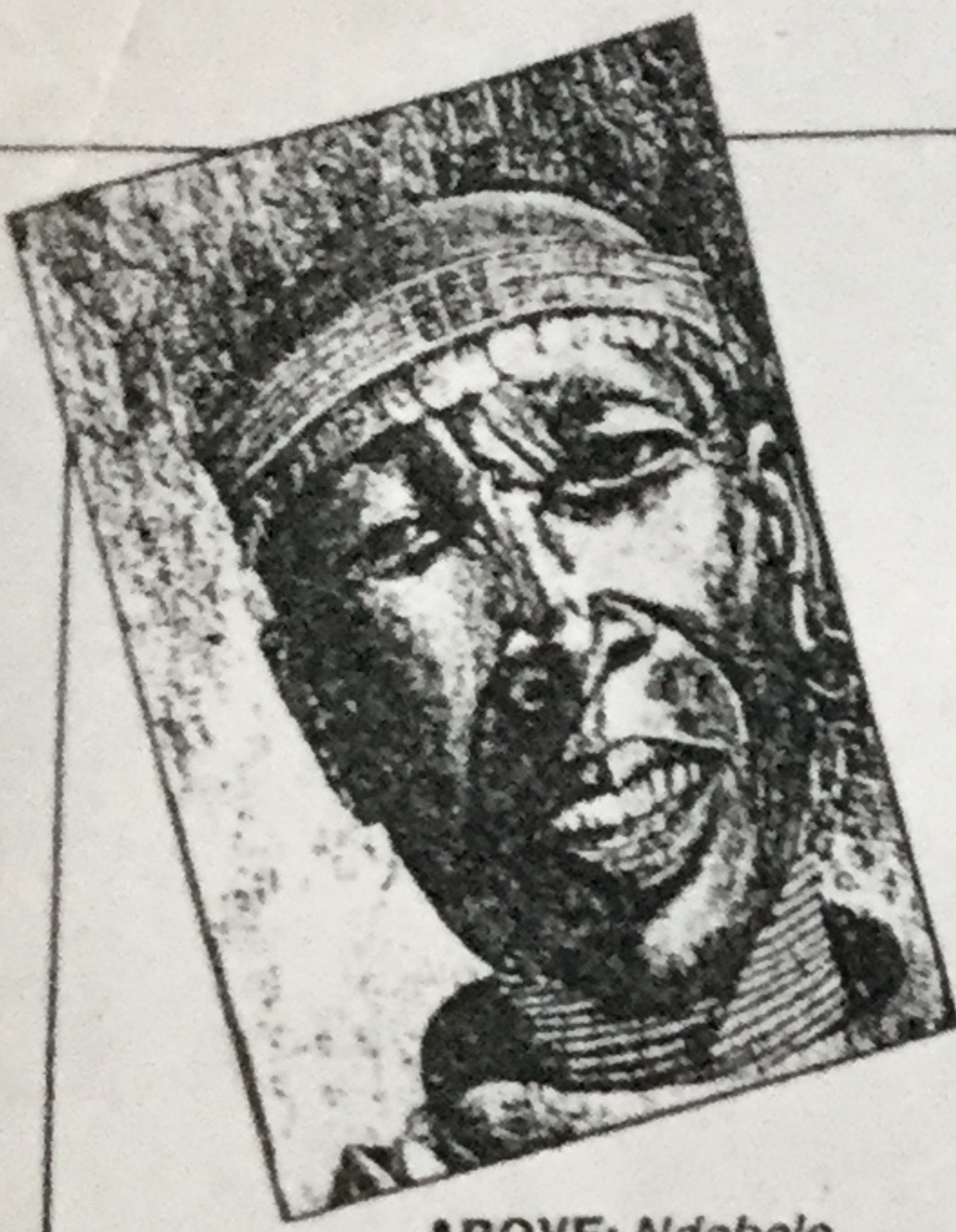
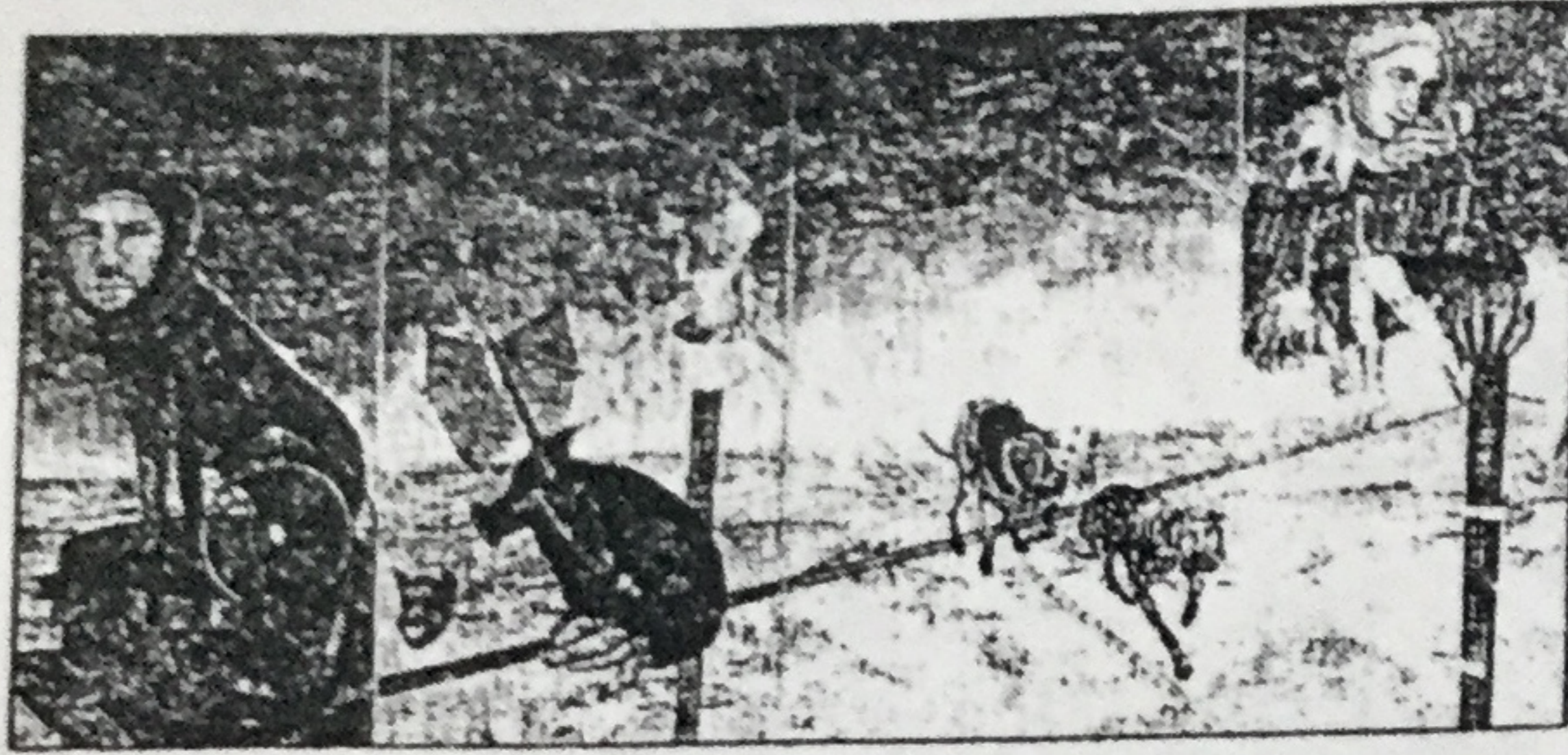


WEEKEND



ABOVE: Ndebele Woman, by Velaphi Mzimba; right, from Series V, by Judy Woodborne.



## Crossing into SOUTH AFRICA

Rarely seen works by 13 artists reveal richly exotic styles

By HELEN L. KOHEN  
Herald Art Critic

**W**e talk about the art world, the global art market and the international nature of contemporary art, but the art most of us see most of the time comes from a small "universe": the European art traditions. And this is only one good reason to welcome *Crosscurrents: A Window to South African Art*.

The omnibus exhibition at Barbara Gillman Gallery introduces the current work of 13 artists from that newly stabilized nation. A survey that tries especially hard to include a wide range of expression, from the folkish, uninhibited musings of Thomas Kgope to the high sophistication of graphic artist Judy Woodborne, from glass sculpture by David Reade to the photo-constructions of Lien Botha, the show also suggests that South Africans know the power of art and take it seriously.

Two of the exhibiting painters accompanying the show, Louis T. Jansen van Vuuren and Zwelethu Mthethwa, tell of a time when the apartheid government censored writers and performing artists but overlooked what visual artists might have to say. So there is a tradition of protest in the country that continues through this show as social commentary on one hand and celebration on the other.

Storytelling is a given here, whatever the medium or form the art takes. The handle of a pewter spoon by Carrol Boyes and a Barbara Jackson ceramic sculpture are both about women. Alfred Thoba expands the human theme to couples, nagging about the destructive nature of life in black communities where he sees crime and sex as prevalent as the leaves on trees. According to Sue Lipschitz, who curated this show and brought it to

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Miami from South Africa, Thoba's family is ashamed of his paintings. Sex is a taboo subject in their culture and, in an effort to keep him from embarrassing them, they have been known to destroy his works.

The many depictions of Nelson Mandela are a tipoff to the origins of this exhibition. He plays heroic roles in these works, most effectively in a painting created especially for the display by Tommy Motswai. April 27, 1994, the date of South Africa's first free election, is the thematic center of the picture, which includes images of Mandela and a lion, flags of the ANC, references to his country's bid for the Olympics, and at least one enigmatic symbol, a cross formed of Band-Aids.

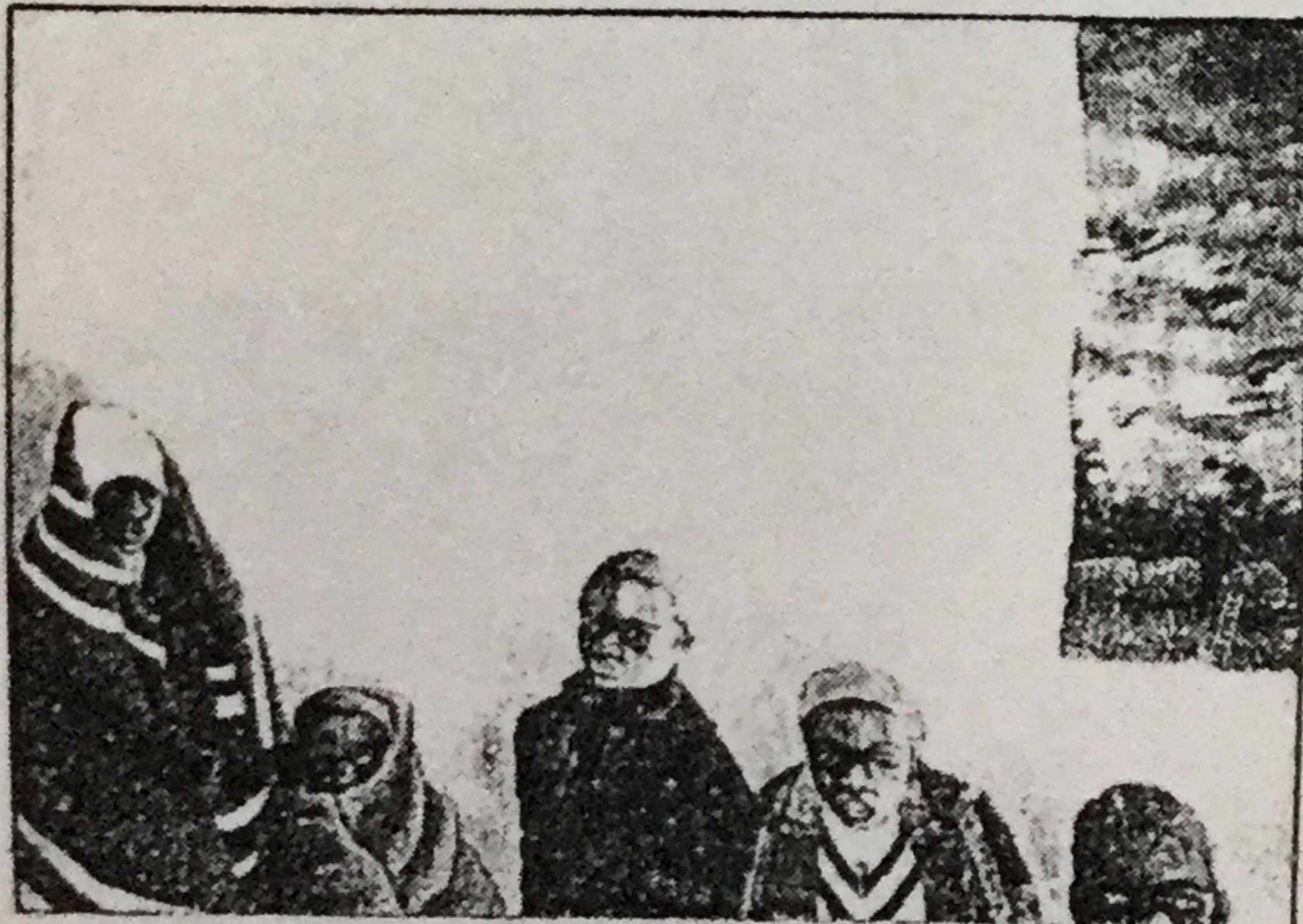
If Motswai's inclusive exuberance represents an informal approach to art making, there is a balance of formality. Van Vuuren's still lifes, all from the series *Crossings*, constitute the most traditional group in the selection. African artifacts and symbols find comfortable places in his pastel vignettes of Western-style domestic interiors. The fabric from Cairo, fruit from Morocco, or tribal mask from Nigeria are added to a colonial mix that

includes Italianate chairs, Frenchified draperies, and the vaulted architecture of Roman Africa.

Mthethwa, who studied at Rochester Institute of Technology under a Fulbright Scholarship, affects a more contemporary approach. He also works in pastel, but his style is bold and unencumbered, and the color establishes strong patterns. He places personal symbols in the pictures, an airplane in a scene of an initiation ceremony standing for transcendence, for example.

Lipschitz says that the artist population in South Africa numbers about 450, and that most artists are self-taught, though many gain some technical knowledge at a weekly art class in the township or from a mentor. Though materials are plentiful, they are expensive, she says. Many artists mix their own paints. Still, art flourishes, as this little sample clearly shows. Though hardly more than that, this is a rare chance to see what's happening across the world from us.

**Crosscurrents: A Window to South African Art**, opening during Gallery Walk, 6:30-9:30 p.m. Saturday and on view through Oct. 5, at Barbara Gillman Gallery, 939 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach. Hours: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday, noon-10 p.m. Saturday, and noon-6 p.m. Sunday. Call 534-7872.



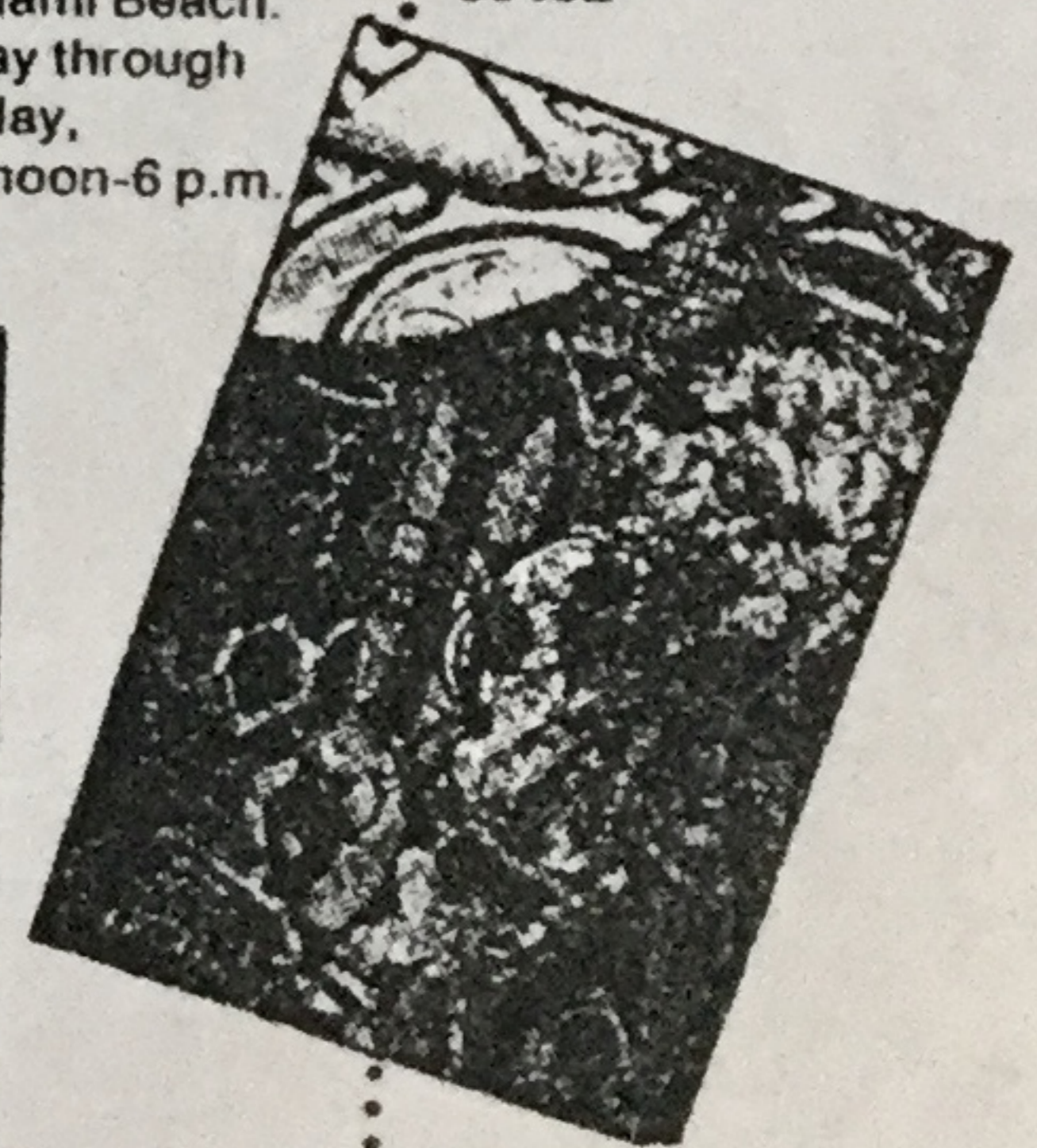
DO GREENER PASTURES LIE AHEAD: By Zwelethu Mthethwa.

# GALLERY



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33132**



TOP: Still Life with Calrean Cloth and Figs, by Louis T. Jansen Van Vuuren.