



SPEECH

BY

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ON

**THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF JO
ROGGE'S ART EXHIBITIONS AT OMBA**

WEDNESDAY, 07 July 2010

WINDHOEK

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Being asked to speak at events like this is like being asked to be the designated driver. It is nice to enjoy the confidence of your colleagues, so that they get to party.

My great thanks on behalf of you all as guests to this wonderful gallery and to Jo Rogge. We are here because of you.

Art is everywhere because people need to use it for daily uses. Art can come in the form of many things, including posters, murals, covers, paintings and more. However, why do people everyday use it? What significance does it hold?

A common usage of art is to show ideas. Ideas can come in many forms, writing, talking, but art is and can be viewed by many without the need of voice. People look at art to look at different ideas that they want to know more about or may be studying. Art can show ideas about the past, what has happened as of late, what is currently happening and what may happen in the future.

Art can be used to show meaning. People can use art to show love, to show boredom and to show creativity. Art can be meaningful because of the images that can be collected into one small area. It is then up to the person to look at this form of art and to think about it and to make a conclusion about it. Is it shocking, is it sad or is it nice?

Art can also be used to liven up things in this world. It may not have a specific idea or meaning but it can be used to make things look better and more complete. Art is found everywhere, including parks, buildings and is used just to make the place more comfortable and appealing to the public. It can sometimes act as a filler because it looks better than to just leave something on its own.

Furthermore, art is usually a criticism of the world as it is and a vision of the world as it might be. As Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic for the New York Times, has observed: “A characteristic of good art is that it engages individuals in a very deep and personal way, and in ways that may not be shared by every member of a group; but art can also forge common bonds among groups.”

Modern art is based on the notion that the artist does not have to speak to a consensus. By allowing for a wide variety of individual responses, modern art produces a different kind of collective. Modern art asks people to reinvent their world to accommodate these new creations.

To borrow the words of Peter Sellars, director of the Los Angeles Festival, “...there is no meaning, either in art or in society, without participation.” What sparks engagement is something that speaks to you personally. In other words, the purpose of art is to find a way to wake people up who are going through their lives sleepwalking by challenging them to stop and look at the woman/man in the mirror.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are several pleasures with occasions like this, which always somewhat overwhelm me. That means your designated driver is well-meaning but clueless.

Here is one of the pleasures of this occasion: one has a certain warm confusion as to what the occasion is. We are here as a gathering, in the winter of beautiful Windhoek, with the artist’s friends. There is a speech and there is a little feeling in the air. And we are at something that is hard to know what it is.

This occasion has many of the more normal ceremonies we take part in, and know how to make complete sense of.

It has some aspects of a funeral, with its solemnizing and scope for outbreaks of high emotion, only of course it is much happier.

Neither is this occasion a wedding, although it has some of the features of one.

And you could say to yourself, what is this warm occasion and gathering about?

Another great pleasure is that this wonderful occasion is happening to someone else. Clearly this pleasure is part of the ironic charge at a funeral. It is also a happy feature of going to another's wedding not your own.

However, one of the unsettling and particular feelings of this occasion is that it is not about someone, even someone called Jo Rogge. This wonderful exhibition is about something. And it is a very different occasion than we are generally used to seeing.

This something is in part a thorough and beautiful takeover of the whole gallery. Large visual artworks activate the walls here and cannot be seen all at once by the viewer. They strongly solicit attention. We glimpse here and there the strong abstract pull of the work while we are having our conversations and various distractions.

So what is this particular work as something to look at and think about, and what difference does it make?

The point is, each large work here is both a painting, or is a developed visual idea, and also retains strong linkages with objects in the world. There is a literalness to these paintings, together with the abstraction.

When an art show comes to achieve a particular authority, power and quality, which this one does, it sends out huge wafts, to touch the broadest of states of feeling. We sense in such a show as this the invisible presence of all the things we care about most.

Let me briefly come back to the life of Jo Rogge and her artwork. Jo Rogge's training and exhibitions in the area of art span over a period of more than two decades. She obtained her BA Visual Arts (Honours) at the University of Natal in 1986 and subsequent to that, she attended additional trainings at the then Academy in 1987, Centro Cultural "El Nigromante" in Mexico in 1992 and a Printmaking Workshop in New York City in 1992.

She also participated in one-person and group exhibitions in Namibia, South Africa, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Canada, USA, Norway, Finland, Germany and Spain.

Ms. Jo Rogge has also occupied different leadership positions e.g. as co-founder and Director of John Muafengejo Art Centre, coordinator of Tulipamwe International Artists Workshop, founder/project director of The Big Issue Namibia and current Head of Bank Windhoek's Creative Services. On top of that, she has also provided lectureships and trainings at different institutions including the Polytechnic of Namibia and the University of Namibia.

As one art critic has recently remarked in "New Era," the title of artist Jo Rogge's exhibition depicts the phenomenon known as the "fight or flight response." This is considered to be the physiological and psychological response to an apparent threat or danger that prepares the body to either "fight" or "flee" from the perceived attack, harm or threat to survival.

For the exhibition, Rogge has selected a range of new and old artworks. These depict various themes dominant throughout her career as a fine artist and as a human being, for example feminist activism and her late father's displacement as a refugee from East Prussia, subsequent internment in Germany and later exile in Africa.

Jo Rogge's involvement in teaching digital art and desktop publishing over many years has also enabled her to "graduate" to digital paintings, thus keeping abreast with current technological developments which she imparts to new generations of learners as well.

Finally, to paraphrase the "New Era" art critic's comments on Jo Rogge's latest artwork, with this latest exhibition, she has, as it were, come full circle in her soul-searching journey to assess her own identity, physical situation and future state of being.

With these few words, it is my pleasure to declare this exhibition open.

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