4 EXCURSUS: NETWORKS

Throughout my discussion, it has become obvious that the emergence of settler primitivism in South Africa was intertwined with a restructuring of the national art scene. It is therefore worth examing how settler primitivists got organised in different networks that played a major role in this reformation. Said networks can largely be categorised into four groups, with some overlaps: women's networks, Jewish diaspora networks, Afrikaner networks and the foremostly younger generation consolidating in the *New Group*. In the following excursus, I will describe each network and its most important members and show how they interacted. While the Jewish diaspora and women's networks were mainly formed in order to generally support the careers of their members that were usually marginalised in mainstream society, the Afrikaner network was more identity-based and also had a political/ nationalist component. The younger generation organised in the *New Group*, on the other hand, intended to cause a change in the conservative, rigid and rusty structures governing the art scene in South Africa and to professionalise its frameworks. It should be noted that my research did not show that the topic of primitivism featured as a point of discussion in any of the networks discussed below. Even though settler primitivism was hugely significant for the emergence of modernism in South Africa, it was not a uniting interest that resulted in specific networks. Rather than artistic interests relating to content or style, networks were born from identity-based or structural alliances – which is to say that members were supported either because they belonged to the same ethnic or gender group or because they strove for the same structural changes. This is emphasised by the fact that all networks discussed below were not only relevant for modernists but also for traditionally working artists – such as the *New Group* for Ruth Prowse or the Jewish diaspora for Moses Kottler. Nevertheless, for the careers of the settler primitivists who affected the change to modernism in South Africa's fine arts, these networks were of great importance.

4.1 Women's networks

The following section gives an overview of the way South African women supported each other, especially from the 1920s to 1940s. I take Irma Stern as an example, as she most markedly relied on the support of other women such as Freda Feldman, Hilda Purwitsky, Roza van Gelderen or Thelma Gutsche. Other women artists such as

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Maggie Laubser and Cecil Higgs were less actively involved in women's networks than in the respective Afrikaner and *New Group* networks. Except for the social researcher and author Thelma Gutsche, all the women in Stern's network listed here were Jewish which means that there is a considerable overlap of women's and Jewish diaspora networks in this case. However, it is not feasible to subsume the women's network around Stern into Jewish networks for a two-fold reason. Firstly, Jewish networks surrounding male artists such as Lippy Lipshitz, Moses Kottler or HV Meyerowitz were not nearly as pronounced as the mutual support of women such as Stern, Millin, Purwitsky, Van Gelderen and Feldman. For example, even though Purwitsky and Van Gelderen also endorsed Lipshitz, their promotion of the sculptor does not come close to that of Stern. Additionally, as can be inferred from Lipshitz's diaries, while the male Jewish sculptors Meyerowitz, Lipshitz and Kottler initially supported each other, they soon shifted to regarding each other as competitors.[1] I am convinced that in women's networks such as Stern's, gender did matter and that the women discussed below deliberately supported each other as women.

Secondly, the feminist Thelma Gutsche played an important role for the promotion of Stern's as well as Millin's works even though she was not Jewish. Gutsche took a strong interest in Irma Stern and her career from the mid-1940s. With a strong academic background in film studies and philosophy and a PhD on the influence of European and American cinema on South African audiences, Gutsche was an important advocate of the women's emancipation movement and an active member of the National Council of Women in South Africa, becoming the Johannesburg branch president in 1950. In this capacity, she for example declared her "full support to 'Women for Strife' – strife against discrimination in all its forms: sex, color, race, culture, education, religion."[2] She also showed a profound interest in art and was a member of the Africana Museum Advisory Committee, a founding member, trustee and later honorary life president of the *Association of Friends of the Johannesburg Art Gallery*, member of the consultative committee of the Bensusan Museum of Photography as well as founding member of the Simon van der Stel Foundation. In a 1955 portrait of Gutsche, Corrie Dreyer describes an exhibition organised by her on behalf of the National Council of Women that included works of 300 "women achievers."[3] Unfortunately, the article does not list the participating artists.

Regular correspondence archived in the Thelma Gutsche Collection housed at the Library of Johannesburg shows that Gutsche and Stern were in close contact from 1946 until at least 1960. For example, Gutsche helped Stern with articles the latter published, opened her exhibitions or helped her organise shows in Johannesburg

1 E.g. Lipshitz's friendship with Kottler and Meyerowitz is stressed in his diary entries of 18 January 1924 and 21 August 1927, diaries 1920 to 1928. His dislike of them is articulated in his diary entries of 6 July 1936, 17 July 1936, 14 August 1936, 17 October 1936 and 9 April 1931, diaries 1928 to 1932 and diaries 1932 to 1936.

2 Gutsche, *Civilisation and the Interrupted Sex*, pp. 2–3.

3 Dreyer, "The Woman Who Did It."

and abroad.[4] Together, they planned to make a "pan African" film and to publish a book of Stern's drawings with Gutsche's publishing house Silver Leaf Books.[5] In 1952, Gutsche asked Stern for a print to be published in a book by the Institute of Race Relations whose board member Gutsche was.[6] Stern gave her the print as a birthday present.[7] A manuscript entitled "Ambassador for Africa" that Thelma Gutsche sent to the editor of the weekly magazine *The Outspan* on 12 August 1947 is significant for understanding how she intended to further Stern's career. She describes Stern as a strong personality that had already become apparent in her childhood rebellion against her oppressive father – a metaphor she uses for Stern's following struggle as an artist:

> Her father could throw her things [i.e. painting utensils] out of the window every day of his life – always she would get them back – nothing would stop her – she was going to do what she wanted. That little girl was Irma Stern, today unquestionably South Africa's greatest artist. The life of Irma Stern has proved one of continuous struggle. From those early days when she fought the unrelenting opposition of her parents, onwards throughout her career, she has stood embattled against forces which have attempted to dissuade her from a self-avowed purpose. Irma Stern wanted to paint from the days when she was first conscious of independent volition.[8]

So far, this account fits in with Stern's self-narrative of the misunderstood artist "genius" presented in her article "My Critics" of 1930.[9] However, Gutsche continues with misleading information about Stern's early career: she claims that she had studied all over Europe, that she had excelled over everyone else wherever she studied, that she had still been unsuccessful in Europe since her art was considered too "avant-garde and revolutionary."[10] It is interesting that this description does not correspond with Stern's self-portrayal as acknowledged member of German modernism taken up by most other contemporary journalists. Since Gutsche and Stern were working so closely together, however, it is likely that Stern was aware of Gutsche's exaggerated and sometimes even untruthful description which departed from her own narrative. It is possible that Stern, now that she was firmly acknowledged in South Africa, agreed to testing a stronger and more conventional tale of the "misunderstood artist." As explicated above, Beate Reese has shown how women's individual fate is usually

4 E.g. Stern, letters to Gutsche of 4 August 1946, 14 June 1947, 4 May 1956. Gutsche, letter to Stern, December 1948.
5 E.g. Stern, letters to Gutsche of 9 September 1946, 18 October 1946, 12 February 1947; exchange of letters between Stern and Gutsche of 13 May 1948 to 13 November 1949. Unfortunately, the scope of the "pan African" film is not mentioned in those letters.
6 Gutsche, letter to Stern, 31 July 1953.
7 Gutsche, letter to Stern, 11 August 1953.
8 Gutsche, "Ambassador For Africa."
9 Stern, "My Critics."
10 Gutsche, "Ambassador For Africa."

recounted as the gradual unfolding of a personality that independently cuts her way through a male-dominated environment owing to her feminist virtues.[11] Gutsche's approach fits with this custom and Stern might therefore have found it an interesting extension of her own report. However, there is no evidence that Gutsche's article was ever published or that Stern intended to continue this new narrative. Nevertheless, Gutsche influenced public perception of Stern's life and career until after her death: in November 1966, she supplied Esmé Berman with information on Stern for the comprehensive entry on the latter in Berman's influential *Dictionary*.[12]

In addition to other women's projects such as Stern's drawings book or Nadine Gordimer's first publication *Face to Face* (1949), Gutsche also planned to publish a book with short stories by Sarah Gertrude Millin with her publishing house.[13] Millin, on the other hand, brought Gutsche in contact with personalities that could be of help to Silver Leaf Books.[14] She often publicly spoke about issues relating to women's emancipation. For example, in 1911, she published a number of articles that portrayed different female stereotypes such as "The Colonial Girl," "The Woman Who Would Get On" or "The Vrouw" in which she made fun of a "Johannesburg Man" lecturing the male narrator on clichés of women.[15] In spite of its humorous approach, however, the text still vividly repeats and enforces stereotypes. In 1912, she wrote further articles in which a male narrator is in conversation with "The Johannesburg Girl" about men, women and partnership.[16] These conversations portray the contemporary demand of (young) women to be considered equal to men. By speaking as the man, who, in this conversation, succumbs to his female counterpart, Millin humorously frames women's struggle for emancipation as part of a flirtation between men and women. Although she stresses the seriousness of "The Johannesburg Girl" when she brings forward her demands for equality, by simultaneously revealing the male narrator's physical attraction to her, Millin diminishes her agency. In the article "Oh, a woman!" of 1929,[17] she decidedly rejects any stereotyping of women and in 1930, she writes to her friend Mrs George Pierce Baker: "You'll love Scandinavia. I did. It amazed me too how rationally everyone there considered women – not only the equals of men, but just people, as men are people. It isn't the tradition here. It isn't what I've even been made to feel myself!"[18]

From these sources, it can be concluded that Millin was a strong advocate of women's emancipation, even though her writings often do not overcome traditional ideas of womanhood. She was a very successful writer and for example travelled to America for a book tour on her own in the 1930s. She became good friends with

11 Reese, "Biographie und Geschlechterdifferenz," p. 177.
12 Berman, letter to Gutsche, 21 November 1966.
13 Gutsche, letter to Millin, 7 May 1948.
14 E.g. Gutsche, letters to Millin of 24 January, 3 June and 2 July 1948.
15 Liebson, "South African Types. 2." Liebson, "South African Types. 6." Liebson, "South African Types. 8." Liebson was Millin's maiden name.
16 Liebson, "The Johannesburg Girl. I." Liebson, "The Johannesburg Girl. VII."
17 Millin, "Oh, a Woman!"
18 Millin, letter to Baker, 16 March 1930.

Stern and the two women supported each other. In an interview published in the *Sunday Express* in 1936, Millin was quoted to call Stern "the most intellectual, the most brilliant, and the most psychological painter we have in South Africa today" and thereby used her acclaim as an internationally celebrated writer to foster her friend's standing.[19] Stern painted a portrait of Millin in 1941 that received great public appraisal by Richard Feldman, another close friend of Stern's, who was married to Freda Feldman.[20]

The friendship between Irma Stern and Richard and Freda Feldman is documented by the letters Stern wrote to the couple that were reviewed in a publication by the Feldmans's daughter Mona Berman, who had found said letters shortly after her mother's death in 1987, and in an anthology by the art historian Sandra Klopper.[21] Klopper's book also contains transcripts of all letters. Berman assumes that Stern met the Jewish intellectual Richard Feldman in 1925 and developed a friendship with him that was based on mutual support.[22] Feldman, for example, published some of the earliest positive reviews of Stern's works and Stern designed the cover for his collection of Yiddish stories *Shvarts un Vays* [Black and White] first published in Warsaw in 1935.[23] After he had married Freda Ginsberg in 1931, Stern started to develop a friendship with Freda as well that, after a few years, became more important than that with Richard. Freda Feldman supported Stern by organising exhibitions in Johannesburg, gathering information about other artists, art spaces and art dealers, procuring materials, making hotel reservations, hosting dinners for her, etc. In almost every letter Stern is either asking or thanking Feldman for a favour. It was Feldman, too, who after Stern's death was the most active advocate for turning Stern's former home into a museum.[24] The Feldmans also owned a large collection of Stern's works and Stern produced numerous portraits of both Richard and Freda.

Freda Feldman brought Stern in contact with other Jewish intellectuals. For example, she introduced her to Maria Stein-Lessing, who had fled from Germany to London in 1933 shortly after completing her PhD thesis in art history at the University of Bonn.[25] Stein-Lessing occupied various teaching positions, first at the Technical College in Pretoria, then at the University of Cambridge in the UK and the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Fine Arts where she taught students such as Esmé Berman and Cecil Skotnes, on whom she had a profound influence.[26] She also introduced African art into the art historical curricula at Pretoria Technical

19 N.N., "Outspoken." On Stern's and Millin's friendship, also see Berger, *Irma Stern*, pp. 63–64.
20 Feldman, "Art and the People." See a discussion of this in Godby, "Irma Stern's Portraits of Freda Feldman," pp. 163–166.
21 Berman, *Remembering Irma*. Klopper (ed.), *Irma Stern*.
22 Berman, "A Friendship in Letters," p. 20.
23 Feldman, "Irma Stern's New Paintings." Feldman, "Irma Stern. A New Note in Art." Feldman, *Shvarts un Vays*.
24 E.g. Feldman, "Irma Stern Museum."
25 Knight (ed.), *l'Afrique*, p. 3.
26 Harmsen (ed.), *Cecil Skotnes*, p. 12.

College as well as at the University of the Witwatersrand.[27] She had started collecting African art in Germany in the 1920s and, later, together with her husband Leopold Spiegel, Stein-Lessing accumulated a large collection of African artworks that she specifically chose because they had thus far been overlooked in South Africa.[28] Some of those pieces she bought from Irma Stern, who also had a significant collection of African art, as did Hilda Purwitksy and Roza van Gelderen. In the 1940s, Stein-Lessing worked as Director of Bantu Arts and Crafts for the Native Affairs Department in Johannesburg and in the 1950s, she curated exhibitions such as the "Van Riebeeck Festival Exhibition on South African Art and Design" in Pretoria (1953), the "Historical Exhibition of South African Art" (1955) and "Contemporary Art in the Transvaal" (1955), with a foreword to the catalogue by Walter Battiss.[29] While Freda Feldman supported Stein-Lessing morally and financially by helping her sell jewellery to finance her opening of the probably first shop for African art in Johannesburg in the early 1940s and persuading her friends to buy from her, Stein-Lessing supported Stern by buying her paintings.[30]

Stein-Lessing also bought from and sold to other members of the Jewish community such as Hilda Purwitsky and Roza van Gelderen,[31] a couple of educators and authors based in Cape Town. I have already described how Purwitsky helped further Stern's career by reproducing word-by-word translations of German reviews by critics such as Fritz Stahl and Max Osborn in South African newspapers in the 1920s.[32] Both women wrote numerous articles on Stern, either using their real names or compound pseudonyms such as Rozilda or Hora. They were probably most influential in reproducing and spreading the self-narrative Stern had developed in the South African press. By publishing various texts in Jewish newspapers and magazines, they firmly tried to position her as a Jewish artist.[33] Additionally, they bought multiple works and Stern produced portraits of both women. Stern, on the other hand, supported Purwitsky and Van Gelderen by giving art lessons at their school in Cape Town's District Six in the mid to late 1930s.[34] When in 1940 Van Gelderen was released as headmistress of the Vredehoek girls school that she had been leading for five years with a rather unconventional, autonomous and

27 Girshick, "Maria Stein-Lessing," pp. 37–38.
28 Knight (ed.), *l'Afrique*, p. 15.
29 Ibid., pp. 10,15.
30 Girshick, "Maria Stein-Lessing," p. 38.
31 Knight (ed.), *l'Afrique*, p. 15.
32 Purwitsky, "South-African News-Letter." Also see Rozilda, "Out of the Ordinary. Irma Stern."
33 E.g. Rozilda, "Out of the Ordinary. Irma Stern." Purwitsky, "South-African News-Letter." Hora, "A South African Jewish Artist." Rozilda, "South Africa's Jewish Artists." Rozilda, "Trunk Call from the Cape." Purwitsky, "Irma Stern Exhibits in Munich." Rozilda, "Irma Stern and Her Legacy."
34 Rozilda, "Art and the Child." Also compare Berger, *Irma Stern*, p. 63.

feminist approach, Stern responded with a letter to the *Cape Argus* containing the following passage:

> Why is it that people are so blind to progress? In the principal of the Central Girls' School we have a modern, well-equipped brain capable of using the best that our time provides working with psychology, with biology, giving the children free ideas in art, in music, in literature, in life generally, stimulating our youth, educating them with reason [...] Are we to see this being killed or stifled by nonsensical red tape?[35]

It is difficult to find any information about Stern's connections with other women artists in South Africa. While she was friends with male artists such as Lippy Lipshitz or Jean Welz or the Berlin-based sculptor Katharina Heise, whom she regularly corresponded with and wanted to help migrate to South Africa,[36] she does not often refer to other South African women artists in either her articles or her letters. Due to their mutual interest in German expressionism and their experiences in Berlin, it would have been plausible for Maggie Laubser and Irma Stern to form some sort of private or professional relationship. The two artists met at the latest on a ship from South Africa to Germany in 1922 when Laubser was moving to Berlin and Stern was on one of her trips to Europe. Stern put Laubser in contact with some of her friends in Berlin and the two artists enjoyed a brief friendship, including a joint summer holiday at the Baltic Sea.[37] However, this friendship seems to have ended very soon after Laubser's return to the Cape. The reasons are unclear, especially since the two artists could have formed a strong alliance against the conservative forces that were publicly disdaining their modernist approaches. On the contrary, they seemingly began to consider each other rivals. For example, in a letter to Freda Feldman in 1966, Stern complains about the fact that Maggie Laubser was mentioned in connection with her own name in a speech on occasion of her award of the medal of honour by the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* [South African Academy for Science and Art].[38]

In 1948, the artist May Hillhouse published an article on Laubser, Stern and the younger Russian artist Vladimir Tretchikoff, whose prints were bought internationally and brought him great commercial success. She compares the women's work with that of Tretchikoff, who had seemed to appear as a "foreign prophet" in Cape Town and was immediately granted extreme popularity.[39] Hillhouse, like Malherbe and Anderson as described in Chapter 3, calls Laubser's drawings "deliberately naïve" and rebuffs critics who said she could not draw by referring to her education in Europe.

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35 Cited in Klopper (ed.), *Irma Stern*, p. 39.
36 Compare Below, "Afrika und Europa," p. 108.
37 E.g. Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, p. 175. Van Rooyen, *Maggie Laubser,* p. 13. Marais, *Maggie Laubser*, p. 41.
38 Reproduced in Klopper (ed.), *Irma Stern*, p. 226.
39 Hillhouse, "'n vreemde profeet."

Fig. 49: Irma Stern, *Artists in a Boat*, 1946, oil on board, 100 × 150 cm, Irma Stern Museum

To her, the quality of Laubser's works was that they brought "us a world beyond the surface of our artificial civilization."[40] She had sent Laubser a letter from London in 1920 to warn her about being used and to advise her to let herself be guided, be humble and trust her own instinct and intuition.[41] Laubser was in either Belgium or Italy at the time.[42] This mysterious letter implies that there was a friendship between the two artists. About Stern, Hillhouse writes in her 1948 article that she had masterful control and that her paintings arose from the "need to express emotional tension."[43] She considers Laubser's and Stern's works superior and more in-depth than Tretchikoff's, which she argues were so popular because they resembled travel brochures in their superficial and kitschy advertisement aesthetics. While for the women's work the viewer needed the "key of sensitivity, imagination and understanding," Tretchikoff's world did "not need a key."[44]

Interestingly, the Irma Stern Museum in Rosebank owns a 1946 painting by Stern on which she depicted a member of the Molteno family, Ruth Prowse, herself, Cecil Higgs and Nita Spilhaus (from left to right)[45] in a boat in Table Bay with Dutch sailing ships in the background (Fig. 49). The Molteno family were the descendants of John Charles Molteno, an Anglo-Italian settler, who became the first prime minister of the Cape Colony on 1 December 1872. Molteno was generally portrayed in a very positive light in liberal circles as he fought for the Cape's independence from

40 Hillhouse, "'n vreemde profeet." (My translation, original Afrikaans on p. 273.)
41 Hillhouse, letter to Laubser, 29 August 1920.
42 Marais, *Maggie Laubser*, p. 3.
43 Hillhouse, "'n vreemde profeet." (My translation, original Afrikaans on p. 273.)
44 Ibid.
45 This is the information provided by the museum. It is unclear whether a specific member of the Molteno family was meant.

Fig. 50: Charles Davidson Bell, *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, 1850, oil on canvas, 76 × 92 cm, South African Library Collection

imperial interference and his government founded the universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, introduced grants to build libraries and retained the non-racial franchise system.[46] As he was married three times and had 19 children, the Molteno family was very large. Amongst the more well-known family members were his eldest daughter, Elizabeth Maria Molteno, a racial equality activist and suffragist, his son Percy Alport Molteno, a liberal member of parliament, his son James Tennant Molteno, an anti-imperialist opposition leader and later parliamentary speaker, and his grandson Donald Barkly Molteno, a civil rights and anti-apartheid activist. The unspecified Molteno man in Stern's painting as well as the four women are richly dressed in 17th century Dutch clothing. The Molteno man, Prowse and Stern seem to be dressed in men's clothing with typical white collars (in Prowse's case an almost royal fur collar) and prominent, feathered hats, while Higgs and Spilhaus are wearing women's dresses and lace caps. Stern's garments closely resemble those of Jan van Riebeeck, first Commander of the Cape, in history paintings such as Charles Davidson Bell's famous 1850 work *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (Fig. 50). Stern hence stages herself and the other three women as founding fathers and mothers of the Cape

46 Molteno, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno*.

colony as well as, through the presence of the Molteno man, of more recent imperial independence and liberal politics.

The gender differences portrayed in Stern's painting are curious. A general difference between the three figures on the left (Molteno, Prowse, Stern) and the two on the right (Higgs, Spilhaus) can be observed, as already indicated by their men's and women's clothing. Higgs is portrayed as youthful and attractive with red lips and dreamy eyes, Spilhaus is shown as an elderly lady with spectacles sitting quite low on her long nose. At the time, Higgs was 48,[47] Stern 52, Prowse 63 and Spilhaus 68 years of age. While the Molteno man, Prowse and Stern look at the viewer, Higgs gazes into the distance and Spilhaus at the flask and glass she holds on her lap, with her eyes half-closed. Stern and the Molteno man are drinking as well, the Molteno man from an amphora and Stern from a champagne glass. In general, the portrays can be described as humorous and self-deprecating. The Molteno man is leaning away from the women, into his drink. Prowse almost looks royal in her upright and respect-commanding position occupying the highest point in the picture, while Stern looks slightly drunk with her upper body bent forwards and eyelids heavy. In spite of the relative proximity in age and renown, Prowse and Spilhaus were considered an older generation, Stern the pioneer of modernism and Higgs of a younger generation represented by the *New Group*. In Stern's painting, Spilhaus, a very conservative, impressionist flower and landscape painter, appears to symbolise the outmoded past and Higgs, with a focus on increasingly abstract seascapes, the intangible future. Prowse and Stern are portrayed as the current lords of Cape Town's art scene. Stern as Van Riebeeck could even be regarded its founder. At the time, Prowse was keeper of the Michaelis Collection, Old Town House, Cape Town and two years later became trustee of the South African National Gallery. She clearly stood for an equal treatment of men and women artists.[48]

The painting is entitled *Artists in a Boat* and was originally intended for the Café Royal, an early 18th century structure in Church Street, Cape Town, that was used as a hotel from 1881. The plaque that the museum mounted next to it also includes the explanation that "John Dronsfield, a contemporary of the above group, once remarked that South African art was a ship with Ruth at its Prowse and Irma in the Stern."[49] It is not clear whether this remark predates the painting or vice versa. According to Christopher Peter, the recently retired director of the Irma Stern Museum in Rosebank, the work was a commission by the Café Royal Hotel, was acquired by Basil Trakman in the 1990s and entered the Irma Stern Trust Collection in 2009. It is unknown what prompted the commission and to what extent Stern independently chose the content. An archaeological investigation report of the Café Royal building that was commissioned by the then owner, Syfrets Ltd, prior to its demolition in 1995, states

47 According to Victor Holloway, Higgs's hair had turned silver in her thirties. Holloway, *Cecil Higgs*, p. 9.

48 N.N., "Artist and Keeper of Art."

49 Also compare Klopper (ed.), *Irma Stern*, p. 196.

that the property was bought by I. Stern in 1922 and sold to Syfrets in 1981.[50] It is unclear if I. Stern was a family member of Stern's and how long they owned the property for. It is extremely unlikely that this was Irma Stern herself as this would have most likely appeared in the records. Interestingly, this self-portrait of Stern's is never mentioned by any of the Stern researchers who have stressed the unusualness of the lack of self-portraits in the artist's oeuvre, even after 2009. Neither does there seem to have been any noteworthy friendship or professional exchange between Stern and any of the three women artists, even though they were all important figures in Cape Town's art scene.

4.2 Jewish diaspora

As has become obvious in the preceding section of this chapter, Jewish women played a considerable role in women networks in the South African arts. In addition to protagonists such as Stern, Feldman or Millin, South Africa's Jewish diaspora also had significant male members. Best-known are probably Moses Kottler, Lippy Lipshitz, Wolf Kibel and HV Meyerowitz. They were all supported by Hilda Purwitsky and Roza van Gelderen rather early in their careers,[51] and in the case of Lipshitz and Kibel even before they reached any noteworthy public acclaim in South Africa. In 1931, Purwitsky and Van Gelderen published a four-page overview of Jewish artists in South Africa in the *Hasholom Rosh Hashonah Annual* that included all the aforementioned as well as Eva Meyerowitz and Irma Stern.[52] In the introduction, they stress the importance of Jewish art to South African modernism:

> Jews play an important part in the current history of art in this country, where they hold positions as exponents of modern art tendencies and are doing much to build up an art tradition for the future. Irma Stern's fearless painting, Herbert V. Meyerowitz's practical school of art, Moses Kottler's sculpture, are definite accomplishment, not mere conjectures. They belong to and are part of South African tradition.[53]

Countering other receptions of Jewish art as a foreign element by purposefully situating Jewish artists within South African art traditions is a clear objective in such presentations. There were further attempts to root Jewish art in specifically South African experiences dating form this period of increasing Afrikaner nationalism and

50 Archaeology Contracts Office, *An Archaeological Investigation of the Café Royal Building*.
51 Kottler and Meyerowitz were 29 years old when the first article was published, Lipshitz was 26 and Kibel 25 years of age.
52 Rozilda, "South Africa's Jewish Artists."
53 Ibid., p. 10.

antisemitism.[54] For example, in 1932, a writer using the pseudonym Josephus published an article in the *S.A. Jewish Chronicle* containing the following paragraph:

> Just as the Jew was one of the first to exploit the material wealth of this adventurous land, he seems to be the first to wrench from the dark soul of Africa its inmost secret. The names of Mrs. Millin, Kottler and Irma Stern are well known not only in South Africa but also in Europe, and to these may now be added the name of Mr. Lipshitz, quite a notable artist now exhibiting in Cape Town. There is, in this country, a vast amount of untapped material for artistic exploitation – the vast brooding spaces, the conflict of race and the clash of colour are subjects more suitable for artistic treatment than for political and sociological solution. The Jew who has succeeded in maintaining a certain detachment, and a complete racial purity in this country is more than others in a position to use his objectivity and perspective in the artistic handling of South Africa's problems.[55]

Interestingly, Josephus does not employ the word exploitation in any negative way but relates it to the supposed role of transnationally working Jewish artists to unveil South Africa's dark problems for which there are no political or sociological solutions. The idea of "racial purity" ties in with contemporary racist and nationalist discourses and places South African Jews on a higher step of the racist "purity ladder" than Dutch, French, German or British settlers who had notoriously mixed with Black South Africans since the beginning of European settlement in the Western Cape.

In addition to overviews such as the one mentioned above that purposed to indigenise Jewish artists, Purwitsky and Van Gelderen also published longer portraits of individual artists. Their promotion of Irma Stern has already been discussed above. Likewise, Purwitsky published two articles on the Jewish sculptor Moses Kottler in *The Zionist Record* in January and February 1925, and together with Van Gelderen two further articles in the *S.A. Jewish Chronicle* in October 1928 and in *Ivri Onouchi* in November 1929.[56] In the same year, they wrote an article on HV Meyerowitz for *Ivri Onouchi* and one on the Polish-born Jewish painter Wolf Kibel for the *S.A. Jewish Chronicle*.[57] Most of these articles introduce their subjects as promising young artists enriching the South African art scene. In early 1930, a two-page article including a photographic portrait appeared in *The Ivri* about Lippy Lipshitz in which the two authors, using the pseudonym Hora, pronounce him "A Young Jewish Artist with a Future."[58] They stress his first commission "for Miss Roga [sic] van Gelderen," the critical acclaim of his *De Groote Trek* [The Great Trek] in Paris and his similarities with

54 On antisemitism in South Africa in the 1920s and 30s compare Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism*. Duffy, *The Politics of Ethnic Nationalism*, pp. 80–88.

55 Josephus, "On the Watchtower."

56 Purwitsky, "Moses Kottler." Purwitsky, "Jewish Apathy to Jewish Art." Rozilda, "Out of the Ordinary." Hora, "Moses Kottler."

57 Hora, "Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz." Rozilda, "Out of the Ordinary. A Young Jewish Artist."

58 Hora, "Israel Lipschitz [sic]."

Paul Gauguin.[59] In addition to this publicity, Van Gelderen and Purwitsky also supported Lipshitz financially. In a diary entry of 7 January 1931, he writes: "Roza van Gelderen and Hilda Purwitsky from Cape Town, the dispensers of the bursary of six hundred francs I am to receive for the next six months were in Paris. They gave me the first remittance."[60] An entry dating from a few months later, shows how significant this network of such Jewish arts professionals as Van Gelderen and Purwitsky but also fellow artists such as HV Meyerowitz and Sandór Kónya was for Lipshitz:

> Konjar [sic] and Meyerowitz I hear have become personalities to reckon with in the Cape Town art world. Still they seem to be afraid of competition. I sent some of my drawings to Roza van Gelderen in Cape Town to be sold and she went to consult these authorities as to their monetary and artistic value. They pronounced them 'poor stuff.' Though I have received the best encouragement from leading Parisian critics and artists whose intelligence and sincerity renders them infinitely more qualified to assess my drawings, I am very sore about Konjar's [sic] and Meyerowitz's spiteful disapproval which will undoubtedly affect the sale of these drawings in Cape Town to the extent that nobody will buy them.[61]

Lipshitz's complaint shows how small the Capetonian art scene of the 1920s and 30s was and how much individual opinions mattered. Meyerowitz had just been released from the Michaelis School of Fine Art and set up the South African School of Applied Arts with his wife, Eva Meyerowitz, and the Hungarian architect and graphic designer Sándor Kónya, who had recently arrived in South Africa.[62] In an article of 2015, Anna Tietze illustrates how, "during its short life, this school posed a challenge to the anglophile distinction between the high-status fine arts training of the university and the low-status design training of the technical college."[63] After his return to Cape Town in 1932, Lipshitz continues his slightly bitter description of these "influencers" of the Capetonian art scene:

> The art world in Cape Town had not changed much, except that Messrs Meyerowitz and Konja [sic] had founded the S.A. School of Applied Art, in Stal Plein which they called the Primavera School and which seemed to be

59 At the time, the average reader of course did not know that Van Gelderen was part of the author-team Hora. Irritatingly, considering today's reception of Gauguin's South Sea escapades, the comparison was: "The artist of the type of Paul Gauguin cares nothing about people or things or conditions extraneous to his art, and in some respects Lipschitz's [sic] nature is like that of Gauguin." Hora, "Israel Lipschitz [sic]," p. 31.

60 Lipshitz, diaries 1928 to 1932, 7 January 1931.

61 Ibid., 9 April 1931.

62 It is not clear whether Kónya was Jewish himself but his last name and the fact that he is said to have worked for the Jewish newspaper *Egyenlőség* suggest so. Gergely, "Kónya Sándor." Additionally, he was included in antisemitic attacks by Roworth and Pierneef. Roworth, letter to Pierneef, 5 February 1932.

63 Tietze, "The art of design," p. 7.

> thriving. […] Meyerowitz and Konya were the art authorities of Cape Town, respected, consulted and boosted by the arty elite of Cape Town, prominent among whom were the overbubbling Roza van Gelderen and fussy music lecturer and celebrity hunter Lilian Isaacson.[64] Privileged were the struggling artists and musicians these ladies took under their wing and who were invited to talk and loll away an afternoon at Rosa's [sic] and her friend Hilda's bungalow at Clifton by the Sea.[65]

A prospectus from October 1930 also lists Irma Stern as a teacher of the new school that posed a serious threat to the conservative Michaelis School of Fine Art as its programmes tied in with current ideas of arts and crafts and a more applied approach.[66] According to Tietze, the school closed in 1934 when Michaelis – which had four years earlier terminated Meyerowitz's teaching contract because they considered his applied approach unsuitable for a fine art school – opened a Department for Applied Arts and Crafts themselves.[67] Lipshitz, on the other hand, explains in a diary entry that "Meyerowitz's co-principal Sandor Konya had secretly decamped and left Meyerowitz with the debts and debris of the Primavera School" and that he and his colleague and friend Wolf Kibel benefited from this as they were generously given the school's etching press by Meyerowitz.[68] This demonstrates how, despite his occasional misgivings, Lipshitz still benefited from Cape Town's Jewish network. In a diary entry of 13 July 1936, he also mentions an invitation to the Feldmans's for dinner during his stay in Johannesburg. He furthermore recounts the collection of works by Irma Stern displayed at their home.[69] A few years later, Richard Feldman published two very favourable reviews of Lipshitz's Johannesburg exhibitions of 1939 and 1942 in the *Jewish Times* and in *Forward*.[70] Purwitsky and Van Gelderen's support continued, too. In a review of an exhibition by the newly founded *New Group* of 1939, for example, Purwitsky describes Lipshitz's and the German Jewish sculptor Elsa Dziomba's works as the best exhibits in the show that featured most of South Africa's important contemporary artists.[71]

It is likely that the formation of strong Jewish networks such as the ones described above was partly a reaction against antisemitic sentiments within the South African artworld. For example, the doyen of the South African art scene until the 1940s, Edward Roworth, and the Afrikaner artist JH Pierneef, who was a member of

64 Isaacson, too, was Jewish.
65 Lipshitz, diaries 1932 to 1936, 1932.
66 Tietze, "The art of design," p. 8.
67 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
68 Lipshitz, diaries 1932 to 1936. Eva and H.V. Meyerowitz moved on to first Lesotho and then Ghana; Kibel died of tuberculosis in 1938 at only 35 years of age.
69 Lipshitz, diaries 1932 to 1936, 16 July 1936.
70 Feldman, "Bible Illustrations of Lippy Lipschitz [sic]." Feldman, "The Monotypes of 'Lippy' Lipschitz [sic]."
71 H.P., "Sculpture in New Group Exhibition."

the antisemitic *Broederbond* from its founding in 1918 to 1946,[72] openly attacked Jewish art. In early 1932 a new (and short-lived) *National Academy of Arts (South Africa)* was founded under the presidency of Roworth. Pierneef was elected one of its members but, due to illness, asked his friend Roworth to represent him during the first meeting that was also attended by DF Malan, Minister of the Interior, Education and Public Health at the time.[73] The founding of the *Academy* was criticised by a diverse group of artists and writers such as HV Meyerowitz, Sándor Kónya, Gwelo Goodman, Bernard Lewis and DC Boonzaier. In a letter of 5 February 1932 to Pierneef, Roworth writes:

> That its [the newly founded Academy's] power is already recognised is admirably shown by an hysterical outburst from Messrs Meyerowitz and Konya in this mornings [sic] Cape Times, in their rage and disappointment they profess to regard it as a huge joke and say that its effects on art will be tragic and so on and so on. These aliens are here today but gone tomorrow and their interest in South African art is one of the pocket only – if conditions for making money in art were more favourable in other parts of the world (which at the moment they are not) then the Yiddishes [sic] camp followers of art would take the next ship from our ports and we should hear of them no more. Of course one must expect criticism, but the Yiddishes [sic] contribution is mere idle abuse. If they write to you just let them have it straight from the shoulder. I don't see any reason for the policy of South African art being moulded by Nomads from Eastern Europe who managed to slip in just before the quota act![74]

The Quota Act that had been passed two years earlier, in 1930, restricted the increasing immigration from Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Palestine but was really aimed at restricting Jewish immigration to South Africa.[75] This as well as Roworth's recurrence to stereotypes of Jewish capitalism disclose the antisemitic character of his attack. As a result, Pierneef sent a letter to Malan warning him of "foreign influences" threatening a "Pure Afrikaans Art." On 10 February 1932, he writes:

> I sincerely hope that Your Honour will not let yourself be influenced by the volcanic eruptions of Mr. Meyerowitz and Konya + others. The above-mentioned gentleman is a great danger to a Pure Afrikaans Art, as he is fond

72 Ferreira, "Images of Pierneef's South Africa," p. 17.

73 Pretorius, "Biography of JH Pierneef," p. 78.

74 Roworth, letter to Pierneef, 5 February 1932. In her Pierneef biography for the University of Pretoria, Pretorius quotes the sentence starting with "These aliens…" but simply leaves out the word "Yiddishes" in her idealisation of Pierneef as the patriotic Afrikaner pioneer. Pretorius, "Biography of JH Pierneef," p. 78.

75 The act would not have affected Meyerowitz and Kónya, who immigrated from Germany and the USA respectively.

> of Bolshevist ideas and places the Coloured [*Kleurling*] above us in artistic terms, and it would be a disaster if we were dictated by such foreigners what Afrikaans art is. And since art is the spontaneous and supreme expression of our people who are of Dutch origin, it is essential that we as an Afrikaans people should take care, and guard, that foreign influences do not creep into our art.[76]

Again, words such as "Bolshevist" and "foreign" clearly relate to antisemitic stereotypes. A few days later, Roworth congratulated Pierneef on his letter to Malan and urged him to send another one to prime minister JBM Hertzog at his Cape residence on the Groote Schuur estate in Rondebosch, Cape Town. In a meeting there, Hertzog had already agreed with Roworth "that it was not necessary for the Academy to take any official notice" of the attacks by Boonzaier and "his Jewish friend Bernard Lewis" published in the *Cape Times* which, according to Hertzog, "always opposed any national movement" anyway.[77] The dispute around the *National Academy* shows that antisemitism even split Cape Town's conservative art circles – Roworth and Lewis were both good friends of DC Boonzaier's and would later vehemently fight on the same side against modernists such as Lipshitz and Higgs. In the same spirit of the 1932 debate, Roworth asked Pierneef in 1940 to consider becoming the keeper of the South African National Gallery's collection whose director he was at the time. Following his appeal, Roworth writes: "It would be just wonderful if we could both work together in the National Gallery to build together the foundations of our national art and death to this foul Jewish art which has been permeating our country."[78]

In 1934, Pierneef launched an antisemitic attack against fellow artist Jan Juta, who had worked with him on the interior decorations of South Africa House in London, during a meeting of the *Suid Afrikaanse Akademie vir Taal, Lettere en Kuns* [South African Academy for Language, Literature and Art].[79] The *Sunday Times* afterwards reported that Pierneef had called Juta's panels depicting Jan van Riebeeck and the *voortrekkers* [pioneers] "horrible monstrosities."[80] A day later, the *Rand Daily Mail* wrote that Pierneef had criticised that "South Africa House was filled with work by

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76 Pierneef, letter to Malan, 10 February 1932. (My translation, original Afrikaans on p. 273.)

77 Roworth, letter to Pierneef, 13 February 1932.

78 Roworth, undated letter to Pierneef. This letter probably dates from 1940 as it was followed by another letter on 10 May 1940 in which Roworth informs Pierneef that the board of trustees did not appoint Pierneef keeper as a "Secretary-Accountant" requiring a lower salary was employed instead. Roworth sees a conspiracy in this as he believes that the board is intending to employ a different person as keeper within the next two years. He does not specify who he believes this person to be but writes that "if it comes out all according to plan, then God help South African Art!" Roworth, letter to Pierneef, 10 May 1940. Also see Pretorius, "Pierneef and the Artists of his Time," p. 161.

79 Coetzee, *Pierneef, Land and Landscape*, p. 3. The academy was founded in 1909 on the initiative of J.B.M. Hertzog in order to promote the Dutch and Afrikaans languages in South Africa. It was renamed *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* [South African Academy for Science and Art] in 1942.

80 N.N., "'Monstrosities.' Painter Attacks Panel at South African House."

Jewish artists who had only been in South Africa for a short while and had not even smelt a 'mis' fire."[81] A "mis" fire is a dung fire and presumably symbolised to Pierneef a nature-based way of living that only "true" South Africans were familiar with. Lize van Robbroeck justifiably argues that the

> fact that Pierneef himself was first-generation South African of Dutch descent suggests that an element of anxiety and insecurity possibly underpins these qualms, and that a tenuous hold on belonging is overcompensated by exaggerated claims of authenticity.[82]

But even AC Bouman, who otherwise treated modernists favourably, in an article of 1951, includes Lipshitz in a list of "foreigners" although the artist came to South Africa as a five-year-old child 43 years earlier and had spent more time of his life in South Africa than most other artists:

> If we look only at the trio of Lippy Lipschitz [sic], John Dronsfield and Florencio Cuairan, then it is apparent that they represent human groups and art attitudes with a different character from that which the Afrikaans community shows. Our people require time and energy to learn to understand the message that they bring. If the Afrikaans artists are not alert and energetic, there is a possibility that they will be outstripped by a relatively small number of individuals from across the sea, or South African art will be led into waters differing greatly from that of to-day.[83]

Even though Bouman's statement can be read as a warning against the alteration of South African (and especially Afrikaans) art by "foreigners," he still praises Lipshitz's sculptures and considers him a great and important modernist. Lipshitz himself resentfully protested his portrayal as a foreigner.[84] A letter to the editor published a few days later picks up on Bouman's ambivalence and indicates the nationalistically charged context in which such discussions were viewed:

> Was it intended as a warning against foreign influences or not? I view with alarm anything which encourages our artists to stray from the straight and narrow path of depicting the beauties of our country as God made them and not as these 'modernists' distort them.[85]

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81 N.N., "Painters in S.A. House."

82 Van Robbroeck, "Afrikaner Nationalism," p. 51.

83 Cited in N.N., "'Foreigners" Role in S.A. Art." According to Julia Kukard, Dronsfield, too, was Jewish. Unfortunately, I was unable to find information on the Spanish sculptor Cuairan's ethnicity. Kukard, *The Critical History of the New Group*, p. 57.

84 Lipshitz, "My South African Life."

85 N.N., "True Artists. From 'Scrutator' (Cape Town)." Similar discussions about Jewish modernism endangering "national art" were held by French anti-Semites at the beginning of the century. Compare Michaud, "Un certain antisémitisme mondain," p. 85.

Jewish journalists now, in contrast to their colleagues of the 1930s who had aimed at the indigenisation of Jewish artists, started stressing the benefits of Jewish cosmopolitanism. In August 1941, *The Jewish Herald* published an article in which the author stresses the supposedly universal truth of Lipshitz's sculptures:

> Though he grew up and was educated here, we cannot find in him any trace or influence that we may call South African. For Lippy is essentially a citizen of the world, and a member of the great brotherhood of spirit that knows no boundaries and unites all men. […] His art […] speaks but of one thing – an inner dynamical strength and a truth which is so deep and innate as only a great artist can conceive.[86]

In 1961, Jewish journalist Bernard Sachs conducted an interview with Stern, who told him that Jewish artists' "contribution was to give a cosmopolitan sweep to painting, away from the parochial" and that "Jews have helped to wash this egocentrism out with their universality of outlook."[87] In general, the discussions presented above show the antisemitic sentiments Jewish artists were facing that prompted them to form networks in which they supported each other. On the other end of this spectrum, Afrikaner networks can be situated.

4.3 Afrikaner networks

Networks relating to the Afrikaner community centred around JH Pierneef, Anton Hendriks and especially Marthinus (called Martin) Laurens du Toit in Pretoria in the 1930s. Martin du Toit was the son of Stephan George du Toit, one of the founder members of the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* [Society of True Afrikaners]. He studied German in Stellenbosch, Berlin and Vienna from 1921 to 1925 and returned to South Africa in 1926.[88] Jeanne van Eeden argues that "Du Toit's exposure to German thinking is significant in terms of the influence this seems to have had on his notions regarding national identity and a metaphysical conception of culture."[89] In 1929, he founded the Afrikaans journal *Die Nuwe Brandwag* [The New Sentinel] and was its chief editor until the cease of publication in 1933. Influential figures such as JH Pierneef, DC Boonzaier, Bernard Lewis, AC Bouman and Anton Hendriks regularly

86 Anchor, "Jewish Artists in South Africa."
87 Sachs, "Irma Stern, Painter."
88 Van Eeden, "Collecting South African Art," pp. 168–9.
89 Ibid., p. 169. Van Eeden also stresses that the influence of German fascist ideologies on Du Toit and his colleagues at the University of Pretoria as well as the tension between his involvement with the antisemitic *Broederbond* and simultaneous support of Jews such as Irma Stern need further scrutiny. She assumes that Du Toit's and Stern's friendship started when Du Toit and Stern's husband Johannes Prinz both taught German at the University of Cape Town in 1926/27.

contributed to the journal that discussed the works of such artists as Pieter Wenning, JH Pierneef, Anton van Wouw, Frans Oerder and Gregoire Boonzaier, but also Irma Stern or Moses Kottler. Each journal included between three and nine full-page reproductions of contemporary artworks and thereby gave its Afrikaans-speaking audience the possibility to familiarise themselves with art that was otherwise mainly exhibited in urban centres such as Cape Town, Johannesburg or Pretoria.

This educational agenda also becomes obvious in Anton Hendriks's text on Pierneef published in the very first edition of *Die Nuwe Brandwag* which is largely concerned with explaining to its readers why artists chose certain media, colours or techniques for certain subjects and what the merits of different degrees of abstraction were.[90] Rather than specifically discussing Pierneef's works, Hendriks hence enlightened his audience on artistic methods in general. According to an article by JW Barrett of 1947, Pierneef met the Dutch painter and critic Hendriks in Amsterdam in 1925 and invited him to South Africa in 1926 where he stayed and was later appointed director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.[91] In 1927, Pierneef and Hendriks opened an art school at the Pretoria Technical College together which, however, had to be closed in 1931 due to financial difficulties.[92] Additionally, Hendriks was a part-time lecturer at the University of Pretoria's Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture for four years under Du Toit's direction.[93]

In the first year of its existence, *Die Nuwe Brandwag* also organised a group show in Bloemfontein to coincide with the founding of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* [Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations]. Elizabeth Delmont describes that Du Toit chose five artists to represent different artistic disciplines in this exhibition: Maggie Laubser for portraits, JH Pierneef for landscape, Anton van Wouw for sculpture, Gerard Moerdijk for church architecture and Gordon Leith for domestic architecture. She argues that, in the accompanying catalogue, Du Toit frequently recurs to terms such as '*volk*', '*Boer*', 'Afrikaner' and 'genius' in case of the male Afrikaner/ Dutch exhibitors and terms such as 'farm', 'intimacy', 'truth', 'faithfulness', 'honesty' and 'love' in the case of Laubser, the only female artist in the show.[94] 'Simplicity' and 'spirituality' are further terms that Du Toit applies to most of the artists discussed. In line with the terminology described in Chapter 3, this shows the strongly gendered and nationalist (and especially Afrikaner) context in which Du Toit viewed the artists he chose. His exhibition was the first one featuring Laubser's work after her return from Europe and therefore important for her career and position as an "authentic" Afrikaner woman artist. Letters archived in the University of Stellenbosch's manuscripts section illustrate Du Toit's sincere appreciation of Laubser and her works. For example, on 20 November 1930, he wrote: "I sincerely hope that you will soon be known throughout our country and enjoy the appreciation

90 Hendricks [sic], "Beskouing."
91 Barrett, "In the Limelight," p. 35. Also see Pretorius, "Pierneef and the Artists of his Time," p. 163.
92 Pretorius, "Pierneef and the Artists of his Time," p. 165.
93 Lamprecht, *Florrie's Dream*, p. 31.
94 Delmont, "Laubser, Land and Labour," p. 7.

you deserve," promising to spend a weekend at her parents' farm.[95] Additionally, he assisted in selling her paintings over the years, offered to lend her money and was planning to write a "great and beautiful" monograph on her.[96] Moreover, using the pseudonym P Enseel, Du Toit wrote very favourable reviews of Laubser's exhibitions held at the University of Pretoria, some of which he had hosted himself, for the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Vaderland* [The Fatherland].[97]

From 1931 to 1938, Du Toit was the first head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture at the University of Pretoria that was converted into an Afrikaans language institution in 1932. Van Eeden argues that he "was determined to make this department, the only one of its kind in South Africa at the time, a success" and "undertook an extended study tour to Europe in 1931 to observe recent artistic trends."[98] The latter shows his interest in modern art that interestingly did not conflict with his ambition of brokering Afrikaans art to an Afrikaner audience. During his time as head of department, Du Toit was responsible for a series of contemporary art exhibitions in the Macfadyen Hall featuring artists such as Maggie Laubser (1931 and 1933), Irma Stern (1933), Maud Sumner (1933), Anton Hendriks (1933) and Gregoire Boonzaier (1934).[99] Van Eeden assumes that

> the idea for these exhibitions was possibly planted by JJ Pienaar, Administrator of the Transvaal, when he suggested in 1932 that annual national art exhibitions should be held in South Africa and that the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture should organise them.[100]

As mentioned in my section on Pierneef in Chapter 1, Pienaar took an active interest in the development of a distinctively South African culture. Du Toit organised his exhibitions more regularly than annually and focused on contemporary South African artists. The embeddedness of such exhibitions in an ideology-driven Afrikaner context was extremely beneficial, especially to Afrikaans artists. In 1940, Gregoire Boonzaier explained to Lippy Lipshitz:

> I suppose that the fact that my show is being held under the auspices of the Dept of Afrikaans Kultuur of the University has had very much to do with my phenomenal success. Most people who have bought have, I think, done so primarily because I am an Afrikaner. This is carried out by a scrutiny

95 Du Toit, letter to Laubser, 20 November 1930. (My translation, original Afrikaans on p. 274.)
96 Du Toit, letters to Laubser of 9 March 1933, 15 March 1935, 22 November 1945. The last letter is dated 1945 even though Van Eeden states that Du Toit deceased in 1938. It is unclear who dated the letter but the ink is the same used for the rest of the text. Gregoire Boonzaier and Esmé Berman, too, were planning to write monographs on Laubser during her lifetime.
97 E.g. Enseel, "Tentoonstelling van skilderye." Enseel, "Maggie Laubser haar tentoonstelling." Enseel, "Opgewektheid Vervang die Tragiese."
98 Van Eeden, "Collecting South African Art," p. 170.
99 Ibid., p. 179.
100 Ibid., p. 176.

> of my list of buyers. Only one Englishman and no Jews! … All this goes to show that the 'other' side look upon any show managed by the university as a Afrikaner affair. A great pity that politics should enter into art, but then fortunately I have benefited through it, for had the English only taken me under their wing, I doubt whether I would have had as successful an exhibition.[101]

Through his exhibition practice, Du Toit also laid the foundations for the University of Pretoria's art collection as exhibiting artists would often donate an artwork at the end of their show.[102] He also founded the *Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging* [Afrikaans Art Association] in Pretoria in 1931 that was aimed at "promoting Afrikaans art; collecting Afrikaans art and cultural artefacts; hosting art exhibitions; and encouraging artists by means of personal contact with them."[103] Additionally, he convened and curated the South African art section of the "Empire Exhibition" held in Johannesburg from 14 September 1936 to 15 January 1937 which showed an overview of contemporary art at the Johannesburg Art Gallery.[104] In the catalogue for the exhibition, Du Toit stresses the contribution of the Afrikaner artist whose "young literature and his young art flourish."[105] However, as Lize van Robbroeck explicates in a recent article on the exhibition, his "main selection criteria were modernity and sophistication."[106] She describes Du Toit's selection as showcasing a modernist nationalism and argues that the "visual prominence of romanticised […] images of 'primitive Others' […] is ironically meant to signal settler identity, insofar as the paintings themselves accompany claims to a unique settler art imbued with a native 'spirit'".[107]

In addition to Du Toit, the Dutch literary theorist AC Bouman played an important role in 1930s and 1940s Afrikaner networks. Bouman obtained a doctorate in Dutch philology at the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht and migrated to South Africa in 1921 in order to take up a teaching position in German philology and Dutch history at the University of Stellenbosch.[108] He, too, was a stern advocate of Laubser's work, publishing many favourable reviews of her exhibitions in the Cape.[109] In addition, he greatly supported JH Pierneef from a relatively early stage in his career. For example, in letters dating from 1926 and 1927, he warned Pierneef that the influential Afrikaans newspaper *Die Burger* [The Citizen] feared that Pierneef had "come

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101 Cited in Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 25 April 1940. (Original spelling and punctuation.) In this letter to Higgs, Lipshitz quotes from a letter he had received from Boonzaier and concludes that the latter was "a pure opportunist."

102 Van Eeden, "Collecting South African Art," p. 162.

103 Ibid., p. 167.

104 Ibid., p. 164. For a list of exhibitors see Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, p. 344.

105 Cited in Van Robbroeck, "Afrikaner Nationalism," p. 48.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid., p. 55.

108 Stutterheim, "Arie Cornelius Bouman."

109 E.g. Bouman, "Nuwe Kunsstyl van Maggie Laubser." Bouman, "Kunstentoonstelling op Stellenbosch." Bouman, "Die Kunstenaarskap van Maggie Laubser."

under too much foreign influence" and would "soon lose the Afrikaans character" in his work.[110] Bouman reassuringly discounted these fears. He also tried to boost Pierneef's career by featuring reproductions of his works in high circulation publications. For example, in 1929, he was in the process of publishing a memorial book accompanying Stellenbosch's 250th anniversary and suggested to Pierneef including reproductions of woodcuts that he had produced in the area.[111] Bouman also wanted to use a drawing by Pierneef for the cover.[112] He argued that the edition of a few thousand or more copies would mean good publicity for the artist.[113] Three years later, Bouman wanted to suggest Pierneef's portrait of Paul Kruger for a book published by Professor de Vaays of the Department for Dutch Literature at the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht.[114] He also proposed to organise an exhibition of Pierneef's works at the University of Stellenbosch's domestic economy building.[115]

Interestingly, in a similar vein to Boonzaier as quoted above, Pierneef and Bouman also seemed to perceive a divide between English and Afrikaans art in South Africa. However, in contrast to Boonzaier's opportunist stance, this issue was more ideologically charged for them. For instance, during his sojourn in London in 1933, Pierneef heavily criticises contemporary English art: "The English are always too scared to acquire something individual and it is in their character to be afraid of everything that shows personality and is revolutionary, because the Empire collects colonies, but produces very little itself."[116] He adds that "annexing others was once their hobby."[117] In 1935, Bouman writes to Pierneef in order to discuss his long-existing plan of publishing "a collection of first-class reproductions of Afrikaans artworks and an 'explanation' of each work and artist printed underneath" that should also be distributed to schools as educational material.[118] Additionally, Bouman writes that he had detected "a great dissatisfaction amongst the English in Cape Town" that was caused by Bouman's omission of artists such as John Wheatly and Edward Roworth from his newly published book *Kuns in Suid-Afrika* [Art in South Africa], written in Afrikaans.[119] At the same time, both Bouman and Pierneef attacked Bernard Lewis's writings and were supportive of the younger artists later converging in the *New Group* in their fight against the conservative "traditionalists" governing the South

110 Bouman, letters to Pierneef of 10 May 1926, 6 July 1927. (My translation, original Afrikaans on p. 274.)
111 Bouman, letter to Pierneef, 26 August 1929. Bouman addresses Pierneef as "*waarde vriend Pierneef*" ["dear friend Pierneef"].
112 Bouman, letter to Pierneef, 14 September 1929.
113 Bouman, letter to Pierneef, 26 August 1929.
114 Bouman, letter to Pierneef, 23 February 1932.
115 Bouman, letter to Pierneef, 27 October 1935.
116 Pierneef, letter to Bouman, 23 November 1933.
117 Ibid.
118 Bouman, letter to Pierneef, 5 August 1935.
119 Ibid.

African art scene until the 1940s.[120] This illustrates the ambivalent forces driving Afrikaner artists' networks at the time: the wish to establish a new Afrikaner national art that contradictorily catered to a customarily conservative Afrikaner audience on the one hand and to fight the established English tradition and predominance within the South African art scene on the other. The latter aim, but also to a certain degree their pursuit of a new national South African art, was shared by the influential *New Group* that was founded in 1938 and also counted a considerable number of Jewish artists amongst its members.

4.4 The *New Group*

In 1936, artists and writers Uys Krige, Vincent Swart, Elsa Dziomba and her husband Jumbo Posthumus, Alexis Preller, David Goldblatt, David Fram and Lippy Lipshitz discussed founding a *New S.A. Society for Writers and Artists* – or *The New Unicorn* – in order to, as Lipshitz puts it in his diary, "put a stop to charlatanism in the arts in South Africa."[121] About the proposed structure of the society, Lipshitz writes:

> The society will consist of three classes of members – 1. foundation members (limited to 10 who are the executive body), 2. associate members consisting of professional artists and writers who are nominated by the executive and who must submit examples of their work for consideration, 3. an unlimited number of patrons and public subscribers. Thus Group 1 will have absolute control of the cultural activities of the society. Group 2 will be able to send in work for exhibitions, publication for consideration by Group 1. Group 3 will benefit by its patronage by attending the exhibitions, lectures, social functions of the society. This society if run on these lines, we think, should put a stop to dilettantism in the long run.[122]

A day later, he adds:

> Vincent Swart, Fram, Elsa Dziomba, Preller and Uys Krige and myself are the Executive Committee. Jumbo Posthumus is to be secretary and hold office for at least two years. The meeting took place at Alexis Preller's flat. The name of the society is to be 'The New Unicorn'. We intend printing a circular in English and in Afrikaans and at the bottom there will be a perforated slip which the recipients will be able to return, crossing out whether they wish to be members or patrons of the society. The subscription for members is to

120 Pierneef, letter to Bouman, May 1936. Pierneef also exhibited with the *New Group* in their second exhibition in 1938. The catalogue of the 1948 *New Group* exhibition even lists him as a member. Compare Kukard, *The Critical History of the New Group*, p. 162.

121 Lipshitz, diaries 1932 to 1936, 11, 17, 20 and 21 August 1936.

122 Ibid., 20 August 1936.

> be 2.2.0 Pounds a year and for patrons 25 guineas. We have a block already of the Unicorn with an apt quotation from an old poem. Krige is translating the circulars into Afrikaans. The heading of the circular will also be translated into Yiddish by David Fram. Goldblatt, the producer who will be a patron of the society will get the circular and the membership cards printed. 'It is a good idea to have the name of the Society in Yiddish as well,' enthused Fram, 'It will show up the international spirit of our Society.' Vincent Swart suggested the name 'Unicorn'. I suggested the 'New Unicorn' because there was a society here for literature, now long defunct, called 'Unicorn' and as it happens Swart has the printing block of its heading. It has been decided that the executive members should consist of six and should hold office for six years. The ordinary members will consist of creative artists and writers who must submit their work to the executive in order to prove their eligibility.[123]

This lengthy reproduction of Lipshitz's diary entries may seem disproportionate since, in spite of these very specific plans, *The New Unicorn* was never founded. The plans have, however, not been published before and are of significance as they show the great demand for a body professionalising the South African art (and literary) scene by various protagonists from the Cape and former Transvaal.[124] Additionally, it is interesting that *The New Unicorn* was supposed to cater to English, Afrikaans and Yiddish speaking audiences and thereby foster a (White European) multi-cultural approach – a thought abandoned by the later *New Group*. On the other hand, *The New Unicorn*, while opening the society to patrons and public subscribers, intended to leave the power over its activities and membership in the hands of the six foundation members. This is interesting to keep in mind when considering that the fall of the *New Group* is mostly attributed to its large, unmanageable and eclectic membership producing work of greatly varying quality.

The *New Group* was founded in February 1938 through the efforts of Gregoire Boonzaier, Terence McCaw and Freida Lock in the Western Cape and Walter Battiss and Alexis Preller in the former Transvaal. Its chairmen were Charles Peers from 1938 to 1944, Gregoire Boonzaier from 1944 to 1952 and Ruth Prowse from 1952 to the *Group's* dissolution in 1953.[125] In his "History of the New Group" published in the catalogue for a historical exhibition on the *Group* shown at the South African

123 Lipshitz, diaries 1932 to 1936, 21 August 1936.

124 According to Murray Schoonraad, Walter Battiss in 1937, too, "broached the idea that an independent art society or at least a branch of an art society should be formed in Pretoria." Schoonraad, "History of the New Group," p. 42.

125 Bekker, "Die Nuwe Groep," p. 54. Julia Kukard argues that Prowse resigned on 12 November 1952 and was followed by May Hillhouse and Maurice van Essche, although it is unclear whether Van Essche accepted his election. Kukard, *The Critical History of the New Group*, pp. 26–27.

National Gallery in 1988, Schoonraad cites that it wanted "to raise the standard of art in South Africa" and lists the following aims that determined its foundation:

1. To bring together artists and craftsmen in an effort to raise standards.
2. To help artists in financial difficulties.
3. To form Artists' Co-operatives to import and retail materials at cost.
4. To hold exhibitions all over the country, the standard of which would be controlled by the method of selection, i.e. secret ballot.[126]

In her MA dissertation on the *New Group*, Julia Kukard also stresses the economic reasons for establishing a structure independent of the existing establishment that would enhance art sales opportunities for members.[127] Professional artists were allowed to join upon invitation if they had had at least one solo exhibition and were elected by a majority of existing members. Works to be exhibited were chosen by secret ballot during member meetings.[128] The first exhibition of the *New Group* was held from 4 to 10 May 1938 at the Argus Gallery in Cape Town and included about 80 exhibits by 15 or 16 artists, mainly painters. According to Schoonraad, the exhibition and accompanying lunch hour lectures that introduced artists in person were attended by about 1,000 visitors.[129] The painters sold for over 200 Pounds.[130] For this, as well as for the following exhibitions, an entrance fee was charged, exhibition catalogues sold and an advice service provided to potential buyers. The latter were no longer a selected group of collectors but an increasingly wider public.[131] This was further aided by barter exhibitions where artworks were swapped for other goods or services determined by the respective artist's needs.[132] The *Group* had one branch in the Western Cape and one in the former Transvaal but organised exhibitions in the main centres as well as in country districts. Additionally, publicity was organised for its members in the form of newspaper articles, exhibition reviews and lectures.[133]

Martin Bekker, who published a monograph on Gregoire Boonzaier in 1990, points out the "amateurish" character of art criticism in South African newspapers and other media at the time and argues that the "New Group strove to create an artistic climate by writing letters to the press, by submitting authoritative articles which introduced art and its creators to the public, and by contributing reviews."[134] This practice had already been introduced when, for example, German artist and later *New Group* member René Graetz had published an article on Lippy Lipshitz in

126 Schoonraad, "History of the New Group," p. 44.
127 Kukard, *The Critical History of the New Group*, p. 24.
128 Bekker, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, p. 27.
129 Schoonraad, "History of the New Group," p. 44.
130 Lipshitz, letter to Levy, 22 May 1938.
131 Bekker, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, pp. 27–28.
132 Scott, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, p. 17.
133 Ibid.
134 Bekker, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, p. 27.

The Guardian in 1937.[135] Two weeks later, Graetz reviewed the national "South African Exhibition of Contemporary Artists" and calls the majority of works exhibited "childish, nay, ridiculous, imitations of local art professors" by "ill-equipped amateurs."[136] At the same time, he complains about the exclusion of Wolf Kibel and Lippy Lipshitz from the show. The professor referred to by Graetz is most likely Edward Roworth. Roworth and the journalist Bernard Lewis were at the centre of the *New Group*'s journalistic efforts until their fall in the 1940s. The dispute with these two traditionalist gate keepers of South African art institutions determined most of the newspaper reports on *New Group* activities at the time. From an exchange of letters between Cecil Higgs and Lippy Lipshitz, it becomes obvious that the two artists together with Maggie Laubser, Gregoire Boonzaier, Ruth Prowse and Christina van Heyningen alternately wrote to the press in order to publicly attack Lewis's or Roworth's commentaries. For example, in June 1939, Lipshitz writes to Higgs:

> We have been having a very rowdy squabble at the Fine Arts Association meeting last week with Teddy [Edward Roworth] and the other decrepit animals. I believe a rather illuminating account of the circus was in the 'Cape Times' a few days ago. […] I am glad Maggie [Laubser] is going to exhibit in the Transvaal where she is usually very successful. I hope she will be able to influence the right people with her article for the 'Huisgenoot'. We must avail ourselves of every opportunity to tighten the noose round that perfidious Jackass's neck.[137]

Higgs replies a few weeks later:

> I did read about the stormy meeting of the Fine Arts Association & was rather sorry to miss the affair. By the way, do you remember at the opening of your show [Gregoire] Boonzaier urged me to join the F.A.A.? Well I did, at least I sent them a 10f note (which I could ill afford!) & asked if I could join but have met with complete silence. Why is that do you suppose? What has Bernard Lewis to do with it all? I suppose he feels himself a patron and prince of the arts. A man who criticizes the creative work of others so often feels himself superior to it, a godlike being dispensing judgement. Don't you think B.L. [Bernard Lewis] sees himself in that role? But he must beware. I don't think somehow that he will act so long on the throne of judgement, I feel a fall for him is imminent. I agree with you it can't be very long before he presents some opening for attack & attacked he must be. […] I hope 'Die Burgher' [sic] will ask Dr. Bouman to write a criticism of the New Group show here, as it did for our show in Stellenbosch.[138]

135 Graetz, "A Living Art."

136 Graetz, "S.A. Artists of To-day." For more information on the national exhibitions see Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, pp. 202–203.

137 Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 26 June 1939.

138 Higgs, letter to Lipshitz, 19 July 1939. Higgs's original punctuation and underlining.

The power of critics such as AC Bouman and Bernard Lewis was considerable at the time. For example, in 1947, Norman Herd writes that in the 1930s, "Maggie [Laubser] experienced the mortification of having sales cancelled after the purchasers had consulted the opinions of art-critic friends, or seen an adverse report on her work in the press."[139] As mentioned above, Bouman generally supported the *New Group* members in the dispute with the established gatekeepers. Reviewing an exhibition by Laubser in August 1939, he criticises Lewis and Melvin Simmers for glorifying "bloodless, colourless pictures, which cannot age because they were born lifeless" and for trying "to hurt artists whose work is completely beyond their reach."[140] Bouman was in close contact with Laubser, Higgs and the latter's cousin, Christina van Heyningen, a lecturer colleague of Bouman's at the University of Stellenbosch. In the publicly staged controversy around Roworth and Lewis, Van Heyningen would provide translations from English to Afrikaans and vice versa in order to cater for both audiences. In an undated letter to Lipshitz, Higgs writes:

> Dear Lippy, This is Christina's [van Heyningen] translation of Brander's [Bernard Lewis's] last exposure in last night's Suiderstem. Won't you attack it? C. [van Heyningen] offers to put what you say into Afrikaans. She herself means to write something, not as much on the painters but on certain aspects of Bernard Lewis![141]

In a letter to Higgs of 2 February 1940, Lipshitz reports that Bernard Lewis had been released from "his post as all-round Critic of Literature, Drama, Art and whatnot" at the *Cape Argus* and replaced by David Gamble, who had just returned from London.[142] Lipshitz adds that he learnt from Gamble that "the Editors were influenced in their decision to get rid of Lewis by the letters we wrote to the 'Argus' attacking & making a fool of him."[143]

They launched a similar attack against Edward Roworth, who was at the time director of the Michaelis Art School as well as of the South African National Gallery, and thereby accumulating considerable power.[144] For example, in a letter to Millie Levy of February 1939, Lipshitz writes that their "determined & concerted action has resulted that public's eyes are now open to what corruption has been going on in the art gallery for the last few years – and an enquiry is being held into affairs of the board of trustees!"[145] Additionally, in October 1940, Higgs drafted a petition against Roworth's excessive institutional influence which Lipshitz asked Ruth Prowse to circulate

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139 Herd, "Maggie Laubser," p. 64.

140 Bouman, "Die Kunstenaarskap van Maggie Laubser." (My translation, original Afrikaans on p. 274.)

141 Higgs, undated letter to Lipshitz. The *Suiderstem* [Southern Voice] was an Afrikaans speaking newspaper published by the Union Party and based in Cape Town.

142 Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 2 February 1940.

143 Ibid. Also compare N.N., "'Propaganda' in an art exhibition."

144 Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, p. 254.

145 Lipshitz, letter to Levy, 17 February 1939.

around the *K Club* members and which was supposed to be sent to professional artists in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and other art centres.[146] Unfortunately, I could find no information on what came of this petition. Moreover, Lipshitz circulated an address he had held at the *People's Club* in Cape Town, in which he condemned Roworth's dictatorial demeanour, to the *K Club* and to artists in Stellenbosch and the Transvaal.[147] A few weeks later, the address was published in full length in the newspaper *Trek* that supported Higgs and Lipshitz in this controversy.[148] In his speech, Lipshitz quotes Roworth's admiration of Adolf Hitler in Germany "who has given the exponents of modernism their choice between the lunatic asylum and the concentration camp" and calls upon "the people of South Africa to take direct action against Prof. Roworth, or we may see in the near future an Exhibition of 'degenerate Art' on the pattern of Munich."[149] In his reply published in *Trek* two weeks later, Roworth calls Lipshitz "negligible as an artist" and adds:

> I do not think that speaking as he was to an audience of mixed races, he might have had the good taste, if not the good sense, to refrain from once more cheap sneers at the expense of England, for it is only the courage and sacrifice of England (or more properly, Britain) which stands between people of his race and kidney [sic] and their entire annihilation![150]

This last remark illustrates the racially charged climate at the time as well as the contrasting efforts of "traditionalists" such as Roworth, who maintained a close connection to an outdated English art and imperial thought pattern, and the *New Group*, who aimed at strengthening South African art on a national level. The press, too, clearly expected the *New Group* to "create a national art" for South Africa which, however, it never managed to achieve.[151] Set aside the intention of professionalising South Africa's art scene, there seems to have been an increasing lack of like-mindedness or unity within the *New Group*. For example, while Lipshitz claims in 1938 that "there is nothing new in the New Group," he still considers its first exhibition "perhaps the best exhibition of its kind ever held in South Africa."[152] A year later, he calls the *Group*'s current exhibition "a very select show of pleasing mediocrities except for the

146 Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 17 October 1940. The *K Club* was founded in Cape Town in 1922, organised exhibitions and other art events and dissolved a few years after the foundation of the *New Group* as there was a great overlap of members. Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, p. 152.

147 Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 17 October 1940.

148 Lipshitz, "A Considered Reply to Prof. Roworth." This was a reply to the following article: Sibbett, "Against the 'Cult of the Ugly'." Sibbett was a pseudonym used by Roworth.

149 Lipshitz, "A Considered Reply to Prof. Roworth," p. 20.

150 Roworth, "Admiration and Abuse." In this case, the "audience of mixed races" probably majorly consisted of Afrikaners, Jewish and English South Africans.

151 Eglington, "The New Group. A Disappointment."

152 Lipshitz, letter to Levy, 22 May 1938.

paintings of Maud Sumner and Cecil Higgs."[153] Another letter to Higgs from 1939, only a year after the *Group*'s establishment, suggests that membership was mainly a practical rather than ideological decision:

> Here is no heat or light in the artists that surround us, in these craats, [sic] crones, lemonade-veined dodderers and pale shades of Chelsea eunuchs; – in these [Gregoire] Boonzaiers, Ruth Prowses, Charles Peerses and [Terence] McCawses! Yet what else is there to do to stave off misantrophy [sic] in Cape Town but to group with them, babble with them and kick with them the ball of contention against goalkeeper Teddy [Edward] Roworth? It is great fun, begorrah, with old Bernard Bamboozle [Lewis] romping up and down as Referee crying for all his worth so many fouls and penalty kicks![154]

Although the *Group* was invested in the diminishment of the power of traditionalist gatekeepers such as Roworth and Lewis in line with their aim of supporting professional artists in South Africa, they did not align themselves as a body with European modernism.[155] This becomes obvious in the fact that the *Group* was divided on the controversy surrounding Higgs's *Pink Nude* painting described in Chapter 3. In a letter to Lipshitz of 20 August 1939, Van Heyningen writes that "the business about the nude grows worse + worse – but the greatest shock of all is the behaviour of those members of the Group who want to apologize to Dr Wilcocks," who had ordered the painting to be removed from the exhibition upon Lewis's disparaging review.[156] Van Heyningen adds that "these people [i.e. *Group* members] take the removal of the nude (+ the manner of its removal) as a matter that concerns Cecil only, when it is not only a denial of a fundamental principle, but also a blank insult to themselves as a Group."[157] In order to provide an exhibition space independent of institutional support, she consequently considered turning her loft into a gallery.[158]

In addition to such fissions between different camps within the *Group*, there also seems to have been discordances between the Cape Town and Transvaal branches. For example, in late 1938, Maggie Laubser's works were not accepted into the upcoming exhibition in Cape Town.[159] With the aid of Pretoria-based artist Alexis Preller, Laubser submitted her works for the Transvaal branch exhibition in Johannesburg where all of them were accepted. Additionally, Preller, founder member of the

153 Lipshitz, letter to Levy, 28 April 1939.
154 Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 26 June 1939. (Original spelling and punctuation.) Boonzaier, Prowse, Peers and McCaw were all leading figures in the *New Group*.
155 The fact that the latter is often wrongly assumed is stressed by Kukard, *The Critical History of the New Group*.
156 Van Heyningen, letter to Lipshitz, 20 August 1939. (Original punctuation.)
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Higgs, letter to Lipshitz, 18 November 1938.

Transvaal branch, reacted by briefly resigning from the *Group*. In a letter to Laubser of November 1938 he explains:

> By the way, Maggie, just before I heard the news of selection committee judgment in Cape Town against your work, I found several things quite unsatisfactory with regards to treatment I had received. And very 'hot-headedly' I resigned when I heard about the rotten treatment you had received.[160]

Laubser replies:

> Yes I can understand you also have had trouble with the Group because there are few native artists amongst them consequently they will not understand your work and feel that it is perhaps best that I resign – what do you think? It seems [Gregoire] Boonzaier, Frieda Lock (Boonzaier's friend) + a few other young boys scouts run the Group – they were present when the voting took place + so rejected all my work.[161]

Half a year later, Laubser complains to Preller that there was "a petty spirit in the Group" in Cape Town as her "work was hidden in corners" and calls Bernard Lewis "Gregoire Boonzaier's agent" who "hates modern work or anything that is not like Gregoire + Gregoire's friend's (Frieda Lock) work."[162] These remarks clearly show the hostilities within the *New Group*. On the other hand, Boonzaier offered Preller in 1941 to waive the hanging fees and annual subscription since he was short of money.[163] When Higgs resigned in 1943, Lipshitz again emphasises the practical character of his participation in the *New Group*'s endeavours:

> Personally I think that spiritually there is no real harmony in the Group with so many bad and academic artists in it […] But I suppose the principle reason for me & for Maggie [Laubser], [Jean] Welz, [Alexis] Preller + Maud [Sumner] in belonging to the Group, is that we are unconcerned with its supposed object in producing a school of important S.A. artists – but we use the Group as a means of exhibiting our work – and for me who otherwise could not show a bulk of new work in years – it has been very useful – to show a few sculptures there annually. Nevertheless, don't be surprised my dear Cecil, if I follow your lead in due course.[164]

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160 Preller, letter to Laubser, 23 November 1938.

161 Laubser, letter to Preller, 22 December 1938. (Original punctuation.) When writing "native artists," Laubser is likely to mean White South African-born artists as there were no non-White members. Neither Preller nor Laubser did effectually resign at the time.

162 Laubser, letter to Preller, 18 May 1939.

163 Boonzaier, letter to Preller, 1 February 1941.

164 Lipshitz, letter to Higgs, 20 October 1943. (Original spelling and punctuation.)

This already marks the demise of the *Group* that had been founded only five years earlier. As early as 1943, the press condemned the "large proportion of definitely inferior work" and the lack of "distinction between the art of the New Group and that of the South African Academy."[165] In 1945, the *South African Guardian* concluded that "the New Group has run its useful course."[166] In his monograph on Gregoire Boonzaier, FP Scott argues that the final dissolution of the *New Group* was marked by the resignation of the three central artists Lippy Lipshitz, Maurice van Essche and Jean Welz in 1953 when the *Group* "had become too large and heterogenous, embracing too many artists of divergent styles and learnings."[167] Martin Bekker further argues that, due to the economic upsurge following World War II in the early 1950s, artists received financial independence and "group acting was no longer necessary now that affluence had arrived."[168]

Additionally, the *South African Association of Arts* (SAAA) was founded to replace the *South African Fine Arts Association* in 1944 and took over a lot of the *New Group*'s roles. It was formed by the efforts of Sir Charles Rey, Charles te Water, Ruth Prowse and Gregoire Boonzaier. Te Water and Boonzaier, who was also acting as president of the *New Group* at the time, were nominated representatives of the *SAAA* on the board of trustees of the National Art Gallery.[169] The involvement of Te Water, who was an Afrikaner Nationalist – i.e. National Party representative of Pretoria in the Union parliament (1924–1929), High Commissioner in London under JBM Hertzog (1929–1939) and Ambassador-at-Large under DF Malan's apartheid government (1948–1949) – already indicates the political dimension of this new arts body.[170] According to its constitution, the *SAAA*'s purpose was "to integrate the Arts into the everyday life of the people of South Africa" and "to cover the advancement and encouragement of all the Arts, particularly in their relation to South African activities in the field of Industry, Commerce, Science and Education."[171] The *SAAA* therefore collaborated closely with the South African government as well as with important institutions such as the National Gallery in Cape Town. Accordingly, its first method listed was "holding, sponsoring, or otherwise assisting with or without the Union of South Africa exhibitions or demonstrations of the Arts and Crafts or any other activities amenable to artistic design or treatment."[172]

Most prominently, the *SAAA* in collaboration with the South African government organised the South African participations at the Venice and São Paulo art biennials from 1952, the art section of the "Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Exhibition" in 1952, the "Quadrennial Exhibitions" in 1956, 1960 and 1964 as well as the exhibition of South African art that travelled to Britain, France, Holland, Belgium, the United States and

165 V.J.B., "New Group." Leonard, "Paintings of the 'New Group'."
166 L.N.D., "New Group Exhibition."
167 Scott, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, p. 17.
168 Bekker, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, p. 29.
169 Scott, *Gregoire Boonzaier*, p. 31. Also compare N.N., "New Group Nears Its Teens."
170 Compare Lambert, "'To Back up the British Government'," pp. 26–27.
171 South African Association of Arts, information leaflet.
172 Ibid.

Canada and finally back to South Africa in 1948/49.[173] According to a US-American newspaper article, this exhibition shown at the National Gallery in Washington, DC in July 1949 comprised "nearly 170 picture and sculpture items, 149 of them contemporary [...] They represent 43 painters and 10 sculptors, 15 of whom are women."[174] The Belgian critics were cited to have been "surprised at the strong European influence on the work."[175] In South Africa, however, this show was perceived as of an "essentially South African character" and "as intensely a national product as a strip of biltong."[176]

In addition to shows featuring the works of contemporary artists, the *SAAA* also took an interest in African art which they considered an important part of national South African culture. In collaboration with the *South African Archaeological Association*, they organised an "Exhibition of Prehistoric Art in Southern Africa" in Cape Town in 1946. The committee also included artists such as Walter Battiss and Ruth Prowse. In the foreword to the catalogue, the exhibition is described as "probably the most comprehensive effort yet made in this country to present to its people what is described in this authoritative brochure as 'the most ancient habitual expression of man's artistry the world possesses.'"[177] The text stresses the worth of such heritage to South Africa and explicates that the exhibition will travel "to a considerable number of the larger and smaller towns in the Union in order simultaneously to carry a message to the people of this country, to give them pleasure, and to stimulate their interest in the Arts of Africa."[178] In the same year, the *SAAA* helped organise an exhibition of the work of African pupils of the Cyrene Primary School near Bulwayo, then Southern Rhodesia and now Zimbabwe. The following extract from an exhibition review published in the government publication *South African Panorama* illustrates how primitivism was quickly used to support ideas of difference in South Africa:

> There is an almost mediaeval note in their work, which opens wide vistas of what the future may be for the African artist, who is brought into discriminate contact with European art. Will he be able to hold his own, consistently to give his own interpretation? It is a difficult question, and if one reconsiders the impossibility of any European recapturing the spirit of native or Bushman art, one cannot but incline to doubt. And if, 25,000 years hence, another race of little rock-men, scratching amongst the queer ruins of our one-time picture galleries and houses, comes upon the remains of what were once our finest pictures and murals, will they have as much occasion for sound aesthetic speculation as their work now affords us? Stripped of all other content, how much of our European painting in South Africa would pass muster in their expert judgment? The best we can hope for

173 Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, p. 257. Also see F.F.P., "Important Exhibition by 'New Group' to be Opened."
174 Berryman, "News of Art and Artists."
175 N.N., untitled.
176 N.N., "On Show in Cape Town." Biltong is a South African speciality of dried meat.
177 South African Association of Arts, *Exhibition of Prehistoric Art in Southern Africa*, p. 2.
178 Ibid.

> is a reception something in the nature of that accorded to a collection of reproductions of Bushman paintings in London, which was discussed under the headline: 'Modern Art by Primitive Man.'[179]

The early work of the *SAAA*, manifesting itself for example in the exhibitions listed above, and its involvement with the South African government has so far largely been neglected by scholars and researchers and deserves further attention exceeding the brief excursus I am able to offer here.

4.5 Conclusion

The networks described above often served similar purposes and hence regularly overlapped. All of them aimed at forcing open the set and largely obsolete patriarchal structures preeminent in South African art institutions and supporting its members that operated at the margins of said institutions: women, Jews, Afrikaners and a largely younger generation of artists. While Jewish and women's networks mainly intended to promote their protégées in order to gain renown and financial security, Afrikaner networks were more ideologically driven and often followed a nationalist agenda. The *New Group*, in which members of all three other groups gathered and which represented a younger generation of artists, wanted to generally professionalise the South African art scene and therefore most pronouncedly worked towards the fall of the old elites. The interactions of these groups – especially between Jewish and Afrikaner artists as well as between *New Group* and Afrikaner artists – were hence often coined by ambivalences.

In order to demonstrate the power of women's networks, the networks surrounding Irma Stern form a conducive example. The most influential women supporting her were Thelma Gutsche, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Freda Feldman, Hilda Purwitsky and Roza van Gelderen, most of whom were also Jewish. While Millin, Purwitsky and Van Gelderen were of great help to Stern from early on in her career, Gutsche and Feldman influenced the artist's reception until well after her death. Through her own fame, Millin helped Stern by mentioning her friend's name in interviews and emphasising her "brilliancy." Purwitsky and Van Gelderen built up Stern's prominence by publishing translations of appraisals of her works that had appeared in the German press and by reproducing and spreading Stern's self-portrayal. They also repeatedly positioned her as a Jewish artist in order to fuel Jewish patronage of her work. As a result, Stern's works were collected by many affluent members of South Africa's Jewish diaspora. Feldman, one of those collectors, additionally supported Stern by helping organise her exhibitions and travels as well as by generally promoting the artist within her influential circle of friends. After her death, she was pivotal in advocating for maintaining Stern's home "The Firs" as a museum displaying her works and

179 Hugo, "Painting in South Africa," p. 145.

art collection. Gutsche, on the other hand, advocated Stern as "Ambassador for Africa" and crucially shaped Esmé Berman's entry on Stern in her *Dictionary*. Surprisingly, even though Stern depicted herself in the same boat with other important women artists, she did not form an alliance with other female pioneers such as Laubser or Higgs in order to systematically fight the patriarchal structures of the South African art scene.

Male Jewish artists such as Moses Kottler, Lippy Lipshitz, Wolf Kibel and Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz also received the support of journalists Purwitsky and Van Gelderen as well as of other authors writing for Jewish newspapers such as the *S.A. Jewish Chronicle*, the *Zionist Record*, the *Jewish Times*, the *Jewish Herald*, *Ivri Onouchi* or the *Hasholom Rosh Hashonah Annual*. These writers promoted Jewish artists from early on in their careers and first tried to indigenise them as integral parts of South African art traditions while later stressing the benefits of a supposedly Jewish cosmopolitanism and universal outlook. Both strategies were employed in order to counter contemporary perceptions of Jews as "foreigners" and further antisemitic sentiments. The latter were also spurred by members of the traditionalist art elite, exemplified by Edward Roworth, as well as by associates of Afrikaner networks such as JH Pierneef and AC Bouman. Afrikaner networks often aimed at brokering the consumption of art, including modernist art, to specifically Afrikaner audiences through a focus on identity. This was extremely beneficial to participating artists as they gained new and often highly focused audiences. Most successful in this aim was the university professor Martin du Toit due to his role as founder of the Afrikaans arts journal *Die Nuwe Brandwag*, as first head of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture at the University of Pretoria, where he organised numerous exhibitions, and as reviewer of such exhibitions in different Afrikaans-speaking newspapers. Another important figure was Bouman, also university professor, who supported the Afrikaner artists Laubser and Pierneef from the early stages of their careers. Laubser, Bouman and Pierneef were also interested in assisting the younger generation's *New Group* in bringing about the downfall of the conservative English arts elites.

Founded through the efforts of Gregoire Boonzaier, Terence McCaw and Freida Lock in the Western Cape and Walter Battiss and Alexis Preller in the former Transvaal in early 1938, the *New Group* aimed at raising standards, widening (buying) art audiences and professionalising South Africa's art scene in a democratic process. By realising those aims, they replaced the established institutional elite and attained a stronger interest in the arts by and collaboration with the South African government through the *South African Association of Artists* (SAAA) founded in 1944. However, many members joined the *Group* for opportunist reasons and there were various internal conflicts. The fall of the *New Group* followed in 1953 – caused by its large, unmanageable and eclectic membership producing work of greatly varying quality. The *SAAA* continued its work as most important representative body of South African arts professionals.

It is interesting to note that no comparable network was formed by British settlers. While many of the younger English artists converged in the *New Group*, the establishment, although artistically shaped by British traditions (e.g. Edward Roworth, Gwelo Goodman), in a way transcended ethnic identity since the "old

guard" comprised members such as the British settler Edward Roworth, the Afrikaner DC Boonzaier or the South African Jew Bernard Lewis. However, changing associations at the same time illustrate the ambivalent character of such alliances that were sometimes practically and sometimes ideologically driven. For example, JH Pierneef for a while formed an alliance with Roworth against Jewish artists and for a while with AC Bouman and the *New Group* against the hegemony of English art. Boonzaier and Lewis were supporters of Roworth's conservative understanding of art but at the same time opposed an English-style art academy. The matter becomes even more confusing when considering that, at some point, a majority of the professionally working artists in South Africa held a *New Group* membership and many of them worked in a traditional way. Nevertheless, these networks highlight the different interests shaping the South African art scene during the formation of settler primitivism in the first half of the 20th century.