

THE CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE NEW GROUP

JULIA KUKARD

January 1992

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, UCT for the  
degree of Master of Arts, Cape Town, 1992.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

Firstly to my supervisor, Professor Michael Godby for his supervision, encouragement, advice and enduring patience.

My thanks to Michael Stevenson who has made useful suggestions, found references, proof read, allowed me access to his notes from interview, and has been generally helpful.

Also to the staff at the Irma Stern Museum ; Christopher Peter, Bev Petit, Jane Alexander, Mr Romyn and George Tsilite who made this masters possible, especially Jane who did the proof reading and Christopher who gave me time to work.

Thanks also to Patti Hardy for very generously making her information available to me.

I am also grateful to the many interviewees who shared their knowledge of the New Group and gave freely of their time, in particular Gregoire Boonzaier, Basil Robinson, Eve Dunt, Joe Wolpe, Dr A.D. Wassenaar and Mr Jack Romyn.

Lastly, to Neil, Bertha and my family for their support and encouragement.

## Abstract

---

This research had two aims; to clarify the history of the New Group, and to examine the way in which this history has been constructed and distorted.

The first section of the dissertation presented a history of the New Group. Chapter One discussed general aspects of the Group's history such as their activities and administration, and Chapter Two focused on the reasons for the New Group's formation and its dissolution. It was indicated in these chapters that the Group formed in order to provide production and retail structures which would enable artists to earn a living from their work, and that once these had been established the Group disintegrated.

Chapter Three considered the issue of nationalism and proposed that most art writers during the New Group's existence were primarily concerned with the development of a national South African art. Furthermore, that many of these writers considered modern European art movements after Post-Impressionism and African art, undesirable influences on the development of a South African art.

chapter described the way in which these writers' concern for the development of a national art caused the history of the New Group to be linked to the history and institution of Post-Impressionist art movements in South Africa.

Later writers, using earlier writings on the Group as source material, were led to believe that the New Group formed in order to promote art influenced by modern European movements such as Expressionism. The Group's existence was explained by these authors as resulting from a desire to institute art influenced by European, modern, Post-Impressionist art styles as an accepted art form. Part of this understanding of the Group included the belief that the New Group was as a whole a group of modern artists who had to battle for recognition and acceptance from the critics. Chapter One indicated this not to be true.

Chapter Six found that the use of early writings as source material caused a further distortion in the history of the New Group. The first chapter indicated that African art was an important influence on the work of the New Group artists but, because this was not recognised in the earlier writings on the Group, this influence was not acknowledged in the later writings.

The researcher concluded by indicating that a new approach to the history of the New Group was necessary.

That is, that the New Group be seen in relation to the construction and extension of accessible production and retail structures in art, rather than in relation to the institution of European modern art in South Africa.

## **Contents**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>pp.1-13</b>
<b>Chapter One</b> The history of the New Group.....	<b>pp.14-49</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b> The origins and dissolution of the..... New Group	<b>pp.50-76</b>
<b>Chapter Three</b> Nationalism.....	<b>pp.77-99</b>
<b>Chapter Four</b> An introduction to the early writers on the New Group.....	<b>pp.100-120</b>
<b>Chapter Five</b> A general description of the early writings about the New Group.....	<b>pp.121-139</b>
<b>Chapter Six</b> An examination of the way in which early writings about the New Group influenced later histories of the Group.....	<b>pp.140-153</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>pp.154-157</b>
<b>Appendix A: The Constitution of the New Group .....</b>	<b>pp.158-160</b>
<b>Appendix B: List of Members.....</b>	<b>pp.161-163</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>pp.164-181</b>

## Introduction

---

The New Group was a Cape Town based art group that existed from 1938 to 1954. It was arguably the most influential of all art groups in South Africa as it played a major role in encouraging public approval of art influenced by modern European art movements such as Expressionism and Cubism. Its importance in the history of South African art is also related to the Group's extensive activity in the fields of art education, art criticism, art history, war art, politics, art controversies and the art market itself.

There are several problems involved in presenting an history of the New Group. Firstly many sources, such as minutes from meetings, are unavailable. It was also impossible to determine if all press cuttings relating to the New Group had been assembled. This was because so much was written about the New Group in the press, not only in the newspapers of the larger cities, but also in those from smaller towns. An additional difficulty was in locating the remaining members of the Group. Furthermore, many interviewees were elderly and could not remember details or were influenced by existing histories

of the New Group. Lastly, many of the previous histories of the Group, such as the accounts given by Berman, Bekker, Thomas and Schoonraad(1), did not always reference their information clearly. This makes it almost impossible to verify some of the information given in these texts. When such information is used in this thesis, it will be noted as unverified.

The sources used in this thesis range from secondary texts such as those of Berman and Schoonraad to primary sources such as letters between members, New Group circulars and minutes from meetings. Much of the information given in this thesis was located in newspaper articles from the period 1938 to 1954. Other information was obtained by means of interviews with ex-members of the Group as well as art dealers and members of the public who were involved in the art world during the period 1938 to 1954.

The history of the New Group will be presented in Chapters One and Two. Chapter One will provide a largely factual account of the Group's history, while Chapter Two will give an interpretive account of the reasons for the Group's formation and dissolution. The information

---

1: These are the principle writers on the New Group. Their accounts of the history of the New Group are referenced later.

presented in the first two chapters will provide a measure against which other authors' interpretations of the history of the Group will be assessed.

Chapters One and Two also highlight a major theme in this research; the kind of stylistic influences that art writers of the thirties and forties considered appropriate on a national South African art. Broadly speaking three stylistic influences were apparent during the New Group's existence; romantic realism, modern art and African art. These stylistic influences are important in terms of the Group's work because all member artists to a greater or lesser extent worked within or were influenced by these styles.

In this dissertation, the term romantic realism will be used to describe the establishment art style of the thirties in South Africa. The term refers to a style that is largely realistic<sup>(2)</sup> in form, but romantic in sentiment. It includes artists who worked in an anglicized Impressionist manner.

To a large extent romantic realism was a painting style which focused on portraiture and landscape as the main

---

2: In this text the term realistic will be used to indicate work that strives for verisimilitude to the object/s represented. That is, no abstraction or distortion is employed.

subject matter. Portraits done in this style tended to draw strongly on the European 19th Century tradition of portraiture with dark backgrounds and realistically articulated, foregrounded faces lit from the one side. Landscape art done in the romantic realist style drew from English Romantic artists such as Constable and Turner as well as from Impressionists such as Pissarro, Renoir and Monet. Distortion was rarely used and work very often did not have a high emotional content. Romantic realist work was linked to South African nationalism and seen by many artists and critics, such as Roworth and Brander, as a national art for South Africa. Chapter Three discusses the issue of a national art in full detail.

Artists who worked in a romantic realist style included Edward Roworth, Gwelo Goodman, Nita Spilhaus, George Crosland Robinson, George Smithard, Constance Penstone, George Pilkington, Charles Peers, Allerly Glossop and Albert Gyngell, to mention a few. Although this was an establishment style, many members of the New Group also worked in a manner influenced directly or indirectly by romantic realism, even though the Group was understood by the public to be a group of modern artists. The influence of romantic realism is apparent in the work of

Gregoire Boonzaier, Terence McCaw, Robert Broadley, Ruth Prowse, Neville Lewis, Piet van Heerden and others.

The term modern art was used by most writers in South Africa during the period 1938 to 1954 to describe work influenced by modern European movements after Impressionism. This included Expressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, etc... Because few of these writers had come into first hand contact with modern European art, the term was generally used rather loosely to describe artworks that did not strive for realism. In this research the term modern art refers to art which shows the strongly recognisable influence of modern European art movements such as Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism and Expressionism. Even though only a few members of the New Group could be termed modern artists in the European sense of the word, the Group became a vehicle for the promotion of European modern art in South Africa. This is the fundamental irony of the Group; that even though they were not really a group of modern artists they were able to win acceptance by the public for modern art.

Critics, especially those concerned with the development of a South African national art, viewed modern European art as a foreign culture, whereas romantic realism was

perceived as the local art form. The debate over the desirability of a national romantic realist style as opposed to international modern art, forms a recurring theme throughout the history of the New Group.

African art was a further important influence on the work of the New Group artists. In this text the term will be used to indicate the influence of South African African art, for example Ndebele art, as well as African art from the rest of Africa, for example art from the Belgian Congo(Zaire). Both are included in this research as both regions had an influence on the work of the New Group artists. The last four chapters indicate how the absence or presence of the influence of African art becomes important in the search for a national art for white South Africans.

After the history of the New Group has been presented, the research will deconstruct the way in which the Group has been portrayed in South African art history. The first step in this process of deconstruction is to understand the factors influencing the early writings about the Group. These include nationalism, personal political allegiances, and individual perceptions of art and its role in society, issues which will be discussed in the last four chapters.

The theme of white nationalism will be presented in Chapter Three. A brief review of the history of nationalism during the period 1938 to 1954 will be made and ideological Groups active in the debate over a national art will be introduced. Their different approaches to nationalism, where they converge or differ, will then be discussed. Lastly, the chapter will indicate why the New Group became the focus of the debate over a national art, and will discuss Group members' involvement in this debate.

Chapter Four will then examine the early writers themselves, their political affiliations and personal opinions of art-related issues. A brief discussion of their writings before 1938 will also be provided.

Chapter Five deals with the early writings about the Group. Although this chapter deals predominantly with writings about the Group, other texts on South African art will also be included in the discussion so as to give a broad picture of the expectations art writers had of art and artists. This chapter will focus on controversial issues which were linked to the Group, and aspects of their history and work which were played down in the early writings about the New Group.

The last chapter, Chapter Six, will take the information presented in the previous chapters and indicate how certain factors played an important role in moulding the written history of the Group. This chapter will focus on the way in which art historical myths are created through the use of newspaper cuttings as source material, when the conditions which generated and influenced the text's content and form are not taken into account.

Almost all of the writings on the Group, early and late, follow a Formalist approach to art history. This approach explains both stylistic and structural changes in the art world as resulting from internal conflicts within art. For example, art is described by Formalist art historians as changing as a reaction to a particular style and not in response to external pressures such as the need to earn a living. The Formalist approach illustrates the artist as a spiritual genius who is most often male. As a result, art history is indicated as a series of individual, most often male, bursts of genius. The notion of the artist as a spiritual genius will be examined in relation to the early writings on the New Group(3).

---

3: Information on the Formalist Paradigm can be found in Rees, Borzello, The New Art History.

As has been indicated, the research will examine texts written both during and after the New Group's existence. Texts published before 1954 will be discussed in Chapters Three to Five, while texts written after 1954 will be discussed in Chapter Six. It is necessary at this point to briefly list the more important sources on the New Group.

A large proportion of the early newspaper articles were written by Bernard Lewis who also wrote under the names Brander and XYZ. Many other critics wrote on the Group including Melvin Simmers, E.R.P., H.P. and Prebble Rayner. Most of their articles were exhibition reviews in which contemporary notions of art are implicit. In order to substantiate and elaborate on the information gained from these reviews, more general articles on art have been included where they could contribute to the research.

Letters were written to the newspapers by the members of the public and the New Group in response to what the critics were saying. These will be examined as they indicate public opinion and the attitudes of Group members. Furthermore, it is highly likely that many of the anonymous letters were written by members of the New Group.

Other important early texts were published in journals and magazines. The earliest journal article on the New Group was written in 1939 by a Group member, Walter Battiss(4). This article was published in an international magazine, The Studio Magazine, and focused on illustrating the stand the New Group was making for good and sincere art. The text is largely narrative and gives a description of the Group's aims and membership.

A later article, written in 1941 by the critic A.C. Bouman took the form of an extended exhibition critique(5). This was published in Die Huisgenoot, an Afrikaans South African magazine which played an important role in fostering an Afrikaans cultural identity(6). The article does not offer a history of the Group, but describes the work on exhibition and attempts to make it accessible to the reader.

The first major article written after the New Group's dissolution in 1954 was "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van

---

4: Battiss, W., "Towards an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp.208-209.

5: Bouman, A.C., "Kuns van die Nuwe Groep: Vierde Jaarlike Tentoonstelling in Kaapstad", Die Huisgenoot, March 28 1941, pp.15, 17, 59.

6: Readers Digest, The Illustrated History of South Africa The Real Story, (henceforth known as Readers Digest, The Real Story) p.299.

Suid-Afrika"(7). It was published in 1978 and gave a narrative account of the Group from its inception to its dissolution.

In 1987 Beverly Thomas wrote a thesis on the Group in partial fulfillment of a Post-graduate Diploma in Museum Studies(8). She presented a history of the Group which concentrated on what she calls their "schemes and actions"(9). This was the first time that the New Group's numerous activities were listed in an account of their existence.

The last text to deal solely with the New Group was that of a catalogue for the New Group retrospective of 1989-1990 by Murray Schoonraad. A large portion of the catalogue was devoted to a description of Battiss' role in the New Group(10).

Information on the New Group also appears in monographs on member artists, for example Arnott's book on Lippy

---

7: Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55.

8: Thomas, B., The New Group, Thesis for Post-graduate Diploma in Museum Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 1987 (henceforth known as Thomas, The New Group).

9: ibid., p.4.

10: Schoonraad, M., "The New Group 1938-1954", Catalogue from New Group Retrospective at the SANG, 1988-1989 (henceforth known as Schoonraad, The New Group).

Lipshitz(11) and Scott(12) and Bekker's(13) books on Gregoire Boonzaier. A description of the New Group is given only as part of the description of the life and work of the artist, and is as a result very brief.

Other information on the Group can be found in more general articles such as van der Westhuysen's "Die Hedendaagse Skilderkuns in Suid-Afrika"(14), Bokhorst's "Die Kuns van 'n Kwaarteeu"(15), Battiss' "Kunsbewegings in Suid-Afrika vandag"(16) as well as in Berman's "Modern South African Painting"(17).

The Group was not mentioned in the first two art dictionaries published, Bouman's Painters of South Africa(1949)(18) and Our Art(1960)(19). Later dictionaries such as Berman's Art and Artists of South

---

11: Arnott, B., Lippy Lipshitz, pp.18-22 (henceforth known as Arnott, Lippy Lipshitz).

12: Scott, F.P., Gregoire Boonzaier, p.17 (henceforth known as Scott, Gregoire Boonzaier).

13: Bekker, M., Gregoire Boonzaier, pp. 26-31.

14: van der Westhuysen, H.M., "Die Hedendaagse Skilderkuns in Suid-Afrika", Historia, Vol 9 no 1, p.38.

15: Bokhorst, M., "Die Kuns van n' Kwaarteeu", Standpunte, Vol 9 no 3, pp.43-44.

16: Battiss, W., "Kunsbewegings in Suid-Afrika vandag", Standpunte, August 1965, Vol 18 no 5, p.18.

17: Berman, E., "Modern South African Painting", Financial Mail Publication, 1966, p.181.

18: Bouman, A.C., Painters of South Africa (Henceforth known as Bouman, Painters of South Africa).

19: Our Art, Pretoria Foundation for Education, Science and Technology, 1960.

Africa(20) give a fairly detailed description of the New Group.

Linked to dictionary-type art historical texts are chronological or thematic accounts of art in South Africa. These give a brief narrative history of the New Group, for example Harmsen(21) and Fransen(22).

Most of the information on the Group was written before the Group's dissolution in 1954 in the form of a newspaper or magazine/journal article. All of the later writers used these texts as sources of information. This research thus aims to indicate how the use of early texts on the New Group as source material, caused later writers to perpetuate myths about the history of the New Group, as well as to provide a more accurate account of the history of the New Group.

---

20: Berman, Art and Artists of South Africa (1983) (henceforth known as Berman, Art and Artists), pp.208-210. The account of the New Group has remained the same in all the editions of the book.

21: Harmsen, F., Looking at South African Art: A Guide to the study and appreciation of art, pp.294-296.

22: Fransen, H., Three Centuries of South African Art p.296.

## Chapter One: The History of the New Group

---

The history and nature of the New Group revolves around two issues; the reasons for the formation of the Group and the reasons for its dissolution. Before one can enter into a discussion of these factors, a basic understanding of the history of the New Group is necessary. This is the objective of this chapter; Chapter Two will discuss the New Group in terms of the reasons for its formation and dissolution. Chapter One is largely a factual account of the New Group, while Chapter Two is more interpretative.

There are varying accounts of who was responsible for conceiving of the idea of an art group in South Africa. Both Boonzaier and Battiss have been described as having first thought of the idea of the New Group. This debate is not of major importance to the history of the Group, but it is interesting as it indicates various writers' perceptions of the Group for the reason that Battiss and Boonzaier represent the two poles within the Group. Battiss was seen by critics as a symbol of modern art and African art as opposed to Boonzaier, a symbol of anglicized Impressionism and romantic realism. Furthermore, Boonzaier was from the Cape and Battiss was from the Transvaal, and an artistic rivalry had existed and still does between these two provinces.

Schoonraad(1), Thomas(2) and Battiss(3) claim that the Group was formed after Battiss suggested the idea in a letter to Terence McCaw in 1937. Apparently McCaw then wrote back confirming that it was an excellent and viable scheme(4). There is however no evidence available other than that cited by Battiss, that the letter did exist. Schoonraad and Bekker use Battiss' explanation to validate their argument(5). Furthermore, two versions of McCaw's reply are cited by writers on the Group. In the first instance a description written by Battiss in a New Group document which was later repeated in his article on the New Group. This states

I have been debating the idea of forming a "Group" in South Africa with Gregoire, and have come to the conclusion that it would be quite a good idea.(6)

A different version is quoted in Schoonraad's catalogue for the New Group retrospective of 1989:

I have been discussing the idea of forming a "Group" in South Africa with Lewis and Gregoire and we have come to the conclusion that it would be a good scheme.(7)

---

1: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

2: Thomas, The New Group, p.2.

3: Battiss, W., "Towards an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp.208-209, p.208.

4: Description of Group written on New Group stationary by Walter Battiss. photocopy Coll. SANG.

5: Thomas, The New Group, p.2 and Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

6: Description of the Group written on New Group stationary by Walter Battiss. photocopy Coll. SANG. Battiss also describes the same process in Battiss, W., "Towards an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp.208-209, p.208.

7: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

The essence is the same, but the first letter stated that only Boonzaier was consulted, while the second that both Boonzaier and Lewis were conferred with. Both indicate however that Battiss was responsible for conceiving the scheme of the New Group.

Other authors, such as Bekker and Berman, saw Boonzaier as taking the lead in the conception and formation of the Group. It is possible that Boonzaier may have thought of the idea of an art group before Battiss wrote the letter as he had been trained in Britain and exposed there to art groups such as the London Group, Camden Group and the Artists International Association. It is possible that as a result of his experience with English art groups he may have been directed towards forming a South African art group. Information does suggest however that Battiss did suggest the scheme first, and that Boonzaier only acted on the suggestion.

According to Berman, McCaw played an important role as an organiser and also suggested the name of the Group. Berman also mentions that Frieda Lock and Lippy Lipshitz were also very involved in the initial organisation(8). Unfortunately Berman does not reference her sources and the information stating that McCaw suggested the name, cannot be verified. However, press cuttings from this period indicate that Lock, McCaw and to a lesser extent

---

8: Berman, Art and Artists, p.209.

Lipshitz did play an important role in the organisation of the Group(9).

Battiss went overseas in 1938(10) and it was left to Boonzaier, McCaw and Lock to construct the Group. This process would also have been influenced by other members of the New Group. The way in which the New Group was constructed was strongly influenced by members' experience of overseas art groups, such as the Artists' International Association, the London Group and the Maison de la culture, all of which were connected with socialism.

The Artists' International Association(A.I.A.) was a socialist organisation based in Britain. It was formed by artists in 1933 and aimed to "link with others in every country in support of democracy, oppose fascism and war [and] work for socialism"(11). The first two meetings were held in the studio of Misha Black and most of those present were students of James Fitton, a teacher at the Central School of Arts and Crafts(12). Boonzaier(13), Lock(14) and McCaw(15) attended this

---

9: for example Brander, "n' Jaar se Kuns", Die Suiderstem, 8 October 1938.

10: Berman, Art and Artists, p.37.

11: The Daily Worker, April 2 1958 quoted in Egbert, D.D. Social Radicalism in the Arts, (Henceforth known as Egbert, Social Radicalism) p.498.

12: ibid., p.434.

13: Boonzaier attended the school in 1934, just after the formation of the A.I.A. Thomas, The New Group, p.26.

14: Lock attended the school from 1932 and was in London until 1935. ibid., p.65.

15: McCaw attended the school in 1935. see Berman, Art and Artists, p.193.

school during or just after this period and probably came into contact with the ideas of Fitton. It is notable that these three played a major role in formulating the administration and practices of the New Group.

The A.I.A. held many well-publicised exhibitions in London, the largest being held in 1937. In the same year it sponsored a week long British Artists' Congress and in 1939 held a well advertised anti-fascist exhibition at Whitechapel Art Gallery which was titled "Art for the People"(16).

The A.I.A. had links with other non-socialist art groups, for example The London Group(17), with whom New Group members such as Enslin du Plessis, Cecil Higgs and Terence McCaw exhibited(18). Thus although these New Group members were not exposed to socialism through The London Group, it is likely that they came into contact with socialist ideas through The London Group's connection with the A.I.A..

Other than Boonzaier, Lock and McCaw, the following members of the New Group were in London between 1932 and 1938: Nerine Desmond(19), Leng Dixon(20), Enslin du

16: Egbert, Social Radicalism, p.502.

17: ibid., p.502.

18: Bedford, E., Cohen, E., Alexander, L., Paris and South African artists, SANG, 1987, (henceforth known as SANG, Paris and SA artists) p.29.

19: Desmond was in London at least for the year 1938. Thomas, The New Group, p.33.

20: Dixon was in London during the thirties leaving in 1939. ibid., p.79.

Plessis(21), Eleanor Esmonde-White(22), Cecil Higgs(23), Phay Hutton(24), Alexis Preller(25), Geoffrey Long(26) and May Hillhouse(27). Information on many members' whereabouts during this period was unavailable and it may be possible that more members were in London during the thirties.

Members who were in Paris during this period were also exposed to the ideology of the A.I.A. and socialism. Maud Sumner, Cecil Higgs and Alexis Preller trained under Andre L'hote in Paris. L'hote was a member of the Maison de la culture, a socialist group similar to the A.I.A.(28), and it is likely that through him New Group members were introduced to socialism. The fact that Ferdinand Leger, André Malraux, André Gide, Le Corbusier, and Jacques Lipchitz were members of the Maison de la culture(29) indicates how much support the Maison had, and therefore that it was likely that New Group members

---

21: du Plessis lived in London from 1922, he visited South Africa from time to time. Berman, Art and Artists, p.84.

22: Esmonde-White was in London at least from 1935 to 1936. Thomas, The New Group, p.40.

23: Higgs was in London from 1922 until at least 1933. ibid., p.45.

24: Hutton only came to South Africa from England in 1939, she was trained in London prior to this. ibid., p.50.

25: Preller was in London at least from 1934 to 1935. ibid., p.72.

26: Long was in London from 1934 to 1940. Berman, Art and Artists, p.184.

27: Hillhouse was in London at least during 1938. ibid., p.145.

28: Egbert, Social Radicalism, p.309.

29: ibid., pp.309-318.

in Paris during this period were exposed to its actions and policies.

Members of the Group also came into contact with the Socialism in South Africa. During the thirties the South African Communist Party enjoyed a wide membership amongst white South Africans(30) including members of the New Group such as Gregoire Boonzaier(31).

Thus many New Group members, and notably the three major organisers Boonzaier, Lock and McCaw, were exposed to socialism and socialist art groups in Britain, France and South Africa. These socialist organisations influenced the way in which the New Group members perceived their role as an art group.

The idea of an art group working only in the field of art was not new; artists had formed groups to do so many times before, for example the Salon des Refusés, The Vorticists, The London Group, The Futurists, etc... But, what was different was that the A.I.A. and the Maison de la culture saw themselves as playing a role outside the immediate field of art as well as within it. Both raised money for the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War and some members fought in the war itself, for example Felicia Browne(32).

---

30: Pike, H., A History of Communism in South Africa, pp.190-192.

31: Interviewee wishes to remain anonymous.

32: Egbert, Social Radicalism, p.502.

The active role played by socialist art groups outside the immediate field of art influenced the New Group to see itself as having both an artistic and political or social role to play. Although the Group did not attempt to initiate social change on a broad scale, they were involved in various socially conscious activities outside the field of art. They raised money for the war effort in Spain, for the Chinese Red Cross Fund and for Britain's Bombed-out Cities Fund, for example. They also played an active role in the Second World War as war artists and soldiers. The Group also hosted a debate on the role of art in social change. These activities are dealt with later on in this chapter.

Socialism also influenced their activities within art. As will be indicated later in this chapter, the Group was involved in a number of schemes to bring art to the people. They accommodated the art buyer through various payment schemes so that more people could afford art. Other schemes involved child art funds, cheap materials and access to art education. As will be indicated later, it is unclear whether these schemes were taken seriously or ever came to fruition, but it is important to note the Group's intention; to provide the people with art, art education and materials. This intention was directly influenced by socialist art groups.

The influence of the socialist art groups was also apparent in the Group's vocabulary. The term "artist's co-operative"(33) was used to describe unions of artists within the Group. The New Group met at the "Peoples' Club" in Plein Street(34) and Roworth was once described as "the official pontiff of the Bourgeois Art Academy"(35).

Once the role of the New Group had been envisaged, an exhibition was planned for 1938. It was held in the Argus Building in Burg Street and 84 works by 17 artists were exhibited(36). According to The Cape Times, the exhibition was a financial success.

In the first two hours after the opening of the show on Wednesday a dozen pictures, catalogued at more than one hundred pounds were tabbed with red "sold" labels.(37)

More than one thousand visitors paid the one shilling entrance fee to attend the exhibition and lunchtime lectures(38).

The first exhibition held in 1938, preceded the completion of the draft constitution of the New Group,

---

33: Anon, "The New Group", Rand Daily Mail, 19 February 1939.

34: "Reply to Roworth", a document of the New Group, indicates that it was to be read at the "Peoples' Club" in Plein Street. photocopy Coll. SANG, New Group File.

35: ibid.,

36: D.G., "Exhibition opened today by Mrs Thorne", The Cape Times, 4 May 1938.

37: Anon, "A Short Guide to Art", The Cape Times, 5 May 1938.

38: Anon, title unknown, The Cape Times, 7 May 1938.

which is dated 1939. This document set out to define the activities and nature of the Group (see Appendix A).

Although the document available is only the draft constitution of the New Group, it provides a clear outline of the New Group's policies and administration. Whether or not the draft constitution was ratified is unclear, but the format of the document indicates that it is likely that it was.

The constitution stated that the Group's aim was "...to raise the standard of art in South Africa."(39). This was the only aim stated in the New Group's constitution.

Berman lists four aims of the New Group.

1. To bring together artists and craftsmen in an effort to raise standards;
2. To help artists in financial difficulties;
3. To form Artists' Co-operatives;
4. To hold exhibitions all over the country, the standard of which would be controlled by the method of selection, i.e. secret ballot.(40)

Thomas agrees with Berman's listed aims but adds;

5. To overthrow the stifling and inert standards of the so called cognoscenti
6. To captivate an audience through media exposure
7. To educate the public in art appreciation.(41)

These listed aims are accurate in an interpretative sense as they give an indication of the activities and strategies of the Group. But they do not exist in the draft constitution itself. Berman does not give a reference, but it is likely that she quoted from a

---

39: see Appendix A.

40: Berman, Art and Artists, p.208.

41: Thomas, The New Group, p.4.

newspaper article in The Rand Daily Mail(42) which lists the same aims she does. Thomas probably defined her aims from an interpretation of the actions of the Group. The aims these writers cite, although not strictly true, are useful in understanding the nature of the Group, but they also exclude aspects of the Group's history.

As will be shown most of the Group's activities centred on helping artists to earn a living from their work. This is not sufficiently indicated in Thomas and Berman's accounts of the Group's aims. Therefore, if Berman's and Thomas' aims are to be accepted, a further aim needs to be added:

8. To provide artists with accessible and efficient structures through which to sell their art and, in doing so increase the artists' chance of making a living from the sale of their work.

Aside from stating the aim of the Group, the draft constitution set out how the New Group was to be administered.

The affairs of the Group shall be controlled by the members, who shall elect annually an Hon. Secretary, an Hon. Treasurer and a Chairman.(43)

There is very little surviving information as to when each of the secretaries was in office. Bekker lists the secretaries as Eve Dunt, Ella Chilton and Jack Cope(44).

---

42: Anon, "The New Group", Rand Daily Mail, 19 February 1939.

43: see Appendix A.

44: Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55, p.53.

Eve Dunt said in an interview that she worked as the secretary during the 1940's(45) and a New Group Notice from 1949 confirms this to be true(46). A letter from Boonzaier to Battiss dated January 1951 indicates that she remained in the post at least until this date(47). Minutes from the Annual General Meetings from 1952 to 1954 indicate that Ella Chilton was the secretary during this period(48). Presumably she was followed by Lily Rayard as a letter written to Battiss in December 1954 is signed "Hon. Secretary Lily Rayard"(49), but there is no mention of this in the minutes.

There is even less information on the "Hon. Treasurer". Minutes from meetings indicate that Jack Cope held this office at least from 1952 to 1954(50), but no other information is available.

The third administrative post defined in the constitution was that of Chairperson. Schoonraad indicates that Charles Peers was the first Chairperson followed by Boonzaier, Ruth Prowse, May Hillhouse and Maurice van Essche(51). Bekker lists Charles Peers, Gregoire

---

45: Interview with Eve Dunt, Wynberg, Cape Town, 29 May 1990(henceforth known as Interview with Eve Dunt).

46: New Group Notice 1949, photocopy Coll. SANG.

47: Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss dated January 1951 photocopy Coll. SANG.

48: Minutes from meetings held on 12 December 1942 and 30 June 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

49: Letter to Battiss from New Group dated 29 December 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

50: Minutes from meetings held on 12 December 1942 and 30 June 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

51: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.47.

Boonzaier(eight years) and Ruth Prowse as the chairpersons(52). Berman only lists Boonzaier, but states that he was the first chairperson(53).

Due to limited information, it is difficult to verify who the chairpersons were and when they were in office. Most sources are unhelpful. Newspapers have no information on the chairperson other than one article from 1939 which stated that Charles Peers was the chairperson at that point(54). None of the available catalogues indicate who the Chairperson was(55). This lack of information is further compounded by the fact that neither Berman, Bekker nor Schoonraad give clear sources. The differing opinions of these authors of who was chairperson and when, give some indication of the difficulty in researching this area.

Available minutes from meetings indicate that Ruth Prowse was the chairperson at least from 14 September 1952 to 12 November of the same year when she resigned and May

---

52: Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55, p.54.

53: Berman, Art and Artists, p.209.

54: Anon, "National gallery Attacked", The Cape Argus, 11 February 1939.

55: Catalogues that were available to the researcher include those from May 1938 Cape Town, November 1938 Pretoria, May 1939 Cape Town, Stellenbosch 1939, 1941 Cape Town, May 1924 Cape Town, May 1943 Cape Town, September 1943 Johannesburg, May 1944 Cape Town, May 1945 Cape Town, May 1947 Cape Town, May 1948 Cape Town, March 1948 Johannesburg, May 1949 Cape Town, 1951 Cape Town, October 1952 Cape Town, May 1954 Cape Town, all photocopies Coll. SANG.

Hillhouse became chairperson(56). Hillhouse held this post until July 15 1953 when van Essche was to become chairperson. Van Essche was elected in absentia and it is unclear if he accepted the position. Hillhouse became vice-chairperson and acted in his place during his absence(57). Leng Dixon also acted as vice-chairperson from at least the 12 November 1952 to 15 July 1953(58).

Working with the three administrative figures described above was a committee of not more than five exhibiting members. At different times during the early fifties the committee members included Ruth Prowse, Eleanor Esmonde-White, Audrey Frank, Alfred Krenz, Gregoire Boonzaier, Leng Dixon, Lippy Lipshitz, Florence Zerffi, May Hillhouse and Francois Krige(59). Further information on committee members is unavailable.

After defining the organisation of the New Group, the draft constitution went on to state where it would be active.

In centres other than Cape Town Groups may be formed provided that such centres adopt the Constitution of the parent Group.(60)

Evidence points to the existence of only one affiliated Group, in the Transvaal, where Battiss acted as

---

56: Minutes from meetings held on 14 September 1952 and 12 November 1952, photocopy Coll. SANG.

57: Minutes from meetings held on 15 June 1953, photocopy Coll. SANG.

58: Minutes from meetings held on 14 September 1952 and 15 June 1953, photocopy Coll. SANG.

59: Minutes from meetings held on 14 September 1952, 12 November 1952, 15 June 1953, 30 July 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

60: See Appendix A.

president. Eve Dunt stated that Le Roux was the secretary of the Transvaal branch during the forties(61), but a letter from le Roux to the Cape Branch dated 1953, states that he was not elected nor had ever practiced as the Transvaal secretary(62).

According to the constitution one had to have held a one-person exhibition and have been nominated by a member in order to join the New Group. Berman states that artists could also apply to the Group for membership(63), but this seems unlikely in view of the conditions set out in the constitution. The nomination also had to be supported by two additional members of the Group, each of whom had to have seen the nominee's work. After the proposed member's qualifications had been investigated, New Group members voted him/her in or out by means of a secret ballot(64).

The Rand Daily Mail describes a condition of membership; that a member would have to resign if their work was rejected twice for a New Group exhibition(65). This was not established in the constitution which only stated that

---

61: Interview with Eve Dunt.

62: Letter from Le Roux to the Cape Branch, 21 March 1949, photocopy Coll. SANG.

63: Berman, Art and Artists, p.209.

64: See Appendix A.

65: Anon, "Exhibition by New Group", Rand Daily Mail, 19 February 1939.

The Group shall have power to consider the standing of members in the event of their work not being up to the standard set.(66)

There is no indication of members resigning due to this clause, and this suggests that members were not forced to do so if their work was rejected twice by the judging committee.

Although it was not stated in the constitution, early comments by members of the New Group indicate that the Group was originally conceived of as a small and elite group of artists. Boonzaier commented "We shall have to limit our membership to about a dozen-and-a-half, there are not more young professional artists than that in South Africa, not artists whose work counts".(67) and Battiss stated "Membership of the New Group is limited to thirty."(68). It is likely that the Group did originally intend to be a small, elite organisation. But as the Group grew in size and their power in the artworld increased, it became counterproductive to limit membership. Listings of members differ from source to source. Thomas excludes members whose "success was unrelated to their involvement in the Group " giving a total of 31(69). Berman lists 51(70), Schoonraad lists 82(71) and Bekker lists 46 members(72)(see Appendix B).

---

66: Constitution of New Group, photocopy Coll SANG.

67: unknown author, The Cape Argus, 14 April 1938, quoted in Berman, Art and Artists, p.208.

68: Battiss, W., "Towards an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp.208-209., p.208.

69: Thomas, The New Group, p.21.

70: Berman, Art and Artists, p.210.

71: Schoonraad, The New Group, pp.50-54.

72: Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55, pp.53-54.

The differences between the membership lists results from two factors. Firstly, the date when the members were counted, as membership changed during the course of the New Group's existence when members left or joined. A second factor influencing membership relates to whether or not catalogue source material included visiting artists or not. For example, a New Group catalogue from 1948 lists 42 members, including 2 deceased members, Hugo Naudé and Charles Peers(73). It also includes Gerard Sekoto who had left the country for Paris the previous year(74).

These factors coupled with the scarcity of documentation make it impossible to compile a completely accurate membership list. However, an estimate of members has been provided in Appendix B.

It is important to note the large number and variety of artists who were members; from puppeteers to sculptors, painters and graphic artists. The large membership and wide variety of visiting artists indicates the power the Group could wield in the South African art world. In fact there were probably only about 121 practicing artists in South Africa during this period(75) and only a

---

73: Catalogue from New Group exhibition in Gainsborough Galleries, Johannesburg 1948, photocopy Coll. SANG.

74: ibid.,

75: Anon, "Hoe Die Afrikaanse Kuns Vorder" Die Vaderland 7 April 1948 p.8.

few were not New Group members, for example Irma Stern who did exhibit with the Group as a visiting artist(76).

An indication of the power accrued through the large membership of the Group is that it was able to gain relatively widespread acceptance of art styles derivative of modern European art movements such as Post-Impressionism and Expressionism. From 1938 art influenced by contemporary European art movements could no longer be seen as peripheral and obscure by the public. This was because most artists in South Africa were either working in a modern idiom or were connected to modern artists through membership of the New Group. Thus this form of art could no longer be seen by the public and critics as insignificant, and as a result viewers came to accept its presence and form.

Individual artists such as Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser had attempted to gain public legitimacy for art influenced by modern European movements prior to the New Group, but had had little success. Irma Stern's exhibition in 1920 was "...dismissed as an attempt to startle the susceptibility of Cape Town art lovers."(77) and Maggie Laubser's exhibition in 1925 was a "....critical and financial disaster...."(78). These artists had paved the way for the acceptance of art other than romantic realism but it was largely due to the

---

76: see Appendix B.

77: Dubow, N., Irma Stern, p.10.

78: van Rooyen, C., Maggie Laubser, p.16.

extensive membership of the Group that art influenced by modern European art movements became accepted by the public and critics. This theme will be explored more widely in later chapters.

The draft constitution of the New Group also set out the financial administration of the Group. Members of the Group paid an entrance fee of 10/6 and an annual subscription of 10/6(79). An annual general meeting notice of 1949 indicated that the annual subscription was later changed to 5 shillings which included the hanging costs(80). The fees were deposited in Barclays Bank, Cape Town(81).

New Group exhibition expenses were paid out of the subscription and hanging fees. A further commission of not more than 15 percent was taken from any sale, including bartered works(82). At some exhibitions other income was generated by the shilling entrance fee for visitors and the catalogue sales also at a shilling each(83). Cope's financial report for 1953 indicates that "Dues and Entrance" fees brought in 22 pounds 1 shilling, hanging fees 13 pounds 2 shillings and 6 pence, catalogue sales 38 pounds 11 shillings and 3 pence, and

---

79: Draft constitution, photocopy Coll. SANG.

80: New Group Notice, 23 March 1949, photocopy Coll. SANG.

81: Draft constitution, photocopy Coll. SANG.

82: ibid.,

83: The 1943 catalogue cost a shilling see Catalogue of the Fifth anniversary exhibition of the New Group 1943 Gainsborough Galleries, Johannesburg.

commission on sales 43 pounds 5 shillings and 6 pence(84). This indicates that the Group was earning a fair amount of money from their exhibitions.

The New Group facilitated the sale of art by offering two means of payment other than cash; a hire-purchase scheme whereby the buyer paid works off over a period of time, and an exchange scheme whereby one bartered art for goods of a similar value(85). The barter scheme was an unusual way of selling art, but it enabled the Group to make art accessible to those who could not afford to pay cash. Instead of currency, goods were exchanged, for example a year's supply of milk was traded for a Boonzaier painting(86). Commissions on bartered goods had to be paid in currency by the artist to the Group(87). Schoonraad stated that the Group was going to further accommodate buyers with a five guinea exhibition where all the work would cost under five guineas, but nothing came of the scheme(88).

Other than exhibitions, the New Group was involved in numerous controversies and debates during their existence. These acted not only to encourage mostly good

---

84: Treasurers Report by Jack Cope, photocopy Coll. SANG

85: Anon, "Barter Art Exhibition", The Cape Argus, 23 March 1939.

Anon, "Art for Goods", The Cape Argus, 23 April 1939.

Anon, "'B-ART-ER" EXHIBITION IN CAPE TOWN", The Cape Argus, 5 April 1939.

Anon, "Paintings for Cheese", The Cape Argus, 2 May 1939.

86: see footnote 85.

87: New Group Notice, 23 April 1949, photocopy Coll.

SANG.

88: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.45.

all the work would cost under five guineas, but nothing came of the scheme(88).

Other than exhibitions, the New Group was involved in numerous controversies and debates during their existence. These acted not only to encourage mostly good publicity for the Group, but also to expose various bad practices in the art world. It is notable that only one controversy dealt with the work of a Group member, the rest involved non-member artists or activities. The controversies will be briefly listed, but extra references are given in the footnotes.

The first altercation in which the New Group became involved was what was to be called "The Two-Pictures Controversy" by the newspapers of the day. Edward Roworth, then head of the Michaelis School of Art and a member of the South African National Gallery(SANG) Board of Trustees, was approached in 1937 by IBM to choose two paintings to be exhibited at the IBM World Fair(89). Once exhibited at the fair, these works would become part of IBM's permanent collection and "...represent not South African art but life in South Africa."(90). Roworth chose two works, one of his own and one of a Rhodesian(Zimbabwean) artist who had been one of his pupils(91). His choice was kept a secret and it was only

---

88: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.45.

89: Anon, "The Two Pictures Controversy", The Cape Argus, 4 February 1939.

90: ibid.,

91: ibid.,

by chance that the New Group found out(92). The Group felt that the works in no way represented life in South Africa and were not fairly chosen. They protested the action in newspapers and presented a speech at "The Peoples' Club" in Plein Street, Cape Town(93). Although the New Group's objections to Roworth's decision were well publicised in the newspapers, this was not enough to prevent the exhibition from going ahead(94).

A further controversy occurred when Cecil Higgs' "Pink Nude" was removed from the Carnegie Library at Stellenbosch University. Apparently the nude had provoked remarks from passing students which had embarrassed the female attendants thus causing it to be removed(95). Although the critics did not support the action, they had slated the work in their reviews and it

---

92: Cape Times Correspondent, "Umtali Artist's distinction", The Cape Times 30 January 1939.

93: "Reply to Roworth" presented at the "Peoples Club" Plein Street Cape Town on 8th October 1940, photocopy of speech Coll. SANG.

94: See Anon, "The Two Pictures Controversy", The Cape Argus, February 8 1939. For more information see 1. Anon, "Pictures for the World's Fair", The Cape Argus, 31 January 1939.

2. Anon, "The Puzzle of the Two Pictures", The Cape Argus, 7 February 1939.

3. Anon, "To represent Contemporary Art", The Cape Argus, 6 February 1939.

4. Anon, "Purchase of Two South African Pictures", The Cape Times, 7 February 1939.

5: Crouse, H., "Not Representative", The Cape Argus, 10 February 1939.

6. Camera Obscura, "Prof Roworth's Portrait", The Cape Argus, 10 February 1939.

7. Anon, "National Gallery Attacked", The Cape Argus, 11 February 1939.

8. Anon, "Artists want an Investigation", The Cape Argus, 14 February 1939.

95: "Cape Town Artists Indignant", The Cape Times, 14 August 1939.

did not seem to matter if it was not exhibited(96). The Group responded by writing to the newspapers and exposing the action, but there is no evidence that the work was put back on exhibition(97).

In 1952, a critic, Matthys Bokhorst, stated that Tretchikoff's exhibition of that year was "cheap sensation for the masses"(98). Tretchikoff owners responded angrily and the New Group came out in support of Bokhorst(99). Tretchikoff accused the Group of trying to prevent the success of his imminent American tour. Thomas describes a challenge by Tretchikoff to the Group to hold an exhibition which would run concurrently with his. The winner would be decided from the sales and

---

96: see Brander, "Still-Life by Freida Lock", The Cape Times, 11 July 1939.

97: Anon, "Cape Town Artists Indignant" The Cape Times, 14 August 1939. Also see

1. Anon, "Dynamic Art" The Cape Argus, 5 August 1939.

2. van Heyningen, C., "Letters in defence of Modern Art", The Cape Argus, 5 August 1939.

3. Anon, "Picture Removed", The Cape Argus, 10 August 1939.

4. Taylor, G., "Ultra-Modern Art", The Cape Argus, 8 August 1939.

5. Anon, "A Picture Removed", The Cape Argus, 10 August 1939.

98: Bokhorst, M., "Cheap Sensation for the Masses", The Cape Times, 16 September 1952.

99: see 1. Letters to the Editor, "Tretchikoff's Art and the Masses", The Cape Times, 20 September 1952.

2. Architect, "Art, The Masses and The Artist", The Cape Times, 24 September 1952 .

3. Art Lover, "Art vs Flashing Signs", The Cape Times, 25 September 1952.

4. Cape Times Correspondent, "Reply to New Group", The Cape Times, 24 October 1952.

5. Anon, "Tretchikoff back from U.S. Tour", The Cape Times, 8 August 1955.

attendance figures. Apparently the Chairperson of the time, Ruth Prowse, declined to comment(100).

Although minutes from meetings in 1952 do not describe the Tretchikoff challenge, they do indicate that the New Group found Tretchikoff's work objectionable and were concerned that

....when works [Tretchikoff's] were circulated in the U.S.A and Canada that this would be taken as representative of art in South Africa.(101)

In fact the minutes from the next meeting indicate that "....a letter was written to the American consul referring to the official status given to the opening of Tretchikoff's exhibition."(102). According to Tretchikoff, the consul gave the letter to the press and a heated debate followed. Tretchikoff further implied that as the letter did not prevent him from exhibiting in America, many of his canvasses for the exhibition were vandalised(103). There is no information available to confirm or refute Tretchikoff's suspicions about the identity of the vandals.

Other activities of the New Group included a proposal made by Boonzaier in 1939 for a fund for needy artists. This fund was to combine the resources of the Group, the

---

100: Thomas, The New Group, p.8.

101: Minutes from meeting of 14 September 1952, photocopy Coll. SANG.

102: Minutes from meeting of 12 November 1952, photocopy Coll. SANG.

103: Interview with Tretchikoff described in Terreblanche, C., "Moet asseblief net nie praat van kitsch nie", Die Vrye Weekblad, 11-17 October 1991, pp.10-13.

government, and the local authorities who would each donate money. In return, donors would receive vouchers to the value of the donated money which could later be traded for artworks or art skills(104). There is no indication that anything came of this scheme and it can be assumed that it never came to fruition.

Die Suiderstem of 15 December 1939 commented that New Group artists had offered to camouflage buildings in case of a German bomb raid. Artists were to go through a course before they could do so(105). Apparently, if the government donated money to the voucher scheme described above, they could trade their vouchers for camouflage painting(106). No other information is available.

Neville Lewis(107), Francois Krige(108), Geoffrey Long(109), Terence McCaw(110) and Rupert Shepherd(111) acted as South Africa's official war artists during the Second World War. It is interesting that only two of South Africa's official war artists, Philip Bawcombe and Ben Burrage, were not members of the New Group(112). The

---

104: This was reported in Anon, "Plight of City Artists", The Cape Argus, 15 September 1939.

105: Anon, "Camofleer van Geboue", Die Suiderstem, 15 December 1939.

106: Anon, "Plight of City Artists", The Cape Argus, 15 September 1939.

107: Neville Lewis(1895-1972) is one of the better known portrait artists of South Africa. For more information see Berman, Art and Artists, p.179.

108: see Berman, Art and Artists, p.163.

109: see ibid., p.194.

110: see ibid., p.193.

111: see ibid., p.373.

112: Berman, Art and Artists, p.322.

fact that the Group provided most of South Africa's official war artists may be linked to Boonzaier's suggestion that war artists be employed, which was printed in The Cape Argus of September 1939(113). A New Group catalogue from 1943 includes an "Official War Art Section(Kindly loaned by the Department of Defence)"(114).

The New Group was also involved in other wars. Boonzaier tells of collecting money for the Spanish Medical aid Fund which supported the Republicans against General Franco, and also for the Chinese Medical Aid Fund in the forties(115).

Other schemes of the New Group involved setting up facilities to enable the production of art. At the Group's inception in 1938 most materials were imported from Germany or Britain and were very expensive. With the outbreak of the Second World War they became largely unavailable(116). In order to combat the high costs of the materials as well as their increasing shortage, the New Group decided to import and retail art materials at cost price to members of the organisation. This would

---

113: Anon, "Plight of City Artists", The Cape Argus, 15 September 1939.

114: Catalogue of the Fifth Anniversary Exhibition of the New Group 1943 at the Gainsborough Galleries, Johannesburg.

115: Interview with Boonzaier, Onrus, 29 October 1990 (henceforth known as Interview with Boonzaier).

116: Interview with Basil Robinson, Head of Ashbeys Gallery, Cape Town, 19 May 1990 (henceforth known as Interview Basil Robinson).

make materials accessible and facilitate art production(117). Unfortunately there is no available documentation as to whether this occurred or not.

As has been indicated the New Group played an active role in the controversies of the art world. Aside from this they were involved in both formal and informal education, both as a Group and as individual artists.

According to Thomas and Schoonraad, the New Group intended to start a school, on the corner of Wale and Bree streets in Cape Town, which would teach young artists about contemporary European art(118). There was no evidence available that this was done.

Many members taught at art schools. To a large extent this was due to the fact that teaching art was one of the few ways an artist could earn a living whilst staying within his/her field. Lippy Lipshitz, Eleanor Esmonde-White, Katrine Harries and May Hillhouse taught at the Michaelis School of Art. Boonzaier, Audrey Frank, Alfred Krenz, Erik Laubser and Maurice van Essche worked under the auspices of the Department of Adult Education in Cape Town, while Eric Byrd and Geoffrey Long taught in Natal. Walter Battiss taught at the University of South Africa(UNISA) in Pretoria. Erik Laubscher, Maurice van Essche and Alfred Krenz were instrumental in starting art

---

117: Berman, Art and Artists, p.209.

118: Thomas, The New Group, p.10. Schoonraad, The New Group, p.45.

schools of their own(119). Although members were working independently, it is likely that the kind of art they taught was influenced by that of the New Group as a whole.

The New Group also played an important role in the field of informal education. They held lectures which were popular with approximately 1000 visitors attending the first exhibition and series of lectures(120). A public debate on Art and Social change held in 1942 was reported to be well-attended(121).

Other information on art was passed on to the public by letters to the newspaper. These either informed the public about the New Group's art(122) or highlighted controversial issues. In order to counteract the type of art criticism they were receiving in the newspapers the Group also wrote replies to critics which were also published in newspapers(123).

---

119: Thomas, The New Group, pp.21-92.

120: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.44.

121: Anon, "Art and Social change", The Cape Argus, 6 November 1942. The article in which this meeting was reported did not mention the content of the discussion which might have further linked the New Group to overseas socialist art groups.

122: Lewis, N., "Nazism in art", The Cape Times, 26 September 1940.

123: Lewis, N., "Nazism in art", The Cape Times, 26 September 1940.

Anon, "Cape Town Artists Indignant", The Cape Times, 14 August 1939.

Ordbrown, J., "Modern Art", The Cape Times, 3 October 1939.

van Essche, M., "Accomplished Technique of Jean Welz", The Cape Times, 12 June 1952.

van Essche, M., "Remarkable Talent of Gerard Sekoto", The Cape Times, 28 June 1954.

The New Group also lent their work to schools for educational purposes, for example Belville Boys High School and S.A.C.S. in 1952(124). According to Thomas, the Group organised an exhibition of the work of fifteen year old Valerie Desmore in January 1942. Half of the funds received were set aside to enable her to study overseas and the rest was donated to "Britain's Bombed-out Cities Relief Fund"(125). Thomas also stated that the Group not only supported "young" art in this way, but held other exhibitions or included young artists' work in their own exhibitions(126). There was no evidence available to the researcher to confirm this.

According to Thomas, travelling exhibitions were sent to Morreesburg(1939), Stellenbosch(1939), Hermanus(1951) and Paarl(1952)(127). It is likely that this did occur as Boonzaier commented that exhibitions were held in the country(128). Press cuttings of the 1939 Stellenbosch

---

Battiss, W., "Many Art Shows but how much is art?", The Cape Argus, 5 February 1955.

Lipshitz, L., "The Hole in the Sculpture", The Cape Times, 28 September 1954.

van Essche, M., "Modern Art", The Argus, 6 October 1947.

Laubscher, E., "Modern Art and Dr Pickerill", The Cape Times, 17 July 1952.

Ordbrown, J., "Modern Art", The Cape Times, 3 October 1940.

Krige, Lipshitz, Meyer, Gravette, "Artists profoundly shocked", The Cape Times, 27 September 1940.

Le Roux, L., "Art and Social Change", The Cape Times, 2 May 1942.

124: Minutes from meeting 15 July 1953, photocopy Coll. SANG.

125: Thomas, The New Group, p.9.

126: ibid., p. 9

127: Thomas, The New Group, p.13.

128: Interview with Boonzaier.

exhibition exist(129) and minutes from meetings indicate that exhibitions and work were also sent to Wellington(1951)(130), Paarl(1952)(131) and Bloemfontein(1954)(132). They also state that van Essche proposed that exhibitions be held in Queenstown, Graaf-Reinet and Beaufort-West in 1951(133).

Lastly, it is notable that a black artist, Gerard Sekoto, exhibited with the Group at a time when it was unusual for black and white artists to exhibit together. Lindop states that Sekoto joined the Group in 1942(134). Although there is no available evidence that Sekoto was a member, it is likely that he was a member during the early 1940's. According to Thomas, Sekoto only exhibited with the New Group in 1942(135). However, a newspaper article from 1944 reveals that he exhibited with them in that year(136) and a catalogue from the 1948 Johannesburg exhibition indicates that Sekoto exhibited with the Group in 1948(137).

---

129: see footnote 97

130: Minutes from Meeting 5 December 1951, photocopy Coll. SANG.

131: Minutes from Meeting 12 November 1952, photocopy Coll. SANG.

132: Minutes from Meeting 30 June 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

133: Minutes from Meeting 5 October 1951, photocopy Coll. SANG.

134: Lindop, B., Gerard Sekoto, p.22.

135: Thomas, The New Group, p.90.

136: Anon, "Sekoto's Pictures", The Cape Times, 2 April 1944.

137: Catalogue from New Group exhibition in Gainsborough Galleries, Johannesburg 1948, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Members of the Group also had personal connections with Sekoto. A 1947 newspaper article includes an interview with Sekoto in which he comments that he "...had many friends in England including Lippy Lipshitz, the South African sculptor...."(138). Battiss, who was also an acquaintance of Sekoto, promoted his work in an article in The Studio Magazine of 1952(139).

Possibly related to Sekoto exhibiting with the New Group, was the discussion of a resolution proposed by the Minister of Education which was noted in the minutes of a New Group meeting held in 1951. The minutes state:

Believing that the prohibition of mixed audiences at our exhibitions and other similar functions on the grounds of race as any other distinction would be contrary to the general promotion of the arts as set out in the constitution of the South African Association of Arts this council cannot accept the terms in the letter from the minister of Education on which a grant of a thousand pounds has been made conditional.(140)

The Minister of Education had offered the New Group one thousand pounds on the condition that they kept their exhibitions and functions open to whites only. This proposal was rejected at the meeting by Ruth Prowse and seconded by Francois Krige(141).

---

138: Anon, "To study art in Paris", The Cape Argus, 27 September 1947.

139: Battiss, W., "New Art and Old Art in South Africa", The Studio Magazine, Vol 144, July to December 1952, pp.66-75.

140: Minutes from meeting held on 7 November 1951, photocopy Coll. SANG.

141: Minutes from meeting held on 7 November 1951, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Even though it appears that the South African Association of Arts supported mixed exhibitions, to the researcher's knowledge there had been no mixed exhibitions held in Cape Town prior to the New Group. In fact, a press cutting from 1946 indicates that a colour bar did exist to a certain extent in Cape Town galleries such as Maskew Millars Gallery. An English artist's work was rejected for an exhibition as "...it would never do for them to exhibit native portraits."(142).

This chapter so far has illustrated the internal structures of the Group as well as the activities in which the Group took part. The last part of the chapter will discuss the demise of the Group. The reasons for the Group's dissolution will be given in the following chapter as they relate very strongly to the reasons for the formation of the Group also discussed in Chapter Two. Thus, this chapter will only describe the Group's dissolution without looking at the reasons for this to have occurred.

From 1948, the Group's influence began to wane. Important members such as Battiss, Lipshitz and van Essche began to play a less and less active role in the running of the New Group. Schoonraad claimed that members began to resign from the Group as early as the

---

142: The Cape Times cites as a cause for this that "an exhibition of Cornish art must reasonably exclude portraits of East African natives although executed by a Cornishmen", Anon, "Racial Intolerance Complaint", The Cape Times, 28 November 1946.

late forties(143), but evidence suggests that many members just did not continue to pay their subscription fees. The treasurer's report of 1953 comments that five pounds five was owed in subscription fees indicating that 21 members had not paid their subscription fees of 5 shillings(144).

Schoonraad noted that the last New Group exhibition was held at HAUM publishers in Cape Town from 10 to 21 May 1954(145). There is no evidence of exhibitions occurring after this date. The last meeting of the New Group for which minutes are available, was held in July 1954, the year of the Group's demise. May Hillhouse was in the chair and Prowse, Esmonde-White, Frank, Krenz and Boonzaier were present. The minutes from the meeting show that the Group was still active, planning an exhibition for 1955 at the Argus Gallery and possibly also at the Pretoria Gallery(146).

There is no suggestion in these minutes of the impending demise of the Group, but a letter written to Battiss by Boonzaier in January 1954 indicates that Boonzaier knew of the imminent dissolution of the Group(147).

---

143: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.47.

144: Treasurer's report 1953, photocopy Coll. SANG.

145: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.47.

146: Minutes from Meeting held on 30 July 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

147: Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss, January 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

This chapter has so far discussed the administration, activities and dissolution of the Group. Before moving onto the next chapter it would be relevant to the later chapters of this thesis to look briefly and very generally at the New Group's work and the reception it received.

As will be shown, the New Group did not have an stylistic programme, and as a result members worked in a variety of styles. The majority of Group members worked in a style linked directly or indirectly to romantic realism and English Impressionism. Boonzaier, Lewis, McCaw and many others worked in this way. The second sub-group consisted of artists who were not directly influenced by romantic realism, but showed the strong influence of modern European art movements such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Post-Impressionism etc. Artists such as Higgs, Dronsfield, Preller and other fell into this group. It is notable that it was these same artists who later left the Group to join the International Art Club(148).

Other than romantic realism and contemporary European art movements, New Group members were influenced by African art which had an effect in directing the subject matter and form of many of the artists' work. New Group artists influenced by African art include Preller, van Essche,

---

148: Berman, Art and Artists, p.147.

Battiss, Lipshitz, Ordbrown, Graetz, Kottler, Dziomba, Byrd, Shephard and Sekoto.

Of the three influences, romantic realism was the most evident in the New Group members' work. Because this style was the accepted manner in which to work, New Group artists who worked in this way did not have to struggle for recognition or acceptance from the critics and public. It was only artists such as Higgs, Preller and Battiss who had to battle against the prejudices of the public and critics. Most of the Group members received encouraging remarks about their work in the newspaper reviews, especially Neville Lewis and Terence McCaw. Many of the headlines of the reviews are laudatory of the general standard of work. A reviewer commented that the Group's work was "Most Refreshing and Stimulating"(149) and "New Group's second exhibition's standard is especially high"(150) for example. Chapter Five gives more examples of the praise and support received by the Group from the critics.

Thus, although some New Group artists were harshly criticised, many received encouragement and most of the reviews commented favorably on the general standard of work. Arnott's observation of the first exhibition is an indication of the support received by the Group.

---

149: Simmers, M., "Most refreshing and Stimulating", The Cape Argus, 4 May 1938.

150: Brander, "Nuwe Groep se tweede Tentoonstelling Skilderye se standaard is besonder hoog", Die Suiderstem, 1 May 1939.

It was also enthusiastically received by the press, and engaged the support of a relatively large proportion of the Cape Town public.(151)

This chapter has examined the history of the Group, and given some insight into the artwork produced by the members of the Group. The next chapter will draw on this information in order to explain the reasons for the formation and dissolution of the New Group.

## Chapter Two: The Origins and Dissolution of the New Group

---

The first chapter gave a factual account of the New Group. It is the function of this chapter to interpret the information presented earlier in order to locate the reasons for the formation and dissolution of the New Group.

As has been indicated in Chapter One, the key to the history of the New Group lies in understanding the reasons for the formation and dissolution of this group of artists. To do so one needs to look at production and retail factors within the artworld. These two factors will be termed art structures and include art education, structures that provide materials, exhibition venues, the selling process and the art buyers. The term includes all the factors which make the production and sale of art possible. In order for art to sell well it must be accepted by the buyers, publicised by the critics and later authorized by museums and art history. Jensen highlights the importance of art history and art writing to the artist. He states that

...the ability to control the marketing of art depends on winning control of the interpretation of the art-historical past.(1)

---

1: Jensen, R., "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in art", Art Journal, Winter 1988, Vol 47 no 4, pp.360-374, p.360.

This chapter will examine the art structures existing prior to the New Group, and the changes that the Group brought about within these structures. The research will show that the primary reason for the establishment of the New Group was to change these structures so that they became accessible to member artists.

In Cape Town, and to a lesser extent the whole of South Africa, an art establishment existed in the twenties and thirties. The art establishment consisted of a group of very powerful people in the art world ranging from artists such as Gwelo Goodman and George Crosland Robinson (See introduction), critics such as Bernard Lewis, businessmen such as Cecil Sibbett and art administrators such as Edward Roworth who was also an artist. The art establishment was dominated by Roworth in the positions of Head of Michaelis Art School(1937 - 1953), Assistant-Director(1939) and then Director of the South African National Gallery(1941 - 1948), and also the head of the South African Society of Arts(1908, 1918 - 1920, 1933 - 1936)(2). Roworth and other members of the establishment managed to control to a large extent the type of work produced and sold by influencing both the artists and the public's taste in art.

Roworth and the establishment considered romantic realism, according to the researcher's definition cited in the introduction, to be the only art style of any

---

2: Berman, Art and Artists, p.253.

value. Art influenced by modern European artists after the Impressionists was considered unacceptable. Roworth did not introduce this notion of what was good art but, as will be shown, he guarded it carefully against the perceived threat of European modern art, and perpetuated his ideas about art throughout all the structures of art. The first part of this chapter will show how Roworth and the establishment managed to control most aspects of art production and sale.

In the case of art education, it was possible to receive art tuition at the Michaelis School of Art, established in 1920, and The Cape Town Art School or have private lessons with local artists. Other important art schools active during the twenties and thirties were The Johannesburg Art School, The Witwatersrand Technicon, Unisa, The Durban Art School and The Port Elizabeth School of Art(3). The teaching in these schools most often followed the South Kensington method of art education where drawing from the antique and plaster casts dominated the curriculum(4). Information about contemporary European art was not provided in schools and it was not available in art galleries or at exhibitions. In fact the only source of information on contemporary European art was from overseas periodicals found in public libraries(5).

---

3: Thomas, The New Group, pp.21-92, SANG, Paris and SA artists, p.6.

4: SANG, Paris and SA artists, p.6.

5: Arnott, Lipshitz, p.6.

The fact that most of the New Group members, who were in their twenties during this period, received their tertiary education outside South Africa, indicates that a South African art education was not considered desirable. In fact only two members of the New Group received their tertiary education in art solely in South Africa; Piet van Heerden and Walter Battiss(6).

In the case of informal or public education through newspaper criticism, radio and public lectures, the stranglehold was more complete. Most of the Cape Town critics perpetuated Roworth's ideas about art in newspapers and magazines, and Roworth also wrote reviews(7). Some of the earliest writings about South African art are to be found in Die Huisgenoot where articles on artists were included during 1916 and 1917. These "...were intended to stimulate interest in visual art, but they reveal little discrimination or real knowledge on the subject."(8). They were aimed at the Afrikaans public and were intended to promote Afrikaans national aspirations(9). This was also true of Die Brandwag, The Cape and The South African Nation which published articles on art in the twenties and thirties. Afrikaner nationalism in art writings will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Three.

6: See Berman, Art and Artists, pp.312, 37.

7: An example of one of Roworth's reviews is Roworth, E., "Young Painters Farewell", The Cape Argus, 28 April 1937.

8: Scholtz, du P.J., Strat Caldecott, p.25.

9: ibid., p.25.

Strat Caldecott was the only writer who provided readers with information about contemporary European art during this period. He wrote for The South African Nation from November 1927 to late 1928(10). This newspaper was a South African nationalist weekly newspaper that gave space to "...cultural matters...."(11). Caldecott was one of the few writers of the twenties who promoted the work of artists influenced by modern European art. He supported the work of Irma Stern as early as the twenties and wrote about it in an attempt to make her work accessible to the public.

Aside from Caldecott, Roworth and his followers such as Brander controlled the field of art criticism and art history. The first journal article dealing with South African art was an article on landscape painting by Roworth(12) and the first book was W.H.Knox's The Arts in South Africa(13). Both of these will be discussed in the following chapter. As will be shown, these early art historical texts did not discuss European art after Impressionism or African art at all, unless to oppose them.

As a result of the control Roworth and his followers had over art education, they were able to guide public taste

---

10: ibid., p.26.

11: ibid., p.27.

12: Roworth, E., "Landscape Art in South Africa", The Studio Magazine, 1917.

13: Initials only available.

in art and thus the sale of art during the twenties and thirties in Cape Town and to a large extent the rest of South Africa as well. There were many sales venues in Cape Town such as The Argus Gallery, Ashbey's, Maskew Miller's Bookshop, H.A.U.M. Bookshop, I.D. Booksellers, Darters and son, Martin Melck House and artworks could also be sold from the City Hall(14)(Lezards was based in Johannesburg but Cape Town artists sold through them). Even though there were many sales venues, if the work did not conform to the popular taste of romantic realism it did not sell well, and therefore gallery owners were less inclined to hold exhibitions(15). In addition to this, when non-establishment artists did hold exhibitions at a gallery the costs were so high that very little profit was realised. Artists exhibiting at Ashbey's Gallery were paying five pounds a week for the exhibition space plus a ten percent commission on works sold. Insurance and catalogue costs were paid by the gallery(16). Boonzaier noted that many exhibitions during the twenties and early thirties were therefore held in private homes or work was sold from the studios of the artists(17). But, even though work could be sold from home, this was not as efficient as a public venue which could draw

---

14: Stevenson, M. Kukard, J., "An historical Overview of the white South African Art Market with particular reference to the Cape (1652 to 1954)", Current Perspectives in South African Art and Architecture, Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference of the SA Association of Art Historians, Cape Town, 1990, pp.16-18.

15: This has been confirmed by Boonzaier, Interview with Boonzaier.

16: Interview with Basil Robinson.

17: Interview with Gregoire Boonzaier.

crowds and where skilled art sellers could supervise the sale of art.

During the twenties and thirties other factors acted to stimulate the art trade and resulted in the establishment of the numerous sales venues listed above. Firstly, the South African economy flourished during the thirties(18) and this had several effects on the production and sale of art. The increase in available capital resulted in heightened social mobility and the expansion of the middle class(19), the group which made up the largest percentage of art buyers. This meant an increase in the number of potential buyers, and thus the potential for increased activity in the art market(20).

The improved economic situation was not the only factor to stimulate the art trade. Between the wars, there was a large influx of European immigrants who had a tradition of buying art. This was especially so of Jewish immigrants who supported the art market to a large extent during this period. Not only were many of the artists

---

18: An indication of the flourishing economy was that the gold price rose from four to eight pounds per fine ounce between 1932 and 1934 and there was a seventy percent increase in the gross national product (Hallet, Africa Since 1875 Vol II, p.643.). Furthermore from 1934 secondary industry entered a phase of expansion (Coleman, F. L. (ed), Economic History of South Africa, p.213.).

19: Hallet, Africa since 1875, p.84.

20: Albrecht stated that the rise in the middle class in Europe meant an increase in the number of art buyers. Albrecht, M.C., Barnett, J., Griff, M. (eds), The Sociology of Art and Literature, p.662. Although the conditions were different in South Africa, it is assumed that the middle class in this country make up the largest portion of art buyers.

Jewish, for example Irma Stern, Lippy Lipshitz, Wolf Kibel, Moses Kottler, H.V. Meyerowitz, John Dronsfield, but so were many dealers, for example Joe Wolpe. Many Jewish buyers supported the market among them Ben Jaffee and Alfred de Pas(21).

The art market was stimulated by other factors such as the extensive publicity art received during the twenties and early thirties. Articles on art were published in numerous periodicals and newspapers as well as in magazines such as Die Huisgenoot and Die Nuwe Brandwag. Reproductions of South African art were also made available by dealers such as Schweikerdt who distributed printed colour copies of South African art(22).

The opening of the SANG in 1931(23) may also have had an effect on the art market. Although the gallery did not buy many South African art works at the time(24), it still increased the prestige value of buying art. This was because a special and safe place had been created for art indicating its financial and cultural value.

Lastly, the buying of South African art was further promoted by the cultural isolation during the Second

---

21: See The Purwitsky Collection, UCT, Kaplan Centre, 1982. Brochure available from University of Cape Town Libraries which lists Jewish benefactors to art.

22: Pretorius, J.L., Kunshandel in Johannesburg en Pretoria met besondere verwysing na E. Schweikerdt (Edms Bpk), MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1983, p.3.

23: Berman, Art and Artists, p.260.

24: ibid., p.260

World War. Foreign work became unavailable or prohibitively priced(25) and buyers were forced to concentrate on South African artworks.

Thus, economic factors, the arrival of immigrants with a tradition of buying art, increased art publicity, the opening of the SANG and the cultural isolation during the war served to stimulate the South African art market. An indication of the liveliness of the market is that many art sales venues were established during the thirties to take advantage of the increased trade. This is illustrated by statistics from the Bureau of Census which list the establishment of fourteen galleries/curio shops in the thirties as opposed to four in the twenties(26).

Thus art structures did exist during the thirties, but they were inaccessible to young artists who did not work in a romantic realist style. Some New Group artists such as Boonzaier and Lewis had achieved a measure of acclaim before 1938 and probably could sell their work. It was likely however that others such as Higgs, Battiss and Preller could not sell their work at all. But, even though some artists could sell their work, there were many obstacles, such as commission costs, exhibition venues, public taste and art criticism which prevented artists from being able to make a living from their art.

---

25: Berman, E., The Story of South African Painting, p.81.

26: Union of South Africa Bureau of Census and Statistics: Second Survey of the Distribution and Services Sector 1952: Art and Curio Dealers, p.8.

In order for artists to be able to make a living from their art, these obstacles had to be removed. It was this that the New Group focused its energies on.

A useful model for deconstructing the history of the Group is Diane Crane's research of post-war art styles in America. She stated that "Art styles develop within reward systems"(27). By the term "reward system" she referred to the existence of art structures that would allow the artist an income/reward from his/her art. When the existing structures obstructed the sale of art, as in the case of the Group, Crane cited three strategies as being available. Firstly the artists could increase the difference between their work and that of the other art producers and by doing so, they could sell a new product, one whose market had not yet been met. According to Crane, the best way to do this was to introduce a new style(28) or alternatively to give the appearance of introducing a new style. Other ways to increase the marketability of the art included making a specific art product more visible and "...establishing a leadership role in the market by the sheer fact of their size or their ability to represent the most prestigious and visible artists."(29). Thus, according to Crane, an art product needs to be novel/new, to have a prestige value

---

27: Crane, D., The Transformation of the Avant-Garde, (Henceforth known as Crane, The Transformation) p.110.

28: ibid., p.11.

29: ibid., p.113.

and to be able to dominate the market, in order to sell well.

The first step that Crane described was that of differentiating one's own art product from products already on the market. Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser and Wolf Kibel had introduced contemporary European art, especially Expressionism to South Africa in the twenties, and most of the New Group members were producing a watered-down Impressionist version of this in the thirties. Their art was not a new and different art product and this was recognised by members of the Group themselves as well as some of the critics.

After the first exhibition Battiss commented "I then realised that these people were not really progressive"(30), and Lipshitz wrote in 1940

The exhibition is really flat. Mainly a collection of boring landscapes and still-lives - of the Impressionist persuasion, directly inspired by Piper Press reproductions.(31)

Le Roux commented in 1948 that

....the name New Group is a little misleading to some people who imagine it implies that all their members follow the latest art-isms. They have on the contrary welcomed members of the older school.(32)

Contemporary critics also felt that the Group was not producing new work. The critic H.P. commented that there

---

30: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.43.

31: Arnott, Lippy Lipshitz, p.22.

32: reported in Anon, "New Group nears Teens", The Star, 11 March 1948.

was "...little that is new or justifies the expectations of those seeking new experiences in art." and the "...general quality of paintings is rather conventional."(33).

Even though most of the Group members were not producing art which was strongly influenced by contemporary European art, there were a few such as Preller, Battiss and Higgs whose work did show the influence of this sort of art. Higgs was even accused of "...out-moderning the moderns."(34).

In general the New Group was not presenting the public with a new product. But, in order to sell most of their work, they needed to be selling a new art product. In effect, the Group's work became known to the public as new, even though it was not. The public's perception of the Group artists as producers of modern art was probably formed by the Group in the following ways.

Firstly, the name New Group contains the notion that such a group was going to produce a different and new kind of artwork. These connotations were noted by Le Roux who

---

33: H.P., "Sculpture in New Group exhibition", The Cape Argus, 3 May 1939. He continues that the "...exhibition is so safe that it is almost too safe. Artists in a young country can afford to speculate a little more, to try experiments."

34: Brander, "Still Lives by Freida Lock", The Cape Times, 11 July 1939.

commented that the name was therefore misleading because the Group was not producing new work at all(35).

Secondly, it was probably due to the presence of member artists such as Battiss, Higgs and Preller, that all the members of the Group came to be seen as modern artists or supportive of European modern art. This was in spite of the fact that many worked in a style not entirely dissimilar to romantic realism.

A further reason for the New Group's work to be seen as different to romantic realism was that they continually opposed the artists and writers who made up the establishment, such as Roworth. The numerous controversies described in Chapter One indicate how often the New Group became involved in a conflict with the conservatives. Their position in opposition to the establishment was further emphasized by the numerous articles in the press which described the debates and controversies. This led the public to believe that members of the Group were working in a style opposed to romantic realism, i.e. modern art.

Lastly as will be shown, the search for a national art for South Africa caused critics to examine what sort of influences would be desirable in this process. Many critics felt that the influence of European modern art

---

35: reported in Anon, "New Group nears Teens", The Star, 11 March 1948.

would be undesirable, while others felt that this was the correct route for the search for a national South African art to take. As a result of this debate, the New Group became identified with modern or modern-inspired art. This issue is further examined in Chapter Three.

Thus, as a result of the Group's name, the presence of artists strongly influenced by contemporary European art, the Group's position in relation to the establishment and nationalism, the history of the New Group became inextricably linked with that of European modern art in South Africa. It was these factors that caused contemporary writers of the thirties to see the reasons for the formation of the Group as being related to modern art. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

The second step Crane described is for artists to make themselves and their notion of art more visible. It is likely that much of the publicity the Group received was planned. A report on the 1938 Pretoria exhibition states:

Perhaps more can be done with a Publicity Committee, and the suggestion is thrown that more Press should be invited to more of our functions.(36)

Furthermore, minutes from a meeting in 1952 indicate that the Group wrote to international magazines such as The Studio Magazine and Life Magazine in order to generate

---

36: Report of New Group Exhibition held in Pretoria from 25th November to 10th December 1938, photocopy Coll. SANG p.1.

international publicity(37). Lastly, it was noted in the minutes of a 1953 meeting that it was decided to hold a barter exhibition to "...stimulate public interest."(38). It is therefore likely that the Group was aware of the power of and need for publicity, and that they consciously sought it.

Publicity was generated in many ways, through the numerous controversies in which they were involved, and the activities they organised. These were listed in Chapter One. Other than these, the numerous exhibitions and fundraising parties always kept the Group more or less in the public eye. Novel exhibition practices such as entrance fees, barter exhibitions and the sale of catalogues further aided the production of publicity for the Group. Lastly, when members exhibited outside the Group they had to indicate membership of the Group on their catalogues(39). This acted to remind viewers of the presence of the New Group.

The numerous newspaper articles published during the Group's existence indicate the extensive publicity that the New Group did generate. In this way the Group made themselves and their art more visible, and in doing so can be seen as fulfilling the second strategy described by Crane towards gaining power in the art world.

---

37: Minutes from meeting 12 November 1952, photocopy Coll. SANG.

38: Minutes from meeting held on 15 July 1953, photocopy Coll. SANG.

39: Constitution of New Group 1939, photocopy Coll. SANG.

The third strategy Crane described involved establishing leadership by numerical superiority or by having members with high visibility and prestige. In other words dominating the art world by influencing most of the practicing artists, especially the well-known artists, by means of a controlling body. Chapter One has indicated that most of the professional artists working in South Africa between 1938 and 1954 belonged to the Group at some point during its existence. To a large extent only artists who were well established or had a private income or means of surviving financially did not join the Group at some time during its existence, even though many of these non-member artists took part in the activities of the Group, for example Irma Stern and Gwelo Goodman(40). The fact that artists who were financially secure did not join the Group, indicates that the major role of the Group was of a financial nature, that is organising and financially facilitating exhibitions and the sale of art.

The last strategy described by Crane was to have prestigious members, or members with a high visibility. In order to achieve this, the Group had to incorporate some acclaimed artists from the establishment such as

---

40: Gwelo Goodman, an establishment artist donated ten pounds to the Group to help them on their way and "...promised to keep a fatherly eye on the New Group." as well as "help with advice and criticism". Schoonraad, The New Group, p.44 quoting from an untitled article in The Cape Times, 20 April 1938. Irma Stern, an artist who was wealthy enough not to need the financial support offered by the Group, exhibited with the New Group in 1941. Thomas, The New Group, p.90.

Charles Peers who was the first chairperson of the Group. As has been described above, the New Group also had contact with Gwelo Goodman. A further prestigious member was Boonzaier who had also achieved a measure of fame as a child prodigy(41). There were also notorious artists such as Preller, Higgs and Battiss who were well-known because of the innovative nature of their work and more importantly the critics responses to it.

Part of maintaining the prestige of the Group was to promote the Group in academic circles by publicising their art in academic journals and in art history. Jensen commented on the importance to the art market of controlling the way in which an artist or art group is represented in art history(42). The New Group controlled the way in which they were represented in art history by writing many of the accounts of the Group's work and history themselves, for example Battiss' article in The Studio Magazine. Other members who wrote on the Group's art or activities were Lippy Lipshitz, Joyce Ordbrown, Maurice van Essche, Neville Lewis, Francois Krige and Erik Laubscher(43).

---

41: see Roworth, E., "Young Painters farewell", The Cape Argus, 28 April 1937.

42: Jensen, R., "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in art", Art Journal, Winter 1988, Vol 47 no 4, pp.360-374, p.360.

43: Lewis, N., "Nazism in art", The Cape Times, 26 September 1940.

Anon, "Cape Town Artists Indignant", The Cape Times, 14 August 1939.

Ordbrown, J., "Modern Art", The Cape Times, 3 October 1940.

van Essche, M., "Accomplished Technique of Jean Welz", The Cape Times, 12 June 1952.

Aside from the strategies brought to light by Crane, the Group was also involved in other activities which positively affected the members' ability to make and sell work. As Chapter One has indicated the New Group provided public access to art influenced by contemporary European art through their exhibitions, articles and public lectures. Potential buyers were taught about the art the New Group was selling and this acted to encourage them to buy such an art. The New Group also played an important role in teaching art at tertiary institutions, thus ensuring that such an art would continue to be produced. In effect the education strategies ensured that an appreciative audience for their work would be created and continue to exist.

The New Group played a major role in ensuring that member artists' work would be exhibited and sold. This they did by providing member artists with cheaper exhibition space and by organising the exhibitions themselves. Lastly the publicity generated by the Group acted to encourage visitors and possibly buyers to come to their

---

van Essche, M., "Remarkable Talent of Gerard Sekoto", The Cape Times, 28 June 1954.

Battiss, W., "Many Art Shows but how much is art?", The Cape Argus, 5 February 1955.

Lipshitz, L., "The Hole in the Sculpture", The Cape Times, 28 September 1954.

van Essche, M., "Modern Art", The Argus, 6 October 1947.

Laubscher, E., "Modern Art and Dr Pickerill", The Cape Times, 17 July 1952.

Le Roux, L., "Art and Social Change", The Cape Times, 2 May 1942.

exhibitions. This made it easier for the artists involved to sell their work.

In effect, the Group looked after the interests of their members at most stages of art production and all stages of art distribution. In doing so they set up structures which could enable members to become professional artists and to make a living from their work. It is debatable whether or not all these activities were consciously planned to facilitate these aims. It is however likely that most of these activities were consciously directed towards this end as Boonzaier, the main organiser of the Group remarked; "...when we started the New Group, it was with the intent of making a living and not history."(44). Thus the origins of the Group lie in an attempt to help artists to make a living from their art by providing them with access to efficient art structures.

Other histories of the New Group ascribe the Group's establishment to two factors; an altruistic desire to improve the standard of art in South Africa and a rebellion against the conservative art establishment.

Volschenk's writings are an example of the first approach to the New Group's aims. He commented that the Group formed in a "....conscious effort to breathe new life

---

44: Interview Michael Stevenson with Gregoire Boonzaier, Onrus, 31 May 1990.

into art."(45). Thomas' thesis also fits loosely into this category. She saw the New Group as "...creating an audience for Modern Art"(46). The SANG information sheet states that when overseas educated artists returned to South Africa

...filled with fresh ideas and with a new vision they found the situation stultifying and out of this frustration was born the New Group.(47)

Arnott views the origins of the Group in the same light(48).

The second explanation focuses on the New Group's rebellion against the conservative art establishment. Bekker's article is an example of this approach(49) as is Thomas's thesis in which she states that they formed "To overthrow the stifling and inert standards of the so-called cognoscenti."(50).

Essentially the two stated reasons are correct, but they do not give the full picture for two reasons. Firstly, these two aims were part of a larger aim to provide artists with accessible and efficient production and retail structures. The success the Group had in uplifting the standard of art in South Africa and in

45: Volschenk, P., Kleur as skilderkunstige element in die werk van Gregoire Boonzaier, unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1971, p.180.

46: Thomas, The New Group, p.2.

47: SANG Information sheet PAY 209.68, Coll. SANG.

48: Arnott, Lippy Lipshitz, p.18.

49: "dit is verstaan dat...[Die Nuwe Groep] teen die gangbare kunsopset in die Kaap sou rebeleer" Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27 December 1978, pp.51-55, p.52.

50: Thomas, The New Group, p.4.

changing the power structure of the art world was only due to the success achieved by the Group in providing accessible avenues through which artists could produce and sell their work. As a result of their schemes and activities the Group achieved power in the art world and was able to influence public taste. Artists could therefore sell work more regularly and be more productive. Furthermore due to the marketing strategies of the New Group, many more artists could work professionally as the market could support more artists. Because of this and other factors, such as the overseas art education most of the New Group members received, the standard of art in South Africa can be seen to have been uplifted as a result of the efforts of the New Group.

The second reason why the cited aims do not give the full picture is that they position the New Group in direct opposition to the establishment when in fact many Group members such as Charles Peers, Boonzaier, Lewis etc were part of the establishment. Thus this explanation oversimplifies the issue.

Thus, the cited reasons for the formation of the New Group either oversimplify the issues involved, or do not recognise the overarching aim of the New Group; to help artists make a living from their work. It was this aim that directed the construction, administration and focus of the New Group. Furthermore, it was the achievement of

this goal that was the deciding factor in the dissolution of the New Group.

The reasons for the dissolution of the Group relate strongly to the reasons for the formation of the Group. The Group had formed to allow artists to make a living by making the art structures more accessible. This they had achieved to a large extent by its dissolution in 1954 which was described in the previous chapter.

The Group had played an important role in crushing Roworth's power within the art world. Although Roworth resigned from the SANG in 1941 and as Professor of Michaelis in 1953, his position within the art world had been consistently eroded by the New Group since its inception in 1938. This was done by educating the public and by continually pointing out Roworth's errors and indiscretions, for example in the IBM Two Pictures affair. Boonzaier in a letter to Battiss in 1951 argued that "It was largely the Group that undermined Roworth."(51).

The New Group was also successful in changing other art structures such as those of education, the sale and to a lesser extent production of art. Partly as a result of their success in these fields, they were successful in changing public taste in art, and people began buying

---

51: Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss dated 17 January 1951, photocopy Coll. SANG.

artwork other than romantic realist landscapes(52). Joubert commented that by the fifties "...the battle for the recognition of modern art had largely been won."(53).

The Group had also gained official recognition in 1948 at an exhibition of South African work at the Tate Gallery in London. Of the 44 South African artists represented, 23 were active members of the Group(54). A New Group catalogue states that

During 1947 it received the signal honour of being selected by the Government as being representative of the best in South African professional art, and exhibitions of the work of its members have been held under the aegis of the State Information Office outside the borders of the Union.(55)

In effect the Group had achieved both its manifest and hidden aims. They had uplifted the standard of art in South Africa, but more importantly, the Group had facilitated accessible art structures through which artists could possibly earn a living by selling their art.

An indication of the success of the New Group's activities is the large number of important artists from this period, for example Lippy Lipshitz, Cecil Higgs,

---

52: My opinion is supported by those of Thomas, The New Group, p.15, Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55, p.54.

53: Joubert, Exhibitions, p.6.

54: Berman, Art and Artists, p.210.

55: Catalogue of Exhibitions of paintings and Sculptures by members of the New Group, Gainsborough Galleries Johannesburg 1948, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Jean Welz, Walter Battiss and Alexis Preller. These artists had achieved artistic success largely because they were supported during their early struggling years by the efforts of the Group. Without the Group many of these artists may have been forced to find another vocation or source of income which would have limited or eliminated the time they could spend producing art. It is notable that the number of professional artists from this period far exceed those from other periods in South African art history. This indicates the important and different role the New Group played in the history of art of South Africa and the expansion of the South African art market.

As has been described the Group created a "...viable market for art."(56) and especially for the art of the Group. As a result of this artists no longer needed the financial support of the Group to sell their work. The lack of need for financial support was further heightened by the economic boom and the increased number of potential buyers. Boonzaier commented in a letter to Battiss in 1951 that

...the Art Boom that flourished as the war went on; made it seem no longer necessary [for artists] to exhibit with the New Group in order to sell. They were consequently too busy with their own "one-man shows" and as their interest in the Group in any case were purely personal and materialistic, they soon found no further use for any kind of Group.(57)

---

56: Thomas, The New Group, p.15.

57: Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Another factor affecting the dissolution of the Group was the wide entrance requirements. These had initially allowed many members to join and thus increased the power of the Group. It had also allowed artists of differing degrees of conservatism to be active within the Group. As a result two sub-groups formed within the New Group, the more conservative artists such as Boonzaier whose work was largely representational and focused on South Africa, and artists such as Preller, Battiss and Higgs whose work was influenced by international trends such as Abstraction. When the economic and social reasons for the New Group fell away, these divisions became more apparent and the latter group of artists left to join the International Art Club in the late forties and early fifties.

The International Art Club was formed in 1948 by artists such as Irma Stern and Maurice van Essche(58) to link up with a bigger International Art Club based in Italy to which artists such as Picasso, Matisse and Leger belonged(59). This organisation offered South African artists a chance to exhibit internationally and also to be exposed to international art activities which the New Group could not do.

Artists were also drawn away for other reasons, for example to take part in the Second World War. Five Group

---

58: van Essche also belonged to the New Group at the same time. Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

59: Berman, Art and Artists, p.147.

members left to become war artists and others left to fight in the war. Boonzaier commented in a letter to Battiss that one of the reasons for the dissolution of the Group was that "...some of the members became war artists"(60).

Lastly, during the late forties attention was drawn away from the Cape to the Transvaal where The Wits Group had started exhibiting in 1948(61), and where more money was available for art purchasing. As most of the art activity began to concentrate in Johannesburg, Cape Town based art Groups, such as the New Group, lost some of their attraction, and began to be seen as a backwater group by artists and the art public. Boonzaier commented that

This unfortunate state of affairs arose not because the Group had become sterile or oldfashioned or conservative (62)

In fact the New Group had not become old-fashioned: most of its members had always produced outdated work, especially in terms of European art. When the Group's work was compared to other contemporary art groups such as the Wits Group or the International Art Club, its

---

60: Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

61: The Wits Group included artists such as Christo Coetzee, Lawrence Scully, Cecil Skotnes, Nel Erasmus and Gordon Vorster. They started exhibiting in Johannesburg in the late forties. Their work was influenced by European and American contemporary art as well as African art. Berman, Art and Artists, pp.337-338.

62: Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

conservative nature became even more apparent. The public and the art world began to see the Group as the new establishment(63) even though the Group had always been linked to Roworth's establishment and had never really been new at all. Instead it had produced largely establishment art, but promoted it as if it was new.

---

63: Interview with Boonzaier.

### Chapter Three: Nationalism

---

The first two chapters gave an account of the history of the New Group against which one can evaluate other accounts of the Group. The following chapters discuss the early writings on the New Group and the way in which they influenced the written history of the New Group. In order to do this, the factors influencing the early writings must be examined.

Possibly the most influential agent affecting writings about art during the existence of the Group was white nationalism which played a very "...important part in the cultural milieu of the 30's and 40's."(1). This chapter will provide a brief background to the politics of nationalism from 1931 to circa 1950, and in doing so clarify the importance of nationalism to the New Group and its influence on early art writings.

Three types of white nationalism have been identified for the purposes of this research; English nationalism, South African nationalism and Afrikaner nationalism. The three terms are used only in order to clarify the issue of

---

1: Joubert, Exhibitions, p.153.

nationalism, and were not as clear cut in reality. To a large extent the groups were defined by the way each grouping formulated the relationship between South Africa and Britain.

White English nationalists saw Britain as their homeland. They desired strong links with Britain whose political and cultural lead they would follow. This group was largely represented by the followers of Colonel Stallard(2) and was the smallest grouping of the three. As a result this group played a lesser role in South African politics during the period in question.

The South African nationalists included English and Afrikaans speakers, any white person who considered South Africa his/her homeland and desired the independence and growth of the country as a nation separate from Britain. The United Party represented this standpoint as it combined both English and Afrikaans speaking leaders, Smuts and Herzog, and intended to unite the white population(3).

---

2: Colonel Stallard, C. W. Coulter and J. S. Marwick put forth their standpoint in a pamphlet called Status of the Union Act 1934 its origin, meaning and effect, Researchers Coll.

3: de Klerk, A., The Puritans in Africa, (henceforth known as de Klerk, Puritans in Africa) p.206.

Afrikaner nationalists desired complete independence from Britain and British culture. This group worked loosely under the aegis of the Broederbond which directed political and social development(4), while organisations such as the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuur(FAK) set up in 1929, and the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereeniging(AKTV) established in the thirties, controlled the development of Afrikaans culture(5).

The interaction between the three groupings dominated Twentieth Century South African politics until the early forties(6). This dissertation will only look at the factors that directed the relationship between the three groupings that are directly relevant to the research.

In 1931 South Africa became independent from Britain by means of the Statute of Westminster although she was still a member of the British Commonwealth(7). The English nationalists deplored the weakening of ties with the mother nation and petitioned against the move(8). The bill was supported by the South African nationalists who desired independence, whereas the Afrikaner

---

4: ibid., p.61.

5: ibid., p.61

6: Hallet, Africa since 1875, p.663.

7: ibid., p.663

8: see Colonel Stallard, C. W. Coulter and J. S. Marwick, Status of the Union Act 1934 its origin, meaning and effect, Researcher's Coll.

nationalists felt that the break with Britain had not gone far enough(9).

A further factor influencing white nationalism was an intensification of resistance politics in the Cape during the thirties, starting with the organisation of the Cape rural workers by the African National Congress in 1928. The African League of Rights was formed in 1929, the Pass Burning campaign occurred in the following year as did the formation of the All-African Convention(10). These occurrences encouraged white Afrikaans and English speakers to band together in order to maintain political and economic supremacy.

In 1934 the Smuts-Herzog coalition came into power with the object of uniting white English and Afrikaans speakers in a unified South African Party, and South Africanism rather than language nationalism was encouraged(11). Newspapers such as Die Suidersstem were used to promote this(12). During this period there was

---

9: O'Meara, D., Volkskapitalisme Class, Capital and Ideology in the development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948, (henceforth known as O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme) p.61.

10: Readers Digest, The Real Story, pp.336-337.

11: Wilson, M., Thompson, L.(eds), The Oxford History of South Africa : South Africa 1887-1966, (henceforth known as Wilson, Thompson, The Oxford history of SA), p.380.

12: No evidence of this exists in historical texts, but Wassenaar and Boonzaier both confirm this to be true. Interview with Dr A.D. Wassenaar, previous head of SANLAM and ex-member of the Broederbond, Newlands, 11 February

increased mixing between Afrikaner and Englishmen as a result of Afrikaans migration to the towns and there was a steady increase in bilingualism from 42% in 1918 to 73% in 1951(13). The period from 1934 to 1939 has been termed the "...golden age of fusion when Boer and British came together in a wider context."(14). There were "...differences and tensions..." between these white language Groups, but these were "...far less than those that lie between white and black."(15).

As a result of the perceived threat of black South Africans to white South Africans, Hendrik Verwoerd, later to be associated with the Afrikaner nationalists, indicated a broader kind of nationalism in 1938. This nationalism included all white South Africans and not only the "Boerenasie"(16). Thus, although the Afrikaners were "...almost exclusively concerned with maintaining their position vis-a-vis the English..." from the mid twenties to the mid thirties, by 1938 many were identifying with a South African nationalism which included both white language groups(17).

---

1991 (henceforth known as Interview Wassenaar). Interview with Boonzaier.

13: Hallet, Africa since 1875, p.653.

14: de Klerk, Puritans in Africa, p.201.

15: Hallet, Africa since 1875, p.653.

16: Readers Digest, The Real Story, pp.204-206.

17: ibid., p.211.

Although the two white language groups were united politically during the late thirties, there was still much antagonism between the groups. An example of this was the 1938 commemorative Great Trek in which English and Afrikaans speakers marched together. Although marching side by side gave the impression of a united white South Africa, two English speakers - Solly Sachs and Alan Paton wrote that some English marchers found some of the Afrikaans trekkers exclusive and anti-English(18). Furthermore, only Afrikaans speakers were invited and even Herzog was considered by the Afrikaner nationalists who organised the trek to be too anglicized to speak(19). This indicates that a deep rift existed between the two white language groups.

The division between the groups became more apparent during the Second World War due to differing opinions as to what role South Africa should play. Generally the English speakers wished to support England in the war, while the Afrikaners either did not want to do so, or wanted to support Britain's enemy, Germany(20). To a large extent the differing opinions caused the break-up of the United Party and the resignation of Herzog in

---

18: Harrison, D., The White Tribe of Africa(henceforth known as Harrison, White Tribe), p.112.

19: ibid., p.112

20: Wilson, Thompson, The Oxford history of SA, p.382.

1939. Smuts then led the country to war on the side of the Allies(21).

In 1940, due to further differences within the Afrikaans nationalist group, Herzog resigned from political life altogether(22). His notion of a united white South Africa was perpetuated in the form of the Afrikaner Party, but the rift between Englishman and Afrikaner had become too deep and the party gained no seats in the 1943 election(23).

In 1947 Malan, then head of the National Party, entered into an electoral agreement with the Afrikaner Party and won the following elections in 1948. Once in power the National Party set about consolidating its position and through "...political rule and a network of Afrikaans organisations.", Afrikaner nationalism finally became consolidated(24).

Thus during the period of the existence of the New Group from 1938 to 1954, three types of white nationalism had

---

21: ibid.,

22: ibid., pp.383-384.

23: ibid., p.384.

24: "Met die 1948-oorwinning is die Afrikanerheid gekonsolideer deur middel van politieke mag en n' netwerk van Afrikaanse organisasies". Labuschagne, E.C., Die Geskiedenis en Betekenis van die Afrikaanse Kultuurraad Pretoria 1930-1980, MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1980, p.15.

existed, but two forms had dominated. During the early years, the predominant ideology was one of conciliation between English and Afrikaans speakers and the notion of a united white South Africa achieved prominence. However due to the effects of the Second World War as well as other factors, Afrikaans nationalism gained support from about 1940.

Prior to 1940 the political arena was dominated by the changing relationship between white English and Afrikaans South Africans. The dominant political ideology varied from one of antagonism and separatism between the two white groups to one of unification. During this period white South Africans did perceive a threat to white supremacy from black South Africans, but it was only after 1940 that the relationship between white South Africans and Black South Africans became of major importance in parliamentary politics(25).

The importance of nationalism in politics filtered down to other spheres including art. The next section of this chapter will indicate how nationalism influenced art and writers' perceptions of art. This section will consider the cultural positions of the Afrikaner nationalists and

---

25: Hallet, Africa since 1875, p.663.

the English nationalists, as well as those whose notions of a South African art fell in between these two poles.

During the twenties many Afrikaners had been educated in Britain or overseas or had been immigrants from Holland, for example Diedrichs, Verwoerd and Herzog(26). As a result

...most educated Afrikaners of that time [20s and 30s]...[were] strongly influenced by English culture which was as popular in the Free State as in the Cape Colony.(27)

However, in spite of this, and largely as a result of anti-English sentiment, Afrikaans culture was seen as being derived from Dutch or German ancestry and a "...love and "feel" for the land and "volk.""(28). According to Joubert, Afrikaner nationalist art during the twenties and thirties was art that

...combined use of local subject-matter with a style adjusted to specifically South African circumstances, such as climate..., [and a]...combination of soul and atmosphere, the sobriety and serious outlook on life...[and a]...pervasive air of tragedy.(29)

Joubert continues to say that

An artist had to be nationalistic in his attunement to his environment, his sense for colours, and his

---

26: O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, p.64.

27: Kruger, The Making, p.136.

28: Bedford, E., Assignment 1 PTG 000-K, UNISA Honours Course, 1989, p.1, also see Farlam, C., J. H. Pierneef, 'Cultural hero': A reappraisal in the context of the emergence of Afrikaner Nationalism with relation to the artists Station Panels (1929-1932), Honours Dissertation, UCT, 1990 which reiterates this opinion.

29: Joubert, Exhibitions, p.156.

choice of subject in order to produce a national art.(30)

English culture and to a certain extent European culture was perceived by Afrikaner nationalists as foreign, alien and 'uitlander' culture, and as such was considered undesirable as an influence in Afrikaans culture. In 1932 the Chairman of the Executive Council of the Broederbond declared that

I consider that national culture and national welfare cannot unfold fully if the people of South Africa do not constitutionally sever all foreign ties.(31)

Although he was referring directly to constitutional matters, this attitude filtered down to all levels of life including the production of and writing about art. It is noteworthy that this attitude was still prevalent in 1950 when C.R. Swart, the Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences

...advised students not to try to adopt strange ways and customs [meaning those of 'foreign' cultures]. A man who attempted to pose as something he was not always rang false.(32)

From the Afrikaans nationalist writings about art it is apparent that the most important requisite of an Afrikaans national art was that it had to be representational. This was important because

---

30: *ibid.*, p.156.

31: Wilkins, I., Strydom, H., The Super Afrikaners, p.59.

32: cited in Anon, "Appeals for co-operation between English and Afrikaner", The Pretoria News, 22 April 1950.

representational art allowed viewers and especially white Afrikaans viewers uneducated in art, easier access to an artwork than abstract or distorted forms of art. Furthermore, representational art was perceived by Afrikaans nationalist art writers as being free from the influence of undesirable 'foreign' cultures. It is notable that the only Afrikaans painter who was praised for working in a vaguely unrepresentational manner during this period was Pierneef with his so-called "Cezannesque" interpretations of the highveld(33). A possible reason for this may have been his active role in the Afrikaner nationalist cause.

Not only did the Afrikaans nationalist art writers define the form that Afrikaans nationalist art could take, but they also defined the materials in which an Afrikaans art could be constructed. This included painting, sculpture or print work as it was said that "Traditional mats, ornaments, leatherwork and pottery is above all kaffirwork"(34). Certain mediums were considered inferior and as such only appropriate for black African artists/craftsmen.

---

33: Farlam, C., J. H. Pierneef, 'Cultural hero': A reappraisal in the context of the emergence of Afrikaner Nationalism with relation to the artists Station Panels (1929-1932), Honours Dissertation, UCT, 1990, pp.18-41.

34: "Inheemse matte, ornamente, leerwerk, pottebakkerij is veral kafferwerk." Bosman, F.C.L., Afrikaanse Kultuurbesit 'n Oorsig, p.6.

African art was seen by contemporary writers as an undesirable influence on the art of the white man for the following reasons. Firstly, white ideologies perceived black culture to be inferior to western culture, and thus their art would be seen as such as well. Secondly, the prevailing white Eurocentric view that African art and culture was uncivilised implied that artists and writers making use of this influence would be losing their civilization. As Fine Art was understood by whites to be the epitome of civilisation and high culture, the influence of 'non-civilised' cultures was considered undesirable by white nationalist writers. Lastly, African art was seen as craft, not high art and therefore an inferior influence. This prejudice also resulted from assessing traditional African art according to western art conventions which made it appear unskilled. As such African art was viewed by most Afrikaans white writers as a negative and inferior influence on the development of a white National art and one to be avoided. This attitude was also prevalent amongst the English writers.

The conservative English community was largely represented in the cultural arena by Roworth, whose actions and beliefs about art have been described in Chapters One and Two. As will be indicated later, due to

his conservative notion of art, Roworth was also supported, to some extent, by Afrikaans nationalist writers such as Bernard Lewis.

Roworth declared that European modern art was "degenerate" and "decadent" and that "...degeneracy in art meant degeneracy in the whole life of a nation..."(35). He also publicly declared his support for Hitler's "purging" of this form of art(36). An indication of the kind of art Roworth considered desirable can be found in his article on South African landscape in The Studio Magazine of 1917(37). It is apparent from Roworth's later comments and writings that his attitude to art did not change. In the earlier article he chose the work of Gwelo Goodman, Pieter Wenning, Hugo Naudé, Nita Spilhaus, Gordon Pilkington, McCullough Robertson, Sydney Taylor and himself to illustrate his argument. Most of the works are Impressionistic, romantic conceptions of the South African landscape.

In 1940 Roworth declared that he had founded a South African school of painting among his students at

---

35: Anon, "Work of Michaelis School praised", The Cape Times, 25 September 1940.

36: Anon, "More criticism of Prof Roworth", The Cape Times, 28 September 1940.

37: Roworth, E., "Landscape Art in South Africa", The Studio Magazine, 1917.

Michaelis Art School which would form South Africa's national art(38). Of these artworks Lippy Lipshitz wrote that they were "... anemic and technically incompetent imitations of Turner, Etty and Wheatley."(39).

Both the English conservatives and the Afrikaans nationalists visualised the national art of South Africa as representational and free from the alien influence of modern European art as well as free from the 'inferior' influence of African art. Thus, although they were in different camps and their art differed, the English conservatives and Afrikaans nationalists held the same notion of what a national art should not consist of. These two groups formed a strong lobby to promote and maintain their notion of a national art, and it was against this strong union that the New Group had to battle.

Joubert claims that the most popular artists amongst the Afrikaans nationalists were Frans Oerder, The Wiles family of artists, Wilhelm Coetzer, Tinus de Jongh, Hugo Naudé, Pieter Wenning, Anton van Wouw, Coert Steynberg and Fanie Eloff because their work had varying overtones

---

38: Anon, "Work of Michaelis School praised ", The Cape Times, 25 September 1940.

39: Lippy Lipshitz quoted in Anon, "Prof Roworth's Reply to his critics", The Cape Times, 27 September 1940.

of patriotism(40). An indication of these artists' popularity is that between 1944 and 1947 numerous forgeries of their work were entered onto the art market(41). It is likely that the demand for their work(which caused forgers to make fake Wennings and de Jonghs) was stimulated by buyers in both the English and Afrikaans communities(42).

During the thirties a few books were published on South African art. Most were published in English, although there were some in Afrikaans. These books reflected the various groups' approaches to nationalism and a national art for South Africa.

To the best knowledge of the author, the first general South African art book was The Arts in South Africa by W.H.Knox which was published between 1933 and 1934(43). It was a general book which included sections on Drama, Broadcasting, Dancing, Music, Literature and

---

40: Joubert, Exhibitions, p.4.

41: Berman, Art and Artists, p.121.

42: It is interesting to note that English and Afrikaans representations of the landscape differ in subject matter. Many of the Afrikaans nationalist artists such as Volschenk, Pierneef and Coetzer often depicted wild or untamed land, whereas English artists such as Edward Roworth and Gwelo Goodman, painted scenes of farms and the city. Perhaps this could have occurred as a result of the strong influence Constable had on English South African landscape painters.

43: W.H.Knox(ed.), The Arts in South Africa (henceforth known as W.H.Knox, Arts in South Africa).

Architecture. This book provides an excellent vehicle for illustrating how nationalism and the search for a national art influenced writings about art.

The Fine Arts section was written by Leo Francois, J.A. Smith and Professor M.L. du Toit. A brief description of the artists, including their addresses, follows each writer's contribution. It is presumed that the choice of the artists was made by the editor W.H.Knox, and not the individual authors as du Toit praises the work of Volskenk, but he is not listed amongst the artists appearing after the text or in fact anywhere in the section on the visual arts(44).

The first author, Leo Francois, was a Luxembourg national who most probably held pro-British convictions(45). He discusses the issue of a national art and concludes that

Whether South Africa is destined to develop a distinctive national art of its own is in the lap of

---

44: ibid., pp.187-189.

45: Francois was born in Luxembourg and moved to South Africa in 1891 on Cecil John Rhodes advice. He spent a year in Europe after the Jameson Raid in 1896 (see Berman, Art and Artists, p.177.) It is interesting that Berman includes the Jameson Raid in his biography, possibly indicating that Francois identified with the leaders of the Raid. Francois initiated the South African Institute of Art of which he became the first member in 1926. He was also a member of the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists (see ibid., p.177.). His background and link with Cecil Rhodes, as well as his alignment with the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists suggests that he would be pro-British in political conviction.

the Gods...[but that]...the ultimate future of a fine, virile South African art is assured.(46)

Francois does not discuss modern art in South Africa or Europe, but only states that it is one of the trends of art today alongside "academic" art(47). Of African artists he comments

They possess an undeniable penchant for handicraft...,[but it is very] doubtful [that this] talent will lend itself to development on the lines of European standards.(48)

Although his approach to African art is Eurocentric, it is noteworthy that he did include a discussion of such art, something that would not be repeated for many years in a general book on South African Art. It is probable that the next general book on South African art to include a discussion of black artists would be Battiss' South African Paint Pot, published in 1940(49).

The second author to write on fine art in The Arts in South Africa was J.A. Smith, the Arts Editor of Die Burger from 1925 to 1940. Smith was an Afrikaner

---

46: W.H.Knox, Arts in South Africa, p.168.

47: ibid., p.168.

48: The quote continues that "It is hoped, however that sooner or later in the course of cultural progress there will arise among the Native people, teachers with artistic attainments and ideals of their own to give a new impetus to art well worth cultivating. In this respect it should be realised that the native mind works in different channels from that of the European artists and is inclined to look upon impetus from a curious angle", ibid., p.167.

49: Battiss, W., South African Paint Pot.

nationalist who fought on the side of the Boer commandos in the Anglo-Boer war and later as an Adjutant-General of the Ossewabrandwag. He was also a practicing artist(50).

Smith's article also dealt with the issue of a national art. He commented

...we have already the indication of the existence of South African art expressing the spirit of our young nationhood.(51)

and insisted that "No dictation or influence is desired..."(52) in this process. By "dictation or influence" he would be referring to African art and European contemporary art.

The third article on fine art was written by Professor M.L. du Toit and titled "Art in Afrikaans Culture". The author was at the time the head of the Cultural Studies Department at the University of Pretoria(53).

The article dealt with the artistic life of the "Afrikanders"(54). He described two highlights of Afrikaans culture; Volschenk "The great cultural value of Volschenk cannot be overrated..."(55) and Cape Dutch architecture, "... the greatest achievement of the Dutch

---

50: Berman, Art and Artists, p.83.

51: W.H.Knox, Arts in South Africa, p.177.

52: ibid., p.177.

53: ibid., p.187.

54: ibid., p.187.

55: ibid., p.187.

South Africans in this field [art] was his home itself."(56).

In this article du Toit positions the emerging Afrikaans art within the confines of an exclusively Afrikaans culture. It is seen as deriving from everyday life; Kleiosse(57), Cape Dutch Houses, farm and landscape scenes. du Toit does not mention the possibility of the influence of European modern art or African art on an Afrikaans art.

It is noteworthy that modern art and African art were not discussed in this book. By the time of the book's publication in 1933 Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser and Wolf Kibel had exhibited work of a modern, Expressionist nature. Furthermore Stern's work displayed an awareness of African art. Smith as the arts editor of Die Burger, and du Toit as the head of the Cultural Studies Department in Pretoria presumably must have been aware of these potential influences, and yet did not discuss them at all. This would indicate that they were not considered relevant by these authors in a discussion of an Afrikaans national art.

---

56: ibid., p.189.

57: Of Sculpture, he states that it "...never played an important role in the life of the Afrikaner, yet he was a sculptor in his own way - nearly every boy fashioned and baked his "Kleiosse".", ibid., p.188.

The chapter so far has discussed the importance of nationalism to art, and the way in which it affected writers' notion of what good art was. It is necessary at this point to look at why the work of the New Group and the writings on the New Group became the battlefield on which the controversy of a national art was fought.

The first reason was simply that most of the art work produced between 1938 and 1954 was done within the ranks of the New Group. An anonymous article appearing in Die Vaderland of 1948 commented that there were only 121 practising artists during this period(58) and New Group membership lists ranging from 31(59) to 82(60), indicate that the majority of practising artists belonged to, or exhibited under the aegis of the New Group. F.P. Scott, a later writer stated that

At one stage [it is likely that he means the forties] all the country's leading artists, with one or two exceptions, were members [of the New Group].(61)

Thus, if a national art was to going to develop during this period, it would have probably been made by the members of the New Group, to which most of the practising artists in South Africa at the time belonged.

---

58: Anon, "Hoe Die Afrikaans Kuns vorder", Die Vaderland, 7 April 1948, p.8.

59: Thomas, The New Group, p.21.

60: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

61: Scott, F.P., Gregoire Boonzaier, p.17.

A further reason for the debate over a national art to be centred on the Group derived from the critics' perception of the New Group as having no unified artistic program. In his books Bouman(1942, 1949) does not mention the Group as a whole at all but lists members under styles(62). P.H.W.(1939) commented on the "...broadness and catholicity of [artistic] interpretation...."(63), and Prebble Rayner(1945) noted that

...there are unlimited means of art expression, and in this respect the New Group is openly catholic in its acceptances.(64)

Furthermore, D.G.(1938) argued that it was

...obvious at once that for the moment at any rate, there is no common object nor aim nor even community of interest among the seventeen artists who are exhibiting.(65)

Brander claimed that "There is in its exhibitions a catholic spirit. "(66). The lack of a unified artistic program allowed each art writer to find within the New Group a representation of their notion of a national art. An illustration of this is that Afrikaans nationalist writers used the work of Hugo Naudé while English

---

62: see Bouman, Painters of South Africa where most of the New Group artists are listed under a chapter on Expressionism.

63: P.H.W., "New Group's Exhibition has Wide Appeal", The Cape Times, 4 May 1938.

64: Rayner, P., "Good Meat in Plenty", Trek, 18 May 1945.

65: D.G., "Exhibition opened today by Mrs Thorne", The Cape Argus, 4 May 1938.

66: Lewis, B., "New Group Exhibition at Stellenbosch", The Cape Argus, 31 July 1939.

nationalists used the work of Charles Peers as examples of their version of a national art.

New Group members did enter the debate over a national art for South Africa, but usually it was to disclaim the possibility of such an art. Neville Lewis, for example, argued that

There has never been in the history of art a national school of painting in any country.(67)

Other than members who disclaimed the possibility of the existence of a national art, the New Group was not actively involved in the debate over a national art. Perhaps this may have resulted from the large number of foreign nationals within the Group such as van Essche, Broadley and Lipshitz. It could also have resulted from the fact that providing a national art for South Africa was not part of the Group's programme which was aimed at facilitating artists to make a living from their art.

This chapter has indicated the importance of nationalism to art, and the way in which it influenced art discourse. It has also shown that the New Group was not particularly interested in this debate, and that the responsibility for a national art which was thrust upon them by critics and writers, was not desired or felt appropriate by the

---

67: Lewis, N., "Nazism in Art", The Cape Argus, 27 September 1940.

New Group. Most importantly, it has become apparent that the concern with nationalism was largely confined to writers about art, the very same writers who were to generate histories of the New Group.

Chapter Four: An introduction to the early writers on the  
New Group

---

The history of the New Group and the influence of nationalism on the writings about the Group have been examined in the previous chapters. The latter half of this thesis deals with the early writings about the Group and the way in which they influenced later histories of the New Group.

This chapter provides an introduction to the early writers on the Group. It acts to introduce the writers and in the case of the more prolific authors, give a brief introduction to their writings. Initially, the chapter will deal with the three most prolific writers on the Group; Bouman, Battiss and Brander. After this, less prolific writers on the Group will be discussed very briefly, followed by a description of other authors who did not write on the Group, but whose writings influenced contemporary notions of art and a national art for South Africa.

One of the most important writers on the Group, A.C. Bouman, was born in Leyden and obtained a doctorate from the University of Utrecht in German Syntax. In 1921 he moved to

South Africa where he lectured in Old Germanic, Middle Dutch and the History of Languages at the University of Stellenbosch. In 1946 he was appointed to the Chair of Old Germanic at the University of Leyden and returned to the Netherlands. During his stay in South Africa Bouman wrote extensively on art in books and journals and in both official languages(1).

His first book on South African art, Kuns in Suid-Afrika, was published in 1933-1934 in Afrikaans. This book provides an insight into Bouman's concept of the artist, art and a national art for South Africa.

In his book Kuns in Suid-Afrika Bouman argued that man cannot live by bread alone, but needs spiritual enrichment(2). He described art as fulfilling this spiritual role, that is when making art the artist bares his soul(3) and it is this that provided for man's spiritual needs. In line with this, Bouman equated the artist with a child(4), often seen as the purest and most unpolluted form of human. As such Bouman uses the Romantic notion of the artist, which was described in the introduction, as a pure genius who is most often male. He understands the process

---

1: Standard Encyclopedia of South Africa, Vol 2, BAC CAL, pp. 464-465.

2: Bouman, A.C., Kuns in Suid-Afrika, (Henceforth known as Bouman, Kuns in Suid-Afrika) p.9.

3: "...le sy siel bloot." ibid., p.9.

4: ibid., p.9.

of art making as one linked to inspiration rather than craft. He sees the production of art as a process involving inspiration and talent which comes to fruition in the form of the masterpiece. It is the masterpiece that results from this process that according to Bouman, provided for man's spiritual needs.

In his book Bouman provided a list of the 'good' artists such as Pierneef, van Wouw, Laubser, Boonzaier, Stern, Wenning and Zerffi. Most of these artists produced works which were representational and nationalistic in sentiment in that they were overtly laudatory of South Africa and her land and people. But aside from the blatantly nationalist artists such as Pierneef and van Wouw, the list also included artists who were influenced by modern European art such as Stern. The fact that Bouman found such art desirable is important as many other critics did not consider such a style relevant to South African art. This will be discussed further in later chapters.

Although Bouman was essentially an 'Uitlander', he did involve himself in the development of a South African culture. He was a member of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Taal, Lettere en Kuns(AKTV)(5), an organisation which aimed to further the development of a white South African

---

5: Universiteitskorrespondent, Untitled, Die Burger, 28 August 1939.

culture(6). Bouman also attempted to encourage the extension of the South African collection at the SANG in his newspaper articles(7).

Bouman's notion of a national art was very broad in comparison to other writers. He commented that "South Africa is the mother, the artists the children."(8), and it was for this reason that one could talk about "...our own artists..."(9). This implied that South Africa already had an art heritage, one that not only included South Africans, but also non-South Africans who were inspired by the country. This was a very broad definition of a national art/artist as one only needed to have visited the country to produce South African art. A reason for Bouman's broad definition may be that he saw himself, a foreigner, playing a role in the development of a South African art and, as a result opened the limits to allow like-minded foreign artists and writers to do the same.

According to Bouman, no-one was better equipped to understand an artwork than the artist's fellow citizens(10). This statement is closely linked to nationalism in that it

---

6: Labuschagne, E.C., Die Geskiedenis en Betekenis van die Afrikaans Kultuurraad Pretoria 1930-1950, p.8.

7: Bouman, A.C., "Die kunstentoonstelling in Kaapstad", Die Huisgenoot, 20 January 1939.

8: "Suid-Afrika is die moeder, die kunstenaars die kinders.", Bouman, Kuns in Suid-Afrika, p.189.

9: ibid., p.189.

10: ibid., p.189.

stated that citizenship of a country allowed one immediate access to an artwork made by an artist who is/was a citizen of that country.

Bouman's wide definition of a national art and the belief that being a citizen of South Africa would allow one access to South African art, would probably have encouraged the appreciation of art in South Africa. All art made in South Africa was South African, and all South Africans could gain access to it simply by virtue of being South African. Art described as such, would appear more accessible to the layman and no longer the exclusive property of the initiated few.

A second important writer from this period was Bernard Lewis who wrote mainly for newspapers under his own name and that of Brander and XYZ. For the purposes of this study, he will be called Brander to prevent confusion with David and Neville Lewis.

Brander was born in South Africa and received his secondary education in Darmstadt, Germany. On his return in 1886 he took a position as an accountant at the South African Railways(SAR) and remained there until he retired in 1930.

During this period he travelled widely and also lived in South West Africa(Namibia) for a short period(11).

Brander wrote art criticism for Die Jongspan, Die Suiderstem, Die Burger, Die Huisgenoot, The Cape Times and The Cape Argus. With his wife Elize, he translated two books from Afrikaans to English(12). He later published two books on his own, I Remember(13), and van Eyck tot van Gogh(14). I Remember was illustrated by Nerine Desmond and was

...sponsored by a number of "Uncle Ben's" friends as a token of their gratitude for the enduring joy that his friendship has brought into other lives.(15)

The sponsors included Lady Stella Bailey, an early administrator of the Argus Gallery, and Cecil Sibbett, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the SANG(16). This is indicative of the powerful friends he had in the artworld.

The book, van Eyck tot van Gogh, which consisted of a collation of Brander's articles for Die Jongspan and Die

---

11: Kruger, D.W., Dictionary of South African Biography, Vol 1, no 111, p.515.

12: They were The Adventures of a Lion Family written by A.A. Pienaar and published by Longmans Green of London in 1923, and Tales from the Malay Quarter written by I.D. du Plessis and published by Maskew Millars in Cape Town in 1945.

13: Lewis, B., I Remember (henceforth known as Brander, I Remember).

14: Brander, van Eyck tot van Gogh, Lewenssketse van Grootmeesters van die Beeldende Kuns (henceforth known as Brander, van Eyck tot van Gogh).

15: Brander, I Remember, p.48.

16: ibid., p.48.

Huisgenoot, dealt with artists from the time of van Eyck to European modern artists such as Manet. This book provides valuable insight into Brander's concept of what art should be, the role of the artist and a suitable national art for South Africa.

Like Bouman, Brander understood the artist to be a genius who produced spiritual bread for the people. He saw artists as having a pre-ordained course to work in art. Manet "...answered his calling..." to art and Monet inflicted a storm of controversy after following his calling. Vincent van Gogh was driven by a need to paint, "...but the poor Vincent was mad."(17). In his book, van Eyck tot van Gogh, Brander gave sensational details of the artists lives, especially that of Vincent van Gogh, describing a tragic story of rejection, ear-cutting, madness and suicide. The details, which exaggerate the unusual aspects of the artist's personality and life, illustrate the artist as a mad genius. Like the child Bouman mentions, mad people are believed to have not adapted to society, and as such are still 'untainted' and 'pure'. Brander's notion of the artist therefore is very similar to Bouman's. Both see the artist not as a skilled craftsperson but as an artist genius who produces masterpieces.

---

17: "maar die arme Vincent was mal.", ibid., p.187.

Brander's description of the art itself centred on the influence the listed artists had on contemporary South African art, and whether or not he thought this influence positive in the development of South African art. His conclusions on the usefulness of certain styles to South African art are backed up by contemporary art prices which supposedly demonstrate the artworks' worth or lack thereof(18).

By listing the influences he thought to have a positive effect on South African art, Brander gave the reader a strong guideline for evaluating art. For example, Brander warned the public that the followers of Cézanne used that artist's style to disguise a bad technique and absence of perception(19). Thus when a viewer saw a "Cézannesque" work, s/he would assume that the artist had a bad technique and an absence of perception. These guidelines were very influential in shaping the taste of the public and to a certain extent the taste of the critics. An indication of the power Brander had within the artworld is that Bouman felt it necessary to warn viewers in a New Group exhibition opening speech of the "...disservice..." Brander was doing to art as a result of his conservatism(20).

---

18: ibid., p.187.

19: ibid., p.174.

20: Reported in Anon, "Nuwe Groep se werke", Die Burger, 3 August 1939.

Brander usually dealt with the development of a national white art in his writings, in particular an Afrikaans art. His notion of a white South African art was influenced by his exposure to the cultural ideas of the Broederbond. The SAR during Brander's employment was a hotbed of Afrikaner Nationalism. Railway workers Danie du Plessis, Henning Klopper and H.W. van der Merwe established the Broederbond in 1918 and the SAR acted as an efficient vehicle of the organisation's policies and ideas about culture(21). Brander's use of the notion of cultural exclusivity and his idea to prevent the influence of alien influences, which will be examined in the following chapter, indicate this influence.

The third writer to be considered is Walter Battiss who was born and educated in South Africa. He graduated from The University of the Witwatersrand with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1940. Battiss wrote extensively on art, especially that of the Bushmen. Furthermore, he taught art at UNISA from 1970. More importantly in relation to this research, Battiss was an important member of the New Group, unlike Bouman and Brander who were not artists nor members of the Group.

---

21: Harrison, White Tribe, p.84.

An understanding of Battiss' notion of a national art and of the way he perceived the artist can be gained by looking at an article he wrote in 1960 entitled "Wanted! A History of Art in South Africa"(22). An examination of his earlier writings (23) indicates that he held the same attitudes to these issues as in the 1960 article in which his beliefs and perceptions had been crystalised.

Although Battiss does not deal directly with the notion of the artist as a genius, he does discuss reassessing some of the South African art heroes. He argues

We shall have to learn to look dispassionately on the work of men like Wenning and Pierneef and perhaps dispel some of the heroic myths that possess them....(24)

This is an important comment which indicates that Battiss was aware of other factors, such as nationalism, affecting the status of artists. By pointing to the existence of myths surrounding artists and by indicating that these myths must be dispelled, he was implying that the choice of South African art heroes was not always justified. This line of argument would not even have been considered by the nationalist critics, and in this sense Battiss was an iconoclast.

---

22: Battiss, W., "Wanted! A History of Art in South Africa", Fontein, Vol 1, no 1, 1960, pp.4-8

23: see: Battiss, W., "Towards an Independent Art : The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp. 208-209 and Battiss, W., "South African Paint Pot", 1939

24: ibid., p.7.

Battiss' notion of a South African art is illustrated in the following comment.

... we should learn to accept the dual position of the South African artist. At one moment he is a European with Greek statues and Roman poets inhabiting the shades of his intellectual landscape; at another he is a white man surrounded by forests of African witchcraft, girdled by unending savannas where roam elephants and giraffes.(25)

Battiss thus argues that white man in South Africa must accept both European and African influences as important in a South African art.

In this article on art history in South Africa, Battiss referred only to white males as having a role to play in the development of a South African art and art history. Women and black South Africans are not indicated as playing a role in developing a national culture for South Africa. It is unlikely that Battiss was as racist as he appears here as his art indicates that he valued black South Africans' contribution to the visual arts. Perhaps this comment was influenced by the dominant manner of expression in society, whereby the expert in all spheres including art, was male and white.

Battiss links African art and European modern art by showing "...Africa's contribution to modern art."(26). He sees

---

25: ibid., p. 4

26: ibid., p.8.

"modern art" as "... merely an interpretation of an African style."(27). This is an interesting comment as none of the other authors suggest that European modern art was strongly connected to African art. It indicates Battiss' strong Africanist approach, in that he links European modern art to South Africa through African art, whereas other authors link modern art to South Africa by noting that Europeans living in South Africa perpetuate artistic notions of their land of origin. In this way he ties both European modern art and African art to the development of a national South African culture.

Of the three authors discussed, only Battiss was a member of the New Group, although Bouman and Brander were closely connected to the Group. Bouman knew many of the members of the Group, he commented in Kuns in Suid-Afrika that he knew some of the artists so well he could not be objective about their work(28). Bouman also supported the New Group by mentioning the artists in his books and articles and also rallying to their defense against other critics such as Brander(29). This writer also owned some of their work, for

---

27: ibid., p.8.

28: See Bouman, Kuns in Suid-Afrika, Introduction.

29: Universiteitskorrespondent, Untitled, Die Burger, 28 August 1939.

example a painting by Cecil Higgs(30) and opened an exhibition of the New Group in 1939(31).

Brander knew Boonzaier through his father D.C. Boonzaier, and they corresponded during Gregoire's trip to Europe(32). This critic also knew Nerine Desmond who illustrated two of his books(33). Brander most probably met other members of the New Group through Boonzaier or at the many New Group exhibitions he attended. Bouman described Brander's relationship to the Group: "They have a sort of Godfather that travels with them and writes..."(34).

Of these three authors, Battiss and Bouman had had an academic training and had been exposed to contemporary art abroad. Brander had had limited formal art education and had not been exposed to modern art overseas. Bouman commented of Brander that "...that person [Brander] has done the Group a disservice...", because his criticism was preventing the development of the Group's art(35). du P. Scholtz, agreeing with Bouman, wrote of Brander that he had

---

30: Lewis, B., "Still Life Studies by Freida Lock", The Cape Times, 11 July 1939.

31: ibid.,

32: Brander, "Londonse gekkes skilder soos moderne meesters", Die Suidersstem, 3 June 1941.

33: They were I Remember (1950) and Tales from the Malay Quarter (1945).

34: "Hulle het egter 'n soort peetvader, 'n kritikus wat saam met hulle reis en skryf.", Universiteitskorrespondent, Untitled, Die Burger, 3 August 1939.

35: Reported in Anon, "Nuwe Groep se werke", Die Burger, 3 August 1939.

... not had the long, intimate contact with first rate European works of art which is needed to develop a sure judgement, he lacked technical knowledge, consequently he was not able to make a penetrating and convincing analysis of the painterly qualities of a work.(36)

Aside from Brander, Bouman and Battiss, many other critics wrote on the New Group. Most had very conservative notions of the form good art should take. For example P.H.W., who wrote for The Cape Times(37), listed the more conservative members of the Group such as Lancelot Krige, Gregoire Boonzaier, Enslin du Plessis, Terence McCaw, Maurice van Essche, Nerine Desmond, Ruth Prowse, Leng Dixon, Phay Hutton and Le Roux Smith Le Roux "...among the more rational - or shall we say normal - executants..." of art(38). D.G. who wrote for The Cape Argus(39) was very critical of the influence of European modern art and wrote: "The work of Alexis Preller is at any rate highly decorative but a little beyond me at the moment."(40).

---

36: Scholtz, Strat Caldecott, p.32.

37: P.H.W., "New Group Exhibition has wide appeal", The Cape Times, 4 May 1948, and P.H.W., "New Group Exhibition pleases", The Cape Times, 4 May 1949.

38: P.H.W., "New Group Exhibition has wide appeal", The Cape Times, 4 May 1948.

39: D.G., "Exhibition opened today by Mrs Thorne", The Cape Argus, 4 May 1938, and "As one artist to another", The Cape Argus, 6 August 1935.

40: D.G., "Exhibition opened today by Mrs Thorne", The Cape Argus, 4 May 1938.

More liberal critics such as the artist Melvin Simmers, who wrote for The Cape Times(40), recognised that the Group was not producing modern art. He wrote "...there is nothing startlingly inventive or revolutionary among the exhibits."(41) of the same exhibition to which D.G. refers above. H.P. who wrote for The Cape Argus, found the work of the New Group "...conventional...."(42).

The writings of Prebble Rayner, a well-known author who wrote for Trek(43) and The Cape Times(44), as well as those of E.R.P., who wrote occasionally for The Cape Times(45), will also be discussed in the chapters on the early writings.

The above mentioned authors all wrote specifically on the New Group and in particular on their exhibitions. There were many other authors who did not write on the New Group, but on art in general. These texts have also been examined as they are useful in providing a broader indication of contemporary notions of art and a national art. They

---

40: Simmers, M., "Most Refreshing and Stimulating", The Cape Times, 4 March 1938.

41: ibid.,

38: P.H.W., "Sculpture in New Group exhibition", The Cape Argus, 3 May 1939.

41: Rayner, P., "Good Meat in Plenty", Trek, 18 May 1945.

44: Rayner, P., "Art for Everyone", The Cape Times, 12 March 1941.

45: E.R.P., "Exhibition by New Group", The Cape Times, 5 May 1949.

include writings by Cecil Sibbett, Edward Roworth, Edgar Bernstein and David Lewis.

Cecil Sibbett was a wealthy businessman and the head of the Board of Trustees for the SANG during the 1940's. In this capacity he wrote "Modern Art as I see it", an undated pamphlet printed by the South African National Gallery(47). His views were particularly conservative and he vehemently opposed "modern art"(48).

As has been previously indicated, Roworth was also a writer who opposed the influence of modern art from Europe on a South African art and presented romantic realism as a style for a national South African art(49). Roworth made various public speeches which were recorded in the newspapers, for example "Prof Roworth attacks modern art"(50). The speeches would often provoke letters to the newspapers from the New Group to which he would sometimes reply, for example "Prof Roworth's Reply to His Critics"(51). These controversies most often did not refer directly to the work of the New

---

47: Sibbett, C., "Modern Art as I see it", The Cape Argus, 29 September 1947 reprinted in The Cape Argus, 29 September 1947 as "Against the cult of the Ugly" (henceforth known as Sibbett, Modern Art as I see it).

48: ibid.,

49: Reported in Anon, "Work of Michaelis School Praised", The Cape Times, 25 September 1940.

50: Anon, "Prof Roworth attacks Modern Art", The Cape Times, 25 September 1940.

51: Anon, "Prof Roworth's Reply to His Critics", The Cape Times, 7 September 1940.

Group itself, but to debates in which they had become involved.

Roworth's article "Landscape Art in South Africa" was published in The Studio Magazine of 1917, and was one of the earliest texts on South African art(52). This was printed alongside other articles on the art of British Colonies such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The text dealt only with landscape painting, a form of art which tangibly illustrated the extent of the British Empire because it showed the land conquered by the Empire.

In such a context, one might expect an article illustrating the cultural links between South Africa and Britain. However, Roworth made a point of establishing that the foundations of an independent South African national art were being laid. He attempted to locate South African landscape painting within an African context and not as an extension of the British landscape tradition(53). Roworth argued that although "...there is no such thing as a school of South African landscape painting."(54), works which show the "...monotony, size and light..." of the South African

---

52: Roworth, E., "Landscape Art of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, 1917.

53: ibid., p.115.

54: ibid., p.115.

landscape could be seen as the foundations of such an art(55).

In his article Roworth described landscape art as a patriotic art, "...the greatest South African artist would be the first artist who captured the "ashen and purple landscapes."(56). He illustrated his argument with the work of artists who tried to "...express something of the glory of South Africa."(57).

Roworth saw a national art stemming from a "...religious faith in the possibilities of the subject ..." (58) and "...vital personality."(59). He commented that without these two factors, "...the most accomplished technique is finally in vain."(60). In other words, an art work could only be nationalistic if it expressed a spiritual quality of faith in the land, regardless of technical expertise. Furthermore, he implied that landscape can only be considered good if it expressed this quality. Nationalist art was good and good art was nationalist.

As examples of such 'good' art, Roworth chose the work of Gwelo Goodman, Pieter Wenning, Hugo Naudé, Nita Spilhaus,

---

55: ibid., p.115.

56: ibid., p.115.

57: ibid., p.117.

58: ibid., p.119.

59: ibid., p.119.

60: ibid., p.119.

Gordon Pilkington, McCullough Robertson, Sydney Taylor and his own to illustrate the article(61). Most of the works are romantic conceptions of the South African landscape showing its picturesque beauty.

A further writer who wrote on art during the New Group's existence was David Lewis, the son of Neville Lewis, an artist belonging to the New Group. David Lewis wrote The Naked Eye(62) which was published by Paul Kosten. Paul Kosten's book shop was a meeting place for the local communists(63) of which there seem to have been many in Cape Town(64), including members of the New Group(65). It is possible that Lewis was exposed to Marxist ideas about culture. Although Lewis does quote the work of Marx in his book(66), he does not use a Marxist approach to art. His comments on nationalism and art education are highly perceptive and will be considered in the following chapter.

A further writer from this period was Edgar Bernstein. Very little information is available on Bernstein, other than

---

61: ibid., p.119.

62: Lewis, D., The Naked Eye, (henceforth known as Lewis, Naked Eye).

63: Interview with Mr J. Romyn who worked in publishing at this time. Irma Stern Museum, 13 May 1991.

64: see Pike, H., A History of Communism in South Africa, pp.190-192.

65: Interviewee wishes to remain anonymous.

66: Lewis, Naked Eye, p.56.

that he wrote for The Cape Review(67) in 1939 and Trek(68) in 1950. Bernstein's articles present a liberal approach to a national art for South Africa which is similar to those of Battiss and Lewis. These will also be examined in the following chapter.

Of the authors described Roworth, Brander, Bouman, Lewis and probably Melvin Simmers knew members of the Group and Battiss was a member of the Group. It is also reasonable to suppose that many of the other writers on the Group knew members, but no documentation is available to prove this.

All of the major writers that wrote on the Group during their existence were white males. Ten authors wrote only in English, none wrote only in Afrikaans and two wrote in English and Afrikaans. Bouman and Brander who wrote in English and Afrikaans wrote the most extensively on the New Group.

Thus all the writers who were constructing the history of the New Group were male and white. Furthermore, it was these same authors who were influencing the development of a national art and indicating the role that the New Group was going to play in such an art. Therefore it is likely that

---

67: Bernstein, E., "A Reply to Bernard Lewis", The Cape Review, 29 May 1935.

68: Bernstein E., "Steps to South African Culture", Trek, March 1950, pp.24, 25, 34, 35.

when they speak of a national South African art, these authors are essentially referring to a white male South African art.

Chapter Five: A General description of the early writings  
about the New Group

---

The previous two chapters have discussed factors influencing the writings about the New Group. They have indicated that writers were predominantly concerned with developing a (male) white national culture for South Africa. The concern for a white national art led these writers to discuss the New Group in terms of stylistic influences that would affect this national art. This chapter will discuss the way in which nationalism and the critics' personal notions of art influenced their approach to the New Group's work, and which aspects of the Group's work was de-emphasized or emphasized.

To a large extent the criticisms of the New Group's work have been used to highlight the kind of art the critics desired. The criticisms were more specific than the compliments which were very often general and gave little indication of which criteria were being used to assess the art. An example of this is a comment by Brander (1941) on the work of Charles Peers. "Charles Peers is steadily improving...."(1). This tells us very little about Peers' work or Brander's criteria for judging art.

---

1: "Charles Peers verbeter steeds", Brander, "Interessante Skilderye by Nuwe Groep", Die Suidersstem, 6 March 1941.

As a result, this chapter focuses on the criticisms of the Group. It is important therefore to reiterate a point made in Chapter One; that the New Group were in fact favorably received by the press. Of the 19 exhibitions of which many press cuttings are available, there are only three reviews which comment unfavourably on the work of the Group in general(2). It is important to bear this in mind when reading this chapter.

Nationalism caused writers to focus on the influence of European modern art and African art. As has been indicated in the introduction most critics used the term modern art very loosely to refer to art which distorted or abstracted appearances.

Chapter Three indicated the political reasons for the anti-modern sentiment prevalent in the artworld during the Group's existence, but this antipathy towards the influence of European modern art was also rooted in the form that it took. Brander, Bouman and Sibbett considered art a "...universal language..." which could be understood by all viewers. Sibbett(1947) wrote

---

2: They were Anon, "New Group resting on Laurels", The Cape Argus, 6 March 1941, Brander, "Tekortkoming in Nuwe Groep se Jongste Uitstalling", Die Suidersstem, 4 May 1942, and Brander, "Uitstalling van Nuwe Groep Teleurstellend", Die Suidersstem, 17 May 1945.

Pictorial art is a universal language which can give joy and understanding from China to Peru and from Palestine to Pimlico.(3)

Rayner(1943) commented that "...painting ... speaks a universal language...."(4). Bouman(1949) saw the function of art as "moving" the viewer that is, communicating something to the observer which would evoke an emotional response(5). Communication to all was seen to be the major function of art, for example Brander commented that "...art was for everyone and for everyday."(6), and Kreitner(1950) claimed that

Art is not anymore, as it was some two hundred years ago, the concern of the rich and chosen few.(7)

According to critics such as Brander, art could only fulfill its communication function if it used conventions and rules which could be understood by all. Brander(1939) called these rules or conventions technique("tegniek") or grammar(8). By this he meant stylistic devices such as linear perspective, naturalistic colour, chiaroscuro and the ability to draw and paint realistically. According to

---

3: Sibbett, Modern Art as I see it.

4: Rayner, P., "Cultural Reciprocity", Trek, 3 March 1943, p.14.

5: see Bouman, Kuns in Suid-Afrika, p.9.

6: "Kuns is vir almal en vir elke dag", Brander, "Uitstekende werke van Jongere Kunstenaars", Die Suiderstem, 4 May 1938.

7: Kreitner, L.B., "SA art and its problems", Trek, August 1950, pp.32, 33.

8: "Maar is die tegniek nie vir die skilder wat grammatica is vir die skrywer is nie. Grammatica is die konvensionele gebruik van woorde wat almal kan verstaan", Brander, "n' Praatjie oor Tegniek", Die Suiderstem, 28 January 1939.

Brander these conventions and rules had changed with the advent of modern art, and as a result of this, art had lost its ability to communicate to all and therefore its primary function. Brander(1939) wrote that modern art, especially non-representational art, had made "...art even less understandable ... for people"(9).

Modern art, as the critics understood it, had changed the technique to include previously undesirable elements such as distortion and non-naturalistic colour. Critics such as Brander, Sibbett and Roworth did not accept the changes and continued to evaluate art according to the old rules and conventions. Thus distortion became bad drawing and flat or non-naturalistic colour became unnatural. Of Higgs' "Pink Nude" Brander(1939) commented

... the pink legs and arms may be held to represent nudity but a flat blob of pink paint cannot be taken for a face, nor can a few splashes of pretty colour in vague lines and circles be taken for a serious attempt at composition.(10)

An anonymous critic wrote of Preller's work in 1938

... bent as to the knees, twisted as to the arms and bats-in-the-belfry as to the face, out of drawing and best out of mind.(11)

---

9: "...die kuns al hoe minder verstaanbaar...vir die mensdom.", ibid.,

10: Brander, "Still Life Studies by Freida Lock", The Cape Times, 11 July 1939.

11: Anon, "New Group", The Cape Times, 5 May 1938.

Brander(1941) wrote of the 1941 exhibition that "...many of them showed a total lack of what is vital for good painting - drawing."(12).

Distortion in sculpture was also seen as bad technique by some critics. An anonymous critic(1943) commented of Elsa Dziomba's work that : "Much of the sculpture falls short of achievement, for instance such distortions as "Torso" in Stinkwood."(13).

Thus Brander and many other critics saw distortion as bad drawing or a lack of sculptural ability. When works were represented naturalistically, the form was praised. For example Brander(1941) wrote : "I feel Maud Sumner knows how to draw, and how to build up a composition."(14). Prebble Rayner(1945) wrote : "Marion E. Keegan,..., shows a well-considered marble torso which indicates a good sense of plastic form."(15).

Another criticism of work influenced by modern European art, especially of Higgs' work, was that the work was sketchy and unfinished.

---

12: Brander, "Interessante Skilderye van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 6 March 1941.

13: Anon, "Exhibition of the New Group", The Star, 24 September 1943.

14: "Maud Sumner voel Ek dat sy weet om te teken, en ook om hoe n' komposisie op te bou.", Brander, "Interessante Skilderye van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 6 March 1941.

15: Rayner, P., "Good Meat in Plenty", Trek, 18 May 1945.

What can I say of Cecil Higgs' work? Her work is always too sketchy...there is a foundation of drawing skills necessary in order to give the idea of a picture.(16)

In 1939 Brander commented that Higgs' work on exhibition was "... only ideas for work, in every art it is easier to begin than finish off."(17).

Sibbett commented that artists distorted form because it was easier and required less skill; "It was so much easier, of course, than reproducing something that was intelligible."(18). A letter to the Editor of The Cape Times from Gordon Taylor(1939), an artist working in Cape Town, commented on Cecil Higgs' "Pink Nude"

I know it is much easier to invent shapes for legs than to paint them as they are and to omit the features than to draw them conscientiously.(19)

Critics considered art influenced by European modern art, especially distorted or abstracted work, the result of artists not working seriously or hard enough and not reaching their full potential. Brander(1939) noted

---

16: "Wat kan ek van Cecil Higgs se? Haar werk is altyd te sketsmatig...daar is n' grondslag van tekenkuns noodsaaklik om n' idee te gee van wat die prent te vertel het", Brander, "Tekortkoming in Jongste Uitstalling", Die Suiderstem, 4 May 1941.

17: "...hulle werklik slegs idees vir komposisies is. In elke kuns is dit maklike om te begin as om af te rond.", Brander, "Sewentig voortreflike werke van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 5 December 1939.

18: Sibbett, Modern Art as I see it.

19: Taylor, G., "Ultra-modern Art" listed under "Letter to the Editor", The Cape Argus, 8 August 1939.

I am disappointed with the overall standard the New Group has set itself...[they need] to be more serious about their work.(20)

S. in Die Burger(1939) argued that "...one feels they could do better. The talent does not "break out" and "Perhaps true seriousness [about their work] would be the solution."(21).

Brander, Sibbett and Roworth concluded that artists whose work was strongly influenced by modern European art movements were either criminal or insane. Roworth(1940) gave "modern artists" a choice between the "...lunatic asylum and the concentration camp."(22). Sibbett(1947) stated that "modern art" had a "...pathological cause..."(23) and Brander(1945) commented that

...modern artists ..., belong in a mental home and those that do it in a willful manner should go to jail.(24)

---

20: "Ek teleurgesteld is met die algemene standard wat die Nuwe Groep homself voorop gestel het", Brander, "Beste uitstalling tot dusver", Die Suiderstem, 1 August 1939.

21: "n' mens voel hulle kan beter doen. Die Talent ontbreek nie" "Miskien sal werklike vasberadenheid by hulle die oplossing wees", S., "Tentoonstelling van Nuwe Groep", Die Burger, 6 December 1939.

22: Lippy Lipshitz quotes Roworth's Introduction to "Famous Works of Art", a pamphlet published by United Tobacco Co., in Lipshitz, L., "A considered reply to Prof. Roworth", Trek 7 November 1940, pp.20, 24, p.20.

23: Sibbett, Modern Art as I see it.

24: Moderne kuns[makers]..., behoort na n' kranksinnige gestig te gaan, en diegene wat dit op opregte wyse doen, na die gevangenis" Brander, "Kuns en gesonde verstand", Die Suiderstem, 6 October 1936.

P.H.W.(1949) went as far as to list the "normal" artists, leaving the more "modern" artists such as Battiss, Preller and Higgs off the list(25).

Some writers saw modern art as a plot by critics, artists, academics and art dealers aimed at duping the public and making money. Brander(1936) argued that "modern art" was encouraged by " ... certain scholastic circles."(26) and Sibbett(1947) stated that

The cult of the ugly is rampant and unfortunately, so many newspaper critics, affected by the same complaint help to foster it by their fulsome praise. I can recommend to anyone who is puzzled about what to think about modern art, places blame upon the critics and the market-rigging dealers.(27)

Brander(1945) commented that the New Group was

... so busy trying to sell their work that only the leftovers from their studios were available [for sale/exhibitions] or artworks that were very quickly put together for the exhibition.(28)

He also stated that

Matisse, the Frenchman, and Pechstein, the German, its leaders [Expressionism] invented the bogey of Expressionism to frighten the conservative lover of truth and beauty in art, much as in the 19th century Impressionism had been used.(29)

---

25: P.H.W., "New Group's Exhibition pleases", The Cape Times, 4 May 1949.

26: "...sekere skolastiese kringe.", Brander, "Kuns en gesonde verstand", Die Suiderstem, 6 October 1936.

27: Sibbett, Modern Art as I see it.

28: "so besig om hul werk te verkoop dat slegs die oorblyfsels van hul ateljees beskikbaar was, of dat skilderstukke haastig saamgestel is teneinde betyds klaar te wees vir die uitstalling", Brander, "Uitstalling van Nuwe Groep Teleurstellend", Die Suiderstem, 17 May 1945.

29: Lewis, B., "Art and Artists in South Africa", Cape Times Annual for 1932, pp.29. The theme of modern art frightening

This chapter has so far indicated the reasons relating to form that caused the critics to consider art influenced by European modern art an undesirable influence in a national South African art. These were linked with the political reasons listed in Chapter Three and relate to the origins of modern art as being European.

In contrast to the above writers, Battiss, Bernstein and Bouman felt it was only through the influence of European modern art that a South African national art could emerge. As has been described in Chapter Four, Battiss(1952) linked this form of art to African art which he saw as playing a large role in the development of a South African culture. He commented that "African subject matter has found its happiest revelation through modern techniques."(30). Bernstein(1952) argued that

It is exactly this foreign intruder[modern art] that has always made South African art alive and progressive. It needs the foreign stimulus to make art grow.(31)

---

the public is reiterated in Anon, "I wandered", The Cape Times, 23 May 1947. The author reports on a comment by Mr Pilkington, a Cape Town artist; "'We can all have awful nightmares", Mr Pilkington said "but there is no need to put them on canvas" I agreed"'.

30: Battiss, W., "New Art and Old Art in South Africa", The Studio Magazine, Vol 144, July-Dec 1952, pp.66-75, p.70.

31: Bernstein E., "Steps to South African Culture", Trek, March 1950, pp.24, 25, 34, 35. p.34.

Bouman(1949) claimed that the influence of European modern art on Boonzaier's work "...testifies to the benefit every artist derives if he goes abroad and wanders about."(32).

Thus two groupings occurred within the debate over the influence of modern European art in the work of the New Group. Sibbett, Roworth and Brander considered it an undesirable influence, while Battiss, Bouman and Bernstein claimed that it would have a favourable effect on the development of a national culture. The extent of the debate between these two groupings served to highlight the Group in the context of European modern art in South Africa, so that they later became known amongst the public and many critics as a modern art movement. This is discussed further in the following chapters.

Another point of debate was that of the influence of African art on a white national South African art. Chapter Three described some of the reasons that influenced writers to believe that African art had an inferior influence on white South African art.

It is notable that in the context of the Group, writers very seldom dealt with the possible influence of African art. There are however a few cases where African art is related

---

32: Bouman, Painters of South Africa, p.47.

to the work of the New Group, two of which relate to Battiss' work. An anonymous critic(1947) from The Cape Argus commented that

The work of Walter Battiss will deservedly attract attention because of his clever use of primitive colour and his obsession with the Bushman tradition. These paintings are genuine Afrikana.(33)

A second critic(1947) wrote of the same work that

When he chooses to throw overboard the influences of both Bushmen and modern French art, he is capable of vivid and direct work.(34)

Both articles denounce the influence of African art. In the first case the critic places the work within the category of Afrikana, and not contemporary Fine Art. In the second quote the author only considers Battiss' work to be valid if he rejects the influence of African art and European modern art.

A further indication of the critics' opinions of the influence of African art is illustrated in an anonymous article from 1943

Battiss' seem reminiscent of Bushmen drawings, and in the rather inscrutable canvasses of Messrs. A. Preller, C. Higgs and Jean Welz we enter the debatable land in which the uninitiated will do well to walk warily(35).

---

33: Anon, "Good Work made by New Group", The Cape Argus, 23 May 1947.

34: Anon, "New Group Show has vitality", The Cape Times, 23 May 1947.

35: Anon, "New Group's Annual Show", The Star, 20 September 1943.

This critic argues that artists must be very wary of the influence of African art especially that of Bushman art. It is important to note at this point that Battiss' work was particularly influenced by Bushman art, which is very different in form from African art and European modern art. European modern art was influenced by the sculptural forms of African art which are unlike the two-dimensional nature of much of Bushman art. Critics thus could not interpret such forms as resulting from the influence of European modern art, and it is perhaps due to this reason that Battiss was severely criticised by reviewers.

It is notable that artists whose works displayed an obvious African influence, for example Preller's or Battiss', were often the same artists who received the harshest criticism. Brander comments on Preller's work

Such childish attempts like the two figures by Alexis Preller, that are painted in bright red, are really laughable and lower the general standard.(36)

Prebble Rayner comments of Battiss' "Old Freestate Griqua" "...I shouldn't like him ever looking down at me from my walls."(37). Artists whose work did not show the influence

---

36: "Sulke Kinderagtige pogings soos die twee figure van Alexis Preller, wat in helder rooi geskilder is, is regtig belaglik en verlaag die standaard as n' geheel", Brander, "Uitstekende werke van nuwe kunstenaars", Die Suiderstem, 4 May 1938.

37: Rayner, P., "Good Meat in Plenty", Trek, 18 May 1945.

of African art, were much praised by the critics, for example Boonzaier, McCaw and Neville Lewis(38).

Roworth, Brander and Sibbett do not write about African art as a possible influence in a South African art at all. The lack of discussion on the influence of African art may be related to the following three reasons. Firstly the critics may have interpreted it as modern art. This is possible as modern art does exhibit the influence of African art, and both have similar formal attributes. Secondly, critics may have considered African art irrelevant to a discussion of a national white South African art.

A third reason for writers on the New Group to exclude the influence of African art was the contemporary political climate. As has been shown in the first chapter, South African politics was dominated by the relationship between Englishman and Afrikaner until the 1940's. This was the primary political issue for this part of the Group's existence from 1938 to 1954. The concern with and realisation of the possible threat of resistance politics to white supremacy emerged strongly in the 1940's. It is notable that most of the authors who dealt with the influence of African art wrote after 1940, for example

---

38: Most of the reviews from the period 1938 to 1954 have favourable comments to make of the work of Lewis, McCaw and to some extent Boonzaier's work.

Battiss(1960)(39) and Bernstein(1952)(40). The focus on white politics prior to 1940 may have influenced art writers of the time to concentrate on white artistic influences in the form of modern art as opposed to the existing South African art. It was only during the 1940s when the political arena began to focus on black/white relations, that art history responded and began to examine the relevance of African art to white South Africans.

Most of the powerful critics and writers on the New Group such as Brander, Roworth and Sibbett, felt that African art was an undesirable influence on the Group's art. But as has been indicated, in many cases their disapproval was indicated by silence. Bouman's approach to African art was different.

Bouman found the influence of modern European art to have a positive effect on the development of a national South African art (41). However, part of the nature of modern art was derived from Africa, for example certain kinds of distortion. African art mediated by Europe and presented as European modern art was acceptable to Bouman. When it appeared in an unmediated form, for example in the work of Battiss, it was not acceptable. An example of this is the

---

39: Battiss, Wanted, pp.12-178.

40: Bernstein, Steps to South African Culture pp.24, 25, 34.

41: Bouman, Painters of South Africa, pp.77.

work of Maggie Laubser, who was influenced by the German Expressionists who in turn were influenced by African Art. Bouman praises Laubser's work in Painters of South Africa(42) and two other articles(43), but does not even mention Battiss in a general book he wrote on South African art, Painters of South Africa in 1942. Battiss' work showed the direct influence of African art through reference to the art of the Bushmen, which as has been indicated, could not be misinterpreted as derivative of European modern art.

Bouman's writing(1941) indicates that he perceived the influence of African art as undesirable and potentially dangerous. This is illustrated by his comments on the Belgian Congo(Zaire) in relation to van Essche's work. He stated that it is "a land too glowing-hot for a white man, dangerous also for his art"(44). It is notable that the African country he was referring to, the Belgian Congo, was to provide a positive impetus to the art of Irma Stern, Maurice van Essche and Alexis Preller(45).

Not all critics felt this way, Bernstein noted that

---

42: ibid.,. pp.7, 25, 27.

43: They were Bouman, A.C., "Maggie Laubser", Die Huisgenoot January 1943, pp.7, 25, 27 and "Drie Belangwekkende Kunstenaars", Die Huisgenoot, 3 January 1941, pp.21, 23.

44: "n' land te gloeiend-heet vir n' witman, gevaarlik ook vir sy kuns" Bouman, A.C., "Kuns van die Nuwe Groep Vierde Jaarlikse Tentoonstelling in Kaapstad", Die Huisgenoot. 28 March 1941, pp.15, 17, 59.

45: see Berman, Art and Artists, pp.284, 309, 239.

The habit of scoffing at Bantu culture as "primitive"(in the derogatory sense) or "uncivilised" does grave injustice to the non-European, while psychologically it masks a fear, on the part of the white man, of the Black man's creative power. The cultural expression of the Bushman and Bantu is "primitive" and "uncivilised" only in terms of the standards which the white man brought with him from Europe three centuries ago, standards many of them, which have outlived their usefulness there, and inapplicable here, period standards of prose and painting and versification which have here given rise to an underbrush of cultural inconsequence - stereotyped pictures of sun-dappled farm-houses, empty verses of the "rolling veld", sterile fiction about brawny farmers and "savage" blacks, a "history" which is too often only a whitewash of chauvinism(46).

Battiss quoted in his work from African sources and wrote six books on African art, emphasising the role it had to play in the development of a South African art(47). Furthermore "For at least thirty years Battiss was actively involved in promoting and publicizing the Rock Art of South Africa"(48).

Bernstein and Battiss felt that a combination of African and European modern art influences would lead the way to a

---

46: Bernstein, Steps to South African Culture, p.25.

47: Of the eleven books Battiss published, six dealt with art of races other than whites art, especially that of the Bushman. They were:

- 1: The Amazing Bushmen, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1939.
  - 2: South African Paint Pot, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1940.
  - 3: The Artists of the Rocks, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1951.
  - 4: Fragments of Africa, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1951.
  - 5: Bushman Art, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1953.
  6. With Franz, G.H. and Junod, H.P. and Grasser, J.W., The Art of Africa, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shuter, 1958.
- Twenty eight of the eighty two articles he wrote dealt with Bushman Art see De Arte, 10 October 1971, pp.44-46.
- 48: Skawran, K., MacNamara, M., Walter Battiss, p.51.

national art. Bernstein(1952) commented when speaking of African art that

Today, a belated appreciation has at last arisen of the cultural significance of those distant early steps [of the Bushmen and Black Africans] towards a South African art.(49)

Thus some writers found the influence of African art and Bushman art undesirable, some found it acceptable only if presented as influenced by European modern art, and other authors considered it crucial to the birth of a national visual arts culture in South Africa. Those who completely rejected these forms of art as an influence in a South African culture hardly discussed it at all. Bouman who found African art acceptable as long as it was presented as European modern art, discussed it only once. Battiss and Bernstein who wrote on art during this period did not make the comments in the context of the Group. Thus there was very little written about the New Group's relationship to African art, and as a result of this, this influence was not fully recognised in the early writings, even though it had been an important stylistic influence for many of the New Group artists.

It is relevant at this point to discuss whose national art it was that was being debated by the critics and writers. It is reasonable to say that all of the conservative and

---

49: ibid., p.25.

some not so conservative writers, were only writing about a white national art. In all likelihood they thought that they were writing about a national art for South Africa, but they did not take any other racial group's interests into account.

Bernstein and Battiss could have been writing about a national art for all races. Both considered the inclusion of Western and African influences in art as vital in developing a national art. In doing this, they were making some attempt at giving more than the whites and western culture a say in the development of a national art.

One could argue however, that the African influence they advocated was merely an attempt to locate themselves and their art in Africa. A quote from an article by Battiss(1960) suggests this to be true

[we must] ... accept the dual position of the South African Artist. At one moment he is European with Greek statues and Roman poets inhabiting the shades of his intellectual landscape, at another moment he is a white man (sic) surrounded by forests of African witchcraft, girdled by unending savannahs where roam elephants and giraffes.(50)

Even if Battiss is using the term man in the generic sense, his statement still indicates that he was only writing about the art of the white man.

---

50: Battiss, Wanted, p.5.

This chapter has indicated that most of the early writings about the New Group dealt with the work of the Group in relation to the institution of European modern art in South Africa and to a much lesser degree, African art. The issue of modern art was emphasised as all the critics joined in the debate. In contrast there was very little written about the potential influence of African art and this was not included as an influence on the New Group's work. The next chapter will examine how the emphasis on the influence of European modern art in South Africa and the de-emphasis of African art in the context of the New Group, affected the way in which the New Group was represented in art history.

Chapter Six: An examination of the way in which early writings about the New Group influenced later histories of the Group

---

The first two chapters provided an account of the history of the New Group, while the next three chapters gave insight into the early writers and writings about the Group. This chapter will use the knowledge presented in the previous chapters to ascertain how the early writings about the New Group influenced the later writings, and in which ways they acted to confuse the history of the Group.

The writings of Berman, Bekker, Thomas and Schoonraad will be discussed as examples of later writings about the New Group. The briefer accounts of the history of Group given by Arnott, Volschenk, Scott and van der Westhuysen will also be examined.

Bekker's article(1978) uses F.P. Scott's book Gregoire Boonzaier(1964), Bruce Arnott's Lippy Lipshitz(1964), Boonzaier and Lipshitz's Wenning(1949) and newspaper articles as sources of information. Thomas uses newspaper cuttings, Battiss' 1938 article on the Group, Scott's book on Boonzaier, Schoonraad's 1976 thesis, Bekker's article and

Berman's Art and Artists of South Africa as her major sources. In his catalogue for the New Group retrospective exhibition, Schoonraad uses newspaper cuttings, correspondence between the artists, the constitution of the Group, Battiss' early article, Thomas' thesis, Berman's Art and Artists of South Africa, an article by Volschenk(1971)(1) on Boonzaier and Arnott's Lippy Lipshitz.

Thus, all the major later writers on the Group have used newspaper cuttings, two have used Arnott's book, two have used Berman and two have used Battiss' early article. Single authors have made use of Wenning, Schoonraad's thesis and Volschenk's article. Most importantly, all the later writers on the Group have used press cuttings from newspapers published between 1938 and 1954.

As has been indicated these early writings were largely directed by writers' concern with nationalism and the search for a South African national art. As a result of this, certain aspects of the Group's history were highlighted above others, in particular the influence of European modern art.

---

1: Volschenk, P., Kleur as Skilderagtige element in die werk van Gregoire Boonzaier, unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1971(henceforth known as Volschenk, Kleur in Gregoire Boonzaier).

Previous chapters have shown the way in which the earlier critics linked the New Group to modern art even though most of the Group members did not work in a blatantly modern way and, even though Maggie Laubser, Irma Stern and Wolf Kibel had introduced European modern art to South Africa ten years prior to the Group's formation. This is apparent in newspaper articles from the period 1938 to 1954 which continually describe the New Group as an organisation of modern artists. This had several effects on later writers' approaches to the New Group.

Berman's article in Art and Artists of South Africa was the first text written on the Group after its dissolution in 1954. The text was written in 1971, and remains in the same form in later editions of the book.

Although Berman does not mention the term modern art at all in her description of the Group, she described them as a group of artists influenced by contemporary European movements, which could only mean modern art. According to her, the reasons for the Group's formation stem from the New Group wanting to change the "... stultifying inertia ...." of the art world(2) by widening the range of accepted styles of art. She described them as a group of artists influenced by contemporary European movements who only became

---

2: Berman, Art and Artists, p.209.

conservative, "... entrenched in their pre-war styles ...", towards the end of the Group's existence(3). She relates the break-up of the Group to internal tensions.

Berman ascribes the Group's formation and break up as resulting from the artists' reactions to a style and the desire to change the dominant style of art. That is, to a conflict between different styles of art, and not as a reaction to outside pressures such as the need for artists to earn a living. She does relate the Group's activities to the sale of their work, but does not connect this with the aims of the Group nor the reasons for its dissolution.

The second text dealing solely with the Group after its dissolution was Bekker's "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika" written in 1978. As the name "Kunspioneers" or art pioneers indicates, Bekker saw modern art as an important aspect of the Group's program. He sees the Group's establishment as resulting from a desire to rebel against the art establishment(4), and institute art influenced by European modern art as an established art form. The reasons Bekker gives for the Group's dissolution were that they had achieved their goals; they had raised the standards of art, made the public conscious and more

---

3: ibid., p.210.

4: Bekker, Die Nuwe Groep, p.54.

accepting of "modern art", and established a (financial) stability for art and artists(5).

Bekker's description of the Group links them very strongly to modern art, so much so that at times they appear as the South African avant-garde. Even though he describes the Group's dissolution in terms of external non-stylistic factors, he does not see these as bearing any relationship to the reasons for the Group's formation. These he describes as being related to the institution of a style.

Thomas' thesis on the New Group, written in 1987, is the closest to this research's approach in that she cites external factors as playing an important role in the history of the New Group. She links their origins with the institution of modern art, but adds that they wanted to "... re-educate the public and uplift the standards of [art] appreciation in order to create a more selective audience."(6). Much of her thesis deals with the controversies in which the Group were involved, especially those in which they opposed Roworth(7). Thomas' description of the dissolution of the Group described external and internal factors as being influential, in that she argues

---

5: ibid., p.54.

6: Thomas, The New Group, p.2.

7: ibid., pp.4-12.

that the viable market for art was one of the factors causing the break up of the New Group(8).

The financial security that artists achieved allowed them to develop independently, and the structure of the Group no longer served its purpose.(9)

She gives two further reasons for the dissolution of the Group; the schism within the Group and the departure of members as a result of the Second World War(10).

Thomas thus ascribes the Group's existence to the desire to institute "modern art" as an accepted art form and to create a buying public(11). In this argument she takes internal stylistic factors and one external factor into account, while in the reasons she cites as being responsible for the dissolution of the Group, she take full cognisance of both external and internal factors.

The last text written solely on the Group was a catalogue for the New Group's retrospective exhibition in 1989(12), by Schoonraad. Schoonraad describes in some detail the conservative art establishment prior to the New Group. In doing so he sets the scene of the New Group as art rebels, modern artists, reacting against the conservative art

---

8: ibid., p.14.

9: ibid., pp.13-14.

10: ibid., pp.13-14.

11: ibid., p.9.

12: The catalogue was largely informed by previous research done on Walter Battiss.

establishment(13). Although he describes their origins as stemming from a desire to change the art establishment, he does not describe the Group's work as strongly influenced by European modern art at all. In fact, Schoonraad stresses that the Group were in general very conservative artists(14). Furthermore, he sees this conservatism as playing a role in the Group's dissolution; that the promised programme of modern art was never realised and as a result, members left to join the International Art Club where they could get access to international modern art.

Schoonraad, like Berman and Bekker, see the history of the Group as relating to stylistic and internal factors. One of the most important pieces of information in this text is that the New Group were not described as a Group of modern artists, a notion which other histories of the Group, such as Bekker and Berman, have perpetuated.

Aside from Schoonraad, Berman and Bekker, other accounts of the history of the New Group describe their existence and dissolution to internal, stylistic factors. Volschenk argued that the Group formed in a "conscious effort to breathe new life into art"(15). The SANG information sheet stated that when overseas educated artists returned to South

---

13: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

14: ibid., p.45.

15: Volschenk, Kleur in Gregoire Boonzaier, p.180.

Africa "filled with fresh ideas and with a new vision they found the situation stultifying and out of this frustration was born the New Group"(16). Arnott views the origins of the Group in the same light(17).

As has been indicated in Chapter Two, internal, stylistic explanations for the formation of the Group are valid, but they only form part of the major reason for the formation of the Group that is, to enable artists to earn a living. The above distorted approach to the reasons for the formation of the Group resulted from two factors.

Firstly, the search for a national art during the Group's existence caused writers about the Group to describe Group artists as instituting European modern art. Critics often focused on New Group artists who worked in a modern style and who had to struggle against the establishment. This was in contrast to most of the Group members whose work was acceptable to the early critics and writers. Because the press focused on the modern artists of the Group, their struggle against the establishment, and also on the controversies in which the Group was involved, later researchers were led to believe that the New Group was a modern art movement in total opposition to the establishment. Furthermore, that the New Group's existence

---

16: SANG Information sheet, PAY 209.68, Coll. SANG.

17: Arnott, Lippy Lipshitz, pp.18-19.

was marked by a series of battles against the art critics and establishment when in fact, as Chapter One has indicated, they were supported to a large extent by most of the critics, and some of the Group members were members of the establishment, for example Charles Peers.

The second factor causing later writers to indicate internal stylistic factors as responsible for the formation of the Group, was the predominant art historical paradigm, Formalism. This approach does not invite art historians to perceive external factors as influential in art or on an art group. Instead Formalism leads art historians to look at internal issues, such as style, to explain change within the art world.

Because the Group have always been explained in terms of modern art, certain myths have resulted. Firstly that they were a modern art movement, and secondly, that they were in total opposition to the establishment. As a result of this misconception, histories illustrate the Group as "Art pioneers"(18) and fighters against conservatism(19).

---

18: Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55, p.52.

19: see Berman, Art and Artists, Thomas The New Group, Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27, December 1978, pp.51-55, and Schoonraad, The New Group.

The second way in which the early writings about the Group influenced the later writings, was in relation to African art. The debate over a national art had caused writers to reduce the importance of African art in relation to the New Group's work. This was because it was either misinterpreted as derivative of European modern art, or because it was not considered relevant as an important influence on a national white South African art by most of the early authors. Only a few authors discussed the influence of African art and in most cases the discussion related to the drive for a South African national art and not directly to the work of the New Group. Therefore, none of the later writers have used this material as source material.

As a result, the influence of African art in the work of the New Group has been overlooked. Berman, Bekker, Schoonraad and Thomas for example do not discuss it as an important influence. By leaving out a discussion of the influence of African art, writers are giving an inaccurate picture of the work of the New Group.

Partly as a result of the lack of discussion of the influence of African art in the earlier writings, there is little discussion of Gerard Sekoto in terms of the Group. Sekoto is seldom written about in the early articles on the

Group(20), instead he is referred to separately as "Native artist"(21) or is listed in general texts on South African art, for example in texts by David Lewis(22) and Walter Battiss(23). One of the few early mentions of Sekoto having exhibited with the Group is in the catalogues from the Group's exhibition in 1944(24) and 1948, when Sekoto had already left the country(25). Thus there appears to be very little written about Sekoto's role within the Group in the press cuttings from 1938 to 1954.

Sekoto's role in the Group has however been recognised by later writers. Berman, Thomas and Schoonraad described his activities with the New Group, although there is some dissension as to whether he was a member or not(26). It is likely that art historians re-examined his role in relation to the New Group because of a change in Art History to a less Eurocentric white approach. This is the only instance

---

20: Only two articles mention Sekoto exhibiting with the New Group. They were Anon, "New Group's Annual Show", The Star, 29 September 1943, and Anon, "New Group's Annual Show", The Rand Daily Mail, 20 September 1943.

21: Anon, "Native Artist for Paris", The Cape Times, 29 September 1947.

22: Lewis, Naked Eye, pp.31-32.

23: Battiss, W., "New Art and Old Art in South Africa", The Studio Magazine, Vol 144, July-Dec 1952, pp.66-75.

24: Catalogue for New Group exhibition, Argus Gallery, Cape Town 1944, photocopy Coll. SANG.

25: Sekoto left for France in 1947. see Anon, "Native Artist for Paris", The Cape Times, 29 September 1947. New Group Catalogue for 1948 exhibition at Gainsborough Gallery, Johannesburg, photocopy Coll. SANG.

26: Berman argued that Sekoto was not a member (Berman, Art and Artists, p.210) while Lindop commented that he was (Lindop, B. Gerard Sekoto, p.22).

when inaccuracies in the earlier writings were corrected in later histories.

The early writings influenced later writings in ways other than in relation to modern art and African art. For example many authors emphasize Boonzaier's role in the activities of the Group. Boonzaier was the main organiser of the New Group, but his role is overemphasized. This was because newspaper articles written during the Group's existence accentuate Boonzaier's role, probably because as the major organiser of the Group, he did most of the liaising with the press.

Partly as a result of Boonzaier's role being emphasised, Battiss' role in the conceptualisation of the Group has been underestimated. Berman(1987) states that Boonzaier, Lock, McCaw and Lipshitz were responsible(27). Volschenk(1971)(28) however, suggests that it was Boonzaier alone as does H.M. van der Westhuysen(1964)(29) and F. P. Scott(1964)(30).

The only writer who sees Battiss as having suggested the Group is Schoonraad, and Thomas(1985) who uses

---

27: Berman, Art and Artists, p.208.

28: Volschenk, Kleur in Gregoire Boonzaier, p.180.

29: van der Westhuysen, H.M., "Die Hedendaagse kuns in Suid-Afrika", Historia, Vol 1 no 9, 1964, pp.34-43, p.38.

30: Scott, F.P., Gregoire Boonzaier, p.17.

Schoonraad(1989) as a reference(31). Schoonraad's hypothesis was not based on newspaper articles, but a letter written to McCaw by Battiss which suggested the formation of the scheme after his(Battiss') involvement in the Pretoria Music festival(32). This approach was also suggested by Battiss' comments in "Towards an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa" which cites Battiss as a founding member(33).

Early writings about the Group do not indicate the influence of socialist art groups such as the Artists' International Association and the Maison de la culture. This lack of connection is perpetuated in later writings because it was unrecorded in the earlier newspaper articles. However, information on this was available from members of the Group, and from people who lived in Cape Town during the period and had connections with the art world. In spite of this, the connection was never made, probably because of the anti-communist sentiment in South Africa and the 'Macarthyism' resulting from this. An indication that this still exists is that one of the interviewees who informed this researcher on this issue wished to remain anonymous.

---

31: Schoonraad, The New Group, p.42.

32: ibid., p.42.

33: Battiss, W., "Towards an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp.208-209.

Although the Formalist approach of the later writers on the Group to a certain extent masked the influence of the newspaper cuttings because they caused writers to look only at internal factors as influential, it is still accurate to note that the earlier writings greatly affected later histories of the Group. These early writings influenced later writers to perceive the history of the New Group in terms of the institution of European modern art in South Africa, to diminish the importance of African art in terms of the New Group's work, to emphasize Boonzaier's role in the Group and to eliminate the influence of the socialist art Groups in the history of the Group. The only time that the position reflected in the earlier writings was rejected was in relation to Sekoto.

## Conclusion

---

The research covered two aspects of the history of the New Group. Firstly, it gave a factual and interpretative account of the Group's history. Given alongside this was a description of the existing accounts of the history of the New Group. It was found that the existing histories of the Group, to a large extent, only took stylistic factors into account and by doing so distorted the history of the New Group.

The second part of the research dealt with why previous researchers based their accounts of the history of the New Group on stylistic factors. Aside from following a Formalist approach to art history, it was found that all previous researchers used press cuttings from the period 1938 to 1954 as source material. An analysis of the period which produced the New Group, and the early writings about the Group, indicated that the early writers of these articles were directed by a desire for the formulation of a South African national art, and also by their own private notion of what sort of art was desirable. This resulted in an accentuation of stylistic factors in the early press cuttings about the Group and hence, a distortion of the history of the New Group in later accounts of the Group's history.

As a result of examining these three aspects of the New Group's history, certain myths and distortions in the existing accounts of the history of the New Group became clear.

Of major importance was previous researchers' understanding of the reasons for the formation and dissolution of the New Group. None of the previous researchers on the subject saw the Group forming to enable artists to earn a living from their art. Instead, the New Group's existence was ascribed to a desire to uplift South African art or to overthrow the establishment. This research maintains that these were important only in as much as the Group needed to uplift the standard of art in South Africa and overthrow the establishment, in order for many artists to be able to make a living from their work.

Part of the understanding that the Group aimed to uplift South African art and overthrow the establishment was that the New Group was a collection of modern artists in opposition to the establishment. In actual fact most of the Group artists were working in a style strongly derivative of romantic realism, the establishment style. As such they were not modern artists and were not in complete opposition to the establishment's work. Instead of the Group being opposed to the establishment's style, as existing histories indicate, the New Group was opposed

to the power the establishment could wield over the sale of art.

Linked to the notion of the Group as modern artists was the idea that New Group artists had to battle for recognition by the press and public. As has been shown, most of the work produced by the Group was readily accepted and bought by the public, precisely because their work contained such a strong component of the accepted style, romantic realism. It is however worth noting at this point the fundamental irony of the Group; that even though most did not work in a modern style, the Group did achieve the recognition and acceptance of modern art in South Africa through their work in education and their association with modern artists.

Also of some importance was the lack of recognition in previous accounts of the influence of African art on New Group members' work. This absence resulted from later researchers using source material, written by the early writers, which excluded this aspect of the New Group's work.

A further misunderstanding of the history of the New Group, was that the Group broke up because of stylistic differences, when these differences had been apparent throughout its existence. As Chapter Two pointed out it was only when the Group had achieved some economic stability for their members that stylistic differences

became important and played a role in the Group's dissolution.

This research has indicated that a broader understanding of the history of the New Group which includes economic, social and political factors, is fundamental to an understanding of the New Group's history. Aside from this, the research has shown the enormous power that source materials and especially newspaper cuttings have in directing later histories, and the enormous potential they have for distorting art history.

## Appendix A : The Draft Constitution of the New Group

### HEADQUARTERS

The headquarters of the New Group shall be in Cape Town.

### AIM

The aim of the New Group shall be to raise the standard of art in South Africa.

### CONTROL

The affairs of the Group shall be controlled by the members who shall elect annually an Hon. Secretary, an Hon. Treasurer and a Chairman. The Group shall also have power to elect an Executive of not less than five members. Further, the Group shall have power to elect sub-committees and to invite the co-operation of suitable persons, outside the Group, for special purposes.

### AFFILIATIONS

In centres other than Cape Town Groups may be formed under the title of the New Group, provided that such centres adopt the constitution of the parent group. The Cape centre shall have no financial liability in such organisations and their relations to such centres shall be reciprocal.

### MEMBERSHIP

Members shall be by invitation only. Members have the right to nominate for election as members of the Group any artists who have held "one man" exhibitions in South Africa. Such proposals must be supported by two additional members, each of whom must have seen the work of the proposed candidate before proposal can be submitted to the Group. If the nominee is approved election shall take place at a subsequent meeting after a full investigation of the nominees qualifications. A secret ballot on forms specially provided for the purpose shall be taken.

At such a meeting five shall form the quorum.

The right of voting by post can only be extended to members not resident in Cape Town, and provided such members are acquainted with the work of the nominee.

It shall be incumbent upon all members when holding individual exhibitions that the sub-title "Member of the New Group" shall appear on invitations, catalogues and advertisements for same.

No member shall write to the Press or consent to be interviewed on controversial matters in the name of the New Group without consent of the Committee, and then not until all the facts connected with the controversy are fully investigated.

The Group shall have the power to consider the standing of members in the event of their work not being up to the standard set.

#### HONORARY MEMBERS

The Group shall have power to elect Honorary Life Members who shall have the right to attend the Annual General Meeting, but have no voting power.

#### SUBSCRIBER MEMBERS

The Group may elect Subscriber Members who shall have free access to all exhibitions and other functions organized by the Group.

#### SUBSCRIPTION

Entrance fee shall be 10/6 and the annual subscription 10/6.

#### ACTIVITIES

##### 1. EXHIBITIONS

- a) Exhibitions by the New Group shall be held once a year in Cape Town. No member shall hold an exhibition in Cape Town during the month preceding the Annual Exhibition. The Group to give members at least three months' notice of date of exhibition.
- b) Additional exhibitions may be held in Cape Town and other centres at the discretion of the Group.
- c) Members shall pay a hanging fee of 10/6, irrespective of the number of works submitted.
- d) A commission not exceeding 15% will be charged on all sales.

##### 2. OTHER ACTIVITIES The Group may undertake :

- a) Publication of drawings and literature.
- b) Raising of Artist Fund by :
  1. General levy on exhibitions.
  2. Annual contribution.
  3. Honorary member contributions.
- c) Affiliations with other cultural Societies.
- d) Invitation of artists, not resident in South Africa, to exhibit with Group.

#### MEETINGS

##### 1. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A general meeting of the New Group shall be held annually at a convenient date after the first New Group Exhibition of the year. Notice of this meeting with agenda shall be circulated not less than fourteen days before the date the meeting. The agenda shall include the following :

- a) Consideration of the Annual Report and Financial Statement for the preceding year.
- b) The election by ballot of the officers and Committee for the following year.
- c) Consideration of any proposed alterations to constitution of which written notice shall have been

received by the Secretary not less than twenty-one days before the date of the meeting.

d) Any competent business.

## 2. SPECIAL GENERAL MEETINGS

A Special General Meeting, of which not less than seven days notice shall be given, may be called at the request of the Chairman, or in response to a requisition signed by not less than five members of the Group within fourteen days of the date of the receipt of the request of the requisitions. The notice convening this meeting shall state the nature of the business to be discussed, and no other business shall be considered thereat.

## FINANCE

All money belonging to the Group shall be deposited with Barclays Bank, Cape Town, and all payments made by cheque signed by the Hon. Treasurer and the Chairman, or in the absence of either, by an alternate member chosen by the Committee.

## BY-LAWS

The Group shall have power to make by-laws governing Exhibition which will permit of some variation in terms to members, according to circumstances.

## Appendix B: Membership lists

### Key

- 1 - Catalogue from New Group Exhibition, Johannesburg 1948.  
 2.- Berman, E., Art and Artists of South Africa.  
 3.- Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep: Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, Vol 27 December 1978, pp.51-55.  
 4. - Thomas, B., "The New Group" Thesis for Postgraduate Diploma in Museum Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 1988.  
 5. - Schoonraad, M., The New Group 1938 - 1954, Catalogue for New Group retrospective at SANG 1989 - 1990.  
 6. - Membership list according to researcher. This list was determined by sources listed in bibliography.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Battiss, W.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Boonzaier, G.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bennet, A.					*	
Borbereki, Z.					*	
Botha, D.					*	
Broadley, R.		*	*	*	*	*
Browne, F.					*	
Busk, B.					*	
Byrd, E.	*			*	*	*
Couwenberg, S.					*	
Cuairan, F.					*	
Davis, E.					*	
Desmond, N.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dixon, L.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dixon, J.	*				*	*
Domsaitis, P.		*	*	*	*	*
du Plessis, E.	*	*	*	*	*	*
du Toit, P.					*	
Dziomba, E.		*	*		*	*
Esmonde-White, E.		*	*	*	*	*
Ellis, E.					*	
Elwes, S.					*	
Evans, D.L.					*	
Everard, R.		*	*		*	*
Everard-Haden, R.		*	*		*	*
Farley, J.		*	*		*	*
Frank, A.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Franck, B.					*	
Gluckman, J.	*	*	*		*	*
Graetz, R.		*	*		*	*
Hahn, S.		*			*	

Harries, K.				*		
Hart, P.	*				*	
Harvey, R.					*	
Hendriks, A.	*				*	
Hendriks, P.A.	*					
Hendrikz, W.		*	*		*	
Higgs, C.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hillhouse, M.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hughes, M.		*			*	
Hutton, P.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Juta, J.		*	*		*	*
Keegan, M.					*	
King, E.		*	*		*	*
Kottler, M.	*	*			*	*
Krenz, A.		*	*	*	*	*
Krige, F.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Kussel, R.		*			*	*
Laubscher, E.		*	*	*	*	*
Laubser, M.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Leftwich, P.	*					
Le Roux Smith, L.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lewis, N.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lipshitz, L.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lock, F.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Long, G.	*	*	*	*	*	*
McCaw, T.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Naudé, H.	*	*			*	
Meyerowitz, E.					*	
Morrees, V.					*	
Ordbrown, J.		*	*		*	*
Peers, C.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Pierneef, J.H.	*				*	
Pinker, S.					*	
Pope Ellis, J.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Preller, A.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Prowse, R.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ronsheim, N.	*				*	
Sargeant, W.	*	*	*	*	*	
Sekoto, G.	*				*	*
Shepard, R.		*	*	*	*	*
Stayt, M.					*	
Stern, I.					*	
Sumner, M.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Theron, L.					*	
Todd, C.					*	
van Essche, M.	*	*	*	*	*	*
van Heerden, P.				*		*
Vaughan-Williams, M.	*				*	
von Michaelis, H.					*	*
Wallis, J.		*	*		*	*
Wagner, A.	*				*	
Welz, J.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Walie, E.	*					

Wolfe, E.		*	*	*	*	*
Wright, J.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Young, G.		*	*	*	*	*
Zerffi, F.	*	*	*	*	*	*
TOTAL	42	51	46	31	82	48

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Many of the newspaper articles do not have a page number as the number was not recorded in the press cutting book at the SANG from where most of the cuttings come.)

Albrecht, M.C., Barnet, J.H., The Sociology of Art and Literature, London, Gerald Duckworth and Co, 1970.

Alexander, F.L., "The Art of Lippy Lipshitz", Jewish Affairs, February 1969.

Alexander, F.L., Art Life in South Africa since 1900, Cape Town, A. A. Balkema, 1962.

Alsop, A. (trans A. Bostock), The Rare Art Traditions: The history of Art Collecting and related phenomena, New York, Princeton University Press, 1979.

Alter, P., Nationalism, UK, Edward Arnold, 1989.

Anderson, D., "Lively exhibition by members of New Group", The Cape Times, 16 September 1952.

Anderson, D., "Ten South African Painters and the Primitive Revival", The Studio Magazine, March 1957, pp.65-73.

Anderson, D., "Art in South Africa", Pamphlet printed by Hayne and Gibson, Johannesburg, undated.

Anon, "Kuns in Suid-Afrika deur A.C. Bouman", Die Burger, 18 February 1935.

Anon, "A Short Guide to Art", The Cape Times, 7 May 1938.

Anon, "National Gallery attacked", The Cape Argus, 11 February 1939.

Anon, "Die Nuwe Kunstgroep", Die Burger, 30 April 1939.

Anon, "Skilders put uit natuur", Die Suiderstem, 3 May 1938.

Anon, "Nuwe Groep se werke", Die Burger, 3 August 1939.

Anon, "Attractive work at Barter Exhibition", The Cape Times, 27 April 1939.

Anon, "Group of Young Artists", The Cape Times, 28 April 1939.

Anon, "Kaas en Drank vir Skilderye", Die Suiderstem, 3 May 1939.

Anon, "Skilderye vir kaas", Die Suiderstem, 28 April 1939.

- Anon, "Nuwe Groep se werke", Die Burger, 3 August 1939.
- Anon, "The New Group", Rand Daily Mail, 19 February 1939.
- Anon, "Barter Art Exhibition", The Cape Argus, 23 April 1939.
- Anon, "Art for Goods", The Cape Argus, 23 April 1939.
- Anon, ""B-ART-ER" EXHIBITION IN CAPE TOWN", The Cape Argus, 5 April 1939.
- Anon, "Paintings for Cheese", The Cape Argus, 2 May 1939.
- Anon, "The Two Pictures Controversy", The Cape Argus, 4 February 1939.
- Anon, "Pictures for the World's Fair", The Cape Argus, 31 January 1939.
- Anon, "The Puzzle of the Two Pictures", The Cape Argus, 7 February 1939.
- Anon, "To represent Contemporary Art", The Cape Argus, 6 February 1939.
- Anon, "Nuwe Groep se werke", Die Burger, 3 August 1939.
- Anon, "Cape Town Artists Indignant", The Cape Times, 14 August 1939.
- Anon, "Umtali Artist's distinction", The Cape Times, 30 January 1939.
- Anon, "Dynamic Art", The Cape Argus, 5 August 1939.
- Anon, "Picture Removed", The Cape Argus, 10 August 1939.
- Anon, "Purchase of Two South African Pictures", The Cape Times, 7 February 1939.
- Anon, "National Gallery Attacked", The Cape Argus, 11 February 1939.
- Anon, "A Picture Removed", The Cape Argus, 10 August 1939.
- Anon, "Artists want an Investigation", The Cape Argus, 14 February 1939.
- Anon, "Cape Town Artists Indignant", The Cape Times, 14 August 1939.
- Anon, "Plight of City Artists", The Cape Argus, 15 September 1939.

- Anon, "More criticism of Prof Roworth", The Cape Times, 28 September 1940.
- Anon, "Prof Roworth replies to his critics", The Cape Times, 25 September 1940.
- Anon, "Nazism in Art", The Cape Times, 27 September 1940.
- Anon, "Work of Michaelis School praised", The Cape Times, 25 September 1940.
- Anon, "This Morning's exhibition", The Cape Times, 5 November 1941.
- Anon, "New Group Exhibition", The Cape Times, 7 March 1941.
- Anon, "High Standard Reached", The Cape Argus, 29 April 1942.
- Anon, "Exhibition of the New Group", The Star, 24 September 1943.
- Anon, "A New Group Show", The Cape Argus, 21 November 1945.
- Anon, "Good Work by New Group", The Cape Argus, 23 May 1947.
- Anon, "New Group's Show has vitality", The Cape Times, 23 May 1947.
- Anon, "Galleries and Schools Bad for Art", The Cape Argus, 16 June 1947.
- Anon, "Stimulating exhibition by New Group", The Star, 11 March 1948.
- Anon, "What is the function of modern art", The Cape Times, 26 April 1948.
- Anon, "Exhibition by New Group", The Star, 11 March 1948.
- Anon, "New Group nears teens", The Star, 11 March 1948.
- Anon, "Hoe Die Afrikaanse Kuns Vorder", Die Vaderland, 7 April 1948, p.8.
- Anon, "Scarcity of Oil-Paints Hits Artists", The Cape Times, 30 January 1950.
- Anon, "Tretchikoff back from U.S. Tour", The Cape Times, 8 August 1955.
- Anon, "Die Eerste Jaarlike Tentoonstelling van Suid-Afrikaanse Kuns", Lantern, March 1957, pp.281-287.

Alexander, F.L., "Art Criticism", The Cape Times, 20 March 1948.

Architect, "Art, The Masses and The Artist", The Cape Times, 24 September 1952.

Art Lover, "Art vs Flashing Signs", The Cape Times, 25 September 1952.

Arnott, B., The Evolution of Sculpture in South Africa, MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1961.

Arnott, B., Lippy Lipshitz, Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1964.

Badenhorst, M.A., "Enkelende Hulpmiddels by die Studie van Afrikaanse Kultuurgeskiedenis", SA Tydskrif vir Kultuur en Kultuurgeskiedenis, 1987, Vol 1 no 2, pp.144-155.

Bann, S., "Art History in Perspective", History of the Human Sciences, Vol 2 No.1, pp.1-17.

Battiss, W., "Ancient Engravings found in the Free State", The Star, 21 August 1938.

Battiss, W., "Some curiosities of South African Villages and Towns", The Star, 16 March 1939.

Battiss, W., "Toward an Independent Art: The New Group of South Africa", The Studio Magazine, May 1939, pp.208-209.

Battiss, W., The Amazing Bushmen, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1939.

Battiss, W., South African Paint Pot, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1939.

Battiss, W., "The Sculpture of Lippy Lipshitz", Common Sense, July 1943, pp.8-9.

Battiss, W., The Artists of the Rocks, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1951.

Battiss, W., Fragments of Africa, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1951.

Battiss, W., "New Art and Old Art in South Africa", The Studio Magazine, Vol 144, July-December 1952, pp.66-75.

Battiss, W., Bushman Art, Pretoria, Red Fawn Press, 1953.

Battiss, W., "Many Art Shows but how much is art?", The Cape Argus, 5 February 1955.

Battiss, W., Grasser, J.W., Franz, G.H., Junod, H.P., The Art of Africa, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shuter, 1958.

- Battiss, W., "Wanted! A History of Art in South Africa", Fontein, Vol 1 no 1, 1960, pp.12-17.
- Battiss, W., "Kunsbewegings in Suid-Afrika vandag", Standpunte, Vol 18 no 60, 1965, pp.18-27.
- Becker, S., Artworlds, London, University of California Press, 1982.
- Becker, M., Gregoire Boonzaier, Cape Town, Pretoria, Human and Rousseau, 1990.
- Bekker, M., "Die Nuwe Groep, Kunspioneers van Suid-Afrika", Lantern no 27, December 1978, pp.51-55.
- Berman, E., Art and Artists of South Africa, Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1983.
- Berman, E., The Story of South African Painting, Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1974.
- Berman, E., "Modern South African painting", A Financial Mail Publication, 1965.
- Bernstein, E., "A Reply to Prof Roworth", The Cape Review, 29 May 1935.
- Bernstein, E., "Steps to a South African Culture: The Problem, and the Primitive Approach", Trek, March 1950, pp.24, 25, 34, 35.
- Bockhorst, M., "Kuns in die Kasteel", Lantern, October 1952, pp.126-127.
- Bockhorst, M., "A Painter expounds Lachrymose", The Cape Times, 16 September 1952.
- Bockhorst, M., "Die kuns van n' kwarteeu", Standpunte, Vol 9 no 3, pp.37-51.
- Bockhorst, F., "The Story of Fine Art", in Honikman, A.H. (ed) Cape Town, City of Good Hope, Cape Town, Howard Timmlins, 1966, pp.168-176.
- Boonzaier, G., Lipshitz, L., Wenning, Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1949.
- Bosman, F.C.L., Afrikaanse Kultuurbesit n' Oorsig, Nasionale Pers, 1930.
- Bouman, A.C., "Kuns van Die Nuwe Groep Vierde Jaarlikse Tentoonstelling in Kaapstad", Die Huisgenoot, 28 March 1941, pp.15, 17, 59.
- Bouman, A.C., "Drie Belangwekkende Kunstenaars", Die Huisgenoot, January 1941, pp.21, 23.

Bouman, A.C., "Maggie Laubser", Die Huisgenoot, 1 January 1945, pp.7, 25, 27.

Bouman, A.C., "Die Kunstentoonstelling in Kaapstad I", Die Huisgenoot, 13 January 1939, pp.30-31.

Bouman, A.C., "Die Kunstentoonstelling in Kaapstad II", Die Huisgenoot, 20 January 1939, pp.15, 17.

Bouman, A.C., Kuns en Kunswaardering, Cape Town, HAUM, 1942.

Bouman, A.C., Painters of South Africa, Cape Town, HAUM de Busy, 1949.

Bouman, A.C., "Suid Afrika in die Kuns" in van den Heever, Dr C. M. , Pienaar, Dr. De V. (eds), Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner Deel III, Kaapstad, Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk., 1950.

Bouman, A.C., "n' Ryksmuseum? Steunpilaar van die Nasionale Trots", Die Burger, 7 January 1935.

Bouman, A.C., "Duisend Pond vir Kunswerke", Die Burger, 30 March 1936.

Bozzoli, B., "Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories South African Experiences 1978-1988", Radical History Review History from South Africa, January 1990, pp.13-29.

Brander, "Kuns en Gesonde Verstand", Die Suiderstem, 8 October 1936.

Brander, "In die Afrikaanse Skilderwereld", Die Suiderstem, 16 December 1936.

Brander, "Skilders Boikot die tentoonstelling", Die Suiderstem, 28 December 1936.

Brander, van Eyck tot van Gogh, Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1936.

Brander, "Londonse Gekkes skilder soos Moderne Meesters", Die Suiderstem, 26 June 1937.

Brander, "n' Jaar se Kuns", Die Suiderstem, 8 October 1938.

Brander, "Kunstenaars vorm Nuwe Vereeniging", Die Suiderstem, 23 February 1838.

Brander, "Skilders put uit natuur", Die Suiderstem, 3 May 1938.

Brander, "Twee Moderne Skilderye", Die Suiderstem, 17 May 1938.

Brander, "Uitstekende werke van nuwe Kunstenaars", Die Suiderstem, 4 May 1938.

Brander, "Voortreflike skilderye in stad vertoon", Die Suiderstem, 29 December 1939.

Brander, "n' Praatjie oor Tegniek", Die Suiderstem, 28 January 1939.

Brander, "Nuwe Groep se Tweede Uitstalling", Die Suiderstem, 1 May 1939.

Brander, "Still-lives by Freida Lock", The Cape Times, 11 July 1939.

Brander, "Beste Uitstalling tot dusver", Die Suiderstem, 1 August 1939.

Brander, "Seventig voortreffelike werke van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 5 December 1939.

Brander, "Mooi skilderye op Stellenbosch", Die Suiderstem, 7 August 1941.

Brander, "Besienswaarde werk van L. Lipshitz", Die Suiderstem, 13 January 1941.

Brander, "Interessante Skilderye van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 6 March 1941.

Brander, "Tekortkoming in Jongste Uitstalling", Die Suiderstem, 4 May 1941.

Brander, "Die Nuwe Groep in die Argus Galery", Die Suiderstem, 4 May 1944.

Brander, "Uitstalling van Nuwe Groep teleurgestellend", Die Suiderstem, 17 May 1945.

Brander, "Skilderye van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 26 May 1947.

Brander, "Uitstalling Kunswerke van Nuwe Groep", Die Suiderstem, 13 November 1949.

Brander, "Is daar so-iets as n' Suid-Afrikaans kuns", Die Suiderstem, 3 January 1950.

Brantlinger, P., "Victorians and Africa, The Genealogy of the Dark Continent", Critical Enquiry, Autumn 1985.

Burger, P.(trans. Shaw, M.), Theory of the Avante-Garde Theory and History of Language, Vol 2, Manchester University Press, 19.

Camera Obscura, "Prof Roworth's Portrait", The Cape Argus, 10 February 1939.

Carrier, D., "Winckelman and Pater, Morelli and Freud, The Tropics of Art Historical Discourse", History of the Human Sciences, Vol 2 no 1, pp.19-37.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1938, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, December 1939, Pretoria, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1939, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, March 1941, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1942, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, September 1943, Johannesburg, Gainsborough Galleries, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, 1943, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1944, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1945, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, 1945, Johannesburg, Gainsborough Galleries, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1947, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1948, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, March 1951, Gainsborough Galleries, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1949, Cape Town, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1951, Argus Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Catalogue of New Group Exhibition, May 1952, Johannesburg, Lidchi Gallery, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Cape Times Correspondent, "Reply to New Group", The Cape Times, 24 October 1952.

Cape Times Correspondent, "Umtali Artists Distinction", The Cape Times, 30 January 1939.

Coleman, F.L.(ed), Economic History of South Africa, Pretoria, HAUM, 1983.

Crane, D., The Transformation of the Avante-Garde. The New York Art World 1940-1985, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1987.

Crouse, H., "Not Representative", The Cape Argus, 10 February 1939.

Davies, R.H., Capital, State and White labour in South Africa 1900-1960 An Historical Materialist Analysis of class Formation and Class Relations, UK, The Harvester Press, 1979.

Degenaar, J., Art and the Meaning of Life, UCT, Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, Summer School, 1986.

Dekker, G., "Die Calvinisme en Die Kuns", Standpunte, Vol 7 no 3 vol 27, April 1953, pp.1-13.

de Klerk, A., The Puritans in Africa A Story of Afrikanerdom, London, Bok Books International, 1975.

D.G., "Exhibition opened today by Mrs Thorne", The Cape Argus, 4 May 1938.

D.G., "As one artist to another", The Cape Argus, 6 August 1935.

D.L., "New Group Exhibition", The Star, 1 March 1939.

Draft Constitution of The New Group, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Dubow, N., Irma Stern, Cape Town, Struik, 1974.

Dubow, N., "Art of Protest", Leadership, Vol 5 no 6, 1986, pp.60-65.

Duerden, D., "Continental Painting in Africa", Art News and Reviews, 1959, pp.15.

Dunbar, Moodie T., The Rise of Afrikanerdom Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion, UK, University of California Press, 1975.

Egbert, D.D., Social Radicalism and the Arts in Western Europe : A cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968, London, Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1970.

Eglington, C., "Die bydrae van Elf Skilderesse tot die Kuns van Suid-Afrika", Lantern, September 1962, pp.37-43.

E.R.P., "Exhibition by New Group", The Cape Times, 5 December 1939.

Falkenheim, J. V., Roger Fry and the beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1980

Farlam, C., J. H. Pierneef, 'Cultural hero': A reappraisal in the context of the emergence of Afrikaner Nationalism with relation to the artists Station Panels (1929-1932), Honours Dissertation, UCT, 1990.

Fischer, E., The necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach, UK, Penguin Books, 1959.

Frank Joubert Art Centre, The Frank Joubert Art Centre 1932-1983, Cape Town, 1983.

Gablik, S., Has Modernism failed?, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1984.

Gee, M., "The Avante-Garde, Order and the Art Market", Art History, Vol 2 no 1, March 1979.

Godby, M., "What are the expectations of the Art Historian", Art Criticism Symposium, University of Pretoria, 1987, pp.5-7.

Grundlingh, A, Sapire, H., "From feverish festival to repetitive ritual? The Changing Fortunes of the Great Trek Mythology in an Industrialising South Africa 1938-1988", South African Historical Journal, no 21, 1989, pp.19-37.

Hallet, R., Africa since 1874, Volume 2, London, Heineman Educational Books, 1974.

Harmsen, F., The Women of Bonnefoi: The Story of the Everard Group, Pretoria, van Schaik, 1980.

Harmsen, F., Looking at South African Art: A Guide to the study and appreciation of art, Pretoria, van Schaick, 1985.

Harrison, D., The White Tribe of Africa, London, BBC, 1987

Hillebrand, M., The Women of Olifantsfontein, SA Studio Ceramics Catalogue for exhibition at the South African National Gallery, 1991.

H.P., "Sculpture in New Group exhibition", The Cape Argus, 3 May 1939.

Hauser, A., (trans. Northcott, J.) A Sociology of Art, London, Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1974.

Hugo, J., "Painting in South Africa", SA Panorama, 1946 published by The Literary Guild, pp.40-41, 43, 45, 143, 145.

- Jensen, R., "The Avant-garde and the Trade in Art", Art Journal, Winter 1988, Vol 47 no 4, pp.360-367.
- Jeppe, H., South African Artists 1900-1962, Afrikaanse Pers, Johannesburg, 1951.
- Joubert, J., The Art Exhibitions held in the Memorial Hall 1931-1951, MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1989.
- Kendal, F.K., A Short History of the South African Fine Arts Association, Cape Town, South African Fine Arts Association, 1941.
- Knight, L., "Lippy Lipshitz", Lantern, August 1979, Vol 28 no 3, pp.24-25.
- Krauss, R., The Originality of the Avant-garde and other Modernist myths, London, MIT Press, 1986.
- Kreitner, L.B., "South African Art and it's Problems", Trek, August 1950, pp.32-35.
- Krige, Lipshitz, Meyer, Gravette, "Artists profoundly shocked", The Cape Times, 27 September 1940.
- Kruger, D.W., Dictionary of South African Bibliography, Vol 1 no 111.
- Kruger, D.W., The Making of a Nation A History of the Union of South Africa 1919-1961, Johannesburg, London, Macmillan, 1982.
- Labuschagne, E.C., Die Geskiedenis en Betekenis van die Afrikaanse Kultuurraad Pretoria 1930-1980, MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1980.
- Laubscher, E., "Modern Art and Dr Pickerill", The Cape Times, 17 July 1952.
- Le Roux, L., "Art and Social Change", The Cape Times, 2 May 1942.
- Letter from Boonzaier to Battiss, January 1951, photocopy Coll. SANG.
- Letter from Le Roux to New Group dated 21 March 1949, photocopy Coll. SANG.
- Letters to the Editor, "Pictures for World Fair", The Cape Times, 31 January 1939.
- Letters to the Editor, "Degenerate Art", The Cape Times, 26 September 1940.
- Letters to the Editor, The Cape Times, 1 November 1940.
- Letters to the Editor, The Cape Times, 7 October 1940.

- Letters to the Editor, "Modern Art", The Cape Times, 6 October 1947.
- Letters to the Editor, "Mr Sibbett on Debasing of Art", The Cape Argus, 7 October 1947.
- Letters to the Editor, "Work of South African Painters", The Cape Times, 29 July 1947.
- Letters to the Editor, "Plea for Sanity on Art", The Cape Times, 17 April 1950.
- Letters to the Editor, "Art and modern Art", The Cape Times, 3 February 1950.
- Letters to the Editor, "Tretchikoff's Art and the Masses", The Cape Times, 20 September 1952.
- Letter from Le Roux to the Cape Branch, 21 March 1949, photocopy Coll. SANG.
- Lewis, B., "Londonse gekkes Skilder soos Moderne Meesters", Die Suiderstem, 28 June 1937.
- Lewis, B., "Art and Artists in South Africa", The Cape Times Annual for 1932, pp.29-32.
- Lewis, B., "Work of Brilliant Artist", The Cape Argus, 11 October 1939.
- Lewis, B., "Exhibition by New Group", The Cape Argus, 5 December 1939.
- Lewis, B., "Work of A brilliant Artist", The Cape Argus, 11 October 1939.
- Lewis, B., "Still-Life by Freida Lock", The Cape Times, 11 July 1939.
- Lewis, B., "Exhibition by New Group", The Cape Argus, 5 December 1939.
- Lewis, B., "Paintings by the New Group", The Cape Times, 6 December 1939.
- Lewis, B., I Remember, Cape Town, The Rustica Press, 1950.
- Lewis, D., The Naked Eye, Cape Town, Paul Kosten, 1946.
- Lewis, D., "The Sculpture of Lippy Lipshitz", The Democrat, 1 September 1945, p.16.
- Lewis, N., End and Beginning, Johannesburg, Constantia, 1945.

Lewis, N., "Nazism in art", The Cape Times, 26 September 1940.

Lipshitz, L., "A Candid reply to Prof Roworth", The Cape Argus, 9 February 1939.

Lipshitz, L., "The Hole in the Sculpture", The Cape Times, 28 September 1954.

Lissoos, S., Johannesburg Art and Artists: Selections from a Century, Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1986.

Long, G., Exhibition of Contemporary South African Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures, Exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, 1948.

Marais, D., "Expressionisme in Suid-Afrika", De Arte, 37 April 1988, pp.72-90.

Martienssen, H., "Art of Irma Stern", in Insights, Selected Essays of Heather Martienssen, Johannesburg, A.D. Donker Publishers, 1984, pp.51-63.

Mayer, E., "'n' Nasionale Kuns van Suid- Afrika", Die Brandwag, 24 December 1919, no 7, pp.139-199.

Minutes of New Group Annual General meeting, 12 December 1942, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Minutes of New Group Annual General meeting, 15 July 1953, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Minutes of New Group Annual general meeting, 30 July 1954, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Mirowski, P., "The Rhetoric of Modern Economics", History of the Human Sciences, Vol 3 no 3, June 1990, pp.234-250.

Nesbitt, E., Port Elisabeth School of Art, a History 1882-1982, Port Elisabeth, Port Elisabeth Technikon, 1982.

New Group notice, 1949, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Ogilvie, G., The Dictionary of South African Painters and Sculptors including Namibia, Johannesburg, Everard Read, 1989.

O'Meara, D., Volkskapitalisme Class, Capital and Ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism 1934-1948, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983.

Ordbrown, J., "Modern Art", The Cape Times, 3 October 1940.

Our Art Vol 1 and 2, Pretoria, South African Association for the advancement of Knowledge and Culture, 1961.

Pelzer, I., Die Afrikaner-Broederbond Eerste 50 Jaar, Pretoria, Tafelberg, 1979.

P.H.W., "New Group's Exhibition has wide appeal", The Cape Times, 4 May 1948.

P.H.W., "New Group's exhibition pleases", The Cape Times, 4 May 1949.

Pike, H., A History of Communism in South Africa, Germinston, South Africa, Christian Mission International of South Africa, 1986.

Pretorius, J.L., Kunshandel in Johannesburg en Pretoria met besondere verwysing na E. Schweikerdt (Edms) Bpk, MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1983.

Prof Roworth, "Value of Art Schools", The Cape Argus, 10 July 1947.

Rankin, E., "Ideas, Ideals and Ideology in the writing on South African Sculpture", Current Perspectives in South African Art and Architecture, Proceedings of sixth Conference of the Association of Art Historians, Cape Town 1990, p.148-160.

Rayner, P., "Art for Everyman", The Cape Times, 12 March 1941.

Rayner, P., "Fig Leaf Frenzy", Trek, 4 December 1942.

Rayner, P., "Cultural Reciprocity", Trek, 12 March 1943.

Rayner, P., "Good meat in Plenty", Trek, 18 May 1945.

Rees, A.L., Borzello, F., The New Art History, London, Camden Press, 1986.

Report of 1936 New Group exhibition in Pretoria, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Robson, D., "The Avante-Garde and the On-Garde: Some influences on the potential Market for the first Generation Abstract Expressionists in the 1940's and the early 1950's", Art Journal, Fall 1988, Vol 47 no 3, pp.215-221.

Roworth, E., "Young Painter's Farewell", The Cape Times, 8 February 1935.

Roworth, E., "Too many Long Faces in Art Galleries", The Cape Argus, 23 June 1947.

Saunders, C., The Making of the South African past : Major Historians on race and Class, Cape Town, David Phillip, 1988.

Saunders, C. (ed), Readers Digest, Illustrated History of South Africa The Real Story, Readers Digest Association, 1988.

Simmers, M., "Works by Artists of South Africa", The Cape Times, 28 April 1937.

S., "Tentoonstelling van Nuwe Groep", Die Burger, 4 May 1938.

S., "Tentoonstelling van Nuwe Groep", Die Burger, 6 December 1939.

S., "Nuwe Groep handhaaf hoe Standard", Die Burger, 8 April 1951.

S., "Bewaring van ons geregshof", Die Burger, 7 August 1952.

Schmidt, L., "Suid-Afrikaanse Kunskritiek", Art Criticism Symposium, Pretoria, 1987, pp.5-7.

Scholtz, du P.J., Strat Caldecott, Cape Town and Pretoria, A.A. Balkema, 1968.

Scholtz, J. du P., D.C Boonzaier en Pieter Wenning verslag van n' vriendskap, Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973.

Scholtz, J. du P., Moses Kottler. His years at the Cape, Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1976.

Scholtz, G.D., "Het die Afrikaner volk n' Toekoms?", in Die Afrikaner en sy Kultuur, Johannesburg, Voortrekker Pers Bpk, 1955.

Scott, F.P., Gregoire Boonzaier, Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1964.

Shiff, R., "On criticism handling history", History of the Human Sciences, Vol 2 no 1, pp.64-87.

Sibbett, C., "Modern Art as I see it", Undated pamphlet printed by the SANG, reprinted in The Cape Argus, 29 September 1947, as "The cult of the Ugly".

Sibbett, C., "A Reply to the critic", The Cape Argus, 29 September 1947.

Simmers, M., "Works by Artists of South Africa", The Cape Times, 28 April 1937.

Simmers, M., "Most refreshing and Stimulating", The Cape Times, 4 March 1938.

Sizwe, N., One Azania, One Nation The National Question in South Africa, London, Zed Press, 1979.

Smith, D.R., "Towards a Protestant Aesthetics, Rembrandt's 1655 Sacrifice of Isaac", Art History, Vol 8 no 3, September 1985, pp.290-301.

Smith, K., The Changing Past Trends in South African Historical Writing, Johannesburg, Southern Books Publisher, 1988.

Stallard, Col., Coulter, W.C., Marwick, J.S., Status of the Union Act 1934. It's origin, meaning and effect., reprinted from The Daily Dispatch, East London, 1934, Researchers Coll.

Standard Encyclopedia of South Africa, Vol 2, BAC CAL, Cape Town, Nasou, 1970-1976.

Stevenson, M. Kukard, J. "An historical Overview of the white South African Art Market with particular reference to the Cape (1652 to 1954)", Current Perspectives in South African Art and Architecture, Proceedings of sixth Conference of the Association of Art Historians, Cape Town 1990.

The Art Critic, "Interpretation of reality by the Artist", The Cape Argus, 14 October 1947.

The Art Critic, "A conversation piece on art", The Cape Argus, 7 August 1945.

The Art Critic, "The economics of an artists' life", The Cape Argus, 24 May 1948.

The Art Critic, "Place of the Art Critic, The virtue of variety in art", The Cape Argus, 8 January 1948.

The Art Critic, "Ignorance not Bliss about painting", The Cape Argus, 26 June 1947.

The Art Critic, "New realism in Modern Painting", The Cape Argus, 29 September 1948.

Thomas, B., The New Group, Thesis for post-graduate Diploma in Museum Studies, Stellenbosch, University of Stellenbosch, 1987.

Taylor, G., "Ultra-Modern Art", The Cape Argus, 8 August 1939.

The Art Critic, "Too many Long Faces in Art Galleries", The Cape Argus, 19 June 1947.

The Summary Guide to South African Gallery of 1952, Cape Town, SANG, 1952, Researchers Coll.

1953 Treasurers report of the New Group by Jack Cope, photocopy Coll. SANG.

Union of South Africa Bureau of Census and Statistics, First Survey of Distribution and Services Sector 1952 Art and Curio Dealers, Pretoria, The Government Printers, 1952.

van der Westhuysen, H.M., "Die hedendaagse Skilderkuns in Suid-Afrika", Historia, Vol 9 no 1, 1964, pp.34-43.

van Diepen for Dr Govan Mbeki Fund, The National Question in South Africa, London and New Jersey, Zed Books, 1988.

van den Heever, C.M., Pienaar, Dr p.de V.(eds), Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner Deel III, Kaapstad, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1950.

van Essche, M., "Professor Roworth and Art Galleries", The Cape Times, 19 June 1947.

van Essche, M., "Accomplished Technique of Jean Welz", The Cape Times, 12 June 1952.

van Essche, M., "Remarkable Talent of Gerard Sekoto", The Cape Times, 28 June 1954.

van Essche, M., "Modern Art", The Argus, 6 October 1947.

Van Essche, M., "Art Critics", The Cape Times, 25 March 1948.

van Heyningen, C., "Letters in defence of Modern Art", Cape Argus, 5 August 1939.

van Rooyen, C., Maggie Laubser, Cape Town, Struik Publishers, 1974.

Vatcher, H.W., White Laager The Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism, London, Pall Mall Press, 1965.

Versfeld, M., "The Catholic Approach to Art Criticism", Standpunte, Vol 6 no 2 vol 22, December 1951, pp.14-24.

Volschenk, P., Kleur as Skilderagtige element in die werk van Gregoire Boonzaier, MA Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1971.

Welz, S., Art at Auction in South Africa Twenty years of Sotheby's, Stephen Welz and Co, Johannesburg, A.D. Donker Publisher, 1989.

Wafer, J., 100 Years on Natal Art: A series of Exhibition celebrating the centenary of the Art School at Technikon, Natal, Durban, 1986.

W.H.K., The Arts in South Africa, Durban, Knox Printing and Publishing Company, 1933-1934.

Wilkins, I., Strydom, H., The SuperAfrikaners, Johannesburg, Jonathon Ball Publishers, 1987.

Wilson, M., Thompson, L., The Oxford History of South Africa Part II South Africa 1870-1966, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, London, 1971.