

By Mark Swift

40 SELF-PORTRAITS, at the University Art Gallery, Dorp Street, Stellenbosch.

At the invitation of Professor Larry Scully, 40 South African artists submitted self-portraits to this exhibition — with "no limitations on size or medium".

The results are fascinating, for they involve time-worn concepts of inner and external reality, the imposition of ego and — naturally enough — self-deception.

The exhibition allows

Glimpses of the artists

the viewer vicarious glimpses of the artist before a mirror — as opposed to his mirrored view of the exterior world. Vanity or pretension in unfinished artists is reflected in pastel or paint.

The "duty-works", those submitted solely on the strength of the invitation, are immediately apparent. Others,

however, testify to soul-searching; to a hunt for elusive portraits of Self.

Approach varies as wildly as technique. Ingrid Scholtz has employed the written word and contained spaces to express the predicaments of womanhood. Norman Catherine and Andrew Verster have resorted to fine, graphite works; Verster's lips

are stitched closed with pencil strokes, Catherine's are parted to a shock of razored teeth.

Leon de Bliquy has experimented with hinged canvases, an approach which allows him free play with distortions of reality and reflection. Berenice Michelow has produced a bold, romanticised "poster", and a roiling work by Kevin Atkinson

is a portrait of the artist in pursuit.

Among the works which are entirely successful as resolved paintings is Gail Catlin's boxed portrait — a fine, complex study on crumpled paper and plastic. Louis Jansen van Vuuren has mounted a superb work which is crowded, subliminal and intense.

Other portraits deserve mention, but space will not permit. A visit to the exhibition is well worth while — it allows us to see artists taking (in Scully's words) "a good hard look at themselves".

