

Black artists' exhibition a city milestone

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AN exhibition of sculpture and painting by 11 black Cape Town artists opens at the Gowlett Gallery, Long Street, tomorrow.

The show is a definite milestone, as three or four years ago virtually no black art of significance existed in Cape Town (with the exception of a few artists such as Peter Clarke), and no one seemed to be doing anything about the situation at all.

Most of the work has been created in the studios of the Community Arts Project (CAP) where, in its new, spacious premises in Woodstock, director Derek Joubert has turned the visual arts curriculum from a leisure-time activity into an intensive training programme for professional artists.

Among the artists providing valuable instruction at CAP are sculptor and woodcarver, Cecil Skotnes, who, perhaps more than anyone else has helped put black art on the map in this country; Hamilton Budaza and Yvonne van der Heul, who assist with painting.

Two of the exhibitors come from the Nyanga Art Centre, where exciting work is also being done under the tuition of Lucy Alexander of the South African National Gallery.

Many of the exhibitors have also benefitted from extra-mural classes held at the Michaelis Art School, under the guidance of Nathan Margalit.

An additional stimulus has been the bursaries provided by the Italian government for a year's tuition at the Perugia University Art School. So far, three black Cape Town artists have been recipients: Bongane Shenge, Hamilton Budaza and Patrick Hollow, who is presently studying at Perugia.

Though there are some paintings on show, the main focus is on the sculpture, which is predominantly in terra cotta — an ideal medium as brick clay is readily available in the Cape at a very low cost. It is also a permanent medium from which bronzes can be easily cast.

"These artists seem to have a natural tendency towards sculpture," comments Cecil Skotnes.

"Like the established Transvaal sculptors, Sydney Kumalo and Ezrom Legae, they are unaffected by Anglo-American influences. Their work flows out of their environment — from their keen observation of people and animals. It is a sort of urban folk art of a very high sophistication.

"The work is sculpturally remarkable and shows a real vision and solidarity of thinking. It also manifests the great cultural strength of the black population, no matter what the hardships".