

THE theme of ceramics and textiles provides a link between cultures. It's this concept that underlies the exhibition "Figurative Ceramics and Decorative Textiles", at the SA National Gallery Annexe.

So as to obtain a broad representation of styles and techniques, the organizers approached a variety of sources throughout Southern Africa (community centres as well as individuals). And it's the aspect of diversity that takes priority over the selection of "show" pieces (though there are several).

This exhibition is in line with the National Gallery's intention to broaden the scope of the Annexe. Previously known as the Touch Gallery, displays now relate closely to workshop activities which are orientated towards non-formal education of children and adults.

There's plenty here to stimulate the imagination and motivation of workshop participants — as well as casual visitors. For a start, one is greeted by a very supercilious lady crocodile wearing a necklace of golden charms with "fists" tightly clutching a bundle of banknotes! "I'm a material girl in a material world" is the delightfully eccentric creation of Delise Reich.

Well-known ceramicists such as John Nowers, Eugene Hon and Clarissa Hathorn also contribute superb examples of ceramic sculptures that

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the cultures

are clearly Western culturally influenced. And the contrast between the urban sophistication of these pieces and the rural simplicity of Katlehong ceramics could hardly be more pronounced.

These simple massive "pots" owe their fundamental structure to animal forms, their warm smoky surfaces to spoon-burnishing and sawdust and dung firing, and their unique character to overt hand and finger pressure.

Several pieces on show blur barriers between art and craft, such as Bonnie Mtalishali's "Zebra Killed by a Crocodile and a Snake", Austin Hleza's "Truck and Trailer", "Monumental Head" by Wilma Cruise, and Sophie Peters' "Man". And among the textiles, Lenswe La'oodie's Zimbabwean war-theme tapestry is outstanding.

Other works, though, reinforce the craft ethic by concentrating more on technique than expression, such as work from the Pelagano and Rourke's Drift workshops, and also pieces by Ruth Nesbitt and Barbara Jackson.

BENITA MUNITZ