

## ART SPOT

## Barker not so 'Super Boring'

ANDREA NAGEL

"THE opening of the exhibition was fabulous," says Wayne Barker, looking over the top of his glasses, legs crossed, arms folded and leaning back in his casual way. He is minus his characteristic hat, but I see a string of intense cobalt blue beads under his embroidered black shirt.

Barker looks good, rested, and it's only the day after the opening of his mid-career (or middle age, as he calls it) retrospective, *Super Boring*, which opened on Tuesday to the wide acclaim of assembled art lovers and artists alike at the Standard Bank Gallery. Come to think of it, he's had a whole day to recover from the after-party.

"I had three people fighting over one of my mixed media works with neon tubing," — he smiles. "I used to beg people to buy my work, now they're fighting over it."

Although Barker loves to sell his art, he seems to regard the buyers with a strange amusement as if they've been left out of an in-joke. "I had one guy, an eye specialist, emphatically telling me 'Wayne, I don't want that work. I need it,' as he incessantly followed me around the gallery."

Although seen by some as the black sheep of the art world for being "rebellious, belligerent, agitative and confrontational", in curator Baylon Sandri's words, (and let's not forget drunk, unruly and outrageous) there's no denying the exquisite technical ability and immense beauty of his provocative work.

There's also a strong Wayne-ness to his work, a style that is chaotic and hyperactive with a pulsating energy that resonates with the rhythm and melody of his colours and lines, and indeed, with the vibrancy of his personality.

His work has been called expressionist, conceptual Afro-pop, subversive, deconstructionist and political. It is an expression of his deep desire to comment on the country and the irony, hypocrisy,

courage and beauty of its people. There are iconic South African landscapes, politicians, activists and whores, rage, admiration, humour and pathos — sometimes all of these things in one visual feast of a work.

And let's not forget the extraordinary visual referencing of other artists like Battiss and Pierneef.

Barker is an artist who is obviously standing inside his subject matter, feeling it and experiencing it, churning it up inside him for deliverance onto the canvas, not merely commenting on it from the outside. "Some of our famous artists are so serious and removed," he comments.

"My art is a visual diary of my life, and as such, it represents the issues and passions that have absorbed me. At the moment I want to indulge in beauty," he says, waxing lyrical about his current muse, a young and beautiful Indian girl, who arrived at the retrospective resplendent in a pretty pink frock. "I'm treating myself by not going into the political."

Barker's work is full of political figures but, he says: "I only include the ones I adore — Mandela, Luthuli, Antjie Krog, Ingrid Jonker, Miriam Makeba — people who moved me in terms of their contribution to change. They all did good s\*\* and I'm paying homage to them."

Asked to comment on the current state of this country's affairs, particularly the display of sushi on a mostly naked girl's body at the opening of Kenny Kunene's new club, Barker said: "That sort of decadence is simply ridiculous. The manifestation of having wealth is so strange in this country. We are lucky to have had such a peaceful transition, but politics is generally disgusting, not to mention super boring. That's why I'm taking a break from it."

*Wayne Barker: Super Boring* will be on at The Standard Bank Gallery until April 9. For a digital representation of the exhibition go to [www.saartnow.co.za](http://www.saartnow.co.za)

'I had people fighting over one of my works. I used to beg people to buy my work, now they're fighting over it'



INTO BEAUTY: 'Golden Girl' (2009) in strung glass beads