



**Scats Esterhuyse (1954-)
“Dorpiess, Places and Spaces”
1 June – 21 June 2006**

Background

Scats Esterhuyse matriculated from The School of Art, Ballet, Drama and Music in Parktown in 1970. He is a self-taught artist, influenced by artists such as Robert, Gwelo Goodman and the work of William Turner. He became a professional fine artist in 1996. He has done Solo Exhibitions at Karen Mc Kerron Art Gallery from 1998 to 2000 and participated in a group exhibition arranged by the Croatian Embassy of South Africa in 2004.

Scats Esterhuyse's genre of landscape painting is fused with his continuous interest in the little dorpiess scattered across South Africa. He has traveled extensively across South Africa together with his wife, Sharon over the last ten years (1996-2006) and one can see his appreciation of these places materializing in his canvases.



Fig. 1.
Wolwehoeksekoeie
Oil on Canvas
2006

Thematic Development

The thematic development of Scats' work might seem slight over the period of time he's devoted himself to the theme of Karoo towns and landscapes. His enduring love to paint towns from an approaching distance, a close-up scene within a given town or the almost ceremonious event of leaving one behind, is evident throughout his work and at face value can be regarded as the total meaning of his efforts. His style has been described by The Financial Mail as that between the photo-realism of John Meyer or Peter Bonnie which could further categorize him as a realist landscape painter. But it is at this point precisely where his work has developed an ever so slight twist over the past few years, other than being a mere landscape or Karoo artist.

He does find a certain comfort in his travels from one town to the next, as if the bonds he has created with these places call him back to revisit their idiosyncrasies once more. But it also calls him back to delve deeper into the idiosyncrasies of his own person



Fig. 2.
Deep Roots (Pella)
Oil on Canvas
2006



Fig. 3.
Thingscangobetter (Hofmeyer)
Oil on Canvas
2006

Titles

What sets him apart from above-mentioned artists is his enjoyable play with titles, either fusing the words into one, such as *Wolwehoeksekoeie* (fig.1) or admitting to his inner person i.e. *Deep Roots (Pella)* (fig.2) via them. This act dislodges the traditional depiction of a landscape or scene of a town into a more personal experience and brings us closer to the personal mythology and his awareness of the human factor. *Thingscangobetter* (fig.3) becomes socio-political commentary by the sheer use of a Coke sign on display whereas *Citrusdalsemense* (fig.4) warmly epitomize the character of the people in that district. His use of Afrikaans in his titles is geographically contextualized as some groups such as the Coloured community and Afrikaans people of the vicinity speak it as their mother tongue. Even his title *Minus 1* (fig.5) which initially might refer to the temperature as he stood on a hill to capture Victoria-West down below, beckons the viewer to participate in his or her own journey to the Karoo. The onlooker becomes the missing person in the artist's consciousness at that point and is therefore inevitably involved.



Fig. 4.
Citrusdalsemense
Oil on Canvas
2006



Fig. 5.
Minus 1 (Victoria-West)
Oil on Canvas
2005

His Camera

Scats' work is very descriptive of the dorps he has visited, as it literally explains the here and now of a place. It is important to note here that, in as much as Scats experiences these little towns firsthand, he makes use of his camera to capture certain angles or moments within the Karoo to further the tale onto canvas with his oils. One could then regard his physical journey as the first step of his methodology and capturing images with his camera as the second.

The camera has had its place in art in the last century as it, to a certain extent, replaced the functional need for realistic interpretation of "reality" by means of painstaking interpretation of oil painting on canvas. The development of art movements such as Impressionism and Art for Art's sake in Modernism came from the need to reinvent art as mere interpretation of reality.

The way in which Scat uses his camera supports his search of, and within the Karoo. He marries his personal experience and memories with the use of his camera to capture definite moments in time. His work therefore does not merely document his geographic journey but also his personal journey as he subconsciously hone in on themes within the broader subject matter of the Karoo which clearly depicts his own soul.

His camera assists him in this matter as the instantaneous depiction of a moment in time (As one of his titles *A Moment in Time* (fig.6) literally communicate) do not argue with his subconscious desire to portray himself within these landscapes.



Fig.6.
A Moment in Time
(Beaufort-West)
Oil on Canvas
2006

The Karoo

Any individual who traveled the vast spaces of the Karoo will know the immense awareness of space and the splendid grandeur of Nature. In this vast space one not only realizes the profound spectacle of Creation but comes in “supernatural” contact with oneself through the contrast of one’s own humanity to the overpowering surrounds of the Karoo. And when one reaches a little town after traveling a long distance, the awareness of human frailty, yet human strength to survive in any circumstance becomes an endurance to respect as he admits in *Deep Roots (Pella)* (fig.2).

Scats’ choice to depict Karoo scenes does not merely fall into a long tradition of landscape painting, but portrays a journey with himself. Paintings such *Deep Roots (Pella)* (fig.2) metaphorically look at the Palm trees with their deep roots in desert-type land. This refers not only to the historical facts of Christian Missionaries who established a missionary station in Pella in 1814, but also to his personal roots into the culture he sees around him and his own deep-rooted spirituality.



Fig.7.
After Hours Nieu-Bethesda
Oil on Canvas
2005



Fig.8.
Timeless (Britztown)
Oil on Canvas
2005

Time

A journey takes time to experience or complete, and people’s relation to time differs across the world. In Scats’ art time is evident in works such as *After Hours Nieu-Bethesda* (fig.7) and *Timeless (Britztown)* fig.8. In *After-Hours Nieu-Bethesda* he comments on the availability of service in relation to time, in this case the building in the foreground is a Post Office, closed as it is after hours. *Timeless, Britztown* might seem to reflect on the feeling that time does not exist in places such as the Karoo or Britztown. It conjures up the element of a forgotten era. With closer inspection the church tower literally has no clock on it. This is not only once again where Scats’ play with titles gives a subtle twist to a traditional subject matter, but makes us aware of the true concepts he is dealing with.

Time has meaning for Scats. As a part-time percussionist (drummer), the metre of space and place is visually evident in his work. His artwork serves as visual documentation of his musical mind’s understanding of a certain time frame, the reality of time and the experience of living. His goal as an artist to savour time as life is fleeting. His awareness of his own time and life experience plays into his works as he understands his own place in the spectrum of time.