

SOCCER WORLD CUP

A Celebration of Soccer Artistry, Mixing Styles From Around the World

By JEFFREY MARCUS

JOHANNESBURG — For most South Africans, soccer looks like the images in Clint Strydom's high-contrast black and white photographs. Barefoot pre-teen boys sporting broad smiles kicking a ragged ball through sand and dirt in KwaZulu Natal.

"I wanted to do the rural side of soccer," Strydom said. "Most of these boys are never going to see the stadiums."

Inside the stadiums at the World Cup, millionaire professionals with lucrative endorsements showcase their artistry on manicured fields, but Strydom, a South African photographer, and many of his fellow artists, chose to showcase the game in a decidedly different light.

"The passion is there, the love of the game is there," Strydom said. "Whether it is the World Cup or not."

The tournament has drawn the world's attention here and the organizers of 2010 Fine Art, an international art exhibit, are hoping it will raise the profile of South African artists and generate interest from abroad in contemporary African art.

"There has always been a natural synergy between sport and art and culture," Craig Mark, the exhibit's managing director, said. "If you go back and look at bushman art, early cave painting, you see sport being illustrated within those paintings. In Africa, football plays a very important role in terms of our daily experience."

While Strydom captured scenes of rural African soccer, the American painter Marcus Jansen's urban expressionistic paintings set the sport in a surrealistic asphalt jungle.

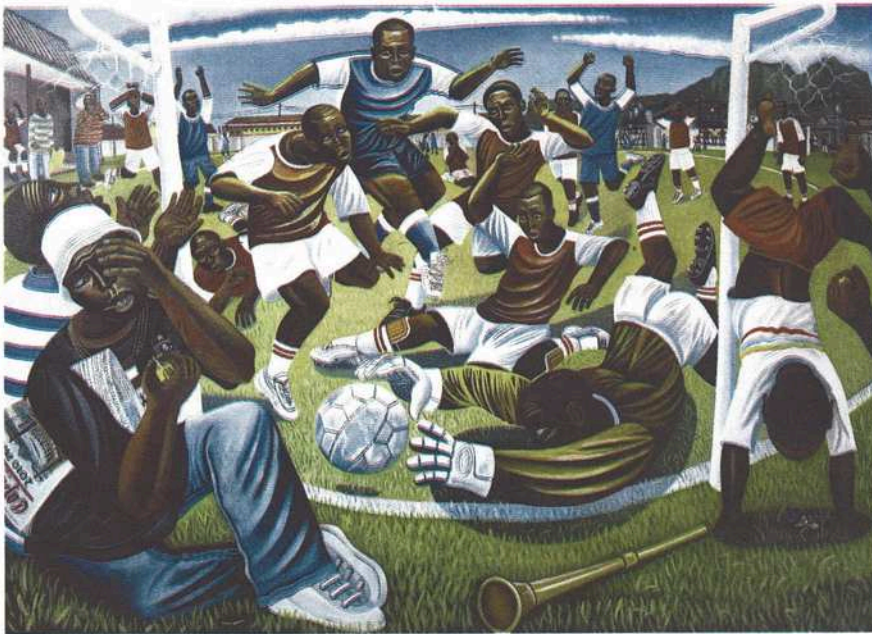
"You have a lot of these artists having never come to Africa but interpreting what they feel Africa is all about within their works," Mark said. "Some of the works are very abstract in nature. There's definitely a soccer theme that carries throughout. In some of the works, animals play quite a strong role."

Artists from the continent as well as five from each of the 32 countries competing in the World Cup were commissioned to produce original works celebrating the game in Africa. The result is an eclectic exhibition that includes works from some of Europe's most celebrated contemporary artists, like Sir Peter Phillips and Ed Gray from Britain, and unknown artists from North Korea whose photo-realistic paintings honor the soccer player as proletarian hero.

The auctions for the African collection, which opened July 4, and the international collection, which opened the next day, will be conducted online by Graham's Fine Art Auctioneers through July 29. Bidders can view the works at the gallery at Melrose Arch in Johannesburg or online.

Tim Howard, the United States goalkeeper, and some teammates bought signed prints of Strydom's photographs, and other works were presented to Sepp Blatter, the president of FIFA.

"There are several South African artists involved and they each have their



ED GRAY



JAMES GEMMILL



PETER PHILLIPS

Artists representing Africa and each of the 32 countries competing in the World Cup were commissioned to submit work celebrating soccer in Africa. Guguletu Strike, above, by Ed Gray of England; Dreaming of the World Cup, far left, by James Gemmill of the United States; Africa Twirl, left, by Peter Phillips of England; and Slide Tackle by Keith Calder of South Africa are part of the exhibit.



KEITH CALDER

ONLINE: SOCCER THROUGH ART

Craig Mark, the managing director of 2010 Fine Art, talks about the first FIFA licensed fine art exhibition to run in conjunction with the World Cup. nytimes.com/sports

own very unique styles," Mark said. "Each has been selected for that very reason. We feel that their works have the power to become iconic images of this World Cup."

In addition to Strydom, the South African artist Esther Mahlangu contributed her paintings in the style of the Ndebele wall paintings, colorful geometric designs traditionally used to decorate houses of the Ndebele people from the southern Transvaal region in Northwest South Africa. Her work is internationally recognized and was used as part of a BMW advertising campaign in 1991.

"With such simple geographic shapes, she's actually managed to portray the game," Mark said.

Keith Calder, a South African sculptor, created a series of bronze statues for the exhibit, including several large-format versions that stand more than nine feet tall and are on display in Nelson Mandela Square, in Sandton, and other public spaces around Johannesburg.

The exhibit opened in the spring and runs through July. The 160 international artists, chosen by a team of curators recruited by an art publisher in South Africa, were asked to provide original works that drew inspiration from soccer and Africa's first World Cup.

The exhibition is licensed by FIFA, which cost its organizers a sizable, undisclosed fee. In the past, soccer's world governing body has commissioned official tournament posters, but this is the first time FIFA has licensed original works of art. Robert Spaul, the exhibit's general manager, said that the official imprimatur of tournament organizers helped with marketing.

"If we didn't have the license from FIFA, we wouldn't have been able to recruit the top name artists from around the world," Spaul said.

It was challenge enough to identify artists in some countries, like North Korea. The curators worked through an art publisher in Italy who had contacts with different schools in Pyongyang.

"I thought we would get some fairly predictable peasants working in the fields with soccer balls," Spaul said. "What we got was some really photo-realistic-type paintings."

The five works show strapping North Korean soccer players with earnest, determined expressions — much like the North Korean players at the World Cup.

None of the submissions from North Korea were signed by the artists. Instead, each original was embossed with the name of the artist's school.

Spaul noted, "Individualism is not particularly encouraged."

Each artist will receive a percentage of the sale of each print, and around 50 percent of the sale of an original. FIFA too will receive a percentage.

"If you bought a T-shirt, there's a limited amount of time you can hang on to that T-shirt," Mark said. "An artwork that you're going to frame and hang in your office or at home becomes a long lasting reminder of your experience, your trip to Africa and this important event."