

VRIENDE VAN DIE MICHAELIS-VERSAMELING / ZIHLOBO YA-MICHAELIS COLLECTION

The Friends of the Michaelis Collection was established in 1993.

Its objective is to stimulate active interest in the Collection and the Iziko Old Town House, the Museum dedicated to it.



New Patron of the Friends of the Michaelis Collection Peter Clarke congratulates Christopher Peter at the end of the demonstration.

Recreating the Floral Baroque

On Saturday 21st September, Friends of Michaelis Council Member Helen Binckes introduced Christopher Peter, Director of the Irma Stern Museum and well-known flower arranger, to the audience for a recreation of the floral Baroque. Christopher talked

principles of flower arranging, acknowledging his debt to Constance Spry, on the one hand, and Balenciaga, on the other. Using both local Spring flowers, both indigenous and exotic, and imported artificial flowers, Christopher composed two magnificent arrangements



Helen Binckes introduces Christopher Peter to the Friends of the Michaelis Collection.

that engaged with Paul Emslie's colourful abstract work from the Baroque meets Modern installation. At the end of the demonstration, Christopher was congratulated by long-time Friend of the Michaelis Collection, Peter Clarke. The arrangement was complemented over the next few weeks by an exhibition of flower paintings from the Ibhathane Project and the Frank Joubert School of Art.

MG



Postcard from 1924 of Frans Snijders' *A Concert of Birds* discovered by Sandra Klopper in Boston.

An American visitor to the Michaelis Collection in 1924

Rebecca Reyher was a New York based journalist who was born in 1897 to Russian immigrants from secular Jewish backgrounds. As a young suffragist, she held street meetings on women's causes and was head of the Boston and New York offices of the National Woman's Party. Reyher first visited South Africa in 1924, as journalist for Hearst's *International* because she realised "that I would have to suggest going somewhere that nobody had ever gone before". In the course of her

life, Reyher spent a total of five years in Africa, visiting 13 countries on the continent. Soon after her first arrival in Cape Town, she described the country as "breathlessly beautiful, maddening, and intoxicating". Although she had initially proposed to do "some stories about women and the many discriminations against them", a theme to which she was deeply committed, the editor of *Hearst's International*, Norman Hapgood, "couldn't have been less interested".

During her first visit, Reyher wrote, instead, on Cape Dutch architecture and furniture amongst other cultural forms. She also developed a close relationship with Irma Stern, who painted a marvellous portrait of her that was sold at Christies, London, in 2012. When Reyher opened one of Stern's first exhibitions at Ashbey's in 1925, she prophesised that Stern would achieve international acclaim. This foresight presumably stemmed from the fact that, while working for the National Women's Party, she befriended Luisine Havemeyer, a major patron of the arts who collected work by Mary Cassatt and other contemporary artists and who gave part of her collection to the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



Rebecca Reyher.

Among her many contributions to South African art, Reyher promoted the career of the Zulu-speaking figurative carver, Tivenyanga Qwabe, whom she met while visiting Nongoma, where she also interviewed Christina Sibaya, the first wife of Zulu King Solomon kaDinuzulu. In her moving biography of Sibaya, *Zulu Woman*, Reyher challenged gender stereotypes and racial clichés in an effort to make sense of the life experiences of this extraordinary woman.

Her subsequent publications included *The Fon and His Hundred Wives*, inspired by her concern for the ways in which societies, such as the Fon Royal House in Cameroon, marginalise and abuse women. In Cape Town she began a life-long friendship with Bishop Lavis, eventually erecting a memorial in his honour in St George's Cathedral.

The following extract from her diary records her visit to the Michaelis Art Gallery, presumably as part of her research into the cultural life of Cape Town:

Michaelis Art Gallery
 Going home I stopped at the Michaelis Art Gallery. The building is quite beautiful, dark wood used throughout with white walls & small rooms which is a warmer background for pictures than great labyrinths. The floors were particularly well done, bordered in old Dutch blue tiles, or wood squares, or patterned in brick & black marble. Most of the pictures were dull. Two were beautiful by Breughel – the color so bright and deep.¹ One by Van der Neer also glowed,² but with yellowish, quieter tones. There were no reproductions of what I liked except this wonderfully happy bit of decoration [see the postcard illustration of Frans Snijders (1579-1657), *A Concert of Birds* (Inv. No. 14/54)]. It was like South Africa.

In 1924, the Michaelis Collection was only ten years old. Following his visit to South Africa with the

original Johannesburg Art Gallery collection in 1910, Hugh Lane hit on the idea of making a collection of Dutch paintings for Cape Town from the period in which the city was founded.³ Max Michaelis bought the collection from Lane in 1912 and donated it to the Union Government in 1914 on the condition that it be properly housed in Cape Town: "In selecting Dutch pictures, I thought of the settlers who left Holland at about the period when many of these pictures were painted". In 1913 the City of Cape Town agreed to transfer the Old Town House to the Union Government and the architect Joseph Michael Solomon quickly

completed the restorations that Reyher so admired. The building was in a sorry state at the time but Solomon retained little of what eighteenth-century fabric did remain, preferring to model his renovation on the grander Guildhalls of Amsterdam and Haarlem: for example, he introduced the double staircase and the wooden panelling in the Frans Hals Room. Interestingly, Solomon wrote that one of the small rooms with Dutch tiles that Reyher enjoyed was "constructed in a pronounced style indicative of an old seventeenth century Dutch kitchen".

Although in 1924, the Collection comprised not only the original Gift but also several works like the two supposed Breughels that were on loan from 1923, Reyher was not able to see some of the more interesting works, such as the De Hooch *Interior, looking out on Water* (Inv. No. 33/6) and the David Teniers *Interior of a Peasant Dwelling* (Inv. No. 33/17) that were not presented by Lady Michaelis until 1933: one can only guess whether she would have considered these also "dull"! Likewise, one has little idea what she meant in her final phrase that it – the collection? the lack of postcards? Or, more likely, *The Concert of Birds?* – "was like South Africa"!

Sandra Klopper and Michael Godby

Endnotes

1 In 1924 *The Blind Hurdy-Gurdy Player* (Inv. No. 33/1), a copy after, or follower of David Vinckboons (1576-1629), that was to be donated to the Collection by Lady Michaelis in 1933 but which had been on loan in the Old Town House since 1923, was attributed to Pieter Breughel: indeed there is a signature 'P. Bregel f.' on the trough towards the bottom right. Similarly, the *Fishermen with their Nets on a Southern Coast* (Inv. No. 33/5), by an unknown artist, that also was on loan but only donated in 1933, was attributed to P. Breughel the Younger at the time of Reyher's visit.

2 The three Aert van der Neer (1603/4-1677) paintings – *River Scene by Moonlight* (Inv. No. 14/38), *Sunrise* (Inv. No. 14/39) and *Sunset* (Inv. No. 14/40) – were part of the original gift by Sir Max Michaelis in 1914: perhaps it was the glowing light of the *Sunset* that caught Reyher's attention.

3 The information in this paragraph is drawn from the essay by Dirk Bax in *Michaelis Collection: The Old Townhouse, Cape Town*, catalogue compiled by Hans Franssen, 1996.

Hans Fransen Honoured

This Newsletter, and the Friends of Michaelis generally, has been negligent in failing to bring to public attention the honour that was bestowed a few years ago on our former Chairperson, Hans Fransen – and Hans is the last person to draw attention to himself! To celebrate the recent coronation of King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, Hans wore the lapel pin of this order which prompted his colleagues to ask more about it and to make mention of it in this Newsletter. The “knighthood” – the “Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau” – was bestowed on Hans a few years ago by the then Queen of the Netherlands, Queen Beatrix. The Dutch Consul-General to South Africa presented Hans with the insignia of the Order – a large medal with ribbon that is worn on the monarch’s birthday and Dutch national days, and a small pin with a crown and the Dutch and orange colours. New “Ridders” are not told why the Order has been given but it is easy to imagine in Hans’s case that it was for services rendered over a lifetime towards cultural relations between South Africa and the Netherlands. Obviously, Hans’s many publications on Cape Dutch Architecture and Dutch painting in South Africa would have been considered; as well as his many years as Director of the Michaelis Collection – before it was integrated into the Iziko Museums of Cape Town. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Hans hosted Queen Beatrix, the Prince-Consort Claus and the



The “Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau” medallion.

then Prince Willem-Alexander when they visited the Michaelis Collection in 2000: they were very impressed by the Collection that is, of course, the largest Collection of Dutch and Flemish Art in the Southern hemisphere. Hans’s colleagues on the Friends of the Michaelis Collection Committee salute Hans on this most prestigious award. MG

CHILDREN FROM SPECIAL SCHOOLS VISIT THE IZIKO OLD TOWN HOUSE

Learners from Mary Kihn School for the Partially Hearing, Dominican School for the Deaf in Wittebome and Eros Special School have been visiting the Old Townhouse – most of them for the first time. Learners in wheelchairs or who have trouble walking have been able to use the lift in the building to reach the upper floor. They have examined the blue and white tiles, looked at the flowers in the beautifully framed pictures and heard stories about Max the Museum Cat who roamed the building as Chief De Mouser! Examples of their works about flowers, frames, tiles and clay cats will be on exhibition later this month at the Old Townhouse. Shameemah, from Eros Special School, designed her own beautiful frame to hold her sketch of Max the Museum Cat (right). CS





Chairman's Choice

Walkabout with Michael Godby at the Iziko Old Town House

Saturday 13th July 2013

It was on a chilly wintry morning that a group of Friends gathered to listen to Michael Godby's "Chairman's Choice". Michael chose to focus on the fine details of paintings in the collection which are of particular interest. For example, in *Interior of a Peasant Dwelling* by David Teniers II, Michael highlighted the fact that many Dutch artists created fictitious architectural spaces composed from various elements which they observed in nature. In this painting an elderly peasant woman sits in the foreground, surrounded by various fruits and vegetables, as well as poultry and a variety of kitchen utensils. Behind her in the gloom, gathered in front of the hearth, are a young boy, a woman and two men huddled in conversation. The brightly lit domestic details of the foreground

highlight the abundance of nature yet the shadowy group in the far recess of the interior suggests a note of ambiguity. In Abraham Van Beyerens's *Still Life with a Nautilus Cup*, Michael drew our attention to the variety of textures and surfaces that the artist attempts to recreate. A Still Life of extraordinary quality, Van Beyerens includes velvet, rich linen, gold, mother of pearl and glass, as well as a variety of fruits and other foods. The niche on the extreme left of the painting is however very significant. Michael highlighted the significance of the flute as a reminder of the fleeting pleasure of the musical note. The empty glass and fallen leaf are reminders of the fleetingness of life itself and of course this thought is consolidated by the constant ticking of the pocket watch as time inexorably passes. Even for the very wealthy, life is transient. As the Walkabout drew to a close, the Friends enjoyed a very welcome glass of sherry. RM



OBJECTS IN THE TIDE OF TIME

The Friends arranged a special Saturday tour of Hayden Proud's recently-curated exhibition at the Iziko South African National Gallery which exposed to view many works and items in the Gallery's collection that have not been seen in many years, as well as recent acquisitions that have also, for various reasons, not yet been exhibited. Of interest were a number of historical Dutch and Flemish works of painting and sculpture which were contextualized with contemporary and modern examples. The exhibition sets out to explain to the visitor the nature and dynamics of an art museum's collection; how and why so little can be seen at any one time, how collecting policies have shifted over the years, and revealed the fascinating provenance of some of the works that have been acquired. Some of the earliest works ever publicly exhibited in Cape Town; remaining pieces of the Von Dessin Collection, which was first exhibited at the Sexton's house adjoining the Dutch Reformed Church on Adderley Street from 1761 onwards can be seen. This sprawling exhibition fills five rooms in the Gallery, and has already delighted many visitors. Precious examples of Ottoman Iznik-ware dating from the 1500s, as well as Pre-Columbian ceramics dating from 600AD are just some of the items to be enjoyed. Helmut Starcke's *The Muse of History* (2001) (above), based on the famous work by Vermeer, is also included and remains a pivotal work around which to debate the relevance and critical function of culture, conservation and museums in a post-apartheid South Africa.

HP



Hayden Proud discussing Philippe de Laszlo's portrait of Leander Starr Jameson.

FMC VISIT TO PARLIAMENT

A small but intrepid group of Friends braved the cold on a Saturday morning in June to visit the art collections of Parliament under the guidance of Lila Komnick and Nigel Scholtz, who generously gave of their time to show us behind the scenes. The Parliamentary complex was silent and empty at this time, which heightened the sense of privilege that we enjoyed; having many magnificent interiors entirely to ourselves. Highlights of the visit were the storage areas created to hold some of the paintings collected and commissioned during the colonial and apartheid eras which are now seldom seen unless by special appointment. A large upper room still contains huge portraits of British royalty from the time of Queen Victoria until the accession of King George VI. Some of the colonial-era portraits in this collection to be seen in storage are by impressive and internationally-famous portrait painters of the day, namely William Orpen and Philippe de Laszlo. Their respective portraits of the young Jan Smuts and Leander Starr Jameson would hold their own in any art museum collection. The visit also took in the Library of Parliament and we were also given the opportunity of viewing special selections from the famous Mendelsohn Collection of watercolours, prints and drawings, which are a vital record of early Cape history.

HP



FMC welcomes SAVAH delegates

At a reception for delegates of the Annual Conference of South African Visual and Art Historians (SAVAH) at the Iziko Old Town House on Saturday 7th September 2013 the Friends' Committee announced the election as Patrons of Dr Jillian Carman (right) and Professor

Bernadette van Haute (left) for their scholarship on Dutch and Flemish Art of the Seventeenth Century in South African collections.

Further Patrons will be announced in due course. MG





Above : Johannes Vermeer, *The Guitar Player* (1672) oil on canvas, Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood House, London.
Above right : Guitar made by René Voboam (Paris, c.1641), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Vermeer and Music

The Art of Love and Leisure

Concerts, instrumental expressions of love and lively celebrations account for as much as 12 per cent of all paintings created in the Dutch Golden Age, demonstrating that music was central to life at this time. Musical instruments appear in a number of works in the Michaelis Collection, notably our paintings by Jan Steen and Dirck Hals, among others. Of the 36 surviving works by Johannes Vermeer, a third of them represent musical instruments or musical themes.

The link between music and painting intrigued artists who were keen to explore the connection between the senses of hearing and sight. There was an attempt, in a sense, of prolonging the transient delights of music through the creation of visual images that helped sustain and extend the memories of such pleasures. Advising young Dutch painters on how to arrange figures in a composition, the Dutch art theorist Karel van Mander encouraged them to think in musical terms: "Just as in music the multifarious sounds of the singers and the players harmonise, so here too [in painting] do the many figures".

It is not surprising, given the penchant for collecting obsessions of all kinds in the Dutch Golden Age,

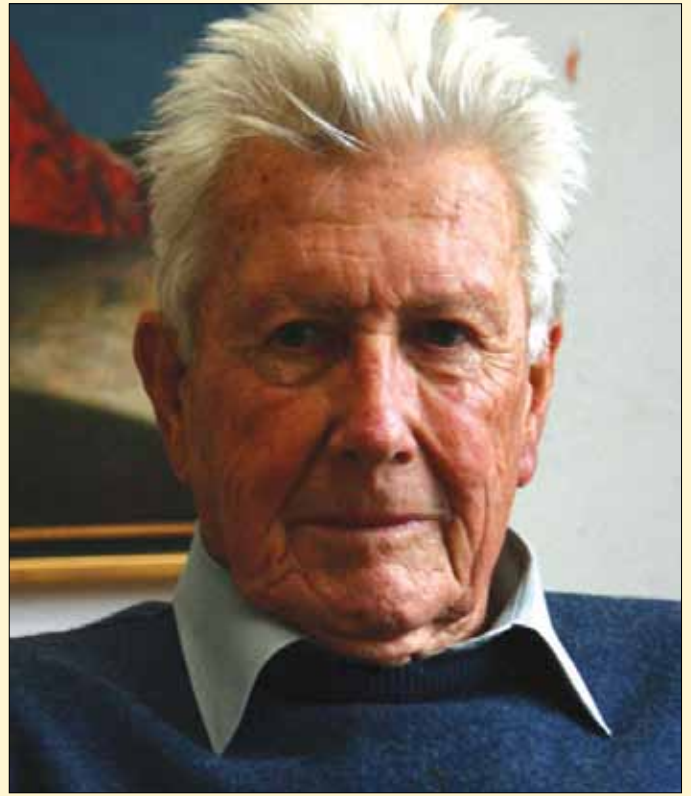
that avid musicians amassed impressive collections of musical instruments, many of them made by internationally renowned craftsmen. Recorders, violins, shawms, viols, citterns, lutes and keyboard instruments (virginals and harpsichords) were sourced not only within the Netherlands, but also imported from England, Germany and Italy. Many of these instruments, with their decorative inlays of marquetry, exotic woods, ivory and mother-of-pearl were works of art in themselves. Another field of creative endeavour that opened up was the publication and illustration of musical scores and songbooks of all kinds. HP

■ *Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure* has been the subject of a recent and highly-popular exhibition at the National Gallery in London. The exhibition is also the subject of a special documentary film to be screened later this month at Cinema Nouveau at Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront.

REMEMBER : Early booking is essential and strongly advised because of limited screenings on 26, 27, 30 and 31 October ONLY .

ERIK LAUBSCHER

1927-2013



The Friends are sad to announce the passing of the artist Erik Laubscher. Erik was closely associated with the Michaelis Collection, both as a Trustees before the existence of Iziko, at the time when the Collection was still an autonomous institution, and later as a committee member of the Friends. He took the initiative for an highly entertaining exhibition by contemporary artists inspired by the Old Masters, some as tongue-in-cheek "takes" on their works, some as genuine responses.

Erik will be remembered for his significant contributions in just about every sphere related to the fine arts. As a painter, after his early "École de Paris" still-lifes, he developed an instantly recognizable semi-abstract landscape style inspired by the local Cape landscape. A Laubscher painting in 2009 was the first by a living South African artist to top the one-million Rand mark at auction.

As an activist, Erik was for seven years the chairman of the local S.A. Association of Art, always in the forefront of initiatives or causes to fight. At his home in Green Point he and his painter-wife Claude Bouscharain were for decades the gathering point of a galaxy of artists and authors.

Perhaps Erik's greatest contribution may still turn out to be his work as a teacher, first at the Cape Town Art

Centre (where he took over from Kevin Atkinson (whose work is now on display at the S.A. National Gallery – don't miss it!) and for twenty years as principal of the Ruth Prowse Art Centre. A well-illustrated book on his life and art was recently written by our former chairman, Hans Fransen.

The Cape Town art fraternity will sadly miss this gentle giant of a man. They don't make them like that anymore.

Annual General Meeting of the FMC

Lecture to be given
by Dr Hans Fransen :

'The Michelangelo
of Brazil' :
Aleijadinho



Saturday 26th October, 2:30 pm. Refreshments will be served.
Venue : Iziko Old Town House. Admission free.