



FynArts Festival Director Mary Faure with Soli Madikane (left) and Raphael da Silva (right) at the opening of the new exhibition, *Engineering the New Jerusalem II*, at the FynArts Gallery in The Courtyard on Friday afternoon.

Getting to grips with Afrofuturistic art

Engineering the New Jerusalem II is the enigmatic title of a solo exhibition of drawings by Lwandiso Njara that was opened at the FynArts Gallery on Friday by Gordon Froud. A sculpture by Lwandiso that forms part of the FynArts Sculpture on the Cliffs Exhibition at Gearing's Point has been the subject of considerable controversy over the last few months, and this exhibition could go a long way to foster understanding and appreciation of this young artist's unique talent and subject matter.

Gordon Froud, a senior lecturer in Visual Art at the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA), who has been actively involved in the South African and international art world as artist, educator, curator and gallerist for the last 30 years, said it was an honour to open Lwandiso's exhibition and to see the event so well attended. "It was heart-warming, too, to have people listen intently, participate in the discussion and ask pertinent questions afterwards."

About the work of Lwandiso Njara, Gordon had the following to say:

"Njara has for many years developed a body of work, initially in sculpture and now in drawing, that investigates the hybridity of contemporary African people. This hybridity is based directly on his own life experience, growing up in a rural setting within his Xhosa tradition and at the same time being taught by Catholic Sisters at a convent school. This is a common experience of many young African people and leads to potential clashes of ideology and cultural practices, forcing the artist in this case to make art that attempts to engage with this phenomenon.

"However, for Njara, there is a third aspect of hybridity to engage with, and that is the aspect of technology. I see his work as that of an Afrofuturist that is embracing the past and yet firmly on a trajectory to the future. He imagines the fusion of technology and the human body as well as aspects of the animal body into a hybrid of the future. Taking the strength and instinct of the animal, the thought capacity of the human and the technical qualities of technology and combining these in an almost cyborg way into this 'new' creature, the African of the future. This is most pertinently seen in the series of high-speed trains that grow horns and eventually morph into high-speed animal trains.

"This morphing of animal and human in art and writing is not new and harks back to Greek and Roman mythology and to tales of ancient civilizations where animal and human characteristics are blended in order to tell a tale that has a moralistic tone. Njara's work stems from this historical narrative but is personalised through his own life experience. This hybridity – which does not come from a place of darkness, evil or Satanism – embodies the struggle that Lwandiso, like many people of his age, bears of being both rural and urban, and how at times each of these aspects is misunderstood by those around him. His art is his way of trying to deal with these severe contradictions.

"This is a brave, remarkable show of beautifully rendered charcoal and pencil drawings by Lwandiso Njara, who is no longer an emerging artist, but a well-established thinker that takes his rightful place in the South African art world."