

ART

Gordon Vorster remembered with affection

A personal tribute to the late Gordon Vorster by
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A lot of people liked Gordon Vorster, that lovely old bull of a man, and a great many loved him dearly.

He worked through the years in the fields of both the visual and the performing arts, moving from one to the other with panache and achievement.

The vision and perceptions of a natural poet shone through his writing and acting, his film-making and broadcasting, his thousands of paintings and sketches.

His broad perspective and the roles he interpreted as an actor stayed in the heart and mind of his audience, in the same way that his warmth, commonsense, and ruminative grumblings will stay with his friends.

Exceptional creative accomplishments were his beautifully conceived award-winning first novel "The Textures of Silence" (published 1982 Howard

Timmins) and his leading roles in the televised Edgar Bold productions of Olive Schreiner's "The Story of an African Farm" (1979) and Pauline Smith's "The Pain" (1980).

In 1987 the Rand Afrikaans University mounted an impressive retrospective of 101 Gordon Vorster paintings, divided by the artist into three sections: The Genesis Series, In Search of a Landscape, and Integration of Animals and their Environment.

In a poem, years ago, Gordon Vorster wrote:

*Some trees
cast a cooler shade
they look
like other trees
their gum drips red
like other trees
their leaves fall
their buds fall
their buds grow
and they die
like other trees
and yet*

*they cast
a cooler shade
it seems at evening
their shadows
are deeper
under such a tree
I slept one night
it had
seven branches
eleven twigs
and one place
where hurt had come*

Eons of time and the perpetual majesty of existence are characterised in his wildlife paintings at which he worked continually to liberate unresolved areas.

He loved the Kalahari and Namib deserts, the burning whiteness of wide African spaces, the relationships between different herds and the abstract analysis of landscape.

This semi-abstracted form of the bushveld he painted in water colour and oils; wildebeest and gemsbok, impala, zebra, eland; golden buck and towering trees; in dramatic night moods, heat mirage or dust storm; through gentle hazes, at dawn and at dusk; reflecting in the painting the same satisfying wholeness as was in the man.

After war service, Vorster first travelled in Europe and studied in Florence, then graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1950s alongside Cecil Skotnes, Nel Erasmus, Larry Skully and Christo Coetzee.

Vorster exhibited nationally and abroad at shows such as the 1958 Venice Biennale,

In another poem which poignantly expresses the heart of his work, Gordon Vorster says:

*No I will not migrate this year
Although the herds have left this barren plain
And all my watchfulness kept them alive
From the lion and the snake
And they have left me
I will not migrate this year
I have done the long march south
once too often and already
I know that when I leave this palmplain
I go home to the mountainsides
And so I punish with my hooves
the dried waterholes of my home
And with my horns flail the treetrunks
of the fevertrees that are white
as my bones will be
And the young does are gone
to the fertile south
And the young bulls toss their horns about
In the air that was mine
And do battle for graceful ones
Here the air is heavy with my longing and my hate
And faraway the grass stops running
at the foot of the mountain mirage
where shortly my spirit will dwell
In a cool miracle-place of death
So I will not migrate this year.*

Gordon Vorster was a man whose beauty many are glad to have known; to use his words, a tree which has cast a deeper shade, whose spirit now dwells in a cool miracle-place of death. He did not migrate this year.