

# VIVIAN VAN DER MERWE

## FORM | STILTE

SEPTEMBER 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION AT THE SASOL ART MUSEUM IN CONJUNCTION WITH MAREE MODERN & CONTEMPORARY

**EXHIBITION TITLE: VIVIAN VAN DER MERWE: FORM | STILTE**

**DATES: 5 SEPTEMBER - 30 NOVEMBER 2013**

**MUSEUM HOURS: MONDAY 10H00 - 16H30 AND TUESDAY-SATURDAY 09H00 - 16H30**

**INFORMATION: IAN MAREE +27 73 306 7578 [IAN@MMANDC.CO.ZA](mailto:IAN@MMANDC.CO.ZA)**

**ULRICH WOLFF +27 21 808 3029 [UW2@SUN.AC.ZA](mailto:UW2@SUN.AC.ZA)**

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“When language is pushed to the limits of its expressive form, it reaches a threshold beyond which it can no longer cope. It comes, as George Steiner put it, to ‘the shores of silence’... It is in these moments of potent silence that Form is rediscovered and affirmed.”

Vivian van der Merwe, 1979

The Sasol Art Museum at Stellenbosch University in conjunction with Maree Modern & Contemporary, is featuring a major mid-career retrospective exhibition of the work of Vivian van der Merwe. The exhibition comprises more than 60 works dating from 1974 to the present.

Vivian van der Merwe completed his fine-art undergraduate studies in 1980 under Stanley Pinker at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. After an extensive research tour in Europe he obtained a Master of Fine Art Degree at the same institution in 1983. He continued painting while teaching at various tertiary art departments as a lecturer in painting and drawing.

Museum Director Dr Lydia de Waal and Professor Lize van Robbroeck, who presented the opening address, both alluded to the significance of Van der Merwe’s recent departure from academia to pursue a full-time painting career. His retirement after 16 years at the Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University was prompted by this decision. His agent Ian Maree of Maree Modern & Contemporary suggests that the timing of this exhibition is important and says: “It is a privilege to be professionally associated with Vivian whose work has evolved consistently over four decades. During this time he has worked and exhibited under the radar of the commercial South African art scene - this exhibition is an opportunity for museum goers to view a significant body of his works as he begins what he sees as the most exciting phase of his career.” For Van der Merwe, this exhibition is a personal watershed. “After years of struggling to combine teaching with a painting career this exhibition is a crucial transition. For the first time my studio is almost completely empty, a clean slate. By its nature a retrospective exhibition affords a great opportunity to take stock. But what really excites me is looking ahead. The Bosman’s Crossing sketch, along with some of the most recent works on the exhibition, gives a clear indication of where I’m going. This is the beginning of a new and substantive chapter.”

The exhibition is a curatorial collaboration between Ulrich Wolff of the Sasol Art Museum and Ian Maree. Maree explains their decision against a predictable chronological exposition. “We deliberately juxtaposed and mixed works of contrasting styles and different periods to illustrate processes in the making of his work.” The four explanatory texts, and still-life objects which are placed alongside the works, provide further insight into the painter’s vision and aesthetic interests. Examples of the most figurative works appear alongside partially and very abstract compositions directly illustrating the artist’s process of abstraction. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that several works were produced over periods of 15 years or more.

This way of hanging the exhibition also affords the viewer insight into the complexities underlying Van der Merwe's more abstract compositions. "My compositions often begin with a highly figurative study of a still-life object or objects. My work then progresses through a process of abstraction, to a point where I feel it achieves visual autonomy beyond the restrictions of language and conceptual meaning. I do this to strip away semantics and the need to identify things. In other words, by distilling the formal elements of the original still-life I integrate chromatic and spatial relationships - how edges, shapes and rhythms resonate within the composition. In this way the painting, through abstraction, becomes a new object."

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MAREE MODERN & CONTEMPORARY

MAREE MODERN & CONTEMPORARY

PO Box 193 Parklands 2121 Johannesburg South Africa

Mobile: +27 (0)73 306 7578

Fax: 086 741 8842

Email: [ian@mmandc.co.za](mailto:ian@mmandc.co.za)

Web: [mmandc.co.za](http://mmandc.co.za)

Facebook: [facebook.com/mareemodernandcontemporary](https://facebook.com/mareemodernandcontemporary)