

MYLCHREEST Ronald

1920 –

b Johannesburg

STUDIED Commercial Art, and under Arthur Podolini, CT.

SUMMARY BIOGRAPHY Served in SA Forces during WW2; camouflage-instructor during latter part of his service; then taught art as a rehabilitative course at Military College, Pta. 1946–69: worked in Johannesburg as an advertising designer; executed commissions for Iscor Bldg, Pta and Potchefstroom Post Office. 1965: began experimenting with a technique of assembling panels from segments of coloured wood; this led organically to the production of free-standing forms – away from painting into sculpture. 1966: exhibited assemblages in group-exhib with five other experimental artists, under the group-title 'Sestigers'; subsequently worked mainly as a sculptor. 1969: resigned from advertising, moved out of Jhb to join the growing colony of artists living in the Broederstroom district and gave his full attention to his art. 1976–77: lecturer in Painting at Univ of Pta. No one-man exhibits after leaving Jhb, occupied primarily with commissions for architectural art: i a Jan Smuts Airport; State Theatre, Pta; Ramada Hotel, Tel Aviv; Venda Parliamentary Assembly Hall; Gazankula Parliamentary Assembly Hall; Diamond Sorting House, Gabarones, Botswana; (all mural art, executed in carved wood, some with metal). Cultivates vines and makes wine as a hobby.

EXHIBITIONS 1951: first one-man exhib, Jhb. 1952: Van Riebeeck Tercent Exhib, CT. 1956: First Quad of SA Art. 1960: Second Quad of SA Art. 1966: Rep Fest Exhib, Pta. 1973: Sao Paulo Bien. 1974: RSA Exhib. 1977: 'SA Art', Nat Gal of Rhodesia, Salisbury (Harare, Zimbabwe).

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS SA Nat Gal, CT; Pta Art Mus; William Humphreys Gal, Kmbly; Ann Bryant Gal, EL; Hester Rupert Mus, GR; Rembrandt Art Foundtn; Univ of Wits Gals.

Ronald MYLCHREEST's painting style followed a consistent line of progression, which began with impressionistic studies of the landscape, led on to stylization of the image and through to formalized composition. With each stage there was lessened reference to objective appearances and by the beginning of the Sixties he had arrived at a style of non-figurative design, the characteristic features of which were cool, subdued colour and the recurrent use of tilted angular planes suspended horizontally across the centre of the format*. Space was suggested by the usually-uninterrupted zones above and below the central motifs.

Mylchreest's craftsmanship is clean and efficient. His non-objective compositions possessed the crispness of architectural renditions – but also some of their sterility and, by 1964, the structured planimetric paintings were becoming little more than variations on a slender, decorative theme. The artist undoubtedly felt himself constricted in the mould he had created, for he began a phase of experiment in several directions. In some of his canvases the object was re-instated; for others he adopted informal abstract techniques. The outcome was a general loosening of composition and a brightening-up of colour

that lent new vitality to his familiar style.

But the urge to break away persisted. He chose the course of switching from his painterly materials to explore a radically different medium, and he began to assemble his designs from planes of wood. The material itself led him to modify the formal construction of his compositions: the previously-typical diagonally-tilted elements were brought into a static vertical-horizontal order; the lost linear movement was replaced by plastic movement, created by projecting and receding cubic segments. These were scored and grooved and given simple colour treatment – often no more than black and white*.

Once Mylchreest had recruited physical space to serve his purpose it was but a step from assemblage-in-relief to construction-in-the-round. The possibilities excited him and the works reflected his enthusiasm. By the end of 1966, he had put paint behind him and was launched on a new course of sculptural experiment.

during the 1970s, his personal output was confined to sculpture. He worked mainly in wood, later incorporating brass and copper elements into his constructions. Despite the switch from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional media, there was no great disparity in style between Mylchreest's works in wood and his earlier output as an easel-painter.

The compositions were all assembled from rectangular timber units, which he had previously carved in low relief. All are essentially frontal in concept: they occupy a very shallow space and depend for their effect not on the interrelationship of volumetric forms, but on the manipulation of texture and shadow in the small recessions and projections of the vertical plane. The approach is eminently sympathetic to mural application, because the panels do not undermine the integrity of the architectural surface.

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