

been valuable – especially for the access they provide to international forums. The publications listed too are disappointingly incomplete, outdated or inaccurate. The same kinds of criticisms apply to the chapter on 'Craft', which has many omissions such as Art Africa, Amatuli Fine Art and Mungo Park.

The handbook is intended as a tool for frequent and close consultation by arts and culture practitioners in their ongoing concerns, but sometimes the relevance of the entries remains unclear. The reason for the inclusion of departments such as Provincial Safety and Liaison or Housing and Land Administration is uncertain, for example, as is the motivation for providing entries on various political parties. If such organisations have a history or policy of funding the arts, or perhaps a budget allocation that justifies their inclusion, it would have been really valuable for these involvements to be identified.

The presentation of inaccurate and outdated information related to the visual arts is my primary reservation about the handbook, a concern that is fed and fanned by regret. Misrepresentation in an important publication such as this is frustrating and is no doubt caused partly by the notorious inability of us visual arts practitioners to organise ourselves. I suspect that many of our publicity mechanisms are inefficient and slapdash. Certainly, too, checking the telephone numbers, addresses and contact names for the range of institutions listed here would present a mammoth task. That said, however, the onus should surely also be on the compilers of a handbook purporting to represent the entire sector to undertake that research. Perhaps the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA), about to be launched nation-wide, can be developed into a powerful lobby group which is able to

petition for bigger, better and brighter representation in the next edition.

Julia Charlton

Michael Stevenson and Deon Viljoen. *Christo Coetzee: Paintings from London and Paris 1954–1964*. 2001. Cape Town: Fernwood Press. R195,00

This book, which forms part of the series *Fernwood Art and Artists*, was published to coincide with a travelling exhibition of Coetzee's work at the Irma Stern Museum in Cape Town in September/October, and at the Sandton Art Gallery from October to November 2001. This collection of 49 canvases, which was stored away for years by the Paris-based art dealer Rodolphe Stadler and by the widow of London photographer and collector, Anthony Denney, was brought back to South Africa by the Cape Town art dealers Michael Stevenson and Deon Viljoen who curated the exhibition.

This lavishly illustrated full-colour publication of 79 pages contains a collaborative essay by Stevenson and Viljoen in which the work of Coetzee spanning the years from 1954 to 1964 is introduced to the reader. The essay is divided into three chronological sections representing the 49 canvases which were all created during Coetzee's years in London from 1951 to 1955 and his eventual stay of ten years in Paris from 1956 to 1961 and again from 1962 to 1965. In their essay, the authors introduce Coetzee, as a young non-conformist art school graduate from the University of the Witwatersrand, who had won a two-year postgraduate scholarship to study at the Slade School of Art in London from 1951 to 1952. In London, Coetzee was introduced to the influential collector Anthony Denney who

became a life-long friend and mentor. Denney was instrumental in arranging his first solo exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in 1955. This gallery had the reputation for staging provocative exhibitions of both British and European artists such as Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, Graham Sutherland and others. Coetzee exhibited 51 paintings which launched his career as an artist whose work became closely linked to that of the European and specifically to the French avant-garde.

In the same year the prominent Parisian gallery owner, Rodolphe Stadler, opened his art gallery where he exhibited the works of Hartung, Soulages, Wols, Dubuffet, Tapi, Mathieu and many other important exponents of the avant-garde. It was during this time that Stadler was introduced to Coetzee through Michel Tapi who saw Coetzee's work whilst on a visit to the London home of Denney. Tapi was attracted to Coetzee's experimentation with texture (*matire*), form, space and imagery and at the same time shared Stadler's interest in promoting work loosely characterised as *un art autre* (alternative art) and *l'art informel* (which can be identified as unformal rather than informal) (p. 20). Coetzee held three successful exhibitions with Stadler, the first in 1959 together with Lucio Fontana and two later solo exhibitions in 1961 and 1963. A selection of works which Stadler retained after each of these exhibitions was presented to the University of Stellenbosch in 1987, whilst works from the rest of his collection is presented in this publication for the very first time plus those from the Denney Collection.

Coetzee's first sojourn in London was followed by further travelling scholarships and bursaries to Italy in 1956 and Japan in 1959. Apart from these official scholarships, he travelled widely and exhibited all over Europe and in America

in the early fifties and sixties where he was exposed to the hub of the European and American art fraternity. It was also during time spent in Spain that he was greatly influenced by the beguiling and liberating architectural forms of Antonio Gaudi whose influence remained part of his creative output throughout his career.

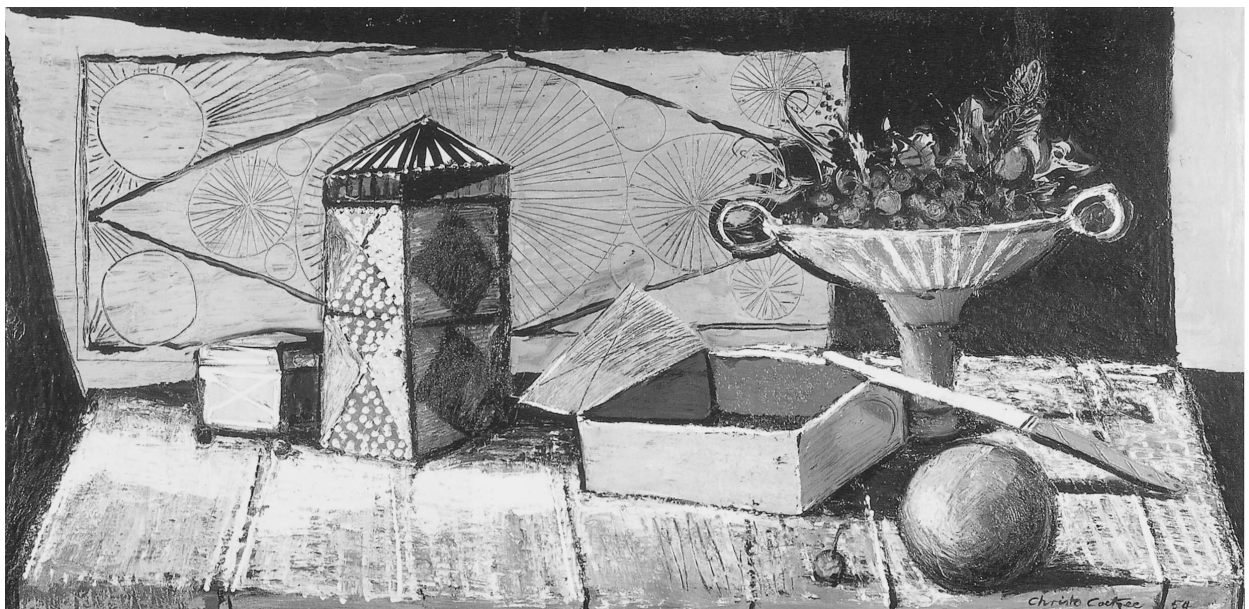
The very brief essay would be informative to the knowledgeable reader, whereas learners and students might be left in the dark due to a lack of contextualisation regarding South African art history of the fifties and sixties. More could have been said about the prevailing stifled art scene in the former Union of South Africa. In brief, after the war in the late forties just before Christo Coetzee's departure for Europe, the first international cultural association between the Union and a European country was established between South Africa and Italy through the South African Society for Cultural Relations with Italy. This liaison resulted in the establishment of a branch of the International Art Club in Johannesburg where South African artists were introduced to the work of the Italian avant-garde. These works were brought to South Africa by Witold Domanski who arranged exhibitions in both Johannesburg and in Cape Town. In close association with Domanski, Matthew Whippman established the Whippman Gallery in Johannesburg to host exhibitions of work from the collection of the international body, but he was also instrumental in establishing a South African branch of the International Art Club. Whippman's Gallery soon became the meeting place for South African artists such as Walter Battiss, John Dronsfield, Irma Stern, Lippy Lipshitz, Alexis Preller, Le Roux Smith Le Roux, Cecil Higgs and others, who associated themselves and their work with the contem-

porary European artistic developments. These artists were invited to exhibit their work at the annual exhibition of the Club in Turin in 1949 which paved the way for South Africa's first inclusion at the Venice Biennale in 1950. Christo Coetzee's work was also represented on exhibitions of the International Art Club at the Whippman Gallery in later years.

Although the text is engaging and readable there is an underlying leaning towards a coffee table publication as noted in the layout of only 15 pages of text, foreword and postscript included. The remaining pages are filled with lavish quotations by Coetzee and other artists from the period under discussion, colour and black-and-white photographs of the interiors of houses of the fifties and sixties, society and other anecdotal pictures taken at the opening of exhibitions plus full-colour reproductions of 49 of Coetzee's paintings, end papers included, which makes this an expensive purchase at R195,00. This creates

the feeling that the sole purpose of publication might have been a mere, brief accompaniment of the exhibition of 49 works, in which case one would rather refer to a catalogue than a book.

The renewed worldwide interest in the French and British (and South African) avant-garde surely demands a more comprehensive text. There are many instances where the authors gloss over potentially interesting debates. One example is the inclusion of pictures illustrating the use of avant-garde paintings in interior design of the fifties and sixties, without engaging with the debate that the avant-garde were very wary of their art being appropriated for decorative ends. Another example is where in the postscript the authors mention that due to Coetzee's preoccupation with international art trends of the sixties and seventies, his political integrity was questioned alongside many other South African artists, both black and white, who it was felt, did not



Christo Coetzee, *Still life with Box* (1954). Oil on board, 60 × 121 cm. Signed and dated bottom right: "Christo Coetzee 54".

engage with the socio-political realities of the time. This theme could have been developed in much more clarity and depth, as it dominated the South African art debate of these troubled times, culminating in the conference which was held at the University of Cape Town in July 1979 on the theme of *The state of art in South Africa*. Twenty-nine speakers from across the artistic spectrum presented papers on issues relating to the nature of art in South Africa, the role of the media, private and public patronage, the problems of art education in South Africa and issues relating to art and the state.

Nevertheless, this book is an important contribution to South African art historical writing as it contributes to an ever-growing body of work in this field. The authors have briefly introduced the reader to the exuberant Eur-

opean art world of the fifties and sixties and through their re-evaluation of Coetzee's work from this period, they have dealt with his valuable contribution towards the European avant-garde. Owing to South Africa's growing political and cultural isolation and the persistent cultural boycotts during the apartheid years, especially during the seventies, Coetzee's work was slowly being forgotten. Here the authors have given us a brief glimpse of the life and work of one the most remarkable and internationally renowned South African artists of the twentieth century.

REFERENCES

Ballot, M. 1999. *Christo Coetzee*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.

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