

INVESTEC CAPE TOWN ART FAIR SHINES

UNATHI KONDILE

I AM not one to heap praise on anything. But there is always an exception. This is it.

Although I was deeply disappointed with this year's Investec Cape Town Art Fair vernissage (private viewing before opening), I can gleefully go on to say the three days thereafter, from February 16 to 18, were a resounding

success.

The vernissage itself was way too crowded. I imagine all 6 500 VIPs confirmed their RSVPs. No free wine or canapés, and guests were limited to purchasing from a limited range of wines from one wine particular wine farm I do not quite enjoy. My whingeing stops here.

"We did well! Take that whole bottle of organic tequila in the corner

there. It's from Mexico!" smugly said a gallerist whose smile, in the art world, is as rare as *izinyolenkukhu* (a hen's tooth).

For those uninitiated, the Art Fair can be quite an overwhelming experience, and this year happened to be its busiest year since its inception 11 years ago. Initial figures show that 30 000 visitors strolled through the Cape Town International Convention

Centre (CTICC) this past weekend.

Tip 1: Get *The Art Paper* publication at the ticket booths. In its centrefold is the floor plan and list of galleries.

Tip 2: Sign up for walkabouts and talks as soon as possible, preferably way before you even get to the CTICC.

Tip 3: Bring money for wine. And food.

I managed to sign up and join Sunday's walkabout led by Iziko South African National Gallery's Andrew Lamprecht, who took us from one booth to the next, interspersing each leap with informative tidbits about the various artists and their work.

"This is by far the best Art Fair I have ever attended," said Lamprecht during the hour-long tour. "You can actually see that the artists have put in the work this year."

A comment with which I fully agree. There were more paintings, more sculptures, more photographs. And far less New Media and video art. It was an aesthetically pleasing visual feast from one booth to the next.

There was an underlying theme of inclusion, empathy and cultural signifiers – a welcome move away from the snootiness and elitism often associated with the art scene. But Ed Young remained Ed Young at the Suburbia Contemporary Art Gallery booth.

"What sets this year's fair apart is its unique leadership by five women who possess a rare quality known as empathy. Unlike many other international fairs that focus on following trends and mass-selling art, these women care deeply about Pan-African art and its significance on the global stage," said Christopher Moller outside the Christopher Moller Gallery booth, which featured the works of Lionel Mbanjwa, Sizwe Sama, David Olatoye, Frans Smit, Azuka Muouh, Joseph Ntensibe and Michael Gah – whose work encourages meaningful debates and discussions on overlooked topics.

Another booth I spent some time in was the blank projects gallery. I'm always fascinated by how minimalist they can go but still claim their artworks are strong. They give off Maurizio Cattelan vibes and I really would not be surprised if ever they taped a nail to the wall and called that art.

The blank's booth at the fair featured Igshaan Adams, Jared Ginsberg, Donna Kukama, Sabelo Mlangeni, Kyle Morland, Asemahle Ntonti, Dineo Seshee Bopape, James Webb and more. And the thing about the "more" is that you actually had to look for it.

"Perhaps it's true that we are known for our pared-down or mini-

mal approach to presentations, but for our part we simply focus on showing strong work by artists whose practices we find compelling," said blank projects' Hannah Lewis.

Not far from blank was Southern Guild's booth featuring Terence Maluleke's exhibition on historic tapestries produced at Rorke's Drift in the late 1960s and 1970s.

"This year Southern Guild made a significant impact at the fair with a dynamic presence across three booths. Our showings in the curated sections were resounding, sell-out successes. Our main booth also performed exceptionally well," said Lindokuhle Nkosi, head of media and cultural strategy at Southern Guild. With more than 100 galleries and 375 participating artists, it is quite difficult to cover and see all of the work at the fair. One might need more than one day.

Something that caught me off-guard, in a hidden corner not far from the VIP corner (I so frequented to save a few rand), was the City of Cape Town's Emerging Artists' booth.

The City's Emerging Arts programme supports under-resourced artists in the early stages of their careers by providing them with training, mentorship, networking opportunities and exhibition platforms. This year's young artists were Ayabonga Ntshongwana from Langa, Yankela Madlevu from Khayelitsha, Hari Lualhati from Parklands, Bevan Blankenberg from Northpine and Fazlin Hoosain from Woodstock. Proper paintings. Proper sculptures. They delivered something beautiful to actually look at and buy.

I also want to mention how much I enjoyed Natalie Paneng's engaging images.

I want to mention Katherine Pichulik's Pichulik Atelier stand too.

I want to mention how good the Goodman Gallery was.

I want to mention the beauty of the Dylan Lewis sculptures.

I want to mention Stevenson's Mawande kaZenzil's *Bazothini Abantu* cowdung painting.

I want to mention how I revelled in the Cecil Skotnes, Peter Clarke, Walter Battiss and Mary Sibande corner.

I want to mention everything.

But I cannot and must apologise to all the other galleries I did not mention by name.

Nonetheless, I am reliably informed that most, if not all booths, had impressive sales at this year's fair.

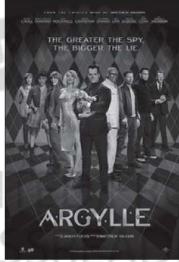
That would explain the bottle of tequila I mentioned earlier. The bar has been set. See you next year at the fair.

EMAIL CTNEWS@INL.CO.ZA FOR NEWS QUERIES AND TIP-OFFS



SEE MOVIES AS THEY WERE MEANT TO BE SEEN, ON THE BIG SCREEN

SHOWING AT STER-KINEKOR THEATRES
FRIDAY 16 FEB - THURSDAY 22 FEB



BOOK US

Ticketline 0861 668 437

SK APP

FOLLOW US

JOIN US

SK CLUB

0861 988 895

SK FAN

MORVIES CLUB

0861 988 895