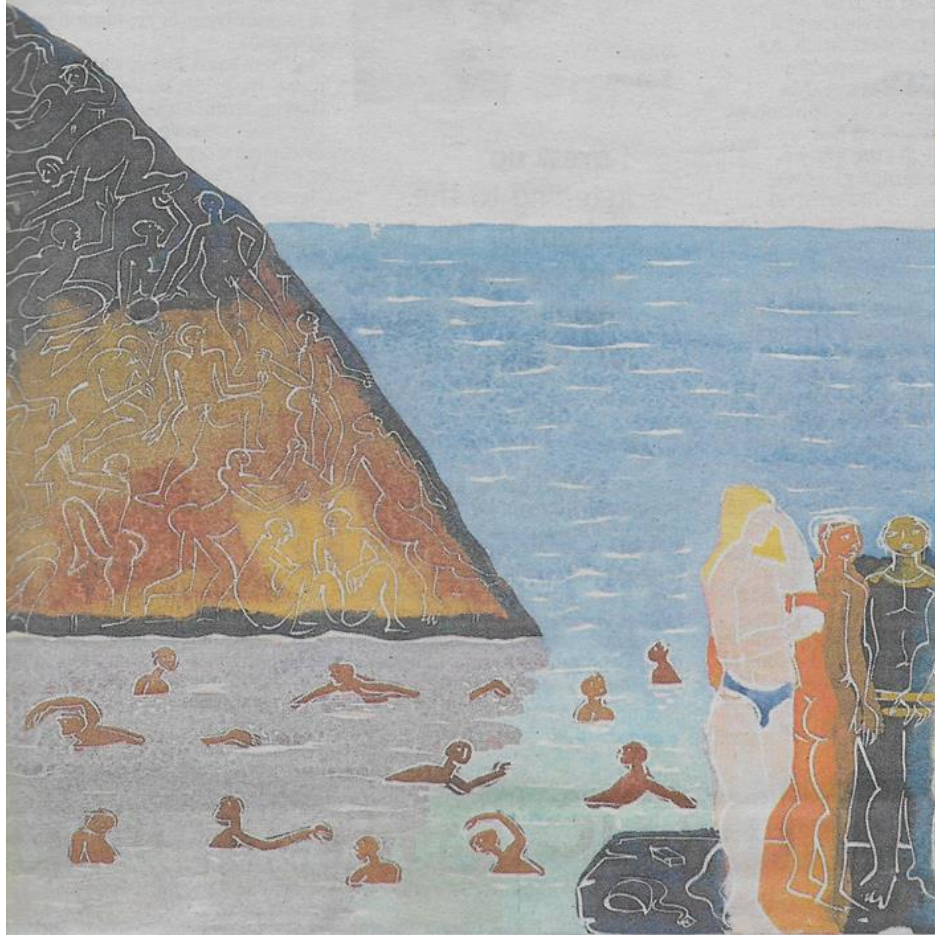


er from Battiss

correspondence informs show, writes **Graham Wood**



(1978), watercolour on paper, one of the works on show from today at the Wits Art Museum



HOT STUFF: 'Red Orgy' (1977)

Siebrits. "They provided so many new insights and made connections for me for the first time."

Their value for Siebrits is more than the thrill of biographical discovery (and they do contain some surprising revelations).

"They allow Battiss to speak in the first person," he says. Sceptical of some of the "limbs" and "tangents" art historians go out on, Siebrits sees the biographical approach of the letters as a chance to pursue a less thematic reading of Battiss's life and work.

Battiss is undoubtedly one of South Africa's most loved artists, and his works are

highly collectable. At the same time, he's become a rather cuddly figure. But the friendly, harmless "Gentle Anarchist" that was presented at the Standard Bank Gallery exhibition a few years back is not the Battiss that Siebrits wants to represent.

So, the third major difference between this exhibition and those in the past, is that it is arranged chronologically and not thematically.

Siebrits refers to thematic arrangements as "amorphous blobs". He doesn't believe they do justice to Battiss's remarkable capabilities as an artist. "Once you've put [a work] into the thematic group, how do you show its unique quality?" he asks.

Siebrits believes the chronological arrangement allows viewers to see how Battiss, unlike most other South African artists who work through clear phases, "revisits styles and pictorial idioms" throughout his career. You can also see the range of the work Battiss produced simultaneously — prints and silkscreens, pop art, oils, performance and conceptual art, and watercolours.

This arrangement demonstrates Battiss's remarkable talents, but also humanises him. "Even for someone as great as Battiss, you want to demystify things," says Siebrits.

● The exhibition runs at Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, until October 10.

ART OF THE MATTER

The vessel that echoes the seas

ECHOES In Clay is the 43rd annual regional showcase exhibition by members of Ceramics Southern Africa. Taking place at the KZNSA in Glenwood, new works by some of the finest ceramic artists in KwaZulu-Natal are on show until July 17.

Artist and arts educator Daryl Houghton speaks to Shelley Seid about *Voyages II*, one of the works on display.



What is it?

A clay vessel made by Durban artist Lynette Morris-Hale. This work is 32cm in height and has been glazed with coloured matt slips. A slip is clay in a liquid form that has been coloured with oxides or stains, and gives a matt finish to a work.

Why look at it?

It is an exciting, contemporary ceramic piece with a lot to interest the viewer in terms of its surface textures and decorative motifs. The form of the vessel is that of a traditional urn, but its decoration, using linear fish motifs scratched into the surface, as well as applied decals of 19th-century sailing ships, is far from traditional. The surface treatment has been extremely well handled and provides much visual interest. The brown and white matt slip glazes have been rubbed off in parts, revealing the creamy clay body, and this gives the work a somewhat ancient look.

What does it mean?

This vessel explores narrative through the means of clay, glazes and applied decoration. Lynette has, since she was a child, felt drawn to the power and rhythms of the ocean, and a continuing fascination with the sea on the part of the artist can certainly be considered the wellspring of inspiration for this particular ceramic piece. The work can be read on many levels, speaking, as it does, of the vastness, the loneliness and dangers of the ocean. It speaks, too, of voyages and the creatures of the deep. The roughened earthy colours of the vessel and the fish designs, like tribal markings, seem to evoke Africa, while the sailing ship motifs might refer to those early European settlers who ventured across the seas to make a new home in a strange and alien land. It is a striking piece that carries our thoughts in many directions.