

John West Art Galleries

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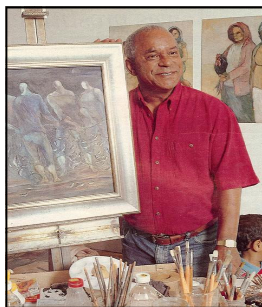
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Featured Artist: Amos Langdown



"I paint with the heart....

...not just with oil."

- Amos Langdown

Born in Plettenberg Bay in 1930, this prolific artist has become one of South Africa's true great artists, who manages to capture the beauty of the land and its people, with all their emotions, humour, frustrations and *being* becoming part of the paintings he produces.

Amos remembers how his father, an erstwhile open ocean whaler, who was forced to do 'odd jobs' after the arrival of the Scandinavians with their whaling station, used to bring home the dirty paint brushes after a day's work. Amos would then take the little bits of paint from under the dried paint skins, and use those to paint his earliest paintings, as a child, on anything that comes to hand. He loved painting the little ordinary things that had happened to him that day. From there his love for the 'ordinary', which most of the time contains a hidden beauty, only observable to those who takes the time to slow down, and really look.

His childhood mentor was the well known poet P. J. Philander, whom he credits with affirming his talent for painting, and helping to firmly set him on a career as successful artist.

Amos Langdown studied under Professors Kuno Brinks, Jan Forrer and Ru van Rossem at the Rijks Academy in Amsterdam (1962 - 63). In 1972 he was appointed Inspector of Arts for the Cape Province, a position he occupied until his retirement a few years ago. He has illustrated several books, and have taken part in exhibitions in the USA, West Germany, Italy and South Africa.

Amos also studied at the University of Port Elizabeth, where he obtained some of the highest grades in the history of that institution.

He loved walking in the wind on the beach, and got much of his inspiration from the ordinary, everyday things in life.

See page 2 for more works by Amos Langdown

- Article by Jesse L. Rowe



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Is Anybody Buying Art These Days? - Part 1

Eric Konigsberg

On Monday, Sept. 15, mere hours after [Lehman Brothers](#) declared bankruptcy in New York City, [Sotheby's](#) was throwing open the doors of its London headquarters for the most extravagant sale in the auction house's history. The sale, of 223 new artworks by [Damien Hirst](#), brought in more than \$200 million — nearly 10 times the total receipts of the previous record-holder for a single artist, a 1993 auction of 88 Picassos that reaped around \$20 million. It was a level of consumption that, particularly when viewed against the concurrent collapse of the financial-services industry, almost immediately acquired a nostalgic air, the last gasp of the art boom.

In the audience sat the men of the Mugar family — the patriarch Jose and his sons, Alberto and David — New York art dealers for whom the evening was not so much a transitional moment as simply another high-stakes day at the office. The Mugaris own what is believed to be one of the largest and most valuable private collections of art in the world. By their estimate, it includes more than 3,000 works. They have built the collection over the past 25 years, since Jose, an Israeli-born fabric merchant who raised the family in Colombia, moved his wife, Mary, and their two sons to America and got into the art business full time.

The core of their collection is a staggering 800 works by [Andy Warhol](#) — “easily the biggest Warhol collection in the world after ours,” says Tom Sokolowski, the director of the vast Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh — and roughly

(Continued on page 5)

More of Amos Langdown's art:



For more on these excellent works of art, contact

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SA Art hits record sales at London Auction

South African artworks fetched record sales at the Bonham South Africa Art sale in London held earlier this month, with some 280 artworks selling for a total of £1.7m (R24.7million).

The top seller at the auction was Maggie Laubser's Indian girl with poinsettias which more than doubled pre-sale estimates and sold for R4 million.

Two record bids were also achieved at the auction including Walter Battiss' Africans in the autumn, the long yellow grass which sold for R862 290, well above pre-sale estimates of between R170 000 – R250 000.

Anton van Wouw's sculpture Shangaan fetched R760 000 ahead of pre-sale estimates of between R100 000 – R150 000.

According to Bonhams, one of the world's oldest and largest auctioneers of fine art and antiques, South African art is showing continued strength in the international market. The record-breaking sales achieved offer an indication of the position of South African art internationally.

The February auction marked the fifth Bonhams South African sale – an event that is fast becoming a highlight in the Bonhams sale calendar.

Giles Peppiatt, head of South African Art at Bonhams, says that since the first South African sale in 2007, the auctioneers have had to extend the sale to two days and two venues “to allow us to exhibit the works as they deserve.”

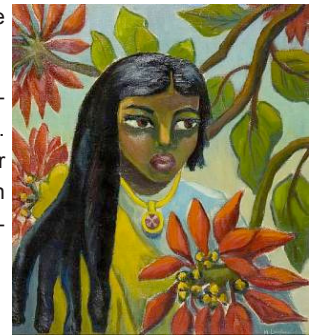
“We are seeing a maturing market for South African Art with a greater appreciation by non South African buyers. Increasingly the market is demanding the best but also paying greater and greater record prices,” he adds.

Speaking of this year's sale Peppiatt said; “This sale was not helped by the current economic climate, but having said that it is

very reassuring to see top prices continue to be paid for the best works of art.”

The next South African Art sale is scheduled to take place on October 14th 2009. Bonhams is currently consigning works for the exhibition with a particular focus on artists such as Gerard Sekoto, Alexis Preller and Maggie Laubser.

- www.sagoodnews.co.za



“I cannot agree with them more!” exclaims West.

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South Africa: Art and the End of Apartheid by John Peffer

The first book to fully explore cosmopolitan modern art by black South Africans under apartheid.

Black South African artists have typically had their work labeled “African art” or “township art,” qualifiers that, when contrasted with simply “modernist art,” have been used to marginalize their work both in South Africa and internationally.

In *Art and the End of Apartheid*, John Peffer considers in depth the work of black South African artists in the decades leading up to the end of apartheid in 1994. Peffer examines painting and graphic art, photography, avant-garde and performance art, and popular and protest art through artist collectives (such as the Thupelo Art Project and the Medu Art Ensemble) and individuals such as Durant Sihlali and Santu Mofokeng. He shows how South African artists imagined what “postapartheid” could mean during

the time of apartheid, even as they struggled with immediate issues of censorship, militancy, street violence and torture, and, more broadly, the problem of self-representation and the social role of art.

Peffer describes how, in defiance of the racial polarization that surrounded them, South African artists created “grey areas,” non-racialized spaces and hybrid art forms in which both black and white South Africans collaborated. Beyond the boundaries of apartheid, these artists forged connections at home and abroad that modeled a future, more democratic society.

John Peffer is editor of Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture, which began publication in 2007. He teaches at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Hot Prices, Cool Heads

Stephan Welz's first auction for Strauss & Co supports the argument that SA art is a defensive asset class in the global financial crisis.

But it's still early days in the economic downturn, and this hypothesis will be further tested in two more auctions due in April and May.

Record prices received at the Strauss & Co auction were R935,000 for an Anton van Wouw bronze "The noitjie van die onderveld", at more than double its estimate. The highlight was Irma Stern's "Magnolias in an earthenware pot", selling at R7,2m (estimate R2,8 - R3,4). Serious collectors and SA big money packed the ballroom of the Johannesburg country club for the sale.

Wels also worked his audience to a record R38m for an SA auction.

A few artists normally overshadowed by the usual top artists achieved record prices for their works, such as Frans Oerder at R1,76m. Frank Spears sold at five times the top estimate for R46,000 and a Battiss oil went for seven times the top estimate at R77,980.

A portrait by Eastern Cape artist Dorothy Kay that Welz said had gone largely unnoticed, went for R1,4m. All of these were considered exceptional examples of the artists' work.

Yet there were clear signs that the frenzy of buying any big name artist's at any price of the past few years were over. Bidders showed they knew which were the best pieces and a safe bet to preserve their wealth. They broke records while more mediocre pieces, even by Irma Stern and Pierneef, went for around their estimated prices or were unsold (see table).

Art prices have outstripped the listed property sector, which has broken even since 2007 and fell 5% in 2008. The JSE Alsi fell 14,7% from 2007 and 26,6% in 2008. By contrast, Welz guessed

that prime art prices rose 35% - 40% since January 2007. But he thinks prices won't rise over the next year.

But the reality of the slowing economy should soon be setting in. Art prices lag the main financial series such as stock exchange and property prices. It is usually the last to rise in a boom and to fall in a recession. The US repeat sales Mei Moses art index has shown that art prices fell marginally in the year to December 2008, from 279 to 271, the first signs of weakness in the art market a year into the US recession.

The early signs of SA weakness could be seen in the absence of frenzy and in the middle range works where Stephan Welz had to use all his skills and experience to entice the bidding. About 15% of the 165 lots were unsold.

Artist and Work	Estimate (R)	Price (R)
Irma Stern: Magnolias in an earthenware pot	2,8m - 3,4m	7,241m
Irma Stern: White Houses, Madeira	4m - 6m	5,72m
Irma Stern: Still life with mask	1,6m - 2,2m	Unsold
Van Wouw: Noitjie van die onderveld	300K - 400K	935,000
Van Wouw: The mealiepap eater	300K - 400K	350,000
Doris Kay: Old oyster woman	700K - 1m	1,4m
Jean Welz: Still life with three vessels	700K - 900K	1,2m
Jean Welz: Woman reading at a table	300K - 400K	334,200
Pierneef: Lig en Skaduwee	700K - 900K	724,100
Pierneef: Rainclouds and sunshine	300K - 500K	400K
Pierneef: Palm trees near Trichardsdal	900K - 1,2m	980,320

But the dealers and collectors argue that, like property, there is a long-term shortage of local stock.

The slowing economy might emerge only in the growing price gap between the best and more mediocre works at Strauss opposition Stephan Welz & Co in association with Sotheby's on April 20, and again at the sale of murdered mining magnate Brett Keble's collection by Graham Fine Art on May 7.

- Financial Mail, March 20, 2009

John West Art Galleries visit Irma Stern



John West Art Galleries has been to Cape Town this month. We have covered some new ground as further attempt in giving the best service to South Africa. Cape mountains, fishermen, children playing on the beach, wind and sun, style and glam-

our; Wow, I love the Western Cape!

If you are in Cape town, or are planning a holiday there, then Irma Stern's Museum is one of the places to visit. I have now an even

better idea of her background, her life and art. It is always interesting to see why an artist paints something they do.

She likes a sense of loneliness portrayed in her art, because she was very lonely. She lived in a mansion and painted. That's part of her story. Now wealthy investors are buying her art for millions. "Deep calleth to deep..": The Bible. Still relevant in today's society. Contact West today and get the best service! Feel free to visit Irma Stern's Museum's website: www.irmastern.co.za

To the right are just three of the paintings that can be seen in Irma Stern's gallery. Unfortunately not for sale.



Is Anybody Buying Art These Days? - Part 1 Cont'd

(Continued from page 2)

100 each by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Tom Wesselmann and George Condo. At 69, Jose remains largely interested in artists with connections to the Pop movement. Alberto and David, who are 38 and 37, respectively, have been accompanying their father to auctions since they were teenagers, and in recent years they've been deputized to seek out younger — or at least living — artists. It is at their instigation that the family now owns about 150 Hirst pieces. They have also bought and sold numerous significant works by Richard Prince and [Jeff Koons](#).

The Hirst sale constituted a vast repository of the formerly Young British Artist's themes and tricks, greatest hits reissued with just a note here or there to distinguish them from their predecessors. There were skulls, butterflies, paintings of colored dots that corresponded to pharmaceutical codings and, of course, animal and fish corpses suspended in formaldehyde inside giant glass vitrines. Among these were a tiger shark, a calf with 18-karat-gold horns and hooves, a zebra and a unicorn — which was actually a foal with a resin horn.

A number of the tanks were plated with gold and were so heavy that the floors of Sotheby's had to be reinforced to withstand the tonnage. The auction house's printed estimates for the pieces ran from roughly \$200,000 for small works to more than \$23 million for some of the installations, with the fat part of the bell curve somewhere in the low seven figures.

The Mugarbis were given seats in the second row and arranged themselves according to family protocol. Alberto, the more outgoing and incautious son, was beside Jose ("He likes to sit next to our dad, and I let him," David said). David, dispassionate and analytical, was between his wife, Libbie, and Alberto.

They were not assigned paddles, because, as David explained, "the auctioneer knows where to look for us." Gazing across the audience himself, though, David barely recognized anybody. "Except I think I see Bianca Jagger, and I think I saw [Russell Simmons](#)."

The family was not selling any of its holdings at the auction, but the Mugarbis' fortune is so tied to their pet artists — like Warhol and Hirst — that they were rooting for a series of bidding wars. "We're not looking for bargains here," David said. "Because it's very unwise as invested as we are in Damien to hope the sale doesn't do well. We want to keep the prices up. We'll try to get some things, but we'd like to see other collectors bidding high."

For the Mugarbis' preferred artists, the family doesn't merely operate in the art market; it is the market. "They're so invested, they're like the casino, not the gambler," said the gallery owner Francis Naumann, a friend. What threatens them at an auction is not the presence of other aggressive bidders but cautious bidders.

"If it's good for Sotheby's and [Christie's](#), it's good for us," Alberto said.

The family admitted to some unease about the front-loaded order in which the pieces were being auctioned. Of the 56 lots on

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Oils may not be oils of masters

Eammon Duff

FORGERIES of at least four Australian masters have allegedly been uncovered in what experts say could be the largest case of art fraud in the nation's history.

NSW Police formed Strike Force Glasson after a Sun-Herald investigation into Sydney art dealer Ronald Coles, who has disappeared allegedly owing hundreds of investors more than \$30 million in lost art and money. Fraud squad detectives

seized firearms and more than 400 paintings from Mr Coles's investment gallery in Kenthurst and two other private properties.

Fine art auctioneers Bonhams and Goodman have since been appointed to catalogue, value and authenticate the collection. Chief executive Tim Goodman would not comment on the findings, but The Sun-Herald understands the seized works contain forgeries of Arthur Streeton and Pro Hart, with further concerns

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Oils may not be oils of masters - Cont'd

(Continued from page 5)

surrounding many works carrying David Boyd's signature.

Bonhams has previously identified a fake Norman Lindsay oil painting that Mr Coles sold to a private investor in 2006.

A leading identity in the auction world said: "From my experience, it's the largest art fraud of its kind in Australia. It's so far-reaching in terms of the hundreds of everyday mum-and-dad investors caught up and the amount of money involved.

"Generally Ron always had a very good reputation amongst all the auction houses so it has come as a complete surprise to them as much as anyone."

Australian Commercial Galleries Association national president Beverly Knight said: "I've never heard of anything on this scale - not in terms of the number of investors caught out."

Law surrounding superannuation and investment art was "contradictory to the conservation of art" and created a "loophole which is open to abuse", Ms Knight said.

By law superannuation-funded art must be kept separate to personal assets. For that reason most of Mr Coles's clients left the art with him to store or sell for a profit. It was never seen again.

Art dealer Michael Reid said: "Coles's turnover a few short years ago exceeded \$20 million a year, which gives you an idea of the sort of money we're talking about."

Mr Reid said there had been two main kinds of art fraud. "The first is the production of fakes by well-known fakers such as William Blundell. The second is the distribution of fakes.

"Ron positioned himself as a leader in art investment packages and it appears he's done the wrong thing by all those people who entrusted him with their life savings.

"There has never been anything on this scale before. Certainly the ACCC needs to take an urgent look at the investment art industry."

NSW Police are still taking statements from hundreds of investors nationally who were caught up in the scheme.

The complaints have unearthed allegations of forgeries and multiple ownership of works by Tom Roberts, Sir Sidney Nolan, Norman Lindsay and a long-time friend of Mr Coles, d'Arcy Doyle.

Doyle's widow, Jennefer, flew to Sydney on Wednesday to inspect 90 seized paintings and drawings carrying her late husband's signature. "They're all d'Arcy W. Doyles, no doubt about it," she said, adding that she hoped people's "faith would be restored" by the news.

"Ron knew d'Arcy for 20 years. Ron was an entrepreneur, he presented himself beautifully, so d'Arcy had faith in him. They had a lot in common, such as art and racing."

Mrs Doyle said Mr Coles would have never set out to hurt anyone deliberately. "I have no idea how this has all happened or what he has done with people's money."

Her late husband would have been devastated to see his friend in such trouble, she said. But she acknowledged that Mr Coles had misled investors late last year when he used her image in television ads to promote regional art sales at which some investors were stung.

The exhibitions were advertised as a final opportunity to buy the last release of work from Mrs Doyle's private collection. "The advert was a bit misleading," she said, adding that she had sold any remaining works to Mr Coles "ages ago".

Mrs Doyle said she never gave permission to use her image in the commercial. "It was me but with someone else's voice. I was overseas at the time."

Mr Coles's solicitor, Peter Zacharatos, said on Friday his client would not be making any comment until police had finalised their investigation.

"He's not in hiding; he's been in contact with police. He strenuously denies dealing in fakes," Mr Zacharatos said.

Mr Goodman would not confirm whether three Arthur Streeton works, once handled by Mr Coles, were among the police consignment.

"Until the investigation is finished, I can't say anything."

- *The Sydney Morning Herald*

West says: "I work very closely with private investigator Mr. Mike Bolhuis of SSS.

We fight for original works!

Call me now if you suspect any fraud in the art business."

Is Anybody Buying Art These Days? - Part 1 Cont'd

(Continued from page 5)

the block the first night of the sale, the two highest-valued by far were coming early. These were the tiger shark (Lot No. 5) and the calf (No. 13). "I'd rather have, in my opinion, a little more momentum before the formaldehyde," David said.

The first four lots sold quickly, for more than their high estimates. The brothers put in an early bid of £380,000 (about \$685,000 at the time) on a red-and-white butterfly painting they'd been eyeing but gave up long before it was sold (for £590,000).

Then came the shark. Alberto started trading [text messages](#) with Hirst, who was apparently playing snooker at a pub but eager to receive a play-by-play of the auction. Jose worried a string of black beads with his fingers and chewed gum.

Bidding began at £2 million but quickly stalled at £3.2 million — below the low end of the house's estimate, which was £4 million to £6 million. The auctioneer, Oliver Barker, looked beseechingly at two long tables, which were lined with perhaps three dozen Sotheby's employees, each manning a telephone to field remote bids from collectors across the globe. But none of them proffered a bid.

"Three million three hundred thousand pounds — want to come in?" Barker said, repeating the challenge for nearly a full minute. He did not want to let the piece get away so cheaply.

"Not good at all," Alberto said. Jose stared wordlessly at Barker, then turned his head to look around the room.

But before the hammer went down, a remarkable thing happened. Jose sat up and began waving his hand, to get the auctioneer's attention. Then he motioned toward one of the phone attendants, who he could see was still talking to somebody on her line.

Barker kept on going, and a new bidder came in. There was another lull — the piece almost sold at £3.7 million — but an auction-house staff member on another phone could be heard successfully coaxing her bidder.

Once the low estimate was reached, a couple of other would-be buyers bid £4.5 million, £4.6 million, £4.7 million and beyond — in no time, all the way past £8 million.

Jose caught the eye of his friend Gabriel Safdie, a Geneva-based curator of private collections who sat nearby, and winked. "You see?" Safdie said quietly. "It was almost dead at 3.2." The hammer finally landed at £8.5 million — which, once Sotheby's commission and taxes were added in, translated to a £9.6 million payout, or about \$17.2 million. The room broke into applause.

Alberto received a text message from Hirst and smiled. "Damien made one of these symbols," he said, sticking out his tongue to demonstrate.

And from there, the auction was a cakewalk — more than \$200 million over the next 24 hours (there was a day session the following afternoon). The Mugrabis bid on a few pieces for which they ended up dropping out early with a swat of a hand or a shrug at the auctioneer. Toward the evening's end, when the brothers decided they didn't want to go home empty-handed, they exchanged a knowing glance, and Alberto kept himself in the running for one of the last pieces long enough to win it — a small canvas with cigarette butts affixed — at £121,250.

"A souvenir," Alberto said.

A few minutes earlier, Jose had been talking about the incongruity between the day's financial news and the auction frenzy, and ventured an interpretation: "When the empires fall — Roman, Greek — all that is left is the art."

THE OVERWHELMING majority of the Mugrabi collection — of their 3,000 works, all but about 200 at a time — resides out of public view, in two warehouses they rent, one in Newark and the other near Geneva. Alberto said it

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Is Anybody Buying Art These Days? - Part 1 Cont'd

(Continued from page 7)

was the only practical solution for a collection of its size, particularly with large pieces like the Hirst tank installations. "Sadly, the whole thing has to be dismantled and drained," he said. "The sharks and the sheep need to be refrigerated."

As private dealers, the Mugarbis do not own a gallery or represent artists. They buy or sell works in about 100 art auctions annually, nearly one every three days (sometimes, with smaller auctions, they bid via phone). And the rest of the time, they buy and sell through galleries and fellow dealers.

"We're market makers," Alberto said. "You can't have an impact buying one or two pictures per artist. We're not buying art like Ron Lauder — just to put it on a wall. We want inventory." He equated inventory with liquidity: "It gives you staying power." In the commodities sector, the analogue would be making a run on a precious metal — in order to manipulate the price.

Over the coming months, the Mugarbis may lose the ability to make that claim. After all, the art market has visibly begun to ebb. Prices — and interest — dropped at the November and February auctions in London and New York. At Christie's and Sotheby's big November contemporary sales in New York, nearly one-third of the 138 pieces went unsold. Christie's total receipts of \$113.6 million came in at half the low estimate of \$227 million. Sotheby's totaled \$125 million, falling well short of its low estimate of \$202.4 million. Totals for the contemporary artworks sold by Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips in February were £43 million, down from £250 million one year before. The auction houses have been laying off staff, and galleries in Chelsea have been shuttered. Dealers who will be at the Armory Show, which is New York's pre-eminent contemporary art sale and which will take place from March 5 to March 8, have drastically reduced their expectations from what they have come to refer to as "2007 and 2008 levels."

Nobody knows yet what the future business of art will look like, but price escalations on the order of Richard Prince's series of nurse paintings — \$50,000 in 2003, \$300,000 in 2005, \$1 million in 2006 and \$8.4 million in the summer of 2008 — are most likely not in the picture. (In November 2008, a nurse painting with an estimated value of \$5 million to \$7 million was bought at auction for \$2.9 million.)

The Mugarbis, however, insist they will be able to continue doing what they do, regardless of how the ground may have shifted beneath their feet. "We'll become more like collectors and less like dealers now,"

David said. "More buying, less selling. It's like Warren Buffett said — a down market is when you find the bargains. Not that much that is special has come up yet, but when it does, we'll be there."

See next month's newsletter for Part 2 of this article.



John West Art Galleries

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John West Art Galleries only collects and sells local South African art. You can trust us for unbiased, professional advice at all times.

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