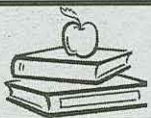


The full picture

This series of 10 books on local artists will not only be useful in Arts and Culture, but also in other learning areas

BOOKS



Debbie le Roux

reviews

GREAT AFRICAN ARTISTS

by Donvé Lee

(Awareness Publishing) R1 495

I wish I'd had Donvé Lee's series on Great African Artists when I was a scholar as I remember barely being able to make out the images in my monochromatic art notes.

Many art students gained very little from such inferior reproductions unless they had active imaginations and a passion for art. By contrast, the full-colour images in Lee's books are of a very high quality and will inspire learners. I wonder if a similarly dull school experience may have triggered Lee's desire to produce these appealing books.

Recently, there has been a necessary surge of books being written on South African artists. Lee's series fills a gap as it is aimed at the younger learner and so complements the excellent "Taxi Art Books", which are better suited to learners and teachers in the Further Education and Training phase or Grades 10 to 12.

The 10 books come in hardcover as a beautifully boxed set. In each of nine books, Lee covers a different South African artist and the tenth book is an *Art Dictionary*.

Artists from the early to mid-1900s, as well as contemporary artists, are in the selection. Many of the featured artists, like Dumile Feni, Dan Rakgoathe and Willie Bester, do not have information on them that is readily available. As each artist in the series has been well researched and important dates are listed at the back, the books provide a good resource on South African artists for art teachers. In addition, each of these books includes a glossary

and an art project. In the glossaries as well as in the *Art Dictionary*, Lee includes and clearly explains a wealth of art terminology and related concepts like "abstract art", "etching", "process", "subject-matter", "exhibitions" and "originals". These are useful tools which will aid teachers in enriching the learners' knowledge of art.

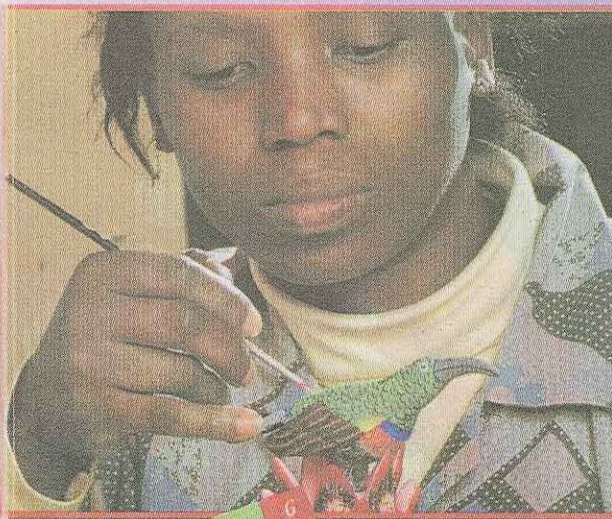
The text is suitably challenging as the books address relevant issues like racism and apartheid, initiation schools and Aids in an accessible way. Teachers could use these issues to create links to other projects and discussions across many learning areas. For example, Peter Clarke's 1964 oil painting, *Ruin*, is about the coloured community in Cape Town who were forced to move from Simons Town to Ocean View during the apartheid era. Here, there is an obvious link to teaching Human and Social Sciences.

Many other possibilities are triggered by the images: for example, in the book on William Kentridge, *Drawing us into a New World*, Lee includes two humorous linocut images of *Walking Man*, depicting a man turning into a tree and *Telephone Lady*, which shows a woman's dancing legs, but her upper body and head is replaced by an old-fashioned Bakelite telephone. These images could be used as a springboard for a drama exercise or they could lead to quirky, lively poems or prose about how it would feel to morph into something else. Lee includes apt captions for the images but I think that she could perhaps have included suggestions for links like the ones above in a separate *Teacher's Guide*.

In an otherwise pleasing set, I found that the level of the art projects suggested in each book does not match the challenging level of the text. They are fun ideas but are definitely aimed at younger children. The text suits slightly older learners ranging from Grade 5 to

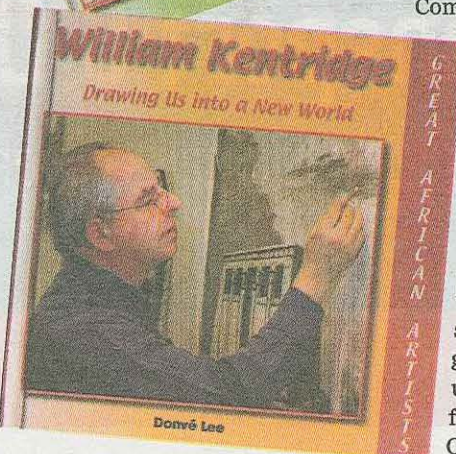
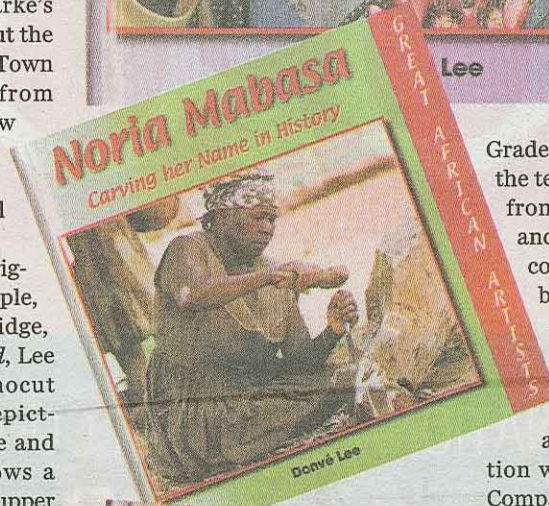
Bonnie Ntshalintshali

A New Way with Paint and Clay



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These hardcover books are a good resource on South African artists

Grade 9. The projects disappoint as the techniques are not approached from a new and inspiring angle and link only superficially to the content of the book. If the set is bought for personal use this is adequate, but as a resource for art teachers, the project ideas are just a beginning.

For example, Lee writes about Kentridge's collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company and describes his interest in shadows and the magical beings he creates out of ordinary objects. Stimulating. But why, then, is her suggested project in this book an ordinary puppet made from a sock, glove or paper packet?

How about this alternative: start the learners off by getting them to create their own shadow creatures, and then get them making puppets with unusual forms that are derived from their shadow creatures? Older learners could tackle relating a narrative through a series of drawings done in Kentridge's manner.

In addition to the need for more substantial art projects which are

directly inspired by the text, there is a further argument for a teachers' resource to link the projects to the learning outcomes in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). This would be an attractive time-saver for teachers as they are required to link all projects in this way to the NCS and, of course, every teacher would appreciate suggested marking criteria for the art projects.

I do not mind that the books are only about art as the school I work at is fortunate to have teachers for each area of Arts and Culture. Teachers who do not have this luxury may not like the fact that the series does not link to Arts and Culture as a whole as it fails to incorporate the other arts (drama, movement, music and dance). They may prefer one of the more general textbooks, fast becoming available, which do address Arts and Culture as a whole. However, it must be pointed out that these textbooks can obviously not go into the same depth about art and artists.

In addition, the fact that the series focuses on art does not alter the fact that a creative teacher will find plenty of inspiration from Lee's books and could devise an integrated Arts and Culture course using the books as a starting point.

Overall, I would recommend the series as both the text and colour reproductions are excellent and the books are inspiring and a pleasure to look at and handle. They will make a good addition to any school library and will provide teachers with a stimulating resource which can be useful not only in Arts and Culture, but also in other learning areas. Lee has made a quality addition to the available books on South African artists and I am sure that teachers who use the books will agree. As there are so many other South African artists who need to be researched and explored in this way, I look forward to the possibility that, in time, Lee will take up the challenge to continue the series.

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