

***Visual Century* puts SA art history in context**

When speaking at the Cape Town launch of the recently released *Visual Century: South African Art in Context 1907 - 2007*, Iziko Museums' CEO, Rooksana Omar, described the book as an indispensable benchmark text for the future study and appreciation of South African art.

Utilising the skills of over 30 contributors, the ambitious work is the brainchild of Gavin Jantjes who also served as project director. Speaking at the launch, Jantjes, who went into exile in 1970, said: "I decided to do this after I returned to South Africa in 1994 and noticed the distinct absence in historical recording of South African art. South African art has an incredible profile internationally - this year's Venice Biennale, for example, featured six South African artists - but locally there's still a lack of knowledge of our own art history."

Accessible language to broaden audience

To redress this, the book, divided into four volumes, each looking at different historical periods, attempts to situate South African art within both historical as well as art historical contexts - kicking off in 1907, after the Anglo-Boer War, and stretching through to 2007. In order to allow it maximum accessibility and engage a broad audience with divergent levels of knowledge of local and international art and history, as well as degrees of literacy it uses accessible language without compromising the quality of the content. This was done in order to make the value of its resources count within varied settings - from the educational to the professional.

Jantjes believes that a concerted effort needed to be made to inspire young people to read this and other texts in order for them to realise the value of our history. The publication of this book has proven that we can tell our own stories - with our own voices.