



BIOGRAPHIES

Irma Stern was born to Jewish German parents who relocated to South Africa (Transvaal) in the late 1800's to seek their fortune. She spent most of her young life travelling between Europe and South Africa, allowing her to see the world from very different perspectives. She studied Art in Berlin around the time of World War 1 and had her first exhibition there at age 24.

She held exhibitions every two years, showing the art she developed during her travels to Europe and in Africa. Initially her work was seen as radical and frowned upon by society due to her Modernist approach and her 'native' subject matter. Her wealthy parents funded her lifestyle and artistic pursuits. She lived in Rondebosch until her death in 1966. Her home is now a museum, dedicated to her life and contribution to the art world.

Gerard Sekoto was born in Transvaal (Gauteng) 1913, the same year that 'Natives Land Act' came into being. The series of measures taken by the government to exploit, alienate and degrade non-white South Africans that followed the Land Act drove Gerard Sekoto, and many other artists, musicians, academics and activists, into self-imposed exile.

He initially trained as a teacher, like his father and taught until the age of 25, when he won an art competition and decided to become a professional artist. Ten years later, he relocated to France which he considered the centre of the world's cultural production. He lived a life of struggle there until his death in 1993. The Gerard Sekoto Foundation is his legacy, to fulfill the artist's wish to educate young South Africans about art related issues.

GLOSSARY

Modernism was an art movement that arose from broad transformations in Western society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Artists tried to align their work with modern industrial life. The term is usually associated with art in which the traditions the past have been thrown aside in a spirit of experimentation

Expressionism aimed to present the world solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically for emotional effect in order to evoke moods or ideas

Impressionism is based on the practice of painting out of doors and spontaneously 'on the spot' rather than in a studio from sketches. Main impressionist subjects were landscapes and scenes of everyday life. Their main concern was for the naturalistic depiction of light and colour

German Expressionism was a German art movement that emphasized the artist's inner feelings or ideas over replicating reality, and was characterised by simplified shapes, bright colours and gestural marks or brushstrokes.

Post Impressionism was a French art movement. They extended Impressionism while rejecting its limitations: they continued using vivid colours, often thick application of paint, and real-life subject matter, but were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, distort form for expressive effect, and use unnatural or arbitrary colour.

Social realism: aims to draw attention to the real socio-political conditions of the working class as a means to critique the power structures behind these conditions.

IRMA STERN

1894 - 1966

INFLUENCES

Her emotive and urgent style are linked directly to German Expressionism.

Her subject matter and emphasis on dynamic colour is linked to Expressionism.

SUBJECT MATTER

She traveled extensively throughout South Africa, Swaziland, Congo, Zanzibar and Portugal to find subjects to paint.

She portrayed local and indigenous people, landscapes and still lifes.

MEDIA: Oil paintings, works on paper and sculpture in clay and cement.

FORMAL ART ELEMENTS

Colour is the main element in her work and she uses strong expressionistic, saturated colours to portray her feelings.

The use of contrasting and complementary colour gives a feeling of joy and excitement.

The colour evokes emotions, rather than describes objects.

Loosely applied brushstrokes create expressive marks.

She used strongly defined darker outlines in a deep blue colour, as did the Post- Impressionists.

STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figurative

Tried to capture the essence of a subject and detail or resemblance was of lesser importance.

Stereotypes: Depicts an idealised view of subjects, often replacing individual characteristics with cultural identities.

Stylisation: She takes natural forms and alters the colour, shapes, lines, and features. Therefore, the art appears similar to the natural state while also looking more dramatic.

Drew subjects in her sketchbook on her travels and completed the paintings in one sitting at her home.

Used loose, expressionist, spontaneous brush strokes.

The use of thick paint sometimes applied with a palette knife creates a sense of emotional intensity expressed in the choice of subject matter, be it landscape, portrait or still life.

GERARD SEKOTO

1913 - 1993

INFLUENCES

His intuitive sense of colour and light links his work with Post-Impressionism.

His subject matter links him to Expressionism and Social Realism.

SUBJECT MATTER

His surroundings in South Africa and the vibrancy of marginalised communities such as Sophiatown and District Six.

He focused on portraiture after voluntary exile to France in 1947.

MEDIA: Mainly oil paintings, but also watercolour, pastel and gouche.

FORMAL ART ELEMENTS

His highly subjective colours create emotional impact.

Sekoto simplified shapes.

He created roundness and solidity in his shapes by the strong contrasts between light and dark.

Rhythm is created by the repetition of shapes and colours.

His shapes and forms were often distorted.

Relied on patterns and textures to describe objects in the landscape.

STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figurative

Painted from the perspective of an onlooker not a participant; his compositions often do not depict faces of the people.

Depicts an idealized view of communities, not the harsh realities of township life.

Focused on exploring the formal elements, rather than subject matter.

He often cropped images which places the viewer in the middle of the action.

Compositions are often dynamic and asymmetrical; balancing large and small figures on opposite sides of the canvas.

Creates a strong atmosphere due to his emotional response to his subject matter.

Creates an interesting surface texture due to his brushstroke and paint application.