

Botha's boxed views delight in the ordinary

Melvyn Minnaar, *Cape Times*

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Capetonian Lien Botha is the latest artist to feature in the *TaXi* series of books about contemporary South African art-makers. The launch at the Bell-Roberts Gallery is accompanied by a small exhibition, on show until next week.

Any artist who compels you to look and look again, to discover the intrigue of the delusive, deserves the honour of public record. The gentle, if sometimes unsettling, visual magic Botha has produced over the past decade or so makes publication of this smart overview a timely honour.

The *TaXi* series of booklets about contemporary South African artists was initiated by the French Institute of SA in 2000. Issued by David Krut Publishing, the series aims to extend the profile of South African artists and develop an active educational programme and teaching resource archive. In this, it has established itself as accomplished.

It all adds up to a publication to relish

Botha is the fifth artist to be featured. The publication illustrates her career since 1990 with dedicated examples from her oeuvre and various art projects. An elegant, informative text by Ashraf Jamal spins a poetic context for Botha's remarkable and distinctive personal art.

Included are quotations from poems by Karen Press, with whom Botha has collaborated on several projects. It all adds up to a publication to relish.

TaXi-005 and the small launch exhibition put a welcome spotlight on a charismatic, single, visual voice. In his introductory essay, Jamal draws a well-argued link between Botha's modern stance here now in South Africa, and the classic surrealist impetus of Giorgio de Chirico whose art is "caught between a dream and waking".

At the same time, the exquisite compositions she constructs, mostly in the confines of boxed space, behind glass or not, but sometimes in the abandon of the public arena, yield to the respect and ritual admiration of artists such as Joseph Cornell - the American who taught us the exotic language of small visual dramas.

Imagery which connects crisply with viewers

Botha works in photo-based media. That means her point of departure is the image recorded through the camera lens. But this is only the beginning. Made and found pictures are then reconstructed and shifted around in subtle contextual rearrangements.

Sturdy awareness of and regard for the traditions of classic Western painting and picture composition, underpin an intuitive talent to arrange and make imagery which connects crisply with viewers, even if they have to sort out the lingering visual puzzlement. In many ways, hers is the old trick of catching the eye with the uncanny, but once seen, the work invades our viewing time.

To quote art historian John Peffer in a different context: "Time becomes heavy in these pictures - time is tied down, and the weight of everyday things becomes a delight for the eye."