucy Lippard suggests that their status as 'artisanía' (craft) and the status of their creators makers as poor peasant/workers ironically protects them from too much 'official' attention, (see Lippard, 1984:86,152-153 and Agosin, 1987/88: 61-64).

It is not incidental that 'women's issues' clearly link the arpilleras to the work of both Coe and Spero cited above. All these activities are significant aspects of that powerful heterogeneous contemporary 'discourse of resistance' that makes up the 'feminist' or 'womens' movement.

In Chile Pinochet's wife, Lucia Hiriarte de Pinochet, and her agents and agencies appear to fulfil the same role – positioning the woman in service of the patriarchal military state – as conservative state-linked women's federations do here. Under her leadership "all the stereotypes of women's place in society are heavily reinforced,

with obsessive interest being placed on a women's duty to serve the Fatherland, and the Father of the country, who is, of course Pinochet." (see Agosin, 1987/88:55-60).

It remains a lamentable fact that participation in the official artistic discourse and its culture of repression in Chile cannot easily be squared with solidarity with the women's movement in that country or South Africa. In Chile, in terms of 'artisanary' culture and the so-called domestic economy of the woman, that repressive discourse is institutionalised in CEMA CHILE (Centres de Madres para Artesania, under the leadership of Mrs Lucia Pinochet), which explicitly seeks to marginalise and denounce the work of the arpilleristas. Against this "each arpillera, successfully completed and sent out of the country, is a victory and a miracle, as is each day that the arpilleristas are able to stay free and work." (Agosin, 1987/88: 61).

Seen from this particular perspective South African participation in the Valparaiso Biennial hardly seems neutral. It begins to look more like 'identification with' than 'resistance to' oppression. In a sense this exhibition certainly does qualify as "one of the elite encounters of avant-garde art" – though patriarchal, authoritarian elitism is perhaps not exactly what the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs had in mind in publishing these words. This aspect aside, the international 'avant-garde' of the world's foremost artists', even considered within its own relatively narrow terms, presents an odd picture when looked at more closely, which we shall now do.

## **INTERNATIONALISM?**

The official mouthpiece of the SAAA – South African Arts Calendar (SAAC) has emphasised the 'internationalist' aspect in its reports on the exhibition over the years. This obviously accords with the official Chilean stress on the 'international' complexion of the Biennial. Its most recent comment, a front page article headed 'Invitation to International Biennial'. (SAAC, Autumn 1987:1-3), mentions a number of the 36 countries represented. It does not, however, elaborate on the peculiarities of this 'representation'. Inspection of the previous two catalogues certainly qualifies the meaning of both the "international" and "the world's foremost artists". In the latter instance to the point of delusion.

In the last two biennials the Chilean entry has been by far the largest, both in terms of artists and artworks. Yet, in local circles especially, more has been made of the fact that such countries as America, Canada and Australia have participated. America was not represented in 1983, and in 1985 by a single painting by an unknown artist – Ramiro Llona. Canada was represented in both years, with two works (graphics), each year by the same artist, equally unknown. Australia was also represented in both years, each year by only one work. So these three countries were represented in the last exhibition by one artist each (out of some 286 artists) and by a total of 4 works (out of some 440). Official Chilean and local publicity gives little or no indication of this uneven distribution of both contributors and contributions.

Of added interest is the fact that not only has Canada been represented in both years by the same artist, but (for example) artists from Italy and Portugal have in fact also been present in consecutive exhibitions. This raises the question of how such artists are selected in their respective countries. The procedure has yet to be clarified. However according to the Chile Today entry "works are sent to the Biennial

through various channels: official routes, through the Ministries of Foreign Relations; by means of such institutions as national museums, art galleries, and art or university foundations; or through private means.” (Chile Today, 1987:22).

So while the South African entry follows an official route (which will become clearer in due course) the much publicised American, or Canadian, or Australian entries may in fact follow ‘unofficial’ or private routes. We can make of this what we wish. Clearly this information no more ‘privatises’ the South African entry than it ‘nationalises’ the much cited and publicised entries described above. This inevitably casts a shadow on the argument put forward by some supporters of participation attempting to ‘legitimate’ involvement – that other ‘open’ countries find Chile and the Biennial acceptable, so it must be acceptable.

Whatever bearing this lopsided weighting of entries and these other details have on being ‘international’, there remains the larger debate on internationalism involving the issue of colonialism and imperialism in both Africa and South America. This was clearly an issue in Allende’s Chile. We can only touch on it here.

In recent years there has been an increasingly conscious cultural resistance in countries in process of de-colonisation to an uncritical acceptance of both the desirability and relevance of ‘international’ exposure. International relations, cultural or otherwise, are qualified and conditioned by various factors, and serve various interests. On the local front these conditions and interests are registered in political action on a broad front – for instance in the sport, academic and cultural boycott against the Apartheid regime and its supporters, and the efforts of that regime to counter these moves to isolate it. These counter strategies, amongst other things, also seek to legitimate and further entrench the regime’s hegemony. It does this through, inter alia, ‘false’ representations of ‘pluralistic’ culture which obscure the protocols of what is essentially a discourse of White nationalism and domination.

Sensitive to this broad context (in the sphere of culture) Sandy Nairne notes that “Art Fairs, Biennales, international exhibitions, are all based on the assumption that art can transcend its maker or place”. Referring to the ‘rules of inclusion’ she observes “A false impression is often given that these criteria define the visual arts; rather, a struggle continues between different sets of rules, between different interest groups, different cultures and different histories, each with its own ideas and priorities.” (Nairne, 1987:208). This consciousness is not only significant (if inadequately recognised in ‘official’ commentaries) in local culture, but also in that of Chile.

Nelly Richard comments on this in relation to Chilean participation in both the 12th Paris Biennale (1982) and the sixth Australian Biennale of Sydney (1986). He speaks of coming from “... a country where the military control implies censorship and repression; a country also inscribed within the problematic of Latin American colonialism” (Quoted, Nairne, 1987:211). Clearly his view of Chilean art is in conflict with the government view quoted from Chile Today, which encourages and approves of the internationalist avant-garde patina of the Biennial. According to Richard “Our difference lies in the non-existence of the avant-garde.” (Davila, 1982:59). Does the Chilean art selected for the Biennial register this ‘other’ reality, this world of cultural ‘difference’?

And, as is the case in South Africa, there does seem to be a world of difference between the two worlds. They are in conflict. To cite just one instance – the ‘official’ view speaks of a fusion of past and present. Richard presents another view of ‘history’ “Our art practices appear to be practices of dissension that have a traumatic relation to history... Our art practices use the discontinuity of a history that emerges today with a drastic change of conscience. Chilean art forms are born of a history lived under tack and deprivation, under censorship, misery and many times terror.” (Davila, 1982:58).

This is a world that the writers of the local catalogue essays of the more recent South African entries to the Valparaiso Biennial appear conspicuously blind to, for it merits no mention. They should know better for these issues are also so clearly our own. At the heart of this blindness is a contradiction. Or is it simply a corruption of ‘difference’? Enforced separatist society and culture on the one hand, and a failure to see the reality of ‘difference’ on the other?

Right from the outset the problem of ‘internationalism’ has been totally ignored by the apologists for participation. Perhaps the blunt assertion of difference in an Apartheid system has subjected those who ‘differ’ (and do not conform to eurocentric expectations) to the point of invisibility. This is the discourse of repression, no less effective for being relatively benign. “It does not discern, it discriminates”(Derrida, 1985:292). Such an attitude reproduces and maintains the hegemony of the dominant culture. As Wally Serote notes “we never had much reason to believe that culture of aesthetics sits above politics” (Serote, 1984:26). Indeed such an attitude is also made possible by the ever expanding commodification of cultural work in the so-called ‘free-market’ economy.

### III

#### INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS AND OWN AFFAIRS

The ‘South Africa’ partial to ‘internationalism’ is here that of the the dominant culture. International exhibitions, ‘administered’ by the SAAA are firmly rooted in official government policy. In 1978 the then National President of the SAAA, Justice J. F. Marais congratulates Ms. Jenny Basson “and her special division in the Department (who) continue to achieve in this field.” (Marais, 1978:4). The department in question was the notorious Department of Information. In fact an earlier issue of the official mouthpiece of the SAAA sports an image of the illustrious Dr. Eschel M. Rhodie, who opened an exhibition from the then Rhodesia organised by his department. (SAAC, March 1978:8). Ms. Basson, for her part, was clearly heavily involved in overseas exhibitions, from the Sao Paulo Biennale to child art in Paraguay, (see inter alia Basson, 1978a, b, c: 10-11, 3, 3).

The relationship between the Association and the DNE (and the Department of Information) involving the promotion of ‘international’ exhibitions was clearly well established by this time. (See SAAC, Apr.1978: 3). It enjoys an essential continuity to this day, notwithstanding the demise of the Department of Information) and other changes claimed to have been wrought in government structures. It is worth noting that the DNE falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Education and Culture. The current Minister is in fact F. W. de Klerk, who, as we have already mentioned, is

responsible for the formulation and imposition of the drastic 'regulations' (October 19, 1987) widely held (in the open educational sector) as constituting a threat to the autonomy of South African Universities.

## **THE DNE AND THE SAAA**

Until the so-called 'new constitutional dispensation' (1983) (1) the Department's National Cultural Council concerned itself with the "preservation, promotion and advancement of the culture of the Whites in the Republic of South Africa." (DNE, A.R., 1981:42). The National Cultural Council was dissolved in 1983, in accordance with the Culture Promotion Act, 1983 (Act 35 of 1983). (DNE, A.R., 1983:6,55)

After the changed constitution the department's brief was, and is "to deal with matters regarding national education policy, sport and culture as general affairs..." (State Departments, 1986:67). The Directorate of Culture in the Department of National Education, is, significantly, "responsible for the promotion of educational and cultural ties with other countries, while with regard to general affairs it is also responsible for the preservation, development and advancement of culture in South Africa." (DNE, A.R., 1986:46). The department is also responsible for the appointment of cultural attaches, part of its "external culture campaign" (See DNE, A.R., 1983:7). (2)

It is to the South African Association of Arts credit that it objected to the designation of art as 'own affairs' in the new constitution. (SAAC, Sept.1983, 3). Yet it has not acted on its sentiments. While the state divides culture within (own affairs) it seeks to present a united cultural front without (general affairs). It may have been expected that the SAAA would decline to be part of this ideological double game. But no, the Association complies. So the tradition inaugurated by the inclusion of Ezrom Legae in the first South African participation in Chile (IV Valparaiso Biennial 1979) enjoys a continuity unaltered by the change in the constitution. In the 1985 VII Biennial, works of two black artists, Billy Makhubele and Bekhi Myeni were included. It seems likely that more are likely to feature in forthcoming events.

Clearly this is a cosmetic continuity. What was bad before has worsened under the so-called 'new constitution'. The false face of the State, clearly aided by the Association, presents an image of liberal 'pluralism' to the outside world. Pluralism is here a travesty of the 'separate but equal' apartheid doctrine. Andre Brink, speaking about the government's apparent liberalisation of censorship in certain sectors of culture suggests that "it amounts to a mere facade... This appearance of liberalisation enables the government to become more repressive in other areas." (Brink, 1987: 8). The pattern is familiar.

Yet, at this point in South African history (especially in the context of the visual arts) it seems unlikely that politically pointed work would in fact gain official sanction or tolerance. For instance, visual and textual documentation of the genesis of the 'peoples parks' (figs.15-16) in the black urban community would be unlikely to find it's way to Valparaiso along this particular route. Still less documentation of their destruction by 'security' forces maintaining what passes for 'law and order'. (See Nyaka, 1986:11). This is not 'usable' cultural production – not at the moment at any

rate. It may of course become usable at any point in the future by the State. This eventuality must be guarded against.

This speculative example – documentation of a cultural event – is not specious. For it points beyond the immediate issue to the wider debate relating to the way a conservative exclusively eurocentric Art History discourse constructs and identifies its objects. The way that discourse brackets and elevates the art object, differentiating it from other forms of visual sign production in the social realm. Such ‘objects’ are allegedly held together by some putatively universal ‘aesthetic’ and amenable to purely ‘aesthetic’ evaluation. It is here that the discourse adjudicates on the meritorious and the meretricious. It is here that notions of merit enter the debate and are legitimately problematised. Certainly questions of fitness, of merit, may be engaged on more levels than the simply ‘visual’, which is itself socially produced and reproduced. ‘Merit’ becomes a fluid and certainly a negotiable concept.

The following is a sketch of some points of contact between Chile, South Africa involving the DNE and the SAAA. It’s purpose is to counter any simple notion that these relationships do not exist, or if they do, that they are innocent of political intent, effect and consequence.

Academics from the ‘revised’ educational system in Chile (noted above) have been the guests of the same state department (DNE) that has subsidized the South African entry to the Valparaiso Biennial. Their histories cross a good deal. That these connections or crossings may be ‘unintentional’ does not alter the fact that they are part of a unified larger ideological design.

In 1979 Professor Martinez Perez Canto, co-rector of the University of Chile, visited South Africa. (DNE, A.R., 1979:89). This was the year of the first entry of South Africa to the Valparaiso Biennial. (Berman, 1983:463). This was also the year of the national ‘The State of Art in South Africa’ conference held at the University of Cape Town (July). Two resolutions were passed at this conference, which took place just a few months before the Biennial. The second resolution includes the following “...it is the responsibility of each artist to work as diligently as possible to effect change towards a post apartheid society. It urges artists to refuse participation in state sponsored exhibitions until such time as moves are made to implement the abovementioned change.” (Proceedings, 1979:159). A number of individuals who have been or are involved with the Valparaiso Biennial actually gave papers at this conference. Some presumably supported the resolutions. As it happens this support has in some cases revealed itself as being only and merely verbal.

The year 1981 was, in a sense, the paradigmatic moment in the history of this cultural collaboration. In this year Prof. Hernan Garcia Vidal, vice-principle of the University of Chile, director of the International Executive Corps and director of the television service of the University of Chile, visited South Africa. (DNE, A.R.,1981:53). This was the year of the Republic Festival. This was also the year in which the South African entry to the Biennial was abandoned. Two of the five artists invited declined the invitation to exhibit, David Brown and Jules van de Vijver. “Personal reasons” were given as explanation by the then national president of the SAAA, Prof. G. Muller Ballot. (Ballot, 1981a:2). The remaining three were Nils Burwitz, Leonard Matsoso and Paul Stopforth. Apparently their brand of ‘protest art’,

especially the latter, left “the Government unable to countenance their exhibition”. So the Department of National Education “advised all three artists that it ‘could not be expected to promote and finance officially the exhibiting of such work abroad’ and was therefore withdrawing South Africa’s entry from the Bienal(sic).” (Berman, 1983:463).

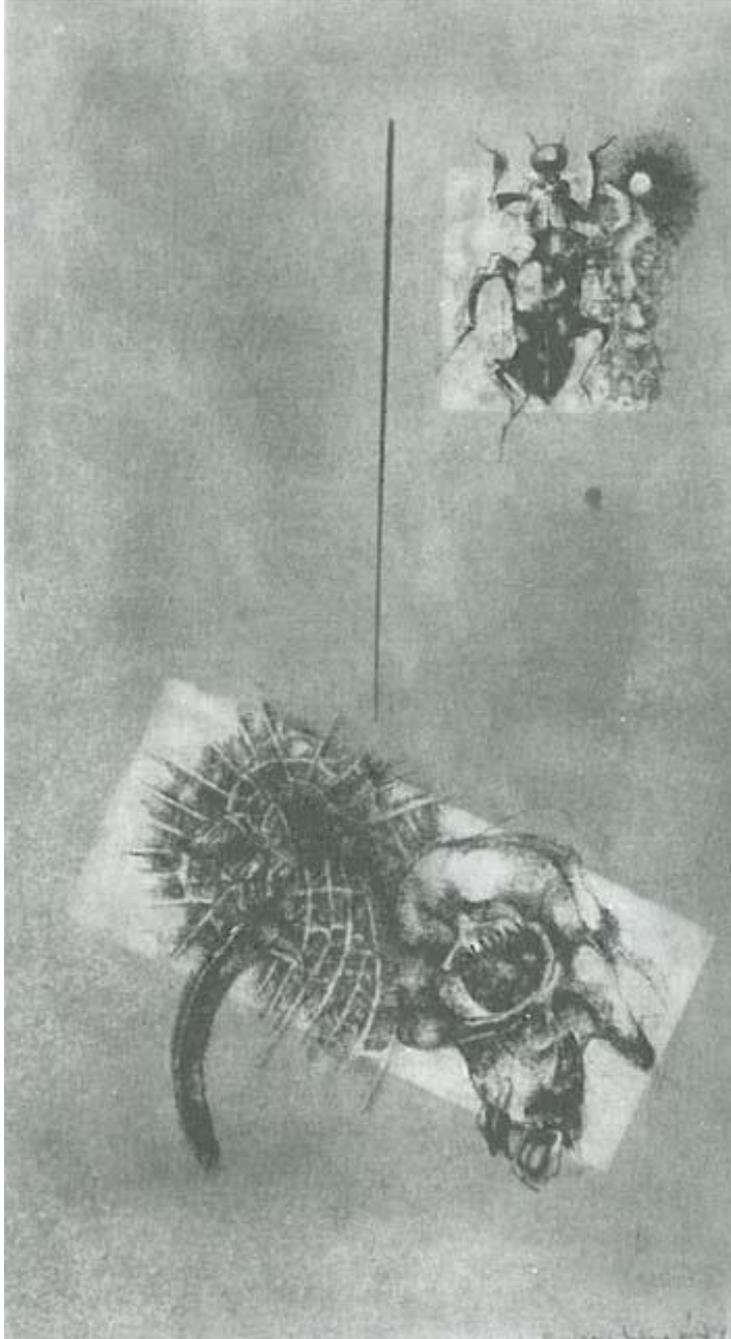


Fig. 1. Ezrom Legae, *The Death of Freedom No. 2*, Oil and conte on paper, Coll. Johannesburg Art Gallery, (Source: E. Berman 1983).

This scenario deserves comment. We must assume that Ezrom Legae’s ‘Freedom is Dead’, (Fig.1) awarded an honourable mention at the 1979 IV Valparaiso Biennial was clearly a tolerably ‘aesthetic’ death, as far as the State backing the show was concerned. (See van der Merwe, 1980:6). It was rumoured that the lost freedom was acceptably generalised, metaphorical and satisfyingly symbolic of an implacable and unchangeable ‘natural’ condition. As an image (bird and predation) it could – at a stretch – be palatably ‘non-social’. Any uncomfortably specific meaning in which ‘the implacably natural’ (unchangeable) becomes ‘the historically cultural’ (hence changeable in socio-political terms) could readily be dissolved in some or other ‘primal’ romance. This apparently did occur when queries were raised behind the scenes as to the precise nature of the dead freedom.

Not so Paul Stopforth’s less ‘metaphorical’, more threateningly forensic images of the dead Steve Biko (from the Biko series of 1979). (Figs. 2 & 3). These images are too close to home and too close to the bone to be as vulnerable to the same romance. The fable did not work and the work could not be sanctioned. After this, then, one cannot help but expect that any work traveling that particular South African Chile route would necessarily not offend (i.e. be approved by) the government or

frustrate its pursuit of its own particular ends. Invisible ideological strings only remain so if they are not strained too far. If they are they become concrete and binding.

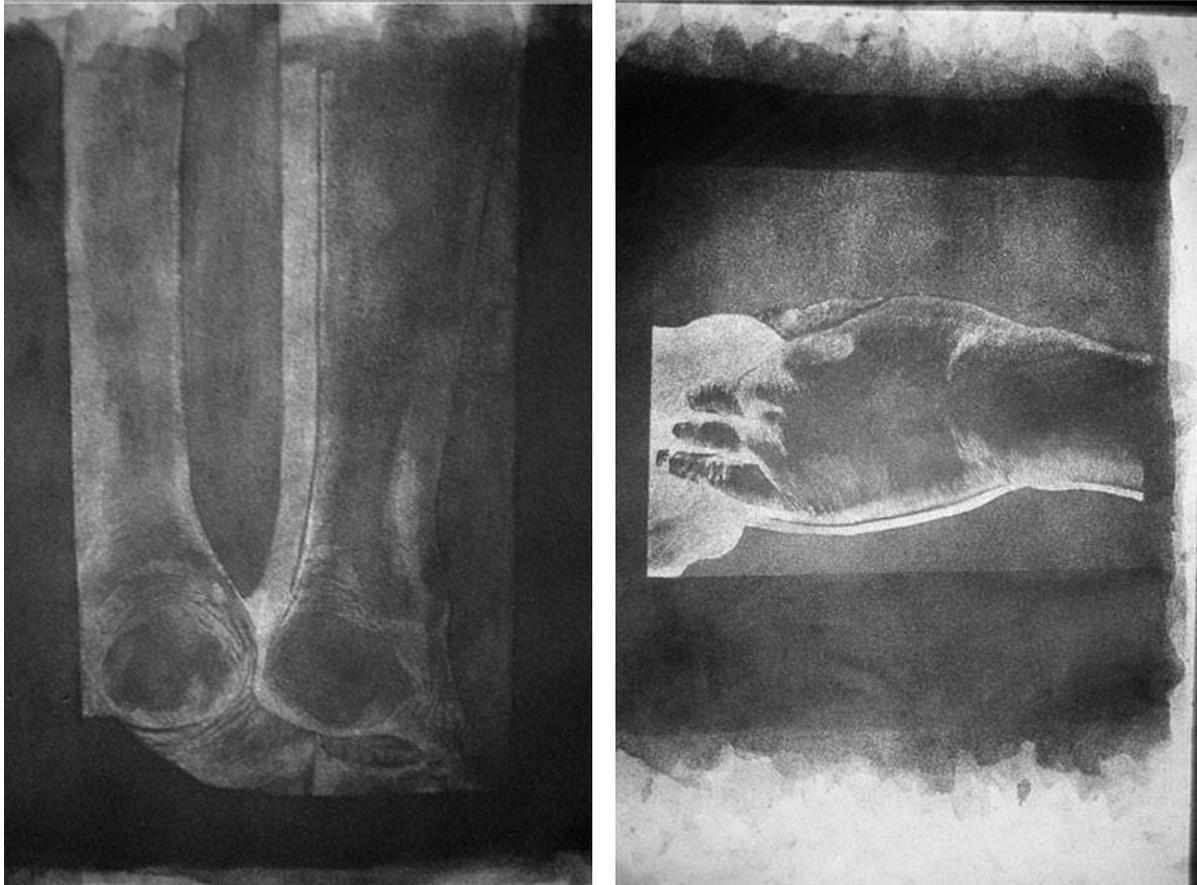


Fig. 2. and Fig. 3. Paul Stopforth, *Biko*, 1979, Graphite and wax on paper, Coll. Getrude Posel Gallery, (Photo courtesy the artist) Note: This was temporarily retitled *Requiem for Allende*

Prof. Muller Ballot, (as indicated earlier one-time National President of the SAAA and thus intimately involved with the Valparaiso Biennial) appears to have enjoyed close ties with the government. So much so that he was appointed Cultural Attache to the South African Embassy in Bonn, West Germany, in 1981. (See Harber, 1981b: 2). He served on numerous influential committees, amongst them the Commission for Plastic Arts, the Organising Committee of the Republic Festival Exhibition and the National Culture Council (then the official custodian of 'white' culture, in spite of some manoeuvres in the dark about that 'whiteness', see SAAC, Sept/Oct.1980:8) of the Department of National Education. (Harber, 1981b: 2). Accompanying him on the Organising Committee of The Republic Festival Arts Exhibition was an official from the DNE (Subdirectorate of Culture) Mr V. J. Krohn. (Republic Festival, 1981).

The following entry appears in the 1981 annual report of the DNE "The presentation of countrywide Republic festivals during May, with the main festival in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, was the most important cultural event in which the Department was involved this year. The Festival Director and other officers of the Department who undertook the organisational work in this regard played a leading role in making the festival a resounding success and in making all the country's inhabitants thoroughly aware of the theme 'Unity in Diversity'". (DNE, 1981:41-42).

Now firstly one wonders if there could have been a conflict of interests regarding the SAAA's 'autonomy', the DNE and the State. Muller Ballot seems not to have thought so, and stated that he served on the Visual Art Commission in his 'private capacity'. (Ballot 1981a: 3). Even if we could accept this, it seems curious that in his report on a SAAA National Executive Committee meeting Muller Ballot states that the selector-judges for the 1981 Biennial were in fact named by the DNE, and not, as some of us might have expected, by the SAAA. (Ballot, 1981a: 2).

The second issue is even more disturbing, namely the direct involvement of the Department in the presentation of an art exhibition – The Republic Festival Arts Exhibition. This seems somewhat at odds with the official policy of the department not to present exhibitions itself, but to leave such matters exclusively to its appointed 'autonomous' agents instead. (See Ballot, 1981b: 3). In this instance the State forsook even its own illusion of only being involved in culture at a respectable remove. Even so, many in the SAAA didn't see this as compromising the association's 'autonomy' in any way, and it remained a conspicuous participant in the Festival proceedings.

This stance did not enjoy unanimous support within the SAAA. The Natal (NSA) and Western Cape regions 'distanced' themselves from the Republic Festival enterprise. (Ballot, 1981a: 2). Muller Ballot himself, Albert Werth and others gave their support to the Festival in response to what some saw as an 'expedient' statement made by the Minister of National Education, Dr. Gerrit Viljoen (March 24, 1981) itself in response to "recent crises in the art world". (Ballot, 1981b). The then National Vice-President of the SAAA, Rodney Harber, speaking 'around' the political issue, opined that "This national event is a rare opportunity and has been organised in the belief that it will further the course of art in our country – open as it is to all artists irrespective of their affiliations or views." (Harber, 1981a: 6-7). That is of course if they are not restricted, banned, dead or in exile, in the name of the 'Republic'.

Andrew Verster commented on the NSA's disinclination to support the Festival Exhibition – "The announcement ... at the height of the rebellion a few weeks before the exhibition's opening was seen by many as a palliative to temp(sic) waverers into the government camp. The NSA did not trade principle for expediency, however." (Verster. 1981:10). Given the place of artculture in the so-called new dispensation the 'reassuring' utterances of the Minister on that occasion have been shown to be hollow. The NSA has significantly also registered its resistance to the continuation of the Valparaiso entry. The same is reportedly true of the Western Cape region.

In 1983 Prof. R. Escobar, of Chile (see Escobar, 1985:9) visited South Africa. (DNE, A.R.1983: 58) This was the year of 'our' third entry to the Biennial (VI). This entry was curated and accompanied to Chile by Prof. Nico Roos of Pretoria University, (SAAC, Nov.1983: 2). On this occasion sculptor Gavin Younge declined an invitation to participate "in protest at General Pinochet's murderous campaign against artists, students and academics in that country" (Younge, 1986:10). The amount allocated for the exhibition by the DNE was R23, 000.00. (DNE, A.R., 1983:60).

Later, on the occasion of his opening an exhibition of Chilean paintings at the West Gallery of the SAAA in Pretoria, Roos enthusiastically recalled that "the work of Eduardo Villa... made such a strong impression on the organisers and in particular

on Don Raut Garcia of the Municipality of Valparaiso, to such an extent that he was willing to consider the establishment of a South African square in the main street of Valparaiso where one of Villa's sculptures would have been erected." Finance was the reason given for the abandoning of this idea. (Roos, 1987:114). The context and content of Roos's address are interesting and will be discussed in due course.

In 1985 Dr. Albert Werth published extracts of the report on the visual arts by the Schutte Commission (1985). Item 5.3.1.1. notes that "In 1983 the South African Association of Arts ...received only R16, 000.00 subject to certain conditions for participation in an art exhibition abroad." (Werth, 1985:7). Is this in reference to the Valparaiso exhibition? Apart from the discrepancy in the amount, one wonders what the conditions were, given the 1981 debacle. Strings may indeed have been attached. This is something to be kept in mind when pondering the SAAA's statement in its most recent report on the Biennial concerning State funding "without strings". (SAAC, 1987:3).

In 1985 the South African entry was accompanied to Chile by Marilyn Martin, then national vice-president of the SAAA. (Louw, 1985:45). Ms Martin was also part of the three person judging committee for the exhibition. The amount allocated was R15, 000.00 (DNE, A.R., 1985:126). Mr. A. S. Conradie, First secretary of Information in the South African Embassy in Santiago was intimately involved in the proceedings. On that occasion the South African contribution received an award as the best foreign entry. (Martin, 1987; interview). Hylton Nel was awarded an honourable mention for his stoneware sculptures 'Tortoiseman' and 'Mouseman'. (Catalogue, 1985a).

For the record, on "the question of sponsorship" and financial rewards Marilyn Martin later wrote "In Valparaiso, thousands of American Dollars are given as prizes and vast sums spent on organising and presenting the Biennial – by the Municipality." The first prize is equivalent to US\$ 7,000. (Martin, 1986b: 55).

## CROSSOVER?

During these last years certain art events of interest have been occurring in South Africa, more particularly in Pretoria. These reflect the depth and intimacy of the cultural relationship between the two states.

On November 12, 1984 an exhibition of Chilean graphics, ceramics and crafts at the South African Association of Arts Gallery in Pretoria was opened by Prof. Nico Roos. The Chilean Cultural Attache, Prof. Alberto Arce wrote a short review of this show in the newly established 'Unisa Latin American Report'. (Arce, 1985). It is noteworthy that Marilyn Martin has also published material in this journal, which is put out by The Unisa Centre for Latin American Studies. The Centre itself has an interesting history.

The inauguration of the Centre took place on August 17, 1984. The opening speech was given by Mr. D. J. L. Nel, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. He notes that the "idea of a Centre was first broached by the Honourable H. F. Botha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at an event held at his home on 29 August 1978. Since then several officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs have concerned themselves with the evolution and eventual establishment of this institution." (Nel, 1985:7). Clearly the

South African Chilean alliance is important for the two isolated states. Perhaps more for 'official' South Africa with her history of international ostracism, but post 1973 Chile has itself become a contender for the status of 'pariah state', (see Geldenhuys, 1985: 43,48-51).

Last year (1986), some two weeks after the crackdown in Chile, and four days after the anniversary of the military coup, another exhibition, one of Chilean paintings was again opened by Prof. Nico Roos in Pretoria (referred to above). This exhibition was a joint venture between the Ambassador of Chile and the SA Association of Arts (N.Tvl). (Invitation, 1986). According to Marilyn Martin, this exhibition was held to celebrate the Chilean National Day (Sept.16) and the 450th birthday of the city of Valparaiso. Four of the artists participated in the VII Valparaiso Biennial, 1985. Two of the artists teach at the University of Chile in Valparaiso. (Martin, 1986a: 10).

The exhibition opened by Prof. Roos, celebrated the 'symbol of liberty' made possible by the military overthrow. These words appear on the invitation "Art is the symbol of liberty, where chains never exist." Prof. Roos is, however, notably intolerant of mixing art and politics. He has stated that "political conflicts and problems" are not legitimately part of the province of art. Art's proper mission, it seems, is to deliver "pictures of colour and form harmoniously brought together" to draw us away from reality. (Roos, 1978:3). Reality does seem to be the loser here.

Roos is either unaware or unwilling to admit (for this would be in conflict with his separatist politics of art) that these words themselves constitute a political statement about art. Furthermore he seems undisturbed that an exhibition notice (the invitation) should include blatantly political material. The invitation speaks of "the Communist Government" (a slight exaggeration, there were only 3 communist seats in Allende's first cabinet) being overthrown "and the Chilean people regained their freedom." (freedom?). All of this is apparently not 'political'.

Extracts of Roos' opening speech (published in the Unisa Latin American Report) are not without interest. The rhetoric is unmistakable. Roos opens by dutifully reiterating the fact that over the past few years "South Africa and Chile have established close ties in a number of fields." He goes on to refer specifically to the Valparaiso Biennial, and is grateful for the link, for "keeping doors open to us... Would it not be wonderful if art could be placed above politics...?" It is unlikely that he has his own 'polities' in mind. Not unpredictably, he ends with this injunction – "It is imperative that this cultural exchange programme between our countries be promoted and supported." (Roos, 1987:113-114). The SAAA seems committed to just this purpose. It is not surprising that the Chilean connection is seen by exiled South Africans as part of the state's effort "to reduce its international isolation." (Sechaba, 1977:43).

Dr. Albert Werth, also heavily involved in the Biennial (see Introduction, Catalogue, 1985:3, selector-judge in 1979 and 1985, chairman in 1981) is also convinced "that art and politics should in no way be mixed" yet he is capable of speaking, from above, of "races coming to self-determination (eie ontwikkeling)" (Werth,1980:12-13). This statement in the best (?) tradition of white nationalist politics was made in response to the 1979 Cape Town conference, cited above. In spite of these utterances made by prominent people in the SAAA establishment, it still brazenly

maintains that it is a 'non-political organisation' (stated in a Press Release concerning the 1987 Valparaiso Biennial and reiterated in the SAAC. Aut. 1987:3)

## THE MILITARY CONNECTION

In a brief note published in the Unisa Latin American Report, Lt Genl Jack Dutton, former S.A. Ambassador to Chile, and member of the 'Comite De Honor' of the 1983 Valparaiso Biennial, wrote on the FIDA 86 'show' held in Santiago, Chile. The show "covers a wide spectrum of armaments in general. This year for the second successive time, Armscor was invited by the Chilean Airforce to participate." Furthermore, "The top South African at the Show was Mr Adriaan Vlok, the Deputy Minister of Defence and of Law and Order, who was in Chile as a guest of their Minister of Defence." (Dutton, 1986:77). The embassy in Chile was opened by South Africa in 1974 not too long after the military coup in that country. And it is in the context of the military that the relationship between the two states has been most openly and enthusiastically engaged. Even here culture is not ignored.

At an occasion celebrating Chilean Army Day at Fort Klapperkop, Pretoria (which coincided with national celebrations in Chile) Brig. A. Rodrigues (Naval Attache to South Africa) noted "there are many ties between our two countries" and speaks of "the great admiration that the Chilean Army feels for South Africa" and "eternal friendship" between the armies of Chile and South Africa. This was the second time Chile Army Day had been celebrated in South Africa. (Paratus, 1982:29).

At about the same time as the 1985 Biennial (13-22 Oct. 1985) the Chilean Minister of National Defence and a delegation of senior Chilean military officials visited the operational area (Namibia). Gen. Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, made a revealing statement on this occasion "I am glad to say that these relations extend beyond defense matters and also concern areas of common interest, including trade and commerce, technology and science, cultural affairs and sporting ties" (Paratus, 1985b: 59).

Now culture certainly includes "artistic ties". The Chilean Cultural Attache, Prof. Alberto Arce makes mention of the strengthening of these ties by the participation of South African artists "on a regular basis at the international Art Biennale in Valparaiso." (Arce, 1985).

An article in Paratus, titled 'Links between the RSA and Chile strengthened', Adm. Merino, Chief of the Chilean Navy and member of the Military junta and entourage was reported as having visited South Africa. This was in response to a reciprocal invitation arising out of Gen. Magnus Malan's visit in 1979. "As the next most senior member of the Junta", Merino "is in effect Vice-President of Chile". (Paratus, 1981a: 24). On this auspicious occasion there was the usual trade in homilies on inter alia the communist 'scourge', the protection of 'Western Christian values', and (not least) medals.

There were also some neat distortions of Chilean history in the report. We read "Because he spoke as someone who had not only directly suffered the consequences of a Marxist regime taking over a democratic country, but who had also been directly involved in its successful overthrow, Adm Merino's statements

were of much interest.” (Ibid). One wonders who took over a democratic country? Certainly the Navy was directly involved in the coup. The Navy blockaded Valparaiso harbour, where it turned “its ships into floating prisons”. (Roxborough et al, 1977: 239). “In the first weeks after the coup, no fewer than 45,000 people were detained for political reasons. During interrogation the majority of the prisoners were kicked, beaten, threatened, and subjected to many kinds of physical and moral pressures... In many of the detention centres, such as the Estadio Chile or the boats LEBU and MAIPU anchored off the coast of Valparaiso, physical abuse and physical conditions were appalling.” (Amnesty International, 1976: 206).

There is a direct link with visual artculture in this exchange. “Genl Magnus Malan thanked Admiral Merino for visiting South Africa and hoped that the visit would strengthen the good relations already existing... The Minister also thanked Adm Merino for again sending the splendid sail-training sailing vessel of the Chilean Navy, the ESMERALDA to South Africa, especially as this visit would coincide with the 1981 Republic Festival during May.” The ship visited Durban from 27 May to 1 June. (Paratus, 1981a: 25) and contributed to the festivities in Durban. (Paratus, 1981b: 7).

It would not be too fanciful to imagine that one may have caught a glimpse of that illustrious vessel white wandering around the Republic Festival Art Exhibition. If one chose to go there, that is. The venue – the exhibition hall at the Ocean Terminal – “nestled among ships and cranes” and one certainly had a view of the harbour from the verandah. (See Harber, 1981a: 6-7).

Now the name ESMERALDA crops up in another more sinister context. We read the following words in a report from Amnesty International – “At times the brutality reached animalistic levels. Prisoners have been forced to witness or participate in sexual depravities. An unknown number of women have been raped; some of them, pregnant after rape, have been refused abortions. Women have had insects forced up their vaginas; pregnant women have been beaten with rifle butts until they have aborted. Prisoners have been forced to eat excrement, have been plunged endlessly into ice-cold water, have had their bones smashed, have been left naked in the sun for many hours. On the boat ESMERALDA, anchored off the shore of Valparaiso, prisoners were allegedly left naked and tied to the masts of the boat. At times prisoners were forced to witness the torture and death of others...” (Amnesty International, 1976: 207).

The ESMERALDA has been here before (1977) (Paratus, 1981b: 7), and since (1985). A picture of it “graces the wall of the Centre’s office (UCLAS) as a record of this important visit.” (UCLAS News, 1985:44). In January 1985, Marilyn Martin opened a photographic exhibition titled ‘The Face of Chile’ at the Pretoria Art Museum. This exhibition included a picture of the ESMERALDA. She enthuses that these photographs “are indeed images of a country, but they are also stimulating visual experiences.” She hopes “that these photographs will shorten the geographical distance between Chile and South Africa. We have in art a truly universal language.” (Martin, 1986c: 65). It looks as though we might have torture more in common. This spectacle recalls Walter Benjamin’s words with special poignancy “There has never been a document of culture which was not at one and the same time a document of barbarism.” (Quoted, Jameson, 1981:281).

## CONCLUSION

Participation in this exhibition cannot be seen only in the context of a willfully restricted notion of the 'proper' domain of art; for instance various 'formalisms' which confine evaluation to what is held to be visually 'given' within the picture frame or the physical limits of the object. That 'proper' domain achieves its propriety and its 'naturalness' within and through a specific cultural history and specific social relations. Any evaluative account which ignores or diminishes any part of this wider structuring of the context is thereby critically weakened. Pushed too far such a narrowing of horizons simply becomes falsification.

The charges leveled against those involved in the Valparaiso Biennial are serious. In this crucial instance, the SAAA, presenting itself as "a democratic grassroots organization", backed by other powerful, allegedly 'liberal' voices in the 'formal' art-world and supported by some well-known artists, has been seen to be dancing in tune with 'official' discourse in South Africa and by extension Chile. That same discourse is held to embrace apartheid and a massively repressive State apparatus which patently includes the policing of both culture and cultural producers.

The 'orthodox' South African art-world has by and large presented itself as a liberal and 'humanistic' social assembly of essentially like-minded people. It frequently trades on this image in its various cultural operations. 'Art' (as a transcendent, ahistorical category) is said to cement this ideological community into an identifiable social group, traversing other distinctions – gender, race and class – in the process. 'Art' is held to confer a special status and special privileges on its practitioners. This fable has allowed the art-world to reserve rights of expression, action and protection not usually enjoyed in other sectors of the social formation. History and the current situation in South Africa compels us to engage the issue head-on. How viable is this more-or-less self-styled 'privileged liberalism' in culture, both historically and now, in the midst of widespread oppression and the heat of an undeclared civil war?

Perhaps more to the point, what are the possibilities for non-alignment, of liberal individualism in contemporary South African culture? What does it mean to be 'non-aligned' through a long and continuing history institutionalised racism and economic exploitation? Perhaps it means nothing more than getting the best of both worlds while being committed to neither. The SAAA, the judge-selectors, the artists it seems would have us believe that it is indeed something more. They would have us believe, and believe in, the image of an association of tolerant, moderate liberals, conserving and protecting freedoms threatened right and left.

Those hostile to this image see it as mystification. Perhaps this mystification is not intentional, the inevitable result of living in a protected sector of a complex and often contradictory social reality. There is, however, a deep suspicion that this cultivation of the so-called 'moderate middle ground' is but a screen hiding ambitions more to do with harvesting cultural power and short-term profiteering than anything else.

States of emergency are part of daily life in both South Africa and Chile. These respective 'states' conspires to silence and erase not only words but images as well. In South Africa no one can plead ignorance of State proscriptions on various cultural

activities, the production and display of visual images included, not deemed to be in the interests of state security. These prohibitions are extremely wide-ranging, and penalties for transgression severe. That certain cultural producers currently enjoy relative immunity from these is neither a consolation nor an excuse for ignoring those who enjoy no such immunity.

Even in circumstances better than ours, assertions of 'unconditional freedom' and 'freedom of expression' are tricky. They are accountable to something larger than individual desire or whim. Yet, as we know, the claim for freedom based solely on the individualistic notions of liberty is a routine conceit of many artists in the realm of high culture. It is perhaps high culture's ruling obsession. It is one of the most tenacious legacies of Anglo-American Romanticism and all too frequently the sign of an alienated individual in a fractured community.

This 'freedom' is bought at a cost. For some of us the flame is not worth the candle. It is too singular, too self-obsessed, too selective. It is a flame which in this instance seems to invoke more darkness than illumination. A sinister darkness, of dank rooms, privation, torture. But not only that. Less immediately viscous but no less intolerable it is the darkness that habit brings, that conspires to blind us to the everyday atrocities that are part of living in such a society at such a time. 'Autonomy' too eagerly embraced, too readily proclaimed, begins to become unconcern. And unconcern quickly curdles into tacit compliance with those who perpetrate those everyday atrocities. Nothing more than simple aversion to such associations, to these possibilities, would seem to militate against involvement in such an exhibition.

Clearly some would have stronger motives than simple aversion. They would see the issue as particularly one of both specific, historical resistance and affirmation: resistance to the forces of racist separatism and undemocratic rule; alignment, affiliation and solidarity with the larger community up against those forces. In this view to be party to the 'official' relations described above is a mistake – unless the participant does not support the struggle in both countries for a democratic society, or recognise the place of culture in such a struggle. Or unless support means something less than action.

There can be little question that the stakes are high – perhaps nothing less than the preservation of what many of us take to be worthwhile in culture, communal and (not or!) individual. We accept the challenge of doing this in a world of 'difference', a world in which we can take very little for granted. Irresponsible or ill-considered actions could end in discrediting those very practices we value, and by extension ourselves.

The artists statement – however well intended – is difficult to accept. Can they "reject politically oppressive systems wherever they occur" while actively and wittingly collaborating with the producers and agents of such systems? The immediate issue of 'merit' is something of a red herring. Its difficulties do however arise at a slightly different level in the debate, as indicated. Further we must seriously wonder at the very possibility of exclusive, individual 'self-representation' outside, above or below the relations described in this paper. In addition it is difficult to take the artists assertion of support for the "right of all artists to make and exhibit art in any country" seriously. Why then their willingness to consort with those who have demonstrably

not upheld but in fact comprehensively betrayed those rights for others, cultural workers included? As for the issue of censorship – it could only carry weight if tested. On this occasion it was not tested, nor was it likely, given the type or ‘genera’ of work chosen. It was, however, tested before (in 1981) and found wanting. This the artists chose to ignore.

Dr. van Niekerk is probably right in seeing the survival of art as vested in the preservation of its autonomy. But if this ‘participation’ is an instance of ‘preservation’ then the art-world hereby implicated is rendered all the more vulnerable.

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## Notes

1) The situation of art and culture in the new constitution is an ambiguous and divisive one. (REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA CONSTITUTION ACT, 1983. Act No. 110, 1983) Under this constitution “Art, culture and recreation (with the exception of competitive sport) which affect mainly the population group in question” (Schedule 1, note 3, p70) are designated “own affairs” (Part IV, ss 14, notes 1 and 2, p12). This designation is subject to the provisions of ss 16, (p14) namely the discretion of the State President. Population group refers to “White persons, the Coloured persons or the Indians” (ss 100, note ix, p62). There appears to be only one reference in the blacks in the entire constitution, (ss 93, p56) and then only in order to reassert the status quo, and to confirm their exclusion from the democratic process.

2) The chief aims of the Departments foreign educational and cultural programme are to:- (a) promote awareness of South African culture in all its facets abroad; (b) utilise every opportunity to cause cultural life within South Africa to be enriched from abroad; and (c) maintain and strengthen the cultural ties of South Africans overseas with their native land. (Ibid). Clearly this is not meant to include exiles, the likes of Wally Serote, Lefifi Tladi or Johannes Maselwa Malatjie. The Directorate of Culture acts in terms of the Culture Promotion Act No. 35 of 1983. This act empowers the Minister to, inter alia (as he may deem necessary or expedient) “arrange for the exhibition of art, books and other objects of culture from the Republic abroad and of art, books and other objects of culture from other countries in the Republic”.(ss 2.(1)(b)(iii)). See ss 2.(3)(a,b) and ss 3.(5)(a,d)

3) See, inter alia. Proclamation No. R.95,1987; ‘Declaration of a State of Emergency’ Government Gazette (Reg. Gaz. No. 4091), Vol.264 No.10770, 11 June, 1987. And especially Proclamation No. R.97, 1987; ‘Regulations Under the Public Safety Act, 1953’ Government Gazette (Reg. Gaz. No.4093), Vol.264 No.10772, 11 June 1987). Of particular significance are the various relevant definitions – ‘gathering’, ‘periodical’, ‘publication’, ‘public place’, ‘publish’ (p.2); ‘restricted gathering’, ‘security action’, ‘security force’ (p.3); “subversive statement” (p.4); and ‘unrest’ (p.5).

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