

art reviews

Michaelis lecturers exhibit

DALE LAUTENBACH

THE University of Cape Town now has its own exhibition space — the Exhibition Gallery on the Hiddingh Hall Campus. It has the advantage of being a non-commercial gallery and should provide a valuable venue in the future.

The inaugural exhibition is a collection of works by lecturers at the Michaelis School of Art. We have seen works by most of these exhibitors on one-man or group shows and in this context accepted them as professional artists. But here an interesting extra dimension is added by the fact that they are all exhibiting as teachers too.

The catalogue lists the artists in an alphabetical order which will be followed here.

Bruce Arnott has three small bronzes on show. The first, Nemesis, is a tall militaristic figure whose head suggests fascist associations while the columnar, robe-like dress might be priestly. His Betrothal I and II are quaintly human figures with disturbing animal heads — a bear turned

to the wormy, snake-like head of its pregnant companion. The figures compel associations.

Kevin Atkinson's large acrylic on canvas dominates one wall of the gallery. It is an abstract, painterly work employing a coldly acid colour spectrum and a looming black "sky". The gestural quality of paint application creates an illusion of enormous depth, a receding landscape viewed through a curtain of vegetation. But the colours are polluted and urban, sweeping aside those lush connotations in favour of a less comforting statement.

Passages, three works by Peggy Delport, capture strange and gentle embryonic creatures in fields of warm colour. There are disembodied heads and hands scattered in a mysterious nether landscape.

Neville Dubow is represented by Yellowburst, a reduced-scale prototype for a mobile. It is a joyous work, swinging and moving of its own accord and accessible as an environmental piece.

Photographer Geoff Grundlingh takes the

ordinariness of the real world seen through a lens and imposes oblique reference on object and event. It is a playful vision which uses the selective parameters of the photographic medium to focus on the insignificant and thereby alter meaning and association.

Louis Jansen van Vuuren has focused on our squatting neighbours of the Cape Flats in a series of five graphics. Written commentary traces the dusk-to-dawn routine of fear and the careful drawing — of crude plastic and wood overnight shelters — adds a certain human warmth and some dignity to this deplorable situation. The comment combines implied criticism with the artist's gentle sympathy.

Three works by Nathan Margalit — oils and lithographic crayon on paper — invoke an imposing fleshiness without immediate reference to human form. John Nowers offers satirical comment with his delightfully expressive ceramics — the jester's dagger cloaked in his compelling humour.

Stanley Pinker, with three oils, takes one

into a world — to be endlessly explored — of symbolic reference. His technique has a delicacy, his private vision betrays both care and a humorous astringence.

Three works by Patricia Pierce-Atkinson illustrate her lyrical concerns and a quiet exploration of understated colour and organic form. Helmut Starcke, with consummate technique, explores the lushness of nature. His Waterblommietjie and Gemmerbloedel, by the very exaggerated brilliance of colour and light, transport the viewer to a steamy, sunny Eden.

Pippa Skotnes dwells in a dream world of symbols and child-like reference in two fine drawings. The magic of mystery figures and objects traps both the joy and terror of fantasy.

An acrylic on canvas, Markings, represents André van Zijl. With Table Mountain as his dominant symbol he evokes the myriad activities that go on in her lap. There is joy and play and a representation of cruelty and contradiction.

Fission Mission, a painted zinc on welded steel sculpture by Gavin Younge, is aggres-

sive in its simple representation of nuclear technology. A large projectile, naive in its form like a giant child's crayon, rests horizontally in a simple cradle. It is an awesome work, playing with visual and intellectual contradiction. His tiny bronze, Koeberg Kuns, is no less terrifying by its very innocence and the representation of man as vulnerable vessel.

Four etchings by Manfred Zylla are acerbic caricatures in a ludicrous array of colour. Military leaders perform the antics of their nightmares — sailing over the Peninsula on a missile, sinking with their worthy ships. The works throw a cartoon-like jibe at these figures of power and might.

This immensely varied collection will be on show until the end of the month.