

Relax at eye-pleasing show

BENITA MUNITZ

WORK by Zwelethu Mthethwa, Louis Jansen van Vuuren and Mandla Vanyaza at the Association of Arts gallery to December 2.

THAT artists can be serious about their art without dealing overtly with serious issues is demonstrated in this eye-pleasing show ideal for relaxed summer viewing. You'll feel comfortable as you look around the gallery, secure that you're in the company of artists who know what they're doing – and enjoy doing it.

Louis Jansen van Vuuren produces new canvases – mostly minus blue Irises – on which objects of various kinds glide and skid and dance – or just sit. Sheets of strong-hued pigment provide 'beds' for these *divertissements*.

That the canvas is actually flat we all know, but Van Vuuren tells us "it all depends ..."

Using colour's "push and pull" attributes, the artist plays games of illusion with pictorial space. Sparse formats contain a few discretely placed objects that seem to float above the surface – shells, snakes and sparkling bead knots among them. In contrast, firmly anchored Bambara

carved masks reinforce surface flatness. First, it's Zwelethu Mthethwa's colour that hits you – brilliant hues in pastel crayon that illuminate the surface like fluorescent lights. Then you recognise the tableaux with objects and figures carved out of pictorial space. A bride and tuxedoed groom dance in a green-walled room while guests sit desultorily at a table.

Things look pretty solid. But then, so do the spaces between the objects – the negative areas. It's all an illusion of course. Like Van Vuuren, Mthethwa demonstrates his skill in manipulating media and the power of colour to deceive and disorientate. The closer you get, the illusion recedes, and you're left with the reality of defined shapes and assertive hues that interact to energise what is finally revealed as – a flat surface.

Mandla Vanyaza's compositions evoke the smells, sounds and sights of township life. More concerned with how colour functions than with descriptive accuracy or social comment, he develops forms with pastel crayon overlays that sparkle the surface. The starch-white blouses of conversing women in *Making a Call*, for example, stand out against bright beadwork, dark complexions and deep-toned skies.



COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION: One of Zwelethu Mthethwa's works which forms part of the Combined Artists' exhibition at the SA Association of Arts.

ART REVIEW

Within shallow "stage" settings everything jostles for space and all elements – township women, fringed drapes, posters, washing, signs and dogs – seem to be of equal importance. While he doesn't offer any original insights into township existence or into picture-making for that matter, Vanyaza's work clearly has eye appeal. Restless movement flows through these pastels – not so much from figures in action as from interactive colour promoted by purposeful crayon marks that leave no space unanimated.