

LIVELY, INNOVATIVE GALLERY

# Vibrant mosaic of styles and ethnic traditions

**ITHEKO LOKUZA NETHEMBA ELITSHA — CELEBRATION FOR BRINGING NEW HOPE** — an inaugural group exhibition at Brendon Bell-Roberts Fine Art Gallery, 199 Loop Street, Cape Town. Until April 30. Phone (021) 422-1100/1. LLOYD POLLAK reviews.

**P**UT in a nutshell, the Brendon Bell-Roberts Fine Art Gallery has to be the single largest, most stylishly decorated and technologically up-to-date commercial art space in Cape Town.

This huge L-shaped gallery is airy, soothing and expansive. Floors are tiled in grey slate. Walls, a pristine white. The three-track lighting system is adjustable and arguably far more advanced than those of any of the gallery's competitors.

Located on the ground floor, the extensive window space provides a sneak preview of the treasures within, whets one's appetite and makes the gallery far more accessible and inviting than its rivals which are often located up dingy stair-cases with no street frontage.

The Brendon Bell-Roberts Fine Art Gallery is also wheelchair friendly and secure parking can be arranged by phone. No other gallery makes it that safe and easy.

The gallery's policy of producing beautifully designed, copiously illustrated and highly informative catalogues is yet another instance of its admirable professionalism. Catalogues enhance the status of

both the exhibition and the participating artists, and form a useful permanent record and educational resource, yet few commercial galleries beside the Mark Coetzee Fine Art Cabinet produce them on a regular basis.

This inaugural exhibition, intended to celebrate "various aspects of our rich and diverse society" is a kaleidoscopic mosaic that reflects a host of different styles, themes and ethnic traditions.

Colourful, inventive ceramics by Josephine Ghesa, Punch Shabalala, Nhladhla Nsundwane and Nosombuluko Ottilia Nxumalo, of the Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio in the Drakensberg, are exhibited to perfection alongside large-scale sculptures by Brendhan Dickerson and Luke Young.

The latter's work is somewhat too hermetic to communicate successfully, but Dickerson's pieces are a sheer delight. *Go straight to Go*, which draws inspiration from popular culture in the form of allusions to the game of Monopoly, playing cards, dart-boards and sportsman's trophy cups, is a free-wheeling, wag-gish creation which, despite its frolicsome wit, tellingly addresses unreflective macho competitiveness and the damaging consequences it inflicts on our psyches and the world of sports, business, politics and international relations. Monopoly could not be a clearer symbol of capitalist ruthlessness as it revolves single-mindedly around profit, capital, property, electricity, construction, power and transport.

There are also vibrant pastels and oils by Xolile

Mtkatya, intensely cerebral, somewhat chilling, mixed media work by Nadja Daehnke and bold, painterly abstracts by Tyrone Appollis. The latter represent a bold new departure in an artist who has always clung to figuration.

Most accessible and immediately appealing of all, are Van Vuuren's richly evocative dreamscapes which blend the sensual, the erotic, the lyrical and the nostalgic into irresistibly spell-binding imagery.

One cloyingly lovely suite combining silkscreen and pastels, forms a "creative response" to "Jungian dream analysis" and "rotates around living in the compelling presence of Table Mountain".

Operating on the principle of free association, the artist combines the map of Cape Town executed in gold, with glowing pastel vignettes of nudes, the mountain, harbour, vessels, African artefacts, butterflies and fish in sumptuous celebration of the *douceur de vivre* in a place drenched in natural beauty, history, diverse cultural traditions and felicitous personal memories.

Van Vuuren is a friend of Brendon and Suzette, who gave generously of his time in helping them set up this fascinating medley of dynamic contrasts.

Brendon and Suzette do not plan to promote any particular brand of art. Their sole criterion for selection is aesthetic quality, and they want to exhibit the broadest, eclectic range of art so they can appeal to the largest possible public. They also wish to attract a younger audience and to make the art more

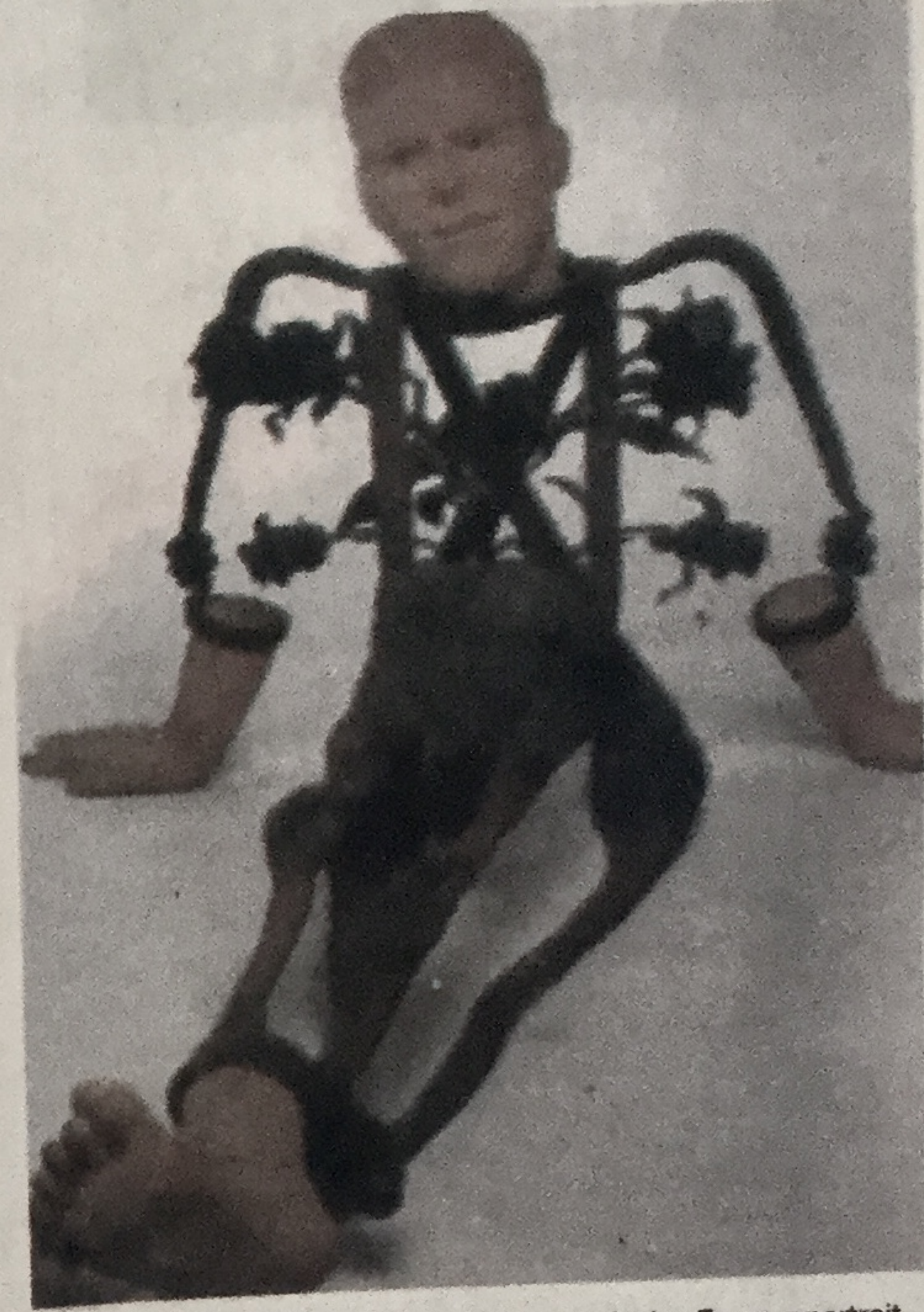
financially accessible, which they have done by asking the artists on show to produce smaller, more affordable works. All obliged.

Another means of making art more affordable is the gallery's practice of producing artists' prints by international South African celebrities such as Zwelethu Mthethwa, Louis Jansen van Vuuren, David Goldblatt, Pippa Skotnes, Arlene Amahler-Raviv and Stephen Inggs in limited editions of 10 to 50.

The gallery plans to scout for talented unknowns at universities and technikons throughout the country, to show artists from other centres how to overcome the regionalism that bedevils our visual arts, to establish a website and database, and to enlist corporate sponsorship so they can establish an annual bursary for a promising young artist, and open rent-free studios stocked with art materials.

Suzette's parents own one of the largest privately owned cultural museums in South Africa: The Hechter-Schulz Cultural museum, which holds no less than ten thousand pieces, represents a comprehensive collection of the traditional tribal beadwork, fertility figures and other artefacts produced throughout Southern Africa.

The museum, which is presently located in — of all places! — Boksburg, will be relocated to Cape Town where it will form an adjunct to the Commercial Art Gallery, generating even more interest and excitement at what promises to be one of Cape Town's most lively and innovative galleries.



**COMING UP ROSES:** Brendhan Dickerson's *Spring Fever*, a portrait of the artist as a young man, playfully embodies innocent youthful romantic aspirations.