

# JOHANNES MEINTJES

1923-1980

Artist, Author, Historian

An essay by Kobus Opperman

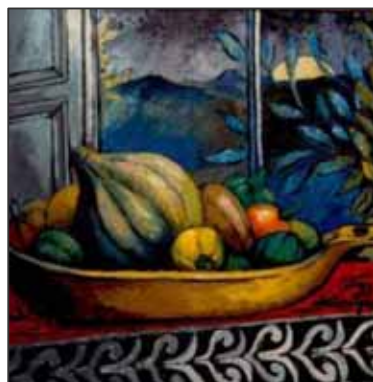
© 2007 Unpublished manuscript available  
on CD by request from [cmt@iafrica.com](mailto:cmt@iafrica.com)



*'There is the Africa of the past and there is the Africa of the present. I am concerned here with what I feel is eternally Africa, yesterday, today and tomorrow, untouched by the vagaries of men'.*

Johannes Meintjes, 1960

A handwritten signature of Johannes Meintjes in cursive script. The signature is written in black ink and features a prominent, sweeping underline.





*1947 Self Portrait with Birds and Flowers*  
825 x 600 NALM Art Collection

*'There you have all the loneliness of youth'*

Judith Gluckman

*'He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all'.*

Johannes Meintjes

*'My work as a painter... is the condensation, the concentration of the hidden, but ever present, sadness that is in all people'.*

Johannes Meintjes

*'The actual power of his brush lives and moves in an interrealm between the world of fact and fiction. His point of departure... is the inner world...'*

Trek, 1947

*'Meintjes seems to be concerned not only with the moment of reality, but the preparation before it, and the length of time that lies beyond it... It is the resulting quality of timelessness that is so strangely moving.'*

Neil Sack, 1954

*'Meintjes brings to his work the inner vision of the dreamer. He seems to... explore the very nature of dream worlds of loneliness and illusion'.*

The Cape Argus, 1959

*'Meintjes' dream world, his world of things remembered, is hardly less personal than anyone else's. But such is the frankness of the terms in which it is stated that we are compelled to enter it'.*

Neville Dubow, The Cape Argus, 1951

*'Few artists have the courage and conviction of Johannes Meintjes'.*

Carl Büchner, Die Burger, 1962

*'The artist has maintained the general high technical standard... which one has come to expect'.*

Cecil Skotnes, The Star, 1964





*Meintjes' Buitengracht Studio (Cape Town)  
Late 1940's*

*'... a painter of integrity, totally personal and inimitable, with superb draughtsmanship and exceptional emotional and evocative power'.*

RJ, SA Art News, 1961

*'... an artist whose work will always live and in which it will be possible to find new interest for generations to come'.*

HE Winder, Rand Daily Mail, 1971

*'The years have not dimmed the... vibrant approach and outlook. His exotic paintings, even still lifes, are the stuff of dreams. His compositions show his particular timeless territory...'*

Richard Cheales, The Star, 1973

*'... he has retained his status as one of the country's most acclaimed artists ever...'*

The Natal Witness, 1979

*'Meintjes is a master at interpreting poetic nostalgia... characterised by technical excellence'.*

Alexander Podlashuc, Oosterlig, 1980

*'For nearly 40 years Johannes Meintjes has enriched the South African art scene with his personalised works which have the inherent quality of good art – the artist's genuine feelings and moods can be felt in each brush or palette stroke...'*

Yvonne Steynberg, Evening Post, 1980

*'Johannes was something of a Renaissance man. First of all, artist. Then author, historian, archivist and even sort-of farmer. Above all, he was a thoughtful, loving and loveable human being who thought very deeply about the human condition'.*

Tertius Myburgh, Sunday Times (Editor), 1990



*1955 Newspaper Seller  
605 x 275 Private Collection*

## JOHANNES MEINTJES ORPHEUS OF SA PAINTING

'It is now forty-six years since that afternoon in the late winter of 1944 when Johannes Meintjes first exhibited in Johannesburg. What an extraordinary event that was!

A young twenty year old Capetonian, trained since his fifteenth year by Florence Zerffi but finding himself in harmony with the German expressionism of Maggie Laubser and Irma Stern, an admirer and friend of Alexis Preller and Cecil Higgs, and claiming May Hillhouse as his greatest mentor and critic, and now exhibiting for the first time in the Gainsborough Galleries in Pritchard Street, by 1944 already the home of painters such as Preller and Battiss and on opening days the gathering place of the city's *avant-garde*.



Meintjes was a handsome, slightly built young man, pleasant and communicative and yet with a brooding, withdrawn presence. His paintings caused a sensation and impelled him into the front ranks of South African painters overnight.



*Self portrait from Diary 1*

Esmé Berman was to write: 'The spectacular suddenness with which Johannes Meintjes catapulted to the headlines during the last years of World War 2 is a phenomenon seldom equalled in South African cultural history. Before he was 22 years old the intense young artist was enjoying the kind of public adulation which was later on reserved for youthful idols of the pop-music world.

The surprising factor was the warmth with which his paintings were received - for Meintjes' approach was blatantly non-conformist, and the main inspiration for his developing style stemmed from artists who were far from being heroes to the general public at the time....



However, although the various influences were clearly apparent in his work, they were subordinated to a personal, highly romantic vision - if his colours were violent and his forms unorthodox, the spirit of his work was dreamy and poetical...'

I have often wondered, looking back, what it was in those strange, enigmatic and extraordinary canvases that spoke so powerfully to us. Perhaps because it was the year 1944 when we had been subjected to the horrors of war so long... to death, to mutilation, persecution and hate. On that afternoon we found ourselves in the presence of a poetic vision of life, of love, of innocence and idealism.

The paintings mirrored the painter: the sensitive mouth, the suggestion of hidden pain in the eyes, the reaching out to communion with all that was beautiful in life. But of course it was more than that. It was the bold, daring, sweeping use of colour; it was the sheer vitality and drama and reckless imagination; it was the form and composition of bodies that no other painter had ever attempted; it was the richness of textures... the evocative placement of figures in the landscape. It was Johannes Meintjes' own individual expression of expressionism.

Meintjes placed his vision of life on the canvasses he painted at the beginning of his career and it was there in the last brushstrokes at the end of his life. In an interview in 1963 he himself stated '[The artist] needs to remain faithful to his vision, to his own idiom... and needs to preserve his integrity, develop spiritually, and work from the heart. This is what I have always been doing and will hopefully keep on doing so until my death'.



*Self portrait from Diary 2*

Throughout his career as painter he remained true to his own personal vision. His critics were to accuse him of never having developed beyond the romantic nature of his youthful work. A strange accusation. Did we ask that Marc Chagall should move away from his vision of bodies floating in the sky? Or was it necessary that Dostoevsky should change his vision of Russian people between *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*? Did the deeper part of the poet in Goethe or Shakespeare manifest itself differently with the passing years? A rose is a rose is a rose as Gertrude Stein once wisely remarked.



1948 Face with Flowers (Ink)  
250 x 180 Private Collection

His paintings grew richer in texture, clearer and firmer in composition, broader in the scope of subject matter. He was and remained the Orpheus of the South African world of painting. He was the singer-poet, the lyricist, like Orpheus a lonely figure wandering through the dark underworld labyrinths of man's spirit in search of his Eurydice whom he found but was never to touch or possess. The longing and the loneliness never left him and he expressed it in his own poetic terms.

Already in 1947 a critic wrote of him that his brush lives and moves in an interrealm between the world of fact and fiction... His point of departure the inner world: an idea rather than external events engendering the spark of his creation... Yes, his landscape was and remained that of the secret labyrinths of man's emotions... a realism above and beyond the real. Anna Vorster was aware of it when she wrote 'The interesting quality in Meintjes' work is that his surrealism reflects an unmistakable South African atmosphere'.

But Meintjes was not only a painter. He was also an author. Since obtaining a BA-degree in his early twenties at the University of Cape Town, his talents as an author accompanied his talents as a painter. During that early stage his first book, a monograph on Maggie Laubser, was published. The editor of *The Star* recently referred to Meintjes as a 'Renaissance Man'. Indeed. Since his earliest years Meintjes insatiably embraced the world of culture. He consumed all the great literary works available in English, French, Afrikaans and Dutch. He writes articles and broadcasts for radio, and lectures in both art and drama. During his first visit to London, Paris and Amsterdam, he completely immersed himself in European painting, sculpture and theatre, and broadcasts together with Arnold Van Wyk for the BBC.



*Grootzeekoegat  
(publication in  
'Frontier Family')*

Two years after his return to South Africa, he withdraws to the isolated family farm Grootzeekoegat. A magical and mysterious word in the life of Johannes Meintjes. The Meintjes family acquired the homestead, built in 1824 as home as well as fortress against the Xhosa nation during frontier wars, in 1859. Here three preceding generations farmed with sheep and this is where his father died when Meintjes was only five years of age. The family had little choice but to move away to Riversdal.

For more than twenty years Meintjes had been dreaming about his return to Grootzeekoegat, to claim his inheritance and to reunite with his past. Here he would give expression to himself as a painter, write all his important manuscripts and build up his highly prestigious library.



*1951 Two interiors of Grootzeekoegat  
200 x 300 Private Collection*



*Meintjes in 1945  
(Anne Fisher)*



*Three Life-Sized Cupboard  
Doors from the 1950's*



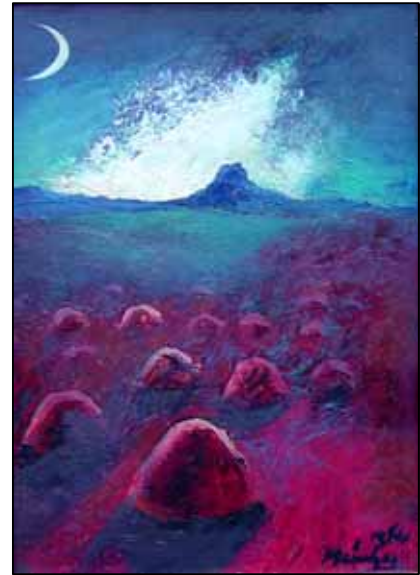


*1953 Landscape with White Birds*  
350 x 450 Private Collection



*1948 Nocturnal Jollification*  
975 x 825 Pretoria Art Museum, Tshwane

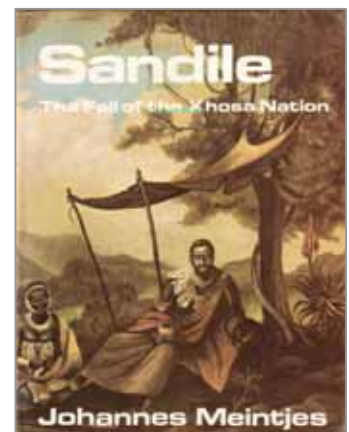
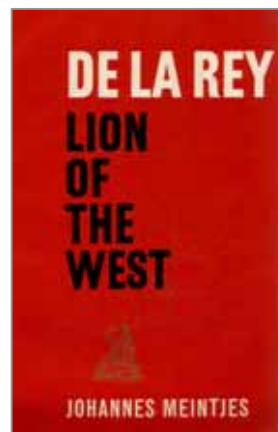
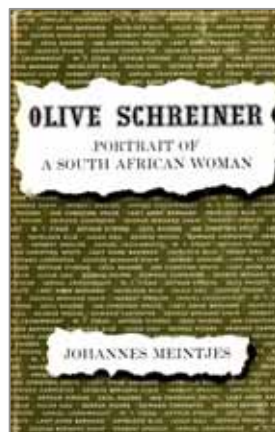
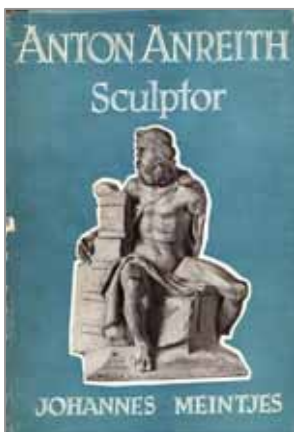
What strange mutations of the spirit moved through those generations of frontier families to bind Meintjes so inextricably to Grootzeekoegat and to spark the creative forces that drove him through his life? No visitor to Grootzeekoegat could escape the haunting atmosphere and sense of mystery that hung over these mountains... the legendary Storm- and Bamboesberge... and the aura of things unknown and unseen that pervaded the silent veld stretching out beyond the farmhouse. Once the sea had covered it; great forests have grown there and through the millennia it had been the home of wild animals and men. It was the scene of the great battles between frontier farmers and the Xhosa nation driven southwards by the warrior King Chaka.



1956 Karoo Moon  
340 x 245 Private Collection

It is almost impossible to pinpoint it, but something of the primeval spirit of that place, of its timelessness, its loneliness and the deepest, most enduring and indestructible part of man is reflected in the canvasses painted by Meintjes.

It was perhaps also the driving force behind so much of his writing... the need to give permanence to his own life and times in his diaries; his fascination with and reconstruction of times past... his bringing to life of Anton Anreith, of Olive Schreiner... the great historical figures of the Anglo-Boer War, amongst them his biography of *General de la Rey, Lion of the West*, that brought him world-wide recognition as an author. And his book *Sandile, The Fall of the Xhosa Nation*... the first major work on a black leader in South Africa.



Together with his wife Ronell, whom he wed in 1960, Meintjes became part of the people of Molteno, the town closest to Grootzeekoegat. Here he was also appointed as the honorary curator of the George Vice Memorial Museum. Following his death the Johannes Meintjes Room was established at the Molteno High School in 1986, housing 74 works of art and the larger part of his prestigious and valuable Africana library.



*Frontispiece of the Meintjes Room Catalogue*

Johannes Meintjes died on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1980. He had established himself as a major South African painter and writer. Apart from numerous articles and smaller works, he had published 35 books, amongst them an Afrikaans play that had won an important prize and a book on the Voortrekkers prescribed for students at Oxford University. He had painted more than a thousand canvases and exhibited in all South Africa's major galleries, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of artists such as Alexis Preller, Walter Battiss, Gerard Sekoto, Maggie Laubser, JH Pierneef and Irma Stern.

His canvases, painted with the knowledge born out of centuries of European experience, speak with the voice of Africa. He once said: 'Mine is the vision of a painter sprung from the soil of Africa and I have given it in a personal statement which may find a response in the heart and imagination of another generation'.



*Self portrait from Diary 3*

Now we are moving into a new era in the history of our country. There is a No-man's land lying between the bearers of Europe and Africa's legacies.

It is in that yet unexplored and unknown territory that they must meet and that history will be written.

I feel that Johannes Meintjes is already part of that history: he has already entered that No-man's land.





*1965 Lovers with Apple  
950 x 670 Private Collection*





*1947 Beach Party*  
*500 x 750 Private Collection*

Looking again at his canvases, they reflect something of the naivety of the African artist... a dimension beyond the purely European - an expression of man's most basic being which is the foundation of great art. There is the timelessness of Africa, its dream quality, its loneliness, its primeval being; there is the poetry of moonlight on mysterious places and people, the sweeping juxtaposition of light and darkness. His work will grow in importance and remain an abiding influence and inspiration in a new South African era'.

Dr Hermien McCaul-Dommisse\*

Opening of the prestige Meintjes memorial exhibition

University of Johannesburg (RAU), 7 June 1990



*1951 Two Young Boys*  
*300 x 200 Private Collection*

---

\* Edited and translated where applicable

Aangesien ons nou by die surrealistiese gebied gekom het, is die tweede deel van hierdie hoofstuk afgehandel. Iets van die Blaue Reiter is vermeld omdat dit 'n direkte uitvloeisel van die Brücke-groep is, en met die Brücke-groep, soos reeds gesê, staan Maggie Laubser in noue verband. Kortliks sal nou aangetoon word wat Maggie se verband met die Duitse Ekspressionisme is :

Toe Maggie in 1913 in Europa aangekom het, het sy spoedig op hoogte van die kunsstrominge gekom. Maar eers in 1922 was sy in direkte kontak met die stigters van die Brücke, en nie net met hulle werk nie, maar met hulle persoonlik. Schmidt-Rottluff was 'n vriend aan wie sy met groot plesier terugdink. En hy, as een van die stigters van die Brücke-groep, moes baie bygedra het tot die uitbreiding van haar kennis. Sy het noue aanraking met mense gehad wat al deur die vuur van tyd en pers heen geveg het. Dit kan eenvoudig nie verwag word dat sy in die rigting van die Kubisme en die Surrealisme sou opgaan nie. Trouens, by daardie tyd was kubisme al 'n dooie kunsvorm, en surrealisme, alhoewel in 'n glorietydperk, het verreweg die meeste mense koud gelaat deur die aanstellerigheid en hol pretensies wat die swakker kunstenaars vryelik rondgestrooi het. Surrealistiese kunstenaars van enige betekenis kan op die vingers van één hand getel word.



VISSERSHUISIE (Olieverf) 1938

## Summary Biography

Born: Riversdale, 19 May 1923

Died: Moltene, 7 July 1980

1923-1928

The son of three generations of sheep farmers; spent his first five years on the family farm Grootzeekoegat in the Moltene district (Eastern Cape).

1928

After the early death of his father, the family moved to Riversdale; he becomes friendly with the elderly Volschenk, drew and painted from childhood and won his first prize at the age of 15 years.

1938

The family moved to Cape Town and the 15-year old boy began serious art studies under Florence Zerffi (widow of Stratford Caldecott).

The speech Meintjes wrote for the Voortrekker Commemoration was broadcast on national radio (and was also read by him).

1940

An exhibition of Maggie Laubser's work evoked his ardent admiration; he wrote her a fan letter and a life-long friendship followed.



*1945 The Knife*  
450 x 350 Private Collection



*From 1954 Sketchbook*  
360 x 250 Private Collection



*1951 Beach Party*  
425 x 385 Private Collection





*1945 Moon*  
*225 x 200 Private Collection*



1941-43

Studies languages at the University of Cape Town where he completes a BA degree and published a book on Maggie Laubser at the age of 21 (which became a sought-after Africana item later on).

During this period close and life-long friendships formed with individuals such as Hubert du Plessis, NP van Wyk Louw, May Hillhouse, Cecil Higgs and Nerine Desmond.

He became the youngest member ever of the exclusive 'K'-club and an exhibition of his paintings caused a sensation. Sells his first painting on 28 February 1942 for nine guineas.

Completes his first life-sized sculpture in 1942.

He published two articles during this period and won the prize for the best Afrikaans article in the Silver Jubilee Edition of 'Groote Schuur'.

*1948 Entangled Figure*  
865 x 465 Private Collection



1944

Moved to Johannesburg to assist Gerrit Bakker with his new bookshop and rented a studio in Market Street. During this period friendships formed with i.a Rosa Neppen, Hermien Dommissie, Walter Battiss and Alexis Preller.

His first exhibition (Gainsborough Gallery, 29 August to 11 September 1944) caused a stir in Johannesburg and Cape Town and he became famous overnight. The fame he enjoyed as a 21 year-old artist is completely unequalled in the South African history of art.

Some of Meintjes' first short stories were published during this period.

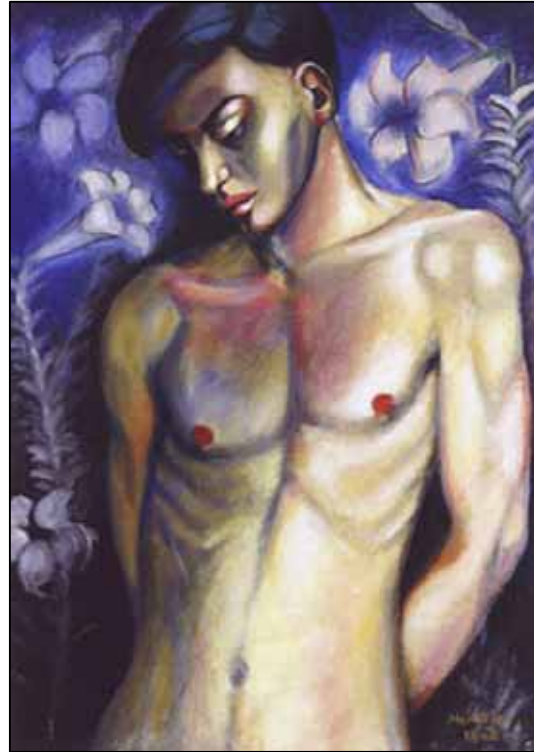
Moved back to Cape Town and taught art at SA College School and Jan Van Riebeeck High School, Cape Town.

Group exhibition with Gerard Sekoto, Jean Welz and Maud Sumner.



*1946 Self Portrait (Charcoal)*  
280 x 240 Private Collection

'New Era' 13 December 1945



1945 Sebastiaan  
825 x 600 Private Collection

Exhibition Michael Stevenson  
December 2005

1945  
Sebastiaan  
Olie op Doek, 24 x 33"  
Uits: Beyers Botha, Gadoole  
Aff. New Era, *Port Elizabeth*

Dagboek 1: 17 April 1945 'My groot nuwe werk, *Sebastiaan*, is nou voltooi. Iemand het daarvoor geposeer, maar dit lyk soos 'n selfportret'.

[Diary 1: 17 April 1945 : 'My large new work, *Sebastiaan*, has now been completed. Someone posed for it, but it looks like a self portrait.']

1945

Designs for ballet costumes exhibited in USA (housed at the New York Public Library).

Successful exhibitions (Johannesburg and Cape Town) provided funds for study in London and Paris.

ca 1945 Costume Design



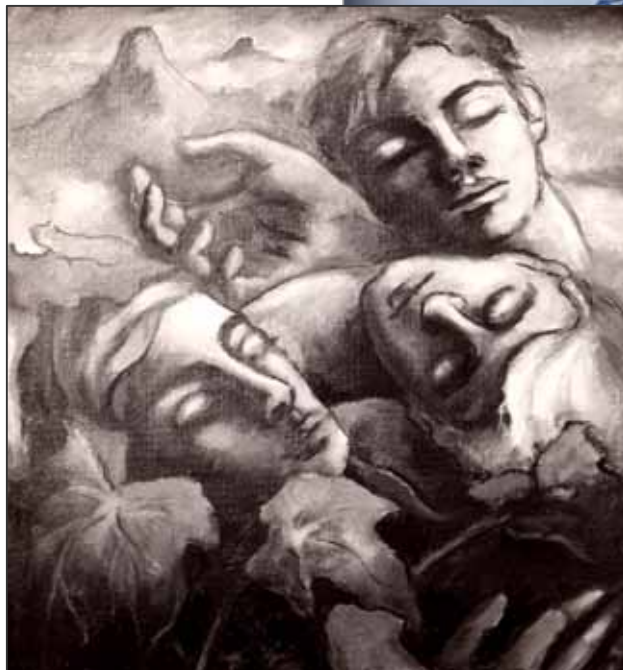
1943 Self Portrait  
395 x 355 Private Collection

1945-1947

While in London, studying at the Central School of Arts, worked part-time as broadcaster for the BBC with Arnold van Wyk.



1954 Night Bathers  
600 x 500 SANLAM Art Collection  
Published in 'Dagboek 3'



1945 Three Sleepers  
500 x 400 Private Collection



1947

Returned to Cape Town; worked at painting, broadcasting and writing.

Lectured at the Worcester School of Drama and lectured art at the Cape Technical College.

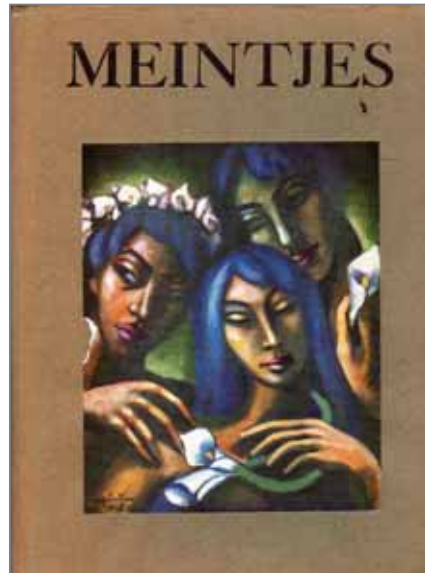
Decor and costume design for Aeonian ballet group.

Exhibitions in Cape Town and Pretoria.

Publication of 'Kamerade'.

Group exhibition with Walter Battiss, Gregoire Boonzaier, Cecil Higgs and Maggie Laubser.

Lectures at the British Art Exhibition in company of Ruth Prowse, Gregoire Boonzaier and Nerine Desmond.

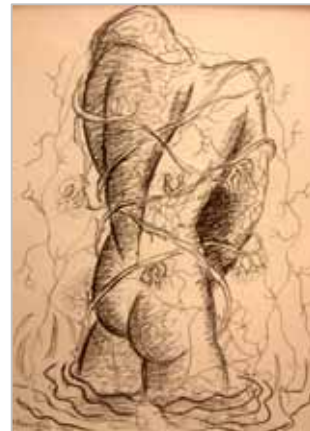
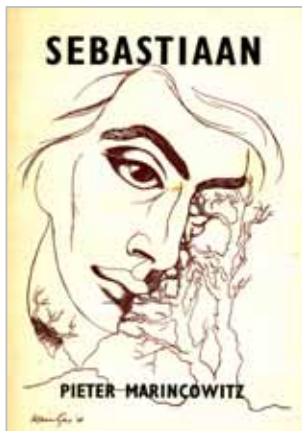


1948

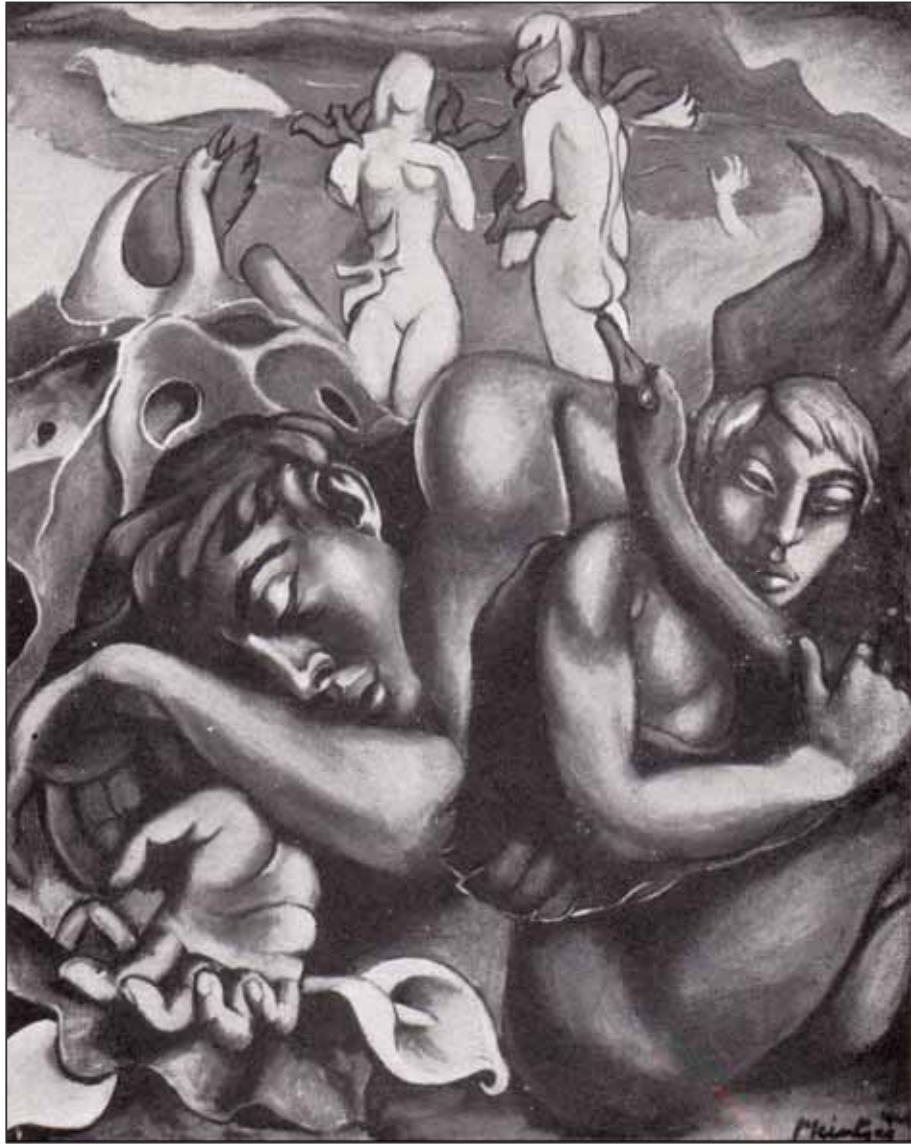
Exhibitions in Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein and Cape Town.

Publication of 'Johannes Meintjes : Lyrical Works'.

Illustrations for the book 'Sebastiaan' (limited edition of 100 copies).







1948 *Icarus*  
985 x 820 Molteno High School Meintjes Room

Meintjes kept archival records of all his works

The examples below are of his manuscripts and publications (1952), sculpture (1948) and paintings (1945)

<p>1952</p> <p>om die werk in hul Dannie-reeks te publiseer (dis 'n soort S.A.-se Penguin) Dannie-boeke verskyn in pap band teen 3/6 en natuurlik sonder illus. toeris. Publikasie mag teen Maart 1954 plaasvind. (22 Nov. 1953) 2/5/55 Dis nog nie uit nie!</p> <p>Die werk het verskyn ongeveer</p>	<p>1952</p> <p>COMPLEX CANVAS A SOUTH AFRICAN APPROACH</p> <p>Reeds begin in 1949 - teels met tekeninge en foto's van skilderye. 'n Posing om deur die oppervlakkige te dink en die intrinsieke wonder van die Kaap-provinsie bloot te stel Datoos: 12 Nov. 1952.</p>
---	---

<p>1948 (vervolg)</p> <p>* VEGTERS Takkliip 13 x 14 1/2" Vers:</p> <p>* STAANDE FIGUUR Verdiel 3 x 7 1/2" Vers:</p> <p>* DIE EENSAME Takkliip 7 1/2 x 17" Vers: Ena en Andries Fourie</p>	<p>1948 (vervolg)</p> <p>* PIONIER - HOEKSTEEN Verdiel 11 1/4 x 16" Vers:</p> <p>* SLAPER Koperkliip 2 1/2 x 3 1/4" Vers: Mij. Suzanne Swart</p> <p>230 PORTRET VAN P. M. [SEUN MET BOEK] Olieverf op Paneel 21 3/4 x 28 1/2" Vers: Sentrale Laerskool, Bloemfont.</p>
---	--



1951 Self portrait  
865 x 700  
NELM, Grahamstown

<p>126</p> <p>DROOMTOEGEL Olie op Paneel, 9 x 12" Vers. Nerine Desmond, Kaapstad</p>	<p>127</p> <p>BEGIN VAN DIE LENTE Olie op Paneel, 15 x 15 3/4 Vers: Mij. Leo vd. Heever, Bloemfont.</p>
<p>128</p> <p>PERD Olie op Doek, 8 x 10 Vers: Dr. Walter Henne, JHB</p>	

1949

Exhibitions in Johannesburg and Bloemfontein.

Won award from 'Die Vaderland' for 'most original SA painting'.

Also won an 'Oscar' art award (together with Maggie Laubser and Edoardo Villa).



*1948 Portrait of Roland Alexander*  
350 x 250 Private Collection  
(one of Meintjes' students,  
on the far left of photograph)  
Sold at Sotheby's in 2006

The press speculates that Johannes Meintjes, Maggie Laubser and JH Pierneef will become the future 'SA Masters'.

Published further essays and short stories.

Retreated to family farm, Grootzeekoegat, to write and paint in total seclusion;  
restored the historical farm building, which was originally built in 1824.

*1946 Self Portrait*  
260 x 200 Private Collection



*1946 Deck Sleepers (Etching)*  
170 x 130 (No 4) Private Collection







*Meintjes in his Tamboerskloof Studio  
(Cape Town, 1940's)*



*1954 Beach Party  
650 x 900 Private Collection*



1950

Exhibition in Cape Town, Queenstown, Bloemfontein and Pretoria.

Also group exhibition with Walter Battiss, Otto Klar and Maggie Laubser.



1951

Exhibition in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Publication of further articles as well as publication on SA sculptor 'Anton Anreith'.

Group exhibition with Erich Mayer, Maggie Laubser, Ruth Prowse, Lawrence Scully and Gregoire Boonzaier.

His drama 'Die Blanke Stilte' awarded with the Literary Award during the Van Riebeeck Commemoration Festival (shared the award with Uys Krige).



1965 Brush Sketch  
(Published in 'Siembamba')

1952

Exhibition at Van Riebeeck Commemoration Festival in Cape Town; also further exhibitions in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria.

His 'pornographic' art caused a stir in Port Elizabeth. Publication of 'Die Blanke Stilte'.



1947 Narcissus  
450 x 350 Private Collection



1949 Boy with Cat  
600 x 450 Private Collection

**Evening Post**  
 PORT ELIZABETH, SATURDAY, JULY 26, 1952. Price 4d.

and Chinese order fight **ARMY:** New Chinese army reported **CRISIS:** Egyptian cabinet chief has resigned **STI**

**WINNER, SAYS TR**

**TROOP NEAR H**

**Portugues**

**HONG KONG.**— Chinese colonial troops are fighting the Portuguese colony of Hong Kong. Three men wounded up to noon.

The clash started last night when Chinese troops fired a shot and there was a primary dispute over a narrow strip of land at an ancient gateway the road connecting Hong Kong to the mainland.

Intense machine-gun was continuing today near the gateway, according to Hong Kong.

The Chinese were reported to have rushed a battalion of troops to the battle ground round the gateway.

The Portuguese immediately imposed a curfew and the were held up and radio-telephone conversations cut off.

The Portuguese general, I said, with heavy machine guns mounted on her deck, standing by in the harbour for action if the situation worsened, said an eye-witness.

**Casualties**

The general was watching the situation on the island of Lantau, a mile north of the tiny Portuguese colony.

Reports in Hanoi said 10 Chinese soldiers were wounded in the Chinese attack, 15 miles north of Hanoi.

The casualties include Chinese civilians and two Chinese soldiers killed and Portuguese and one Chinese soldier wounded.

The dispute began when Chinese guards demanded the Portuguese be moved by soldiers from Portuguese 3. The Chinese refused the request.

As the dispute grew, they said the Portuguese were shooting their guns.

**JOHANNES COULD DRAW BEFORE HE COULD WRITE**

Johannes Meintjes, the Cape Town artist whose exhibition of paintings at the Arts Hall, Port Elizabeth, ended today, is known with his painting "Young Lovers," which some people have called "pornographic" and "disgusting."

It was said this work is a young couple for 60 guineas.

Mr. Meintjes could draw before he could write.

At the age of 15 he was painting in oils, and decorated a number of boats used in the Riverdale country, exhibitions.

Now an art teacher, Johannesburg, near Malmsbury, he grew up in Cape Town and was educated at the Universities of Cape Town, London and Amsterdam.

In addition to painting ("My pictures are mostly women"), he does sculpture work, and writes. He is the author of three books—Annie Arrish, sculpture, a monograph on Maggie Laubser, and Kamerade, a book of stories.

Recently Mr. Meintjes returned to his old hometown, after an absence of 21 years.

He was left the house on the death of his father and he is now busy buying back old treasures which were once part of the house.




1949 Young Lovers  
 475 x 485 Private Collection

One of the 'pomographic' paintings that caused a stir in 1952 in Port Elizabeth

(sold at Sotheby's in 2006)

**A VISION OF AFRICA**

**JOHANNES MEINTJES**



There is the Africa of the past and there is the Africa of the present. I am concerned here with what I feel is eternally Africa, yesterday, to-day and tomorrow, untouched by the vagaries of man. Since the beginning of man's interpretation of vision he has tried to portray a section of this continent, whether in Ancient Egypt, or in the caves of the southern mountainous regions, in the early days of navigation, or in the later period of rapturous response to scenic beauty. All these responses, however variant in quality and significance, have validity, and show the curious hold of the African continent on spectators of all ages. Known as the beloved country, Africa seizes whoever treads her soil in a fierce and passionate grip, reluctant ever to release. Visitors of many centuries have found themselves bewitched, held bound, drawn back again and again. Known also as a continent of darkness, yet sprawled under a scorching sun, Africa holds immediate mystery and immediate fascination in the juxtaposition of darkness and light. Night falls suddenly; the dawn is long and bright. Day and night bring moments of incredible beauty, in line and colour and pattern, part of the silence, the expectant hush of moon, sun and stars awaiting the violence of winds and storms falling on the vast land. The inhabitants of Africa live with their eyes on the sky. From north to south eyes scan the heavens with the patience that is part of Africa. For many years I, too, descendant of a family which has lived in southern Africa for nearly three hundred years, have watched the sky, in sunlight and moonlight and storm. It is a dramatic sky, sudden in its surprises, gentle and violent, a giver and destroyer of life. Mine is the vision of a painter sprung from the soil of Africa, and I have given it in a personal statement which may find its response in the heart and the imagination of another.

Johannes Meintjes, the writer of this article, explains his impressions as an artist interpreting the enigmas of Africa—continent of contrasts

1953

Exhibition in Bloemfontein and Johannesburg.

Participated in group exhibition at Rhodes Festival in Bulawayo. (A quote from a fan letter at the time: 'I still feel like a Christian who had witnessed a miracle - exalted, uplifted and close to God').

1954

Exhibitions in Cape Town and Durban.

1955

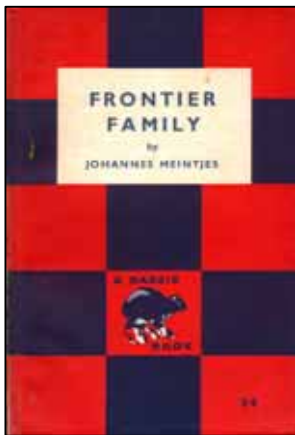
Ended period of seclusion and returned to Johannesburg.

Exhibitions in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Publication of his novel 'Stormsvlei' which was awarded at the Centenary Festival of Pretoria.

Publication of 'Frontier Family'.

1956 Watercolour

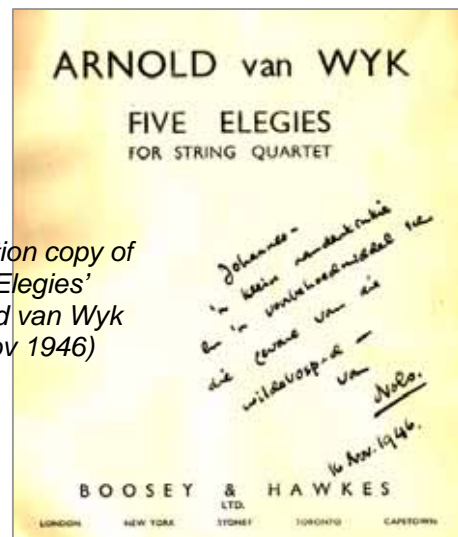


1955 (continued)

Public debate in press with Lawrence van der Post on the Afrikaner's attitude towards other ethnic groups. Met William Plomer and a life-long friendship followed.



1948 Bacchus  
455 x 360 Private Collection



Presentation copy of  
'Five Elegies'  
by Arnold van Wyk  
(16 Nov 1946)





1951 Swazi Landscape  
667 x 533 Private Collection

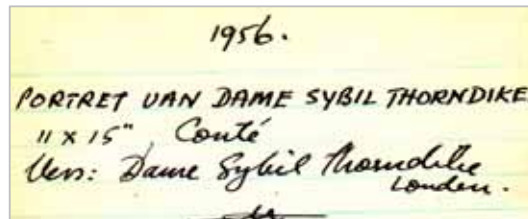


1956

Exhibitions in Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Dame Sybil Thorndike requested him to do her portrait - which caused a sensation in the local press.

*Copy from Meintjes' own  
catalogue of works*



1957

Exhibitions in Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Heidelberg.

Art critics compared Meintjes as the South African equivalent of Cézanne, Gauguin and Chagall.

Meintjes' drama 'Die Soekendes' awarded by APB.

1958

Exhibition in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Left for Europe again to study art in Amsterdam and Paris.

Publication of 'Die Soekendes'.

1959

Returned to SA and exhibited in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town.

1960

Married Ronell Rossouw.

Exhibitions in Pretoria, East London and Johannesburg.

Publication of 'Complex Canvas - The Cape Province'.

First stage production of his play 'Die Soekendes'.

Group exhibitions with i.a. Walter Battiss, Alexis Preller, Maud Sumner, Maurice van Essche, Otto Klar, Cecily Sash and G Cattaneo.



*1961 Portrait of Ronell  
406 x 305 Private Collection*

## PROFILE OF A SOUTH AFRICAN ARTIST

### *Johannes Meintjes, man of many talents*

THE 12th exhibition of Johannes Meintjes in Johannesburg can be seen at the Gallery 101 from July 14 until July 23. His first was held at the old Gainsborough Galleries in Pritchard Street in 1944 (then the leading gallery in the city for the avant garde painters) and had a sensational success.

He joined the small band of professional South African painters then and has worked professionally ever since, enjoying the loyalty and support of a considerable following.

Johannes Meintjes was born in 1923, the son of a sheep farmer of the Molteno district in the North-Eastern Cape. The early death of his father (at 35) caused the family to move to Riversdale, which was his mother's hometown.

His mother belonged to one of the most cultured families of the Western Cape. On both paternal and maternal sides, his family dates back nearly three centuries in South Africa.

He lived at Riversdale from the age of 5 to 15, knew the veteran painter Jan Volschenk in his last years, and was already drawing and painting from an early age. As a child he won all the prizes for painting on the local agricultural shows and bought his art material with his prize-money, including his first oil colours in which he began to work from 15 onwards.

With his mother and three sisters, Meintjes moved to Cape Town in 1938, where he attended the Jan van Riebeeck High School.

He now started his first academic tuition in the studio of Florence Zerff, the widow of Strat Caldecott. It was a thorough training over a period of five years, during which time he came to know all the painters at the Cape.

His was a startling talent, and the Cape artists took such a keen interest in his progress that one can say that all the leading artists of the Cape formed his art school.

After matriculation, there being few art schools of distinction then, he attended the University of Cape Town and proved a brilliant student of literature.

He never ceased painting, however, and about a year after graduation held his first one-man show in Johannesburg at the age of 21. The success he had enabled him to work professionally.

In 1945 he was appointed art master to the South African College School and the Jan van Riebeeck High School. At the end of the year he left the country on a troopship for London where he painted and studied for over a year, supporting himself by part-time duties on the African Service of the R.B.C.

He returned to Cape Town in 1947, took a studio in an old Cape Dutch house and exhibited locally and elsewhere.

He taught drawing to non-Whites at the Cape Technical College, and did a great deal of radio work, including the first art programme for youth ever broadcast in the country. He was also publishing numerous articles, essays and short stories.

His first book, a monograph on the painter Maggie Laubser, was written at 20 and published in 1944. It was one of the finest books ever printed in this country and is rare as *Africana* today. This was followed by a book of stories, illustrated by himself, in 1947, and a book on his lyrical paintings in 1948.

In 1949 Meintjes left Cape Town to settle on the family farm, Grootzakkougat, in the district of Molteno. There he spent five years in almost total solitude, leaving the farm only to exhibit in various centres.

In that time he published a book on Anton Anreith, South Africa's first sculptor, and a play (with Uys Krige) which won a literary award in a competition organised by the National Advisory Board of Adult Education. He also took an exhibition on a lecture tour through the Free State for the Department of Adult Education.



Johannes Meintjes

In 1954 Meintjes moved to Johannesburg, retaining the farm as headquarters to this day.

Showing regularly on national and other group exhibitions throughout this time, he also showed his work in all our main centres, establishing a reputation which was considerable from the start.

In 1955 he published two more books, one on his farm experiences, and the other, a novel, won the highest award in Afrikaans in a literary competition organised by the Pretoria Municipality.

Recently he published a book on the Cape, "Complex Caravan," with 40 drawings, and soon to appear is the first volume of the journal Meintjes has kept for 20 years (*Daybook 1*) which gives a gripping picture of the artistic life of the country.

Paintings by Johannes Meintjes have been acquired by many institutions and distinguished collectors throughout Africa and all over the world.

When possible he visits Europe for further study (as in 1958), and always he gives himself to his work with complete dedication.

His latest exhibition should arouse great interest and further enhance his reputation as a painter of integrity, totally personal and inimitable, with superb draughtsmanship and exceptional emotional and evocative power.

R.J.



1960's : Brooch  
30mm in diameter



Meintjes' Ex Libris



## Johannes Meintjes—Versatile Artist

WHEN Johannes Meintjes is asked when he began to paint he replies: "Even before I could speak." That is not unusual in a child, but perseverance is.

He spent his first five years on the family farm in the Molteno district. His mother was a Borchers, descended from the renowned Meent Borchers. His father died suddenly at the age of 35 and Mrs. Meintjes moved to Riversdale, where Johannes had been born five years before. The old painter Volschenk still lived there, and Meintjes knew him and saw his work, but the old man died when Meintjes was still very young.

He began to show his work at the annual agricultural shows, using the prize-money to buy his first oil paints, beginning to work in oils at 15.

In 1938 Mrs. Meintjes and her four children moved to Cape Town and Johannes studied under Florence Zerffi, widow of the Impressionist Strat Caldecott, and from her he learnt much. Then he discovered Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser and knew at once the direction in which he had to work—towards Expressionism. He was not influenced by Maggie Laubser but by the source of her inspiration, German Expressionism.

Leaving school, he went to the University of Cape Town to study languages, though he worked so hard at his painting that it is surprising that he found time to take a degree. He was learning from all the local artists: Lipshitz, Gregoire, Ruth Prowse, Jean Welz, May Hillhouse, and others.

He graduated at 20, and a bookseller asked him to go to Johannesburg as his representative, so that he became familiar with the work of Alexis Preller, Anton Hendriks, Walter Battiss, and others. He first showed at the Gainsborough Galleries (1944) at the age of 21, selling enough work to be independent for a year.

Back in Cape Town he began to prepare for an exhibition there and his work was well received. He sold so well that he was eventually able to go to Europe, studying in London for 18 months.

His first book, a monograph on Maggie Laubser, appeared in 1944. In 1947 appeared a volume of short stories, and in 1948 a book about his lyrical painting.

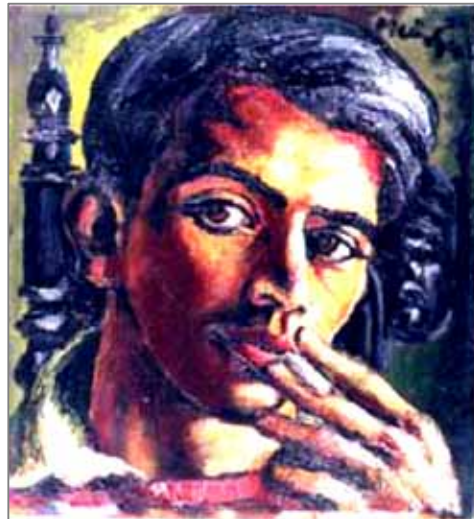
In 1949 he left Cape Town to spend five years on the family farm at Molteno, producing a book on Anreith and a play in collaboration with Uys Krige. Since 1954 he has spent his time partly at Molteno and partly in Johannesburg, with regular exhibitions in the larger towns. Since 1955 he has published various books and part of his diary.

Some opinions about his work are:  
 "Meintjes seems to be concerned not only with the moment of reality, but the preparation before it, and the length of time that lies beyond it" (Neil Sack, 1954.)

"The most interesting quality in Meintjes's work is that his surrealism reflects an unmistakably South African atmosphere." (Anna Vorster, 1959.)

"His present exhibition shows again that passionate introspective quality possessed by this most poetic of younger South African painters." (*Cape Argus*, 1959.)

"Meintjes remains a very interesting painter. A sentimentalist and a romantic he is, and where this has spoiled his work he has been justly criticized. But such criticism often overlooks an important aspect of his work, perhaps the most important, and that is its particular poetic intensity." (Neville Dubow, 1961.)

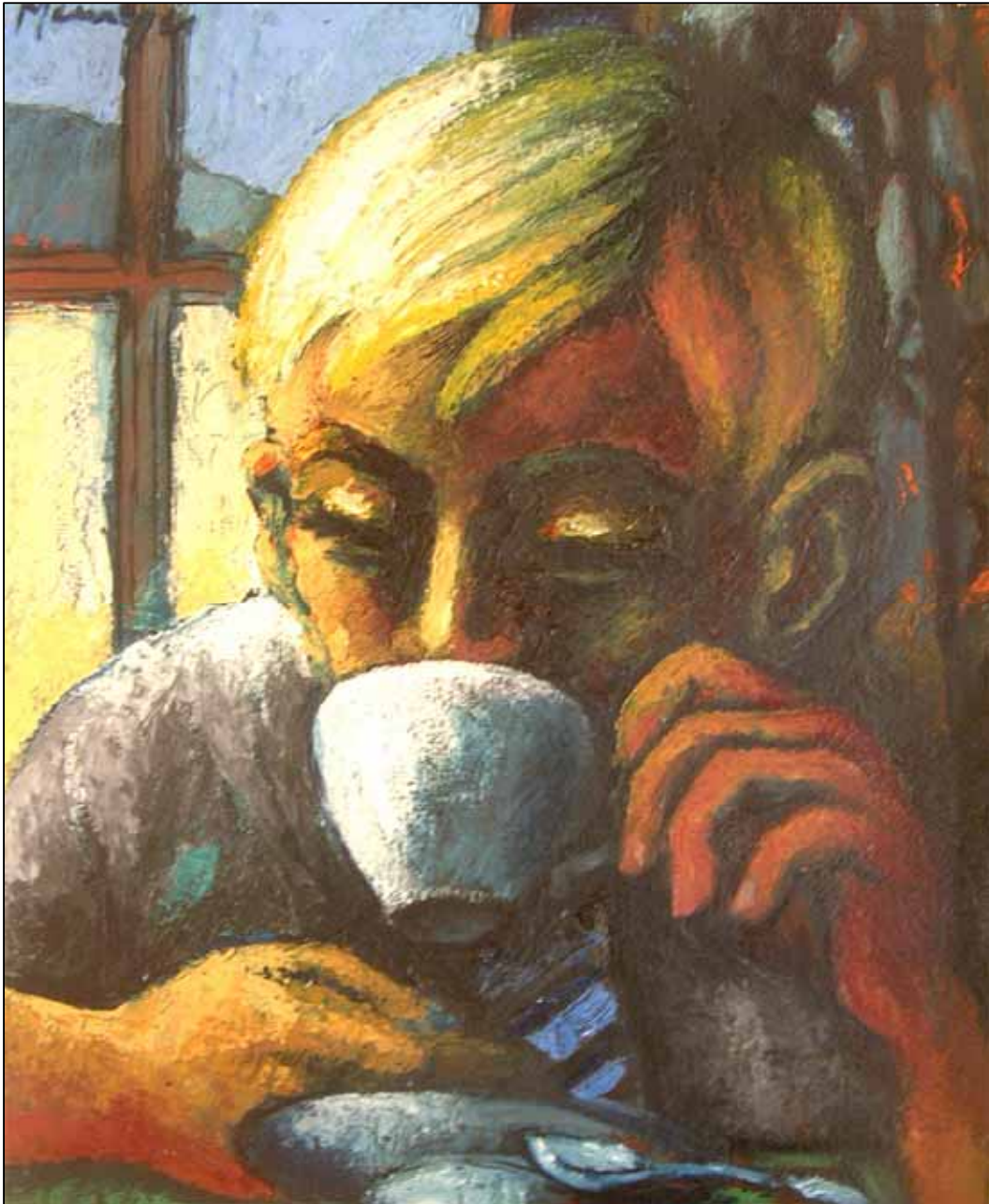


1951 *Self Portrait with cigarette*  
 330 x 310 SANLAM Art Collection



1954 (from sketch book)  
 200 x 150 Private Collection





*1955 Breakfast*  
385 x 325 Private Collection

1951 Interior Grootzeekoegat I (Watercolour)  
350 x 430 Private Collection



1951 Interior Grootzeekoegat II (Watercolour)  
260 x 210 Private Collection

1961

Exhibitions in Pretoria, Durban, Springs, Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Publication of 'Dagboek 1'.

Group exhibition at UNISA.

1962

Exhibitions in Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Cape Town.

1963

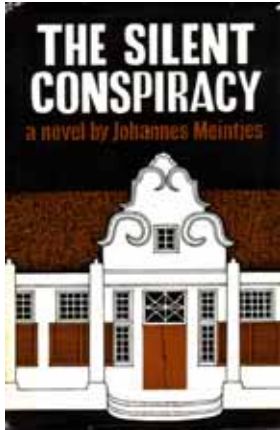
Exhibitions in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Publication of novel 'Gister is Vandag' and publication of 'Jeugjare'.

Press refers to Meintjes as the 'Golden Boy' of SA art scene.

Exhibition of Meintjes' works in the USA.





1964

Exhibitions in Molteneo and Johannesburg.

Exhibition in Washington, D.C.

Publication of 'Mallemeule', 'Manor House' and

'A. Lomax - Portret van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse Dorp'.

Group exhibition with i.a. George Boys, Gordon Vorster, Cecily Sash and Dirk Meerkotter on invitation by the Rembrandt Art Foundation.

1965

Received a literary award from PEN.

Returned permanently to Grootzeekoegat, Molteneo.

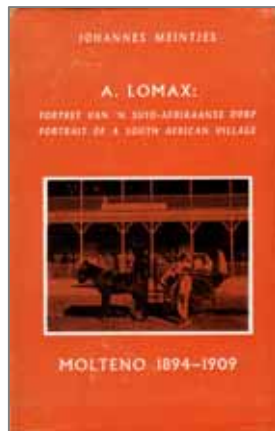
Exhibitions in Cape Town and Pretoria.

Publication of biography 'Olive Schreiner - Portrait of a South African Woman'.

(The President of the SA English Academy describes this work in 1975 as the 'best study ever on Olive Schreiner').

Publication of 'The Silent Conspiracy'.

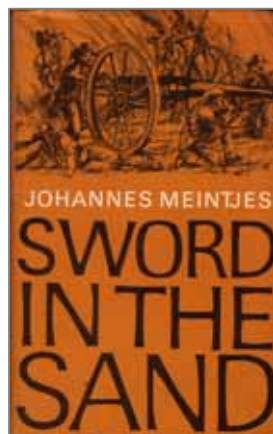
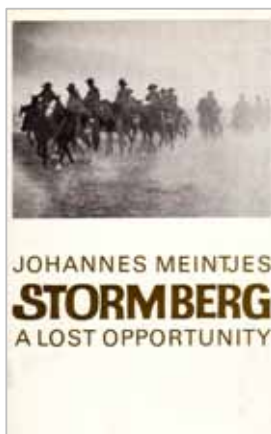
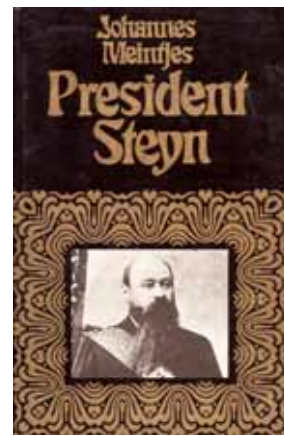
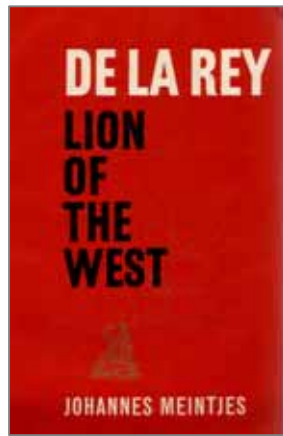
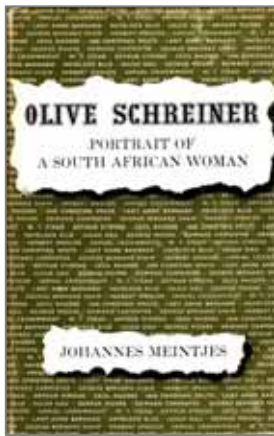
Group exhibition with i.a. Lucas Sithole, Christo Coetzee, Maggie Laubser, Armando Baldinelli and Maud Sumner.







1959 *The Young Man in Sleep*  
355 x 305 Private Collection



1966

Exhibitions in Johannesburg and Molteno.

Participated on invitation in Republic Festival Exhibition in Pretoria as well as the opening of the Hester Rupert Art Museum.

Publication of his (commissioned) biography on General De la Rey, 'De la Rey - Lion of the West'.

International acclaim as author followed. Publication of De la Rey in serial format in 'The Star'.

## BOOKS

# Fine biography of De la Rey

**DE LA REY: LION OF THE WEST.** By Johannes Meintjes (Kearland).

**T**O Mr Meintjes' reputation as an artist must now be added his success as a writer. Biography is by no means the easiest field, and it is made still more difficult when the subject is General De la Rey whose huge figure presides over the drama of the Boer War and the reconstruction period that followed.

Whilst free from adulation, the portrait of De la Rey which emerges is that of a big man, who, despite his oddities, lays claim to our affection. This biography must rank among the finest ever produced by a South African.

There are three phases in the life of General De la Rey. There is his early development in the Kruger Republic, during which time he was quite openly opposed to much of the Kruger policy. The secret session in which Kruger asked for approval for an ultimatum to Britain a few months before the outbreak of the Boer War, found De la Rey on his feet in opposition.

### OUTVOTED

It wasn't that he was unprepared to fight for his country, but that he felt it better to be attacked than to take the initiative, since that would give the Transvaal much better standing with the world powers. When he was outvoted, he accepted the majority decision, as he always did.

Mr Meintjes handles the scene in the Raadsaal with great ability. The second stage of the General's life was his development as a military leader of unusually able capacity, an odd matter in a pacifist. He was by far the most brilliant guerrilla general that South Africa has ever produced.

General Lord Methuen, whom he captured, had very real reason to be grateful to this chivalrous and delightful man. Inevitably, when the war ended, De la Rey emerged as one of its key figures.

To them General de la Rey was also the key man of the moment.

Into this tortured situation entered the Siener, Van Rensburg, with his strange visions and prophecies that influenced the highly religious De la Rey probably more than he realised. The Siener's final warning touches the end of the story with something of the inevitability of Greek tragedy, and De

la Rey's death from a ricochet bullet, really intended for the Foster Gang, brings a great story to a climax.

This is mature, informed writing, fluent and delightful. In many ways it is a tribute to the growing maturity of the South African nation that it can be written without anger and read without resentment. It is part of our history.

B.W.E.

*Dr Brian Rose?*

*Start 10/2/67*  
**The haunted  
warrior**

**DE LA REY—LION OF THE WEST,** by Johannes Meintjes (Hugh Kearland, R5).

**T**HIS book about one of the most colourful and dramatic characters in South African history has attracted wide attention. It is Johannes Meintjes' most ambitious effort. Certainly the subject—General Koos de la Rey, the circumstances of whose death were as dramatic as his life—is such wonderful material for a book that one wonders why nobody had done this biography before.

De la Rey was a haunted man—haunted by the prognostications of the seer, Van Rensburg, who played a sinister and extraordinary role in the life of this idealistic and sensitive warrior, to the extent of predicting the date, certainly, and something of the manner of his death.

Mr. Meintjes has gathered a great deal of material about the life of De la Rey, but his handling of the material leads sometimes to structural weaknesses in the story. It is essentially a chronicle of high drama in the period when the foundations for the South Africa of today were being laid, and the lives of the men who held the stage were in fact the fabric of our history.



1968 Flat-Roofed Lovers  
625 x 500 Private Collection  
(Published in Panorama, July 1974)



Sunday Times -  
London  
7 June 70

# Breaching the laager

JOHANNES MEINTJES, in his late forties, is one of the more articulate South Africans of his generation. A prolific painter, he is also a fluent author in both English and Afrikaans. With unrelenting curiosity about South African national and regional history, he seems blessedly free from political or racial bias, and when he writes of nations or persons in conflict is alert to what is good or bad on both sides.

His last book, "Stormberg" (published in South Africa), deals in detail with the once well-known military failure of General Gatacre in the Boer War. As this occurred near the home of Meintjes's own family, the book is for him a more than a gloated British and humane. It is a that he c or two for tive, ove who left legacy o increased whose int bitterest After the Smuts bel to set asi ness and work for were to admiringl the outsi home. T trusted e Botha ha only 57, together Smuts fa namely viewpoint a remark.

GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA by Johannes Meintjes/Cassell 63s pp 332  
THE GREAT BARNATO by Stanley Jackson/Heinemann 55s

## WILLIAM PLOMER

gifted people, the Afrikaners, from the outside world.

Meintjes has written several biographies of South African worthies. Botha is so far his greatest subject, and this, so far, his best book. As a full-length portrait it supersedes the previous lives of Botha. Courage, warmth, "overwhelming" kindness, unshakeable loyalty to his beliefs and causes, these were

tion "between the races," he meant the British and the Afrikaners, not white and black. It was Olive Schreiner who looked ahead. Never one to adopt accepted ideas without question, she is here quoted as having written that "only by treating the South African natives with justice and binding them to us by affection can we make the future of South Africa great." They have been bound, but not

43 Adastral Avenue  
Hastocks <sup>Sussex</sup> England  
7 June 70

Dear Johannes,

I think you may like to see the enclosed review of your Botha, which appeared in the Sunday Times this morning. I know how unsatisfactory reviews and reviewers are - they seldom say what one would like them to say; they get the emphasis in the wrong places; they miss points one thinks or knows to be important. All the same, I hope you will find this better than nothing. It's prompt, & fairly conspicuous, & may be taken as an indication that I found the book a pleasure to read & learnt a lot from it. As usual, I make a bow to your capacity for hard work & for fairmindedness, to say nothing about composition & skilful marshalling of a great many facts.

This is the busiest month of the year for me, so I must stop, but not without saying I hope all goes well with you. After 5 or 6 weeks of almost African sunshine, we are cheerful here, though bored & disgusted by

electioneering and by nerve-tentacles of all news. All the best to you from William

Letter and review from William Plomer  
Sunday Times London, 7 June 1970



*Invitation: SA Association of Arts (Cape Town)  
12 April 1965*



*Invitation : Gallery Brevan (Cape Town)  
30 March 1972*



1967

Appointment as honorary curator of  
George Vice Memorial Museum.

Exhibitions in Cape Town and  
Johannesburg.

Publication of De la Rey in serial  
format in Afrikaans newspaper.



*1956 Pen Sketch*  
*245 x 185 Private Collection*

1969

Exhibitions in Johannesburg and Molteno.

Publication of biography on General Gideon Scheepers, 'Sword in the Sand - Gideon Scheepers'  
as well as (English) biography on President Steyn.

Publication of 'Stormberg - A Lost Opportunity'.



*1950 Moonlight on Farm Stoep*  
*432 x 283 Private Collection*



*1971 House and Sky (Grootzeekoegat)*  
*455 x 255 Private Collection*



1970

Exhibition in Port Elizabeth.

Publication of the (Afrikaans) biography on President Steyn, 'Steyn – Vader van sy Volk'.

Publication of biography on General Louis Botha; favourable comments in the press; i.a. by William Plomer (UK) and Declerq (Netherlands).

Publication of 'The Round Table in South Africa'.

His book on President Steyn is broadcast on national radio.



1948 Ink sketch  
160 x 150 Private Collection

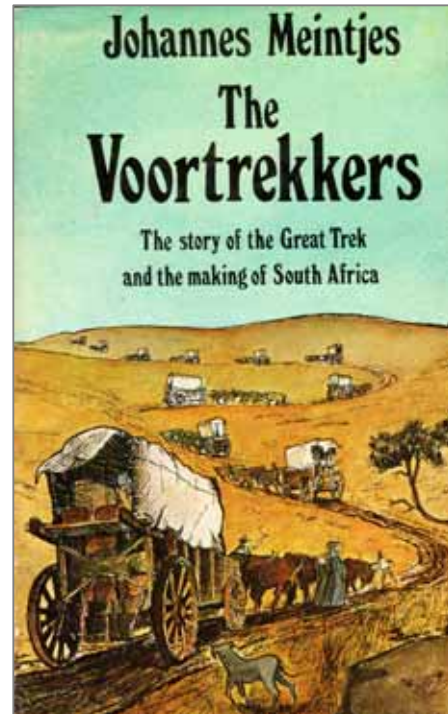
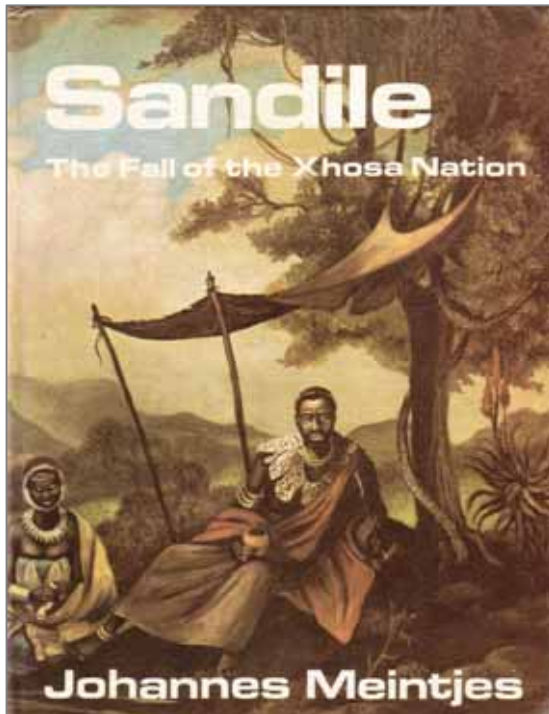
1971

Exhibition in Johannesburg.

Publication of biography on General Piet Joubert, 'The Commandant General - P J Joubert'.

Publication of 'Sandile - The Fall of the Xhosa Nation'.

Publication of short stories and essays, 'Siembamba'.





**D**ERTIG jaar gelede het Johannes Meintjes sy debuut op die Suid-Afrikaanse kunsteneel gemaak. Daarvoor skryf Esmé Berman in haar boek *Art and Artists of South Africa*: "Die opsigbare wyse waarop Johannes Meintjes gedurende die laaste jare van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog ineens groot nuus geword het, word selde in die Suid-Afrikaanse kultuurgeskiedenis gewenaar. Nog voordat hy 22 jaar oud was, het hierdie intense jong kunstenaar dié soort van openbare bewondering geniet wat deesdae vir jeugdige sterre van die popmusiekwêreld gereserveer word."

Met sy eerste tentoonstelling — in Johannesburg in 1944 — is die grondslag van Meintjes se werk as kunsskilder gelê. Dié werk was liries, in die ekspressionistiese rigting, met 'n digterlike kwaliteit wat die verbeelding aangegryp het. Hierdie vermoë het die kunstenaar behou, want hy het selde van sy besondere idioom afgewyk, en die nuwe geslag vind sy werk nog net so opwindend as dié van 30 jaar gelede. In Johannesburg, veral, het elke nuwe Meintjes-tentoonstelling sterk onder die aandag gekom.

Wie Meintjes se skildersloopbaan fyn dopgehou het, sal weet dat die belofte van destyds nie net daarby gebly het nie. Meintjes is die ware kunstenaar wat sy eie, soms moeisame en eensame weg loop en onverbidlik trou bly aan sy selfopgelegde roeping

# JOHANNES

# Meintjes

as kunstenaar. In elke werk wat hy skilder, stort hy homself uit — sy onuitputlike konsentrasie en sy totaliteit van skeppende energie. Vreesloos en openlik projekteer hy op die doek sy innerlike visie as dromer en as digter-met-die-kwas. Vreesloos omdat hy, wat ookal die gevolge, dit durf waag om op so 'n intieme wyse sy innerlike wêreld aan die toeskouer bloot te lê. Nooit is hy tevrede met kitsoplossings of "die tweede beste" nie. En in hierdie proses het hy gedurende die afgelope 30 jaar werke gelewer wat steeds van blywende waarde vir die Suid-Afrikaanse skilderye-skat sal wees.

Meintjes se agtergrond was streng akademies — van die ouderdom van 15 jaar oor 'n

tydperk van sowat vyf jaar in die ateljee van Florence Zerffi in Kaapstad. Sy vriende was egter mense soos Maggie Laubser, Cecil Higgs, Alexis Preller en verskeie ander wat van die gebaande weë weggebreek het. Die ekspressionisme (met 'n somtydse neiging tot surrealisme) was Meintjes se natuurlike rigting.

Maar Meintjes se werk bly pure Meintjes, en kern-Afrikaans, want hy is 'n plaasseun gebore en het die meeste van sy 51 jaar op die ou familieplaas "Grootzeekoogat", distrik Molteno, Oos-Kaapland, deurgebring. Hy het ook in Londen, Amsterdam en Parys gewoon en gewerk.

Opvallend in Meintjes se werk is sy instink-



tiewe gevoel vir komposisie, sy liefde vir teksture en sonderlinge komposisies, 'n element van stilte, en in sy nuwer werk, 'n hele getoordery met kleur. Altyd is daar 'n geheimsinnige eienskap, selfs in 'n stillewe. Min kunstenaars kan op só 'n vernuftige wyse die mens, die landskap en die stillewe op een doek verenig. Ook kenmerkend van sy werk is die melankolie, van verlatenheid en dié dinge wat gesê word waarvoor daar nie woorde is nie.

Sy skilderye spreek 'n digterlike taal van eensaamheid, van verlange, van illusie; kortom, van die ewige raaisel van mense-bestaan. Wie voor Meintjes se beste werke staan, en bereid is om homself, soos die skilder te gee, word telkens weer gehipnotiseer deur die element van tydloosheid wat skuil in wat hy ookal op die doek vasgelê het — sy dit 'n landskap, swewende voëls, stillewe of die helmwee-vervulde oë en sprakelose lippe van sy meestal jeugdige figure.

Meintjes se werk vereis die oorgawe van die toeskouer. Anders is daar net wanbegrip. Sy werk word deur medekunstenaars baie hooggeskat (Maggie Laubser het selfs al haar werkmateriaal aan hom nagelaat) maar meningsverskil is daar ook — en onvermydelik waar daar nie ontvanklikheid vir sy digterlike visie is nie. Natuurlik het hy ook sy kritici. Samevattend kom die vernaamste kritiek



daarop neer, dat hy nooit kon weg beweeg van die sentimentaliteit en die romantiese inslag van sy jeugwerk nie. Kritiek soos hierdie, hoewel miskien in sommige opsigte wesenlik, moet egter ook gesien word teen die agtergrond van ons tydsgewrig waarin daar al te veel en te radikaal wegbeweeg is van die estetisme en die romantiek. Niets is so seker as dat 'n teenbeweging weer hierop sal intree nie, en dit sal interessant wees om dan na te gaan hoe Meintjes se werk aangeslaan word. Soos met die werk van elke belangrike kunstenaar sal net die verloop van tyd die finale balans kan help opmaak, en niemand behoort verbaas te wees as Meintjes se werk mettertyd 'n hoë plek in die Suid-Afrikaanse kunsbesit gaan inneem nie.

Meintjes is jare gelede al beskryf as "die enigmatiese". Die begrip het hy self versterk deur een van die land se voorste biograwe te word — hy het in die afgelope 30 jaar ongeveer 30 groter werke geskryf. Maar in essensie beskou hy homself, en is hy, kunsskilder (mens voel dit in sy boeke ook), en veral van die eensame mens en veld, berg en voël, stillewes van bv. pampoene op sonbestraalde vensterbanke teen oop landskappe, en van figure met hande, blomme en takke in soms verruklike komposisies. Syne is die wêreld van die Stormberge en in sy werk van die afgelope tien jaar weerapieël hy die streek se bule en seisoene in verrassende samestellings van die mens, veld en voorwerp met sy eie digterlike siening. \*\*\*



1972

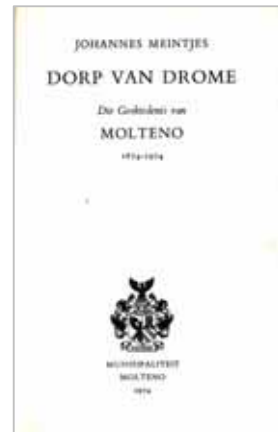
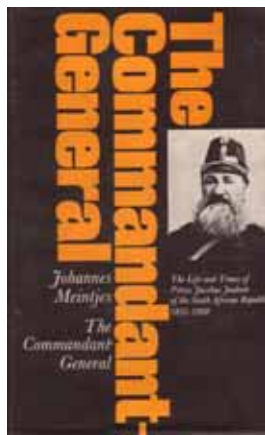
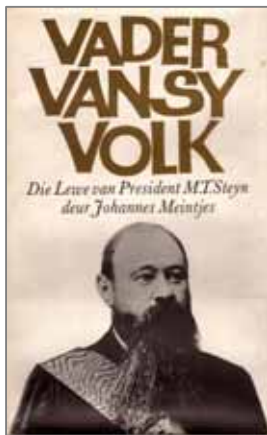
Exhibition in Cape Town. Publication of 'Dagboek 2'.

1973

Appointed as executive member of Burgersdorp Museum.

Exhibition in Johannesburg in commemoration of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Publication of 'The Voortrekkers' (prescribed at Oxford University; also published in Corgi paperback).



1974

Appointed as member of the 'SA Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns'.

Exhibitions in Cape Town and Molteno.

Publication of biography 'President Kruger'.

Publication of 'Dorp van Drome : Molteno 1874 - 1974'.

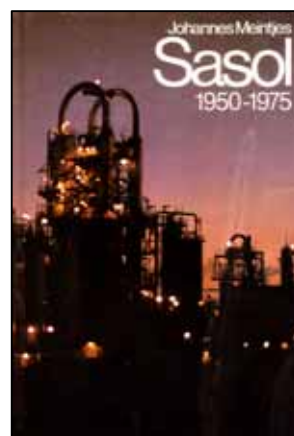
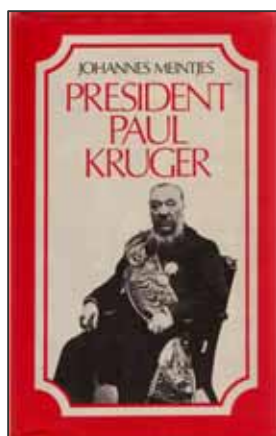


1975

Exhibition in Bloemfontein and Johannesburg.

Publication of the commissioned book 'SASOL: 1950 - 1975' in both Afrikaans and English.

Publication of 'Dagboek 3'.

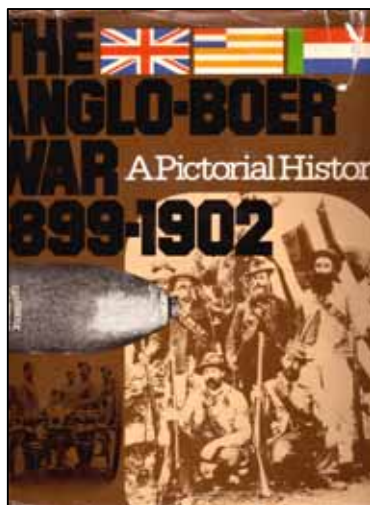


1976

Exhibition in Sasolburg.

Publication of 'The Anglo Boer War 1899 - 1902: A Pictorial History' (Afrikaans and English editions, later also published in German).

Publication of 'The Great Boer War : Arthur Conan Doyle 1'.



1977

Exhibitions in Stellenbosch, Bellville and Molteno.

Publication of 'With Bobs and Kruger : Frederic William Unger 2'.

1978

Exhibition in Lichtenburg.

Prestige group exhibition in Salisbury, Bulawayo and Johannesburg with Geoffrey Armstrong, Armando Baldinelli, Maud Sumner, Gordon Vorster, Walter Battiss and Rhona Stern.

1979

Exhibition on invitation at University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Exhibition in Ficksburg.

1980

Exhibition on invitation at University of Port Elizabeth.



*1969 Boy with Caracal  
625 x 495 Private Collection*



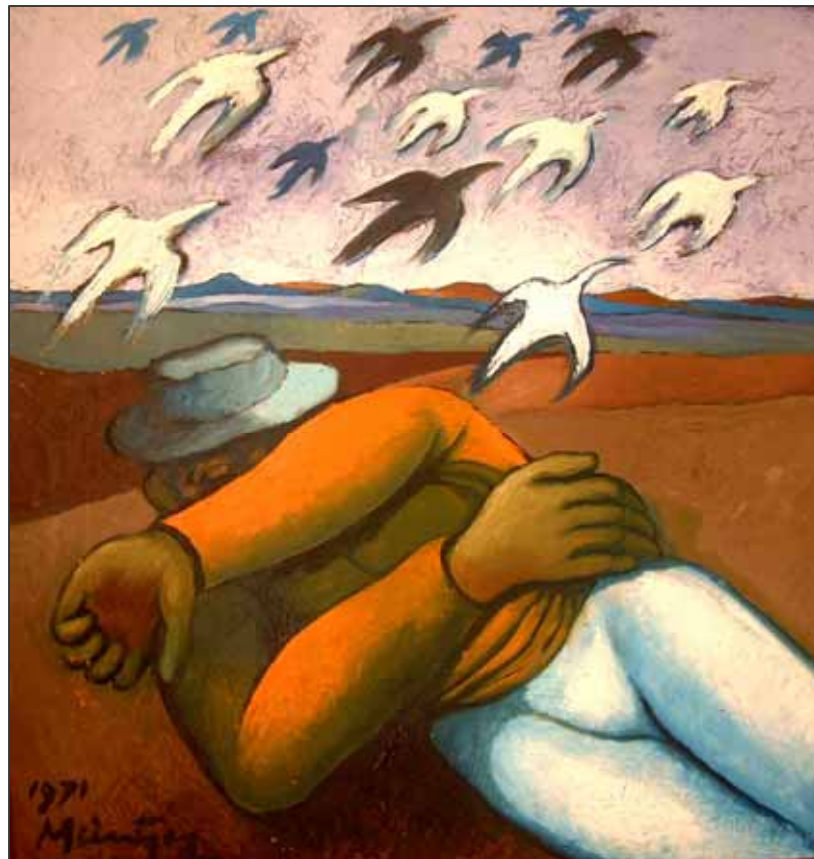
*1952 Carnival  
510 x 405 Private Collection*

Died on 7 July 1980.

At the time of his death, Meintjes had painted more than 1 336 oil paintings, produced dozens of sculptures as well as hundreds of sketches, temperas, graphic works and watercolours.

Several published books (35) and even many more unpublished manuscripts are all evidence of his creative energy.

More than 1 400 newspaper and magazine articles were written about Meintjes during his lifetime. Following his death, most of Meintjes' manuscripts, letters, diaries, etc were presented to National English Literary Museum (NELM), Grahamstown to be housed in a Johannes Meintjes Memorial Room.

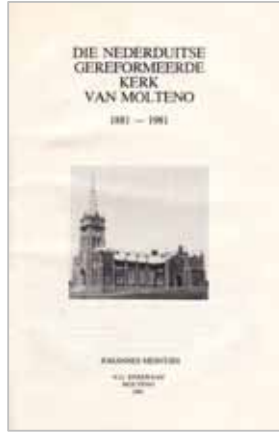


*1971 Reclining Figure with Birds in Flight*  
610 x 610 Private Collection



1981

(Posthumous) publication of 'Eeu van Genade: NG Kerk Molteno 1881 - 1981'.



1954 Bird  
500 x 400 Pretoria Art Museum, Tshwane

1982

Television programme on the life and work of Meintjes.

1983

Memorial exhibition by invitation at University of Orange Free State, Bloemfontein.

1986

Opening of Johannes Meintjes Room, Molteno (permanent exhibition).

On 26<sup>th</sup> May 1987 Meintjes' widow, Ronell Meintjes formally donates 74 works of art (oil paintings, drawings, watercolours, temperas), 10 sculptures, some personal effects and 2237 books from Meintjes' prestigious and valuable Africana library to the Molteno High School.

**MEINTJIESKAMER OP MOLTENO BEWAAR**



Ronell Meintjes en Willie Steyn, kultuursamplers, staan hier by een van Johannes se skilderye. Sy skilderye en boeke versamel is vroeër versprei aan die Hoërskool Molteno geges vir bewaring.

Johannes Meintjes, bekende skilder en digter van Molteno, is in Junie 1980 oorlede en sy eggenote, Ronell, was sy enigste opvoeder. Nadat Ronell in opname gemaak het van alles wat sy geerf het, het sy besef dat dit 'n te groot kultuurerfenis was vir haar om te hanteer, veral sy groot versameling skilderye en sy private boekeversameling wat 'n hele aantal Afrikaanse inhoue.

Die geleëge het toe by Ronell ontstaan om haarde erfenis dele op 'n plek te bewaar waar dit behoue sal bly en ook beskikbaar sal wesen vir mense deur die nageslag. Nadat sy die saak met Willie Steyn, 'n hielal vriend van beide, bespreek het, het beide vir hank Schuurman, skoolhoof van Hoërskool Molteno gesander oor die moontlikheid van 'n lokaal in die skool waar die erfenis opgesluit en bewaar kon word. Willie Steyn was op daardie stadium verbonde aan die perseel by die skool. Hy het sekerheid in jare as kultuursamplers by die Departement van Onderwys en Kultuur aangevra.

Na onderhandelinge met verteenwoordigers van die Regering Onderwysdepartement, is 'n lokaal in die skool ingesit en Ronell het die hielal boekeversameling, 'n paar beeldwerke, 'n aantal skatte, 'n paar waterverf skilderye en ses-tig owerblywende aan die Hoërskool Molteno gestrek.

Die owerblywende is 'n verteenwoordigende versameling van Johannes Meintjes se werk van 1934 tot die laaste tye wat hy lewe. Daar is ook 'n afsonderlike lokaal wat sy werk wat sy op 'n eiland gestaan het en wat sy nog het en op die eiland staan.

Die lokaal is in geskiedkundige woorde die lokaal van die perseel van die skool gemaak is, gesit en daar is ook onder andere Johannes se skilderye, sy eie, 'n paar stoele en meubels in die lokaal gestaan en as 'n geerf 'n baie rykdom "Meintjieskamer" aan die lokaal gesit.

Die opening van hierdie lokaal het op 11 April 1986 plaasgevind en W.A. de Klerk, skrywer en gewone lede van die Hoërskool en Ronell, het die opening gesit op 'n sere beswering wat gesit.

Die lokaal kultuursamplers het die stigting van die Johannes Meintjes Kultuursamplers, ontstaan om daardie die bewaring van kultuur in Molteno op 'n heel vlak gesit. Dit is onwettig 'n wettige kultuursamplers en kultuursamplers wat op die meubels van Molteno toe gestaan is.





*1955 Brothers*  
610 x 483 Private Collection



*1950 Self portrait with hand  
370 x 275 Private Collection*



1990

Prestige memorial exhibition by invitation at the University of Johannesburg (RAU).

Dr Hermien McCaul-Dommisse opened this exhibition. She also opened Meintjes' first exhibition in Johannesburg in 1944.

1990

Prestige memorial exhibition by invitation for the works of Meintjes and Alexis Preller in Pretoria.

1990

Prestige memorial exhibition by invitation at the National Museum, Bloemfontein.

1996

Death of his widow, Ronell Meintjes.

A portion of her collection of Meintjes art works was bequeathed to the University of Stellenbosch.

2004

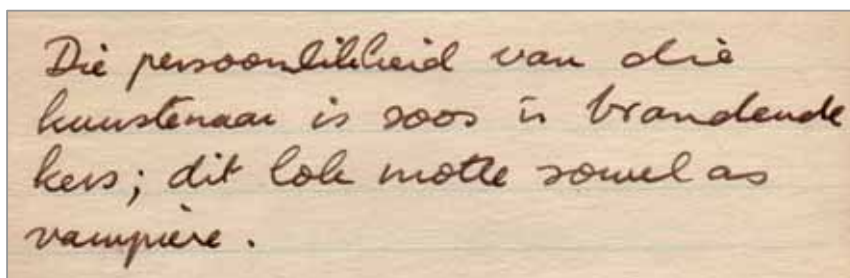
First electronic publication of some of Meintjes' books (Victoria, Australia)

2006

Archival website by The Haeggi Foundation (Basel, Switzerland)

<http://www.art-archives-southafrica.ch/MEINTJES.htm>

A personal note from Meintjes' sketchbook during the 1950's



*The personality of an artist is like a burning candle; it attracts moths as well as vampires*



*1948-49 Sebastiaan (Yellowwood)  
2000 (height) Private Collection*

## Collections

AC White Gallery, Mangaung  
Afrikaans Literary Museum, Mangaung  
Ben Jaffe Art Collection, Cape Town  
Chamber of Mines Art Collection, Johannesburg  
Edrich Art Gallery, Stellenbosch  
Harry Oppenheimer Art Collection, Johannesburg  
Hester Rupert Art Gallery, Graaff-Reinet  
Johannesburg University Art Collection,  
Johannesburg  
Julius Gordon Africana Centre, Riversdal  
Kaffrarian Museum, King William's Town  
Mangaung War Museum, Mangaung  
Meintjes Room, Molteno High School  
Music Museum, Mangaung  
National Museum, Mangaung  
Pretoria Art Museum, Tshwane  
Rembrandt van Rijn Art Foundation, Stellenbosch  
SAMRO Art Collection, Johannesburg  
SABC Art Collection, Johannesburg  
Sanlam Art Collection, Cape Town  
Sasol Art Collection, Johannesburg  
SA National Art Gallery, Cape Town  
Tshwane Metropolitan Art Collection, Tshwane  
University of Pretoria Art Collection, Tshwane  
University of Stellenbosch Art Collection, Stellenbosch  
University of the Witwatersrand Art Collection, Johannesburg  
Willem Annandale Art Gallery, Lichtenburg  
William Humphreys Art Collection, Kimberley  
  
Private collections internationally

You are cordially invited to an

### **Exhibition of paintings**

by

**Johannes Meintjes**

at Gallery 101

Rand Central, Jeppe Street, Johannesburg

at 5.30 p.m. on Monday, 5th of March, 1973

This exhibition marks

the fiftieth birthday of the artist

and closes on Saturday the 17th of March, 1973

*1973-exhibition at Gallery 101 to  
mark Meintjes' 50th birthday*



*1945 Street Musicians  
1500 x 850 Hester Rupert Museum*





*1960 Landscape*  
*635 x 450 Private Collection*  
*(New Zealand)*

TO JOHANNES MEINTJES

A boy dreams of birds  
fill they float above his head,  
wings canopy his bed,  
brush his fingers and knees,  
garlanding trees  
grown between dark and light  
where horizons of morning spread  
to receive their flight,

while he kneels by a pool  
where swans with folded wings  
listen as he sings,  
curved necks bent to his hand  
outflowering from land  
fingers curved to a shell,  
Here he can understand  
all he must tell.

Cold symetric wings,  
warm breast, my silver dove  
never flutter or move  
from hand or dream ;  
dark room, still seem  
my wing leaved grove  
by a swan shadowed stream,  
no day cage my birds.

Ursula Wood, London.

October 1946

(Reprinted with kind permission from: "Need For Speech," Basil Blackwell,  
Oxford.)

(\*Ursula Wood married the composer Ralph Vaughn Williams)







*1945 Vlei Beings*  
*625 x 500 Molteno High School Meintjes Room*

Images used in this document

Frontispiece

Left column

Panorama, 1974

Oliewenhuis Art Museum

Sanlam Art Collection

Sanlam Art Collection

Middle column

Stellenbosch Art Gallery website

Pretoria Art Museum

Pretoria Art Museum

Private Collection

Sanlam Art Collection

Right column

Pretoria Art Museum

Meintjes Room Molteno

Sotheby's Catalogue

Stellenbosch Art Gallery website

p 2 Photograph from 'Dagboek'-series

p 3 'Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum' Art Collection, photograph from 'Meintjes - Lyrical Work'

p 5 Photograph from private archives

p 7 Private collection

p 8 Invitation from private archives; photograph from 'Dagboek 1'

p 9 Photograph from 'Dagboek 2'

p 10 Private collection

p 11 Photograph from 'Dagboek'-series; sketch of Grootzeekoegat published in 'Frontier Family'

p 12 Two interiors from private collections; photograph from 'Dagboek'-series (Anne Fisher)

p 13 Photographs published in 'Dagboek'-series; Pretoria Art Museum, Tshwane

p 14 Private collection

p 15 Frontispiece from the Meintjes Room catalogue; photograph from 'Dagboek 3'

p 16 Private collection

p 17 Private collections

p 18 Page 35 from 'Maggie Laubser' by Johannes Meintjes

p 19 Private collections

p 20 Private collection; published in 'Meintjes - Lyrical Work'

p 21 Photograph from 'Meintjes - Lyrical Work'; private collection

p 22 Colour image from Michael Stevenson's website; 'New Era' cutting from private archives

p 23 Costume design and self portrait from private collections; 'Night Bathers' from Sanlam Art Collection; passage to UK and image of painting from private archives (unknown collection)

p 24 Private collection



*1950 Basutho (watercolour & ink)  
250 x 185 Private Collection*



*1952 Street Musicians  
130 x 170 Private Collection*

- p 25 Meintjes Room Molteno High School, photograph from 'Meintjes - Lyrical Work'
- p 26 Images from private archives; self portrait in the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown
- p 27 Photograph from private archives; private collections and image from Sothebey's Catalogue
- p 28 Photographs from 'Dagboek'-series
- p 29 Private collections; brush sketch published in 'Siembamba'
- p 30 'Evening Post' and 'A Vision of Africa' (Panorama) from private archives;  
image from Sotheby's catalogue (March 2006)
- p 31 Private collection; image of Arnold van Wyk's presentation copy from private archives
- p 32 Private collection
- p 33 Private collection
- p 34 Private archives
- p 35 Private collection; private archives
- p 36 Private archives; self portrait in Sanlam Art Collection; drawing in private collection
- p 37 Private collection
- p 38 Private collections
- p 40 Private collection
- p 42 Private (unknown) collection; image published in Panorama 1974
- p 43 Private archives



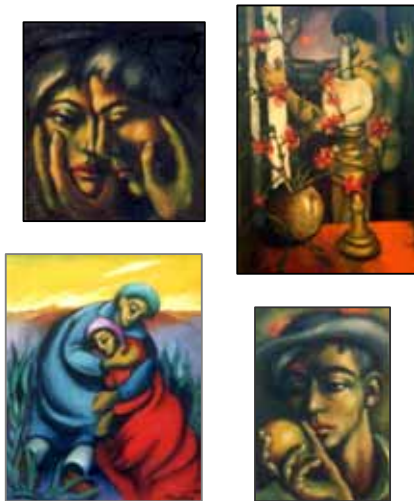
*1945 Coloured Boy ('Jan')*  
450 x 350 Private Collection



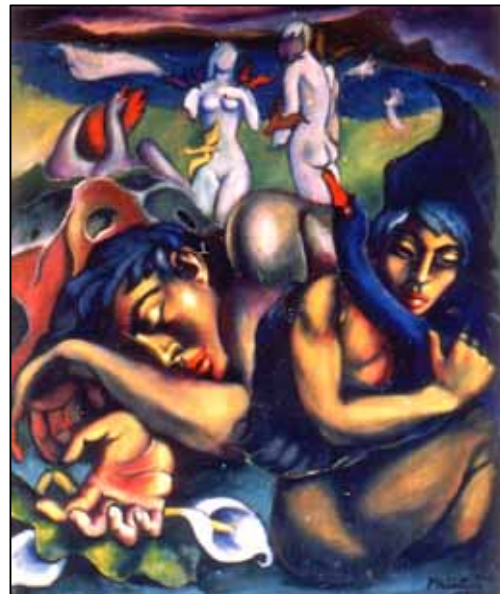
*1954 Two Children*  
500 x 400 Private Collection



- p 44 Private archives
- p 45 Private collections
- p 46 Private collection
- p 47 Panorama 1974 (private archives)
- p 50 Private collections
- p 51 Private collection
- p 52 Images from private archives; Pretoria Art Museum, Tshwane
- p 53 Private collection
- p 54 Private collection (unknown); image from private archives
- p 55 Private archives
- p 56 Private collection
- p 57 Image from private archives; Hester Rupert Museum, Graaff-Reinet
- p 58 Image from The Haenggi Foundation's WebPages; private collection New Zealand
- p 59 Private archives
- p 60 Private collection
- p 61 Meintjes Room Molteno High School
- p.62 Private collection (both images)
- p.63 Private collection (both images)
- p 64 Meintjes Room Molteno High School; images from the 1990 exhibition at RAU
- p 65 Images from private collections made available for use by the late Mrs Ronell Meintjes
- p. 66 Private collection (South Africa)
- p.67 Private collections (Australia and South Africa)



*1990 Exhibition at RAU*



*1948 Icarus  
985 x 820 Molteno High School  
Meintjes Room*

Important notes

This CD / document may not be sold.

The information and images in this document are made available free of charge for purposes of scholarship and research in terms of the Berne convention.

All relevant copyright provisions apply and otherwise remain in place.

© 2007 Copyright reserved and intellectual rights are asserted.

Enquiries: Kobus Opperman [cmt@iafrica.com](mailto:cmt@iafrica.com)

The images in this document are not representative of Meintjes' oeuvre.

(Colour) images may be used, provided acknowledgement is made to Johannes Meintjes as the artist.

Black & white photographs by Constance Stuart and Anne Fisher;  
current owners/collections largely indeterminable.



*1973 Irises in October*  
710 x 610 Private Collection



*1976 Karoo Lovers*  
665 x 610 Private Collection



*1972 Draped Figure in Landscape*  
610 x 610 Private Collection



*1973 The Window Sill*  
560 x 510 Private Collection



*1970 Boys Setting Free a Bird*  
950 x 650 Private Collection





*1947 Beach Party (2)  
500 x 450 Private Collection (Australia)*



*1956 Guitarist on the Beach  
750 x 550 Private Collection*

DIE VADERLAND ★ Vrydag, 25 Augustus 1950.



**MEISIE MET GHITAARTJIE**

MEISIE MET GHITAARTJIE is een van die skilderye van Johannes Meintjes wat tans in Schweikerdt se kunstlokaal in Pretoria uitgestal word. Let op die ritmiese lynne en die balans van die hele werk.

Die Vaderland 25/08/1950



SA Panorama April 1958



An exhibition of paintings by Johannes Meintjes was opened in Johannesburg on Monday evening. In our picture above the artist is seen discussing one of his paintings with Miss...

Rand Daily Mail 08/07/1959

THE CAPE ARGUS, FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 1959

**Johannes Meintjes shows his introspective, passionate work**

**CHARACTER STUDY**



It is some four years since Johannes Meintjes last exhibited in Cape Town. His present exhibition, on view at the S.A. Association of Arts (Small) Gallery until August 29, shows again that passionate introspective quality possessed by this most poetic of younger South African painters.

Meintjes brings to his work the inner vision of the dreamer. In paintings like 'Sleeper in the sofa', 'Seated boy' and 'Quiet player' he seems to penetrate and explore the very nature of the dream world of loneliness and illusion.

The characteristically strong, dissonant colouring — those purple-blues, oranges and reds — is potentially dangerous in the hands of a lesser artist — is used to heighten and intensify the already charged atmosphere.

It is, in fact, in mood and atmosphere that Mr. Meintjes deals. In some of the landscapes stylized feathered clouds appear as storm clouds, as night and autumn winds. It is though there were a kind of extension of Nature into Meintjes. They create their effect, so to speak, but it is these works where such stylized eruptions are subsidiary to the foreground figures that are most compelling.

For Meintjes paints heads and figures, succinctly, well. They appear, without straining the imagination too far, to reflect two aspects of human condition. In 'Boy in a landscape with rocks', 'Siesta', 'Head with shoes', and 'Quiet player' they have a languid serenity born of idealized physical perfection.

In 'Sleeping form' and 'Two women', there is a 'society born, perhaps, of less favoured circumstances.

The figures in the latter group are at the same time about 1900 and part of their background, some in the latter seem to be crushed by it.

Yet they have all been conceived monumentally and have been raised in Dufresne's portraiture terms. They have a solidity — a sense of being up the canvas with their own force — imminent of the great Mexican mural painters.

H.E.D.

'TWO WOMEN' is the title of this painting in the Johannes Meintjes exhibition reviewed to-day.

Cape Argus 21/08/1959





JOHANNES MEINTJIES by Maart in die Schweikert-galery uitgestal word. een van sy werke wat tot 4

Die Vaderland 17/03/1960



DIE SAAIER, een van die doeke van Johannes Meintjes wat nou in die Regency-kunssaal te sien is.

Die Burger 23/10/1962



THE ESSENCE of Johannes Meintjes's work is revealed in paintings like 'Sleeping Boy,' says Neelke Dubow.

Cape Argus 31/10/1961



"Sleeping Boy" by Johannes Meintjes. This work is painted in black and green, creating a sense of remoteness which is peculiar to the style of the artist.

The Pretoria News Monday, March 6, 1961

Pretoria News 06/03/1961





*DIE DAGSTILTE* deur Johannes Meintjes, wat in die resensie hieronder geloof word om sy „sprokiesagtige” karakter en Suid-Afrikaanse geur.

*Die Burger* 21/04/1965



THAT Johannes Meintjes, now showing his new paintings in Gallery 101 has achieved a greater maturity is apparent in "Waiting Woman" (above). It is one of the best pictures in this very good exhibition. It has a more definite and sure line than was the case in some of his earlier work. There is a greater depth in the composition and the vigorous painting is clean and fresh. In fact his painting is especially noteworthy. Where he uses white and yellow he achieves a satisfying luminosity. H.E.W.

*Rand Daily Mail* 30/09/1967



*RUSTENDE VISSERS* (nr. 18), een van die skilderye deur Johannes Meintjes wat nou in die saal van die S.A. Kultuurvereniging in Burgstraat vertoon word. Die tentoonstelling duur nog tot 8. April.

*Die Burger* 03/04/1967



## More mature Meintjies

AS ONE of South Africa's most important artists, Johannes Meintjies grows in stature with every exhibition he holds.

At Gallery 101 in Rand Central Building in Jeppe Street, Johannesburg, we have a more mature, more certain and even more elegant Meintjies.

Particularly attractive is his palette, to which he seems to have introduced a new white and a new brilliant orange.

He paints with assurance; his line is confident and very direct; his statement is certain and unflinching.

He appears to have found his road and steps out along it in no uncertain manner.

He is still the poet of the Coloured community in the Cape and his painting, "Dream of Genadendal," I have chosen as my illustration this week. Note the competent fashion

with which he handles the setting sun, and the delightful feeling of general relaxation of the villagers stretched out on the village green at the end of the day.

His still-lives are vigorous, charming and decorative.

Here is an artist whose work will always live and in which it will be possible to find new interests for generations to come. — H.E.W.

*Rand Daily Mail 27/03/1971*



*The Star 20/11/1979*