



Rebel with a cause

Wayne Barker's retrospective exhibition 'Super Boring' shines brightly

Exhibition

EXHIBITION: Wayne Barker's *Super Boring*
VENUE: Standard Bank Gallery, corner Simmonds and Frederick Street, Johannesburg, until April 9

NATALIE BOSMAN

WAYNE Barker's art is anything but boring, giving the title of his mid-career retrospective exhibition *Super Boring* a bit of an ironic edge.

Barker has made a career out of art that boasts strong, provocative messages and often forces its viewers to engage with uncomfortable societal truths, and as curator Baylon Sandri, of the SMAC Art Gallery in Cape Town explains, this exhibition is important for conveying how central Barker was to an important moment in South Africa's art history, where the black and white art worlds were

converging for the first time.

"In the late Eighties and early Nineties, Wayne was something of a bridge figure; bridging what was very elitist before and what obstructed a dialogue which should have happened far earlier," Sandri says.

"He was a central figure in a group of artists who all got together on the streets of Joburg. And he still is. On any given day, you'll find half the Joburg art scene in Wayne's apartment."

Although Barker is quick to admit that the term "resistance artist" doesn't quite resonate with him, he doesn't downplay his questioning nature – evident in his preoccupation with his country of birth, with pre- and post-apartheid politics, with the figures that have coloured SA stories and history, as well as with some of the great SA painters, such as Pierneef, who've dominated the art scene for decades.

"I don't know if I'm a resistance

artist," he ponders while walking around the gallery and supervising the hanging of his artworks.

"I was ignored by everyone. I was kicked out of art school and I didn't go the army, so I just started making art. I don't really like the term 'resistance artist'. I am just someone who challenges things if I feel strongly about it. I think an artist must always challenge."

The mediums and techniques Barker uses to get his voice heard might change, but at its core his work remains consistent, passionate and committed to his cause.

Afro-pop images, neo-expressionist undertones, traditional beadwork and the signature neon signs that light up his canvasses come together to form an impressive oeuvre of work that resists easy interpretation and categorisation.

"Wayne is about absolute rebelliousness, absolute freedom, absolute rejection of any authority over him.

He's almost an anarchist, yet he always puts his mark on whatever he does," says Sandri.

"It's my strong belief that the sign of a great artist is that whatever they do, you can see their hand in the work."

"Once people have a confidence

in what they do, the important thing is to evolve, not really to change.

"Many artists feel the pressure to change, and I think that's because they lack confidence in what they are actually doing. Hold one of Wayne's 2011 works next to a 1991 work and I see the same artist."

