

WALTER BATTISS 

BY

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VOORGELÊ TER VERVULLING VAN 'N DEEL
VAN DIE VEREISTES VIR DIE GRAAD
MAGISTER ARTIUM
IN DIE FAKULTEIT
VAN
LETTERE EN WYSBEGEERTE

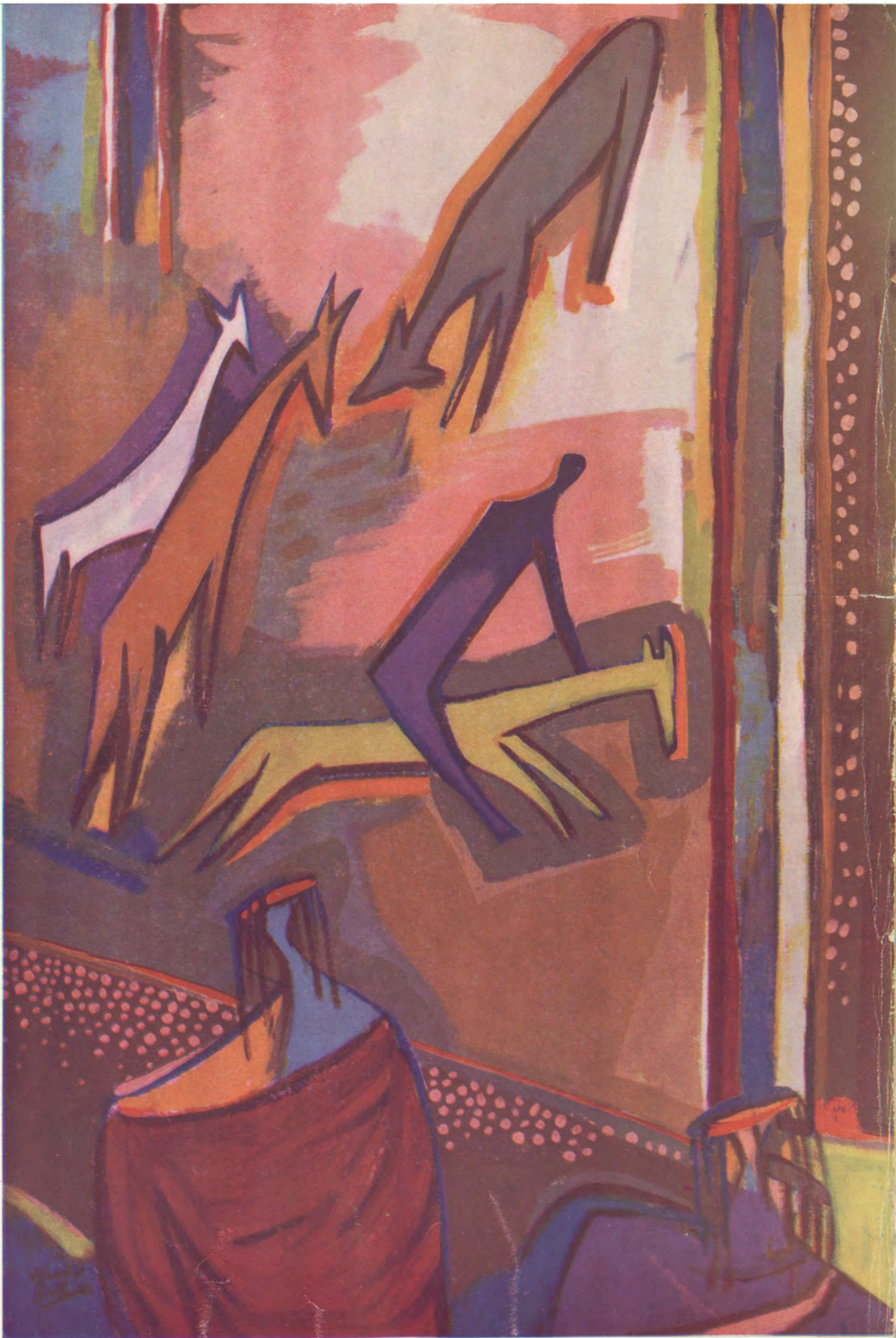
UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
PRETORIA

MARCH, 1963.

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Johannesburg.
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The sources of the illustrations in this thesis are
as follows:

1. Colour-slides by the writer.
2. Black and White photographs (postcard size)
by the writer.
3. Large black and white photographs by Alan Yates.
4. Colour prints by courtesy of Walter Battiss.

* NOTE: ONLY THOSE ILLUSTRATIONS MARKED BY THE ASTERISK ARE IN
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INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION.

It was in 1958 that I decided to write a thesis for the M.A-degree at Pretoria University. My subject was to have been "The Role Religion and Politics played in the Art of the last Decade of the Quattrocento (1490-1499)". After discussion with Prof. dr. H.M. van der Westhuysen, Head of the Department of Art History at the university, I decided rather to postpone study on this subject and to attempt something quite fresh and possibly more useful and valuable - namely "The life and Art of Walter Battiss", with the emphasis on his art. From the very beginning the study has represented to me a considerable challenge. In the first place I was at that time working under him at Pretoria Boys' High School; and although this had very many advantages in that I was close to my subject, it also presented the obvious danger that I might be too close and would lose the perspective necessary for the successful completion of such a task. Secondly there was the great difficulty encountered psychologically - namely that of being in the position to be able to patronize one who had achieved a position of fame beyond our borders, while I was, in spite of my years still a "young artist". It is true that I had been in charge of the History of Art at the school since 1952, but this responsibility only served to emphasize for me the difficulties inherent in this "father - son" relationship as far as writing an objective thesis was concerned. Thus it was that I came to consider the whole question of criticism (and biography) and I naturally looked amongst others to the most famous example in art history - namely Giorgis Vasari. The questions

I/ ...

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I asked myself were i) Did Vasari gain something in the way of insight by having lived after most of his subjects had died?; and ii) did his friendship with Michelangelo enhance in any way his judgement of that great artist's achievements? After study of his famous "Lives of the Artists" I arrived at the conclusion that a) his studies of Donatello, Fra Angelico and Leonardo da Vinci were amongst the weakest from a critical point of view; whilst b) his appreciation of the art of Michelangelo was perhaps the most profound "life" of all (and indeed his personal knowledge of this one artist clarified many of the problems encountered concerning the other artists about whom he wrote). When my relationship with Battiss changed from that of assistant to a senior one in 1960 another adjustment seemed necessary; but that was made easy for me by the supremely civilized attitude he displayed toward me on his return to Pretoria Boys' High School in that year, after holding the Chair of Fine Arts at Rhodes University. I had drawn up my plan of "attack" under various headings and I had written, by 1960 quite considerable notes covering various aspects of his art. But as I began to get the feel of his life, as it were illuminating his art, I felt more and more that this study should not be broken up into parts but should be written to be read in one movement and that the Sibelius Seventh Symphony should rather be my guide and not Beethoven's Ninth. In this way I could more truly capture the spirit of the man and his art even if a subjective note should creep in where a scientific, objective view would be more desirable. Should the latter

appear/ ...

appear to be so I felt that the balance would be restored by a section showing the sources of information with explanatory notes to any information not fully substantiated in the text.

The artist has been the chief source of the biographical material. When it became necessary to ask him for particular details of his life which were not available elsewhere (e.g. in answer to the question "Just how much practical tuition did you receive"), he would write out a page or two or more giving me many more details than I had asked for; and he wrote these notes in such a stylistically artistic way that I decided to include some of these as extracts, just as they were written, rather than to paraphrase them, for they to help us to see the man called Walter Battiss. His writings reveal the simplicity and the complexity of this extraordinary man; they show too his love of words both semantically and for the beauty inherent in them as inventions of sound. So that it is Walter Battiss that I must thank most; as the ever patient, always considerate and generous subject of this thesis, who never made me feel a nuisance even when I telephoned him for the tenth time in one day; and it is he that I must thank for the magnificent illustrations from his "The Artist" of the Rocks" and "Fragments of Africa" that he so kindly gave me and which enhance the visual presentation of this book. I should like as well to record my deep gratitude to Prof. dr. H.M. van der Westhuysen for the great and invaluable help he has given me in relation to the scientific and planning side of the thesis; also Mr. Alan Yates for his magnificent
photographs/ ...

photographs, which he had carefully filed away for posterity; and thank to the many others who made available to me their personal knowledge and information concerning the artist for they helped fill in the numerous gaps. The value this thesis has in the history of art in South Africa will I hope justify their willingness to talk about the artist in a free and spontaneous way. There are no books about Battiss to which one may refer; only newspapers and periodicals; and the artist himself. During the course of this study I have discovered that many people seem to have made the artist their "hobby", some storing up cuttings from newspapers, while others have collected odd drawings and paintings; and all of them will proudly tell you of the different styles and periods they have discovered. I expect in time some of these "fans" will make their contributions to the literature about Walter Battiss; but in the meantime I hereby humbly present my own view of this extraordinary man and in particular, his art.

Laurence Vincent Scully.

W B

"Frankly, I was not much impressed with the other chap's work. It was all Paris and London, watered down. Very decent workmanship often, but no original, convincing force of its own. No original contribution to the wide field of artistic creation.

And that is exactly what your work is in my very personal and humble opinion. I have seen Canadian, Australian, American, and now South African painting. You are an outstanding artist amongst them. Because not only do you thoroughly understand Western contemporary art, and are a master in it, but you fill it and feed it convincingly with a deep understanding of your own country.

Plenty of others have, of course used the visual scene of their country as their subject. But in your work only did I feel the total and harmonious integration of the metaphysical Africa and good contemporary painting....."

This was written by the distinguished Dutch sculptor Titus Leeser, in a spontaneously written letter to Walter Battiss, after seeing his work in Arnhem in a travelling group exhibition of South African art during 1958.² In the past few years there have been many such laudatory criticisms of the artists work, both here and overseas, but I have chosen to quote the above letter not only because it was completely unsolicited, but also because it shows the pleasure the work of one highly gifted artist can give another. Further, it is always pleasant to find one's own judgements confirmed from authoritative source. And there are many in South Africa who now will agree with Leeser's evaluation. Those who come into direct contact for the first time with Walter Battiss are immediately aware of his rare sensitive spirit. This

sensitivity/ ...

sensitivity is apparent firstly, in the choice of clothes he wears, the hand-painted ties³ and grey corduroy trousers and subtly-coloured shirts. But of course that is only incidental to the man, who reveals himself the moment he opens his mouth to speak. As he talks, about art and people and other things, we notice how alive and aware he is to everything. He is, we soon discover, hypersensitive to nuances of colour, tone and shape. We are reminded of Cezanne and the way of the natural sensation-
alist - this is one who responds to his physical environ-
ment in the same way as sensitized paper does to light -
directly and immediately.⁴ But whereas Cezanne in his later paintings seemed to see things in a detached and even unemotional way, Battiss (who would be embarrassed by any comparison with the great Post-Impressionist) is much more at ease with his emotions and is consequently more expressionist, both in his day-to-day relationships
in
and his painting. There is no dichotomy between life and art for him, for he has found his way. He loves people and art as he loves nature and Africa. He com-
municates to us a sense of excitement too - a real joy of
living. His conversation ranges far and wide to Greece and Rome; to natural history and ancient artefacts; to the politics of the day and the timeless quality of art. He is an unusual and strikingly different person in every way. He has, as well, the ability to put at ease all who meet him; and to bring out not only the best in them but to inspireⁱⁿ them the desire to create. His love of nature

is/ ...

is profound. He has said, "The yellow rock-shelter, the red earth, the green sky, the red cloud, the black water - these pull me"⁵. Titles of late paintings show this attraction - this pull. SHADOWS OF THE CAVE. FIGURES IN A WHITE LIGHT. STILL LIFE WITH LUMPS OF HAIL. THE MOUNTAIN TOP. FIGURES IN SUNLIGHT: ARTIST OF THE ROCKS.⁶ The last mentioned title is significant. It is close to my feeling about the artist himself. That is where he is happiest - close to the earth and amongst the ochres, transforming mud into Vermilion, Cerulean blue and Ivory black; scratching on rock, carving his name, and living the life of man before the Fall. "The harmonious integration of the metaphysical Africa and good contemporary painting" is clearly seen in the F.C.L. Bosman GUINEA FOWL.⁷ It is inspired by the gouache painters of POTO-POTO,⁸ those semi-civilized artists of the Congo, who, in the last decade or so (before UHURU), sought to express themselves through a medium brought to them by their European masters. Their work is decorative and slight, with its bright colours on black paper. Yet in some examples we find a treatment which is unique and purely African. It is this that has interested Battiss. In this picture the rocks and birds are used only as a source of reflected light; and they have the quality of decorations on a painted idol seen in the glow of a forest fire by night. They evoke the mystery and terror of the witchdoctor's power. The birds are fragmented and reduced to a pattern of beads; but the black of night overwhelms their innocence and sets the mood for this study in symbolism. The subject

is/ ...

is guileless and free, but the manner of presentation evokes the world of African sorcery.

A Cologne critic,⁹ wrote, in connection with the S.A. Travelling exhibition already mentioned, the following:-

"The big sensation was Walter Battiss who is the only one to have considerably developed his own personal style, rooted in the culture of his native country. He has - in contrast to the others - received no European education. His artistic development is indissolubly bound up with his studies of the South African cave pictures. He concentrates solely on the effect of colour of which, by comparison, van Gogh made only sparing use. Out of the thickly laid-on colours, with a glittering white dominating the centre of the picture, Battiss cuts - for so it must be called - a host of small figures in contour - a whirl of humanity. He is thus one of the few who have not only succeeded in attaining international recognition but also to achieve the unique synthesis of prehistoric and modern art."

The story of Walter Battiss began the year Cezanne died. Let him tell you of his beginnings :¹⁰

"I was born in my grandparent's house which is still standing in Bathurst Street, Somerset East, Cape Province. Date of birth: 6th of January 1906. Somerset East is a pretty little Karoo town with the Boschberg Mountains rising up steeply behind it. The father of Wille m de Sanderes Hendrikz, the sculptor, Carl Buchner, the painter and Nadia Nerine (Judd) were born in this little dorp.

My/ ...

My great grandfather of the Royal Engineers, built forts for Lord Charles Somerset. The oak avenue he planted is still in Somerset East.

My grandfather built the Town Hall and a framed document stating this can be seen in the Town Clerk's Office.

The memories of early childhood are, a little earthquake, Halley's Comet, snow on the mountains and the aroma of a sweet-scented verbena bush in my grandfather's garden.

My father was the owner of a Bicycle Depot and had won over a hundred prizes for cycle races. In 1959 when I was in Grahamstown Professor Guy Butler's father remembered how known he was for cycling in the Eastern Province - the great sport that came before motor car racing.

My mother came out with "Uncle George" Webster in 1902 from London and was first at Middleton and then in Somerset East. This side of the family is related to the 1820 Settlers. My mother's brother Alfred Price, was an artist and an outstanding student at the Royal Academy Schools. Later, as hack work, he designed costumes for Chu-Chin Chow. Another member of the family was a French uncle, Uncle Alias, who was a costumier, under Royal patronage. Charles Alias has been described as a great genius in the creation of fantastic costumes and headdresses, even greater than the famous Clarkson in these fanciful creations. A. Nathan writes: "The Alias

reproduction/ ...

reproduction of the designs by Picasso for the Three-cornered Hat are some of the loveliest we have .

Alfred Price was killed in the first World War in Flanders in 1917. I have a brother Alfred, born in 1907 and a sister, Doreen, born in 1910.

Way back in history we find a Captain Battiss in 1826 fighting a slave trader off Salem, America. Further back we come to the French ancestor Battisse, who was well-known as a marionette player. The family came to England from Normandy.

My mother told me that I started drawing early. She had shown me the letters A, B and C and I lay on the floor with a candle beside me to copy them. I did A and B and instead of doing C I drew the candle. I remember very clearly filling many sketch books at the age of 6. At 9 I drew and painted in every spare minute and the boarders at the Private Hotel run by my father used to be flabbergasted at my talent. For me it was such an ordinary exercise of pleasure that I simply couldn't understand why everyone wasn't doing it. My parents never spoilt me and I was fortunately treated as a very ordinary normal child. At Gill College I think no one worried in the least about my excessive love for art. All this was to the good, life was very lovely and food and play controlled by idle moments as relaxation from art." "

In his early teens the artist began entering art competitions some of which were arranged by the Farmer's Weekly; and in these he won quite a few prizes.

He/ ...

He had no art training as such and is one of the few artists in South Africa who has had virtually no formal tuition. His Fine Arts degree which he obtained only in his 40s was through the University of South Africa and was largely academic and non-practical.¹²

It was to Koffiefontein in the Orange Free State that the Battiss family moved in 1917 and two years later they finally settled in Fauresmith. His father still lives there. His environment in Somerset East was mainly an English-speaking one and the move to the Free State meant, to an extent an upheaval both physical and mental. Now, the youthful Battiss was the odd man out - the Rooinek in an Afrikaans atmosphere. It would be easy to exaggerate this feeling of isolation, so that I mention it only in passing and because it links up with a more personal feeling of apartness of a probably much more intense kind. His father being obsessed with sport and prizes, the young artist found that his interest in art was not clearly understood by either his school or his family. His mother "who has always understood my vision"¹³ encouraged him in art, although "with the wrong dreams of the Academy ahead",¹⁴ so that a certain amount of conflict was present. Every boy wishes at some stage or another to identify himself with his father; and when this proves impossible in such an important thing as an attitude toward a vocation - then the conflict is real - even though when not made manifest by any overt action. Consequently, it was on his mother that the artist relied for encouragement in his artistic activities. Here too there arose the father-mother/ ...

mother conflict of identification. Can it be that the series of drawings and paintings on the theme of mother and child which he was to make in the early forties, was related unconsciously to this problem? For in the drawings we see a mighty male-type mother with a puny child, completely overwhelmed by the enormity of the difference in size between the two of them. It may be objected that what I have written here is pure speculation and I am content to have it so accepted. One cannot prove these things. Just as Freud's theory - that Leonardo was unconsciously painting his two mothers (one illegitimate and true, the other legal though only a step-mother) in his "Virgin and St. Anne with Child" - may never be accepted. However the fact that a certain amount of conflict did exist is confirmed by Battiss; and it may be that this provided the necessary "spur to prick the sides of his intent."

The artist's first commission was to paint the rose garden of Mr. Klasie Havenga the local M.P. who was later to become Minister of Finance.¹⁶ In 1924, after having passed his matriculation examination and "leaving school with a fetish certificate",¹⁷ he went to work as a clerk in the Magistrates Court in Rustenburg, a small dorp in the Western Transvaal ^{near} ~~in~~ which President Paul Kruger ^{lived} ~~grew~~ ~~up~~. He was to stay there for a full five years, during which time he painted many scenes of the mountains, kloofs and waterfalls of this typical Bushveld district. By this time, Battiss had acquired a style that was realistic (in the sense that everything was recognisable and without noticeable distortion). This developed into a more impressionistic/ ...

impressionistic style which was not so much of the kind we associate with the 19th century French painters, but rather that of the kind Velasquez revealed in his Medici Garden paintings of about 1650.¹⁸ For it was not his use of colour, or even the method by which Battiss applied pigment (although there is a similarity) that reminds us of the Spanish master; but his seeing the picture as a whole, rather than the sum of numerous separate parts (such as we see in the paintings of say the van Eycks). His observation of detail in nature is true and unsentimental. It is important here to remember that in South Africa it was a rare experience to see good painting in the 1920's; so that it is all the more noteworthy that Battiss did not succumb to the current vogue of sun-splashed homesteads. There is a considerable depth suggested in these early works, but this rarely disrupts the two-dimensional or flat pattern essential in a painting; essential because in spite of any illusion of space that is created, it should be acknowledged in the paintings that it is an illusion and that ultimately, a painting is made by man, and is primarily a flat surface upon which a number of arbitrary marks in paint are made. Space illusion can often spoil a composition, depending on the size of the canvas. An interesting comparison from another angle is that between Tintoretto's Louvre sketch Il Paradiso¹⁹ and the mighty finished version in the Doge's Palace. In the final work, the gaps have been closed and the whole scene has been brought close to the picture plane. When it came to actually painting the final, huge 84 ft x 34 ft canvas,²⁰ Tintoretto obviously realized he could not upset the architectural/ ...

architectural proportions by any space concept he might have wished to create. If we look again at the Paris sketch we see that something is lacking. It is grand as an illusion, but unsatisfactory as a painting. Artistic values have been sacrificed to serve some other end. (Incidentally it is only in this sketch that Tintoretto came near to any such departure from aesthetic values).

To return to Battiss and his early painting, it is clear that he was fully aware of the business of making a painting. To do just that, was something remarkable in the art climate of South Africa in the 1920's. By simplifying each plane or facet into a more or less unified tone he achieved a sense of design or pattern. One remains conscious of the painting as something composed as well as being an observation of a particular scene. His colours are subdued but never dull or lustreless. They maintain a sense of purity and intensity even after the addition of white. These early paintings are notable not only because they display an unusual sensitivity to the South African landscape, but also ^{because they reveal} the skill with which he handles tone. His technique is bold and sure. In order to keep his colours clear and maintain the exact relationship of tones, he often used as many as 37 brushes on a small landscape.²¹ He has written: "The supreme quality in a painting is tone - so subtle, that form and colour mean nothing without it".²² However, many of his works at this time were in the nature of sketches in oil and water-colour, and do not form an important part of his finished works.

Through/ ...

Through his studies, he came to know intellectually how the earth had risen and fallen as a result of geological upheavals; the structure of mountains and rocks; the distinct anatomy of trees; the different formations of clouds, the effects of atmosphere in aerial perspective and the variety of effects of light in the morning and afternoon; and the visually comprehensible relationships possible between man, animals and nature. Aloes, plants and grasses too were analyzed for their structure and growing habits. He built up a formidable repertoire of the South African scene. The Bushveld and the Magaliesberg was where it started. Later he was to travel far and wide, to the Soutpansberg and the Drakensberg, across the high-veld to the Karoo again; and then to the forests of Knysna and the Cape - to Duivelskloof near the Rain Queen Majagi; and further north into the Rhodesias and beyond. The vocabulary of his personal, artistic language and style was formed and mastered in Africa. Together with this acquisition of visual and analytical knowledge, he extended his range to include everything he saw in nature. His early childhood had been for him (at least in some respects) idyllic. Perhaps his paintings and drawings are all attempts towards the attainment of a similar state of peace and happiness to that which he experienced in his first years; an attempt; also to create with visual symbols, a representation of an ideal existence; which, in his view, natural man now seems largely to have been denied in his over-complicated civilization. Smog and noise and speed and clamour oppress us in the cities, even in Southern Africa. We need the

LONG/ ...

LONG YELLOW GRASS, CRYSTALLINE ROCKS, YELLOW-WOOD FOREST,
THE PLEASURE OF WATER;²³ and in his art Battiss has reminded
us of our dependence on these simple pleasures.

In his FRAGMENTS OF AFRICA, a collection of
woodcuts and drawings published in 1952, the artist wrote:

"When I came down from the mountain of initiation
I was articulate and free. For I had conversed with the
white rocks and local trees, the coucal and the rhebuck.
I had conversed too with the ancient men of Africa who
spoke to me through their picture writings on the walls
of their c̄umbling rock-shelters.

The twisted rivers and the endless veld spoke
of animate and inanimate space.

At night the waters and flats reflected the
macrocosmic spheres above my head. So the planets and
their moons and star suns, twin comets and nebulae shone
hesitatingly upon the river fish and upon the long
tambookie grass.

The hollow of the mountain held a white man's
farm. When I looked on the clear contour of the new white
boy in Africa who had been both these in the Mopani trees,
who loved his father's cattle, who knew where to find under
the ground the rare sweet honey of the small wild bee,
who knew what red wood made the lasting fire, who knew all
the African knew, then I understood the white boy belonged
to the ancient men and was thus, with me a modern man.

Finding these things and selfishly possessing
them had changed me.

All this was my peculiar discovery but I had

no/ ...

no desire to paint an anecdote about them but rather to make pictures of them in such a way that I exposed the happy change they had worked within me.

Yes, I made and want to make pictures which are a colour language of the haphazard experiences of my African existence.

These pictures I call fragments of Africa but they are also fragments of my self."

In the 1930s Battiss began seriously to study the art of the Bushmen. Alfred Fowler²⁴ had introduced him to these paintings when he was still a child; those examples, to be found on the kopjes along the Riet River near Koffiefontein.

As a child he seemed not to have been particularly impressed by them, but when a youth he picked up a prehistoric artefact of the Fauresmith industry at the gate to his house. Now he was ready to be stirred by this ancient stone fashioned by primitive man in crude gropings towards a later excellence. His interest in prehistoric art was to make it possible for him many years later to create such pictures as "WHITE SHAPE ON A RED BACKGROUND"²⁵ and the SKOTNES "DRIFTWOOD ON SAND"²⁶. In both these his knowledge of ancient cultures (particularly those of Africa) is apparent. In the latter we have a strangely ascetic, thinly-painted and deliberately planned work in sober, restrained colour. The rocks and wood, which project towards the spectator, belong however, to the underpainting; while the white sand background has been put in over and around this primary "wash" or glaze of blues and browns. The effect is of a stencil technique and is related/ ...

related, in this respect, to the two serigraphs reproduced in this book.²⁷ The massive rock shapes at the top, are balanced by the all-absorbing interest of the driftwood in the lower two thirds of the painting. The latter seem to move in procession before the great immovable monoliths, which are static, eternal symbols of permanent truths. The driftwood shapes are the "passing show", formed by the ebb and flow of life. Mankind itself; but here symbolised and suggested by the objects he has made through succeeding ages - artefacts, amulets and language signs.

In 1939 he was to publish his first book on these people and their art, in his "THE AMAZING BUSHMEN".²⁸ But it was in 1932, when reading for his B.A. degree (English and Geography majors) that he made a thorough study of the paintings in the Orange Free State.²⁹ He was probably the first contemporary artist to do so, although I know that at some time Hendrik Pierneef began also to take a deep interest in these paintings. By the 30's Battiss had become deeply involved in researches of this kind and was greatly excited about their relevance to contemporary painting. For through these works he came into contact with a race who had lived as close to nature as any man ever had. These primitives knew by heart the sights, sounds and smells of Africa; they knew the sun as friend and foe; and they were a people who had lived a life of the greatest intimacy with the forces of nature - forces, which they knew could destroy the weak but which when understood would make the strong stronger. The paintings by these little people, } which Battiss saw in their river shelters and mountain

aeries/ ...

aeries, showed not only a knowledge of the anatomy of the eland, the buck and the elephant, but also in considerable measure, an absolute joy and delight in the subject and in the creative art of painting. It is this sheer pleasure in handling the materials of the artist, that must surely have had a profound effect on Battiss. For he came face to face with an art that owed nothing to the Egyptians, Greeks or Romans; or to any academic tradition whatsoever. It is an art born out of the most certain knowledge and love for the Bushman's own environment and his need to come to terms with it. This need is true of all artists and mention should be made here of a particular aspect of this problem, which often confronts artists in Southern Africa. For many of them are country-born and find difficulty in adapting emotionally to the cities to which they are drawn by their cultural needs. Battiss has expressed some of their dissatisfaction in some verses he wrote in 1940: ³⁰

While the veld trees grow leisurely
 And the mountains hang like breasts
 firm-set and fast-feeding the gentle
 stream with blue white milk I see in the city
 the constant inconstancy, the breaking down
 the building up - ceaseless commotion of ~~destruc-~~
 tion.

The flux that spells distrust in man's attempt
 to last.

Restless as the sea and lacking permanence, the
 city worms within itself and never sleeps.

As/ ...

As flowers grow in pots so babies grow
and men exist in cells lit with an artificial
light. The woman robs herself of sleep and
apes the blossom of the sun upon her cheeks.
The spire of the church first-kissed of the
new sun, lives above the shadows of a hundred
walls that block the light. So sepulchred
the holy edifice wearies despondently, deserted
through distrust.
Yet the warm heart of man is not effaced by
cold cement. He seeks escape and finds the gate.

In "The Artist of the Rocks",³¹ a handsome book on
Bushman art published by the artist in 1949 we find the
results of his many years of study in this field. It
has forewords by both the Abbé Henri Breuil and Professor
C. van Riet Lowe. It is a beautifully produced book
in which he tells us many of the secrets of the Bushmen.
About their paintings he says: "They never reached to an
understanding of TONE but avoided it. Their art is there-
fore a flat art without an envelope of air".³² But on the
other hand "The South African rockpainters were the only
prehistoric artists who adequately mastered the difficult
problem of foreshortening so that their paintings of
animals shown in foreshortened perspective are unique".³³

Elsewhere he has noted that the Bushman used:

- 1) no shadows;
 - 2) no diminishing sizes of forms as in normal perspective;
- and

3)/ ...

3) the horizon disappeared - leaving a flat aerial view." ³⁴

These characteristics became basic to Battiss's mature style. A painting, which clearly shows this is the mature Schlesinger FIGURE ABSTRACT. Over a powerful yellow underpainting, the artist has imposed an even, brilliant orange over the larger part of the canvas. He has left the yellow to shine through in a pattern of horizontal and vertical areas. Over these dazzlingly bright totem-shaped patterns of yellow, he has drawn in ivory black, symplified and rhythmically drawn details of African figures, singly and in groups. The figures are engaged in the age-old pursuits of the kraals - conversation, listening to music, eating, drinking and sleeping. There is no horizon, no shadow and ~~no~~ perspective. The message is clear and the colour gives us the clue. The SUN is supreme in Africa - the black men are now become its colour and the green veld, under its heat has ~~taken over~~ the orange of ripened fruit.

Speaking to a meeting in Pretoria ³⁵ he said:- "It was believed that ancient man had as finely developed a brain as modern man, and had a deep appreciation of art. This was indicated by the fineness and strength of their drawings." It is obvious from these remarks and others the artist has made that he has identified himself strongly with the Bushmen. "There seems to be a permanent beauty in the cave paintings. If we survey European art over a few decades we are surprised at the short life of some of the art. Yet", he continues, "we can look at the cave art

without/ ...

without the feeling of disillusion and shame for yesterday. The cave-art values are timeless".

His association with the Bushmen and their art has lead Battiss to have identified himself so thoroughly with them, that like them he has almost never signed any of his paintings (i.e. since the 1930's, after he started studying these people seriously). But the parallel between Bushmen and Battiss must not be carried too far. The chosen subjects of the prehistoric artist did not include all nature, but only himself, his fellows and the animals that sustained him.^{35a} Battiss has extended his view to include the whole of nature in all its complexity. The holism of Smuts finds its artistic expression in the art of Walter Battiss, Some more titles indicate this: FLIGHT OF ANTS. INHABITED POOLS. FIGURES AND ANTHEAPS. SWIMMERS WITH WATER DRIPPING FROM THEIR CHINS. JUG AND FRUITS. GIRL WITH UNUSUAL HAIR. CONVERSATION. RUNNING FIGURES. CHILDREN WITH BIRDS. VOLCANIC MOUNTAIN.³⁶

"An artist³⁷ delights in life", the artist has said; and this explains to us why his paintings, particularly of the last decade or so give one such a deep sense of joy and feeling of well-being. In his work there is often nostalgia but seldom any sign of sadness, gloom or despair. Vivid excitement and splendid calm - these are the extremes of his art. His latest paintings often dazzle the eye with their brilliance of colour. In his "Flight of Birds over Ruins"³⁸ of 1960 the warm orange-pinks of the stones silhouetted against a calm and tropical turquoise sky, are the

static/ ...

static setting for the magnificent rush of birds so ingeniously suggested by the dramatic impasto sweep of asgraffito-d pigment above the ruins.

In 1961 he did a series of ZANZIBAR PAINTINGS and two of these especially evoke aspects of the extremes mentioned above. THE PERROT, ZANZIBAR No.5 is an abstract, which suggests the ancient walls and elaborately carved doors of this East African port. Its delicate pinks, off-whites and pearly greys are allied with a viridian and contrasted with a rich indian red. The design itself is complex with its flat areas, its circles and the drippings of running paint; and this combined with his technique of scumbling and glazing opposing opaque stripes or lines of paint, presents a remarkable synthesis of the elements of his technique with the visual image he has created,

The Bennett ZANZIBAR No. 6 suggests calm only in its repeated horizontals, but in colour it is far more evocative and dynamic. The segments of brilliant colour contrasts, with their gouged out "mystery" symbols, form a striking testament to the savagery and violence that at times flares up behind the ancient walls of this East African metropolis. In the hinterland lies the primitive and also the glamorous; and the artist gives us a peep at this through these (stained-glass) windows of voluptuous pigment. The shape at the top with its "eye", evokes a greater form incorporating the other shapes and which strongly suggests a du Buffet-cum-African infant. In this respect a note of surrealism creeps into Battiss's art.

Looking/ ...

Looking back to his early work it is obvious that he has travelled a very long way in these 30 years. The metamorphoses from the subdued early landscapes to the late twenties - to the striking compositions just described, was of course not accomplished without a tremendous dedication. To-day it is his colour more than any other quality that moves. He is undoubtedly South Africa's colourist par excellence. The revolutions in art in Western Europe, which began to gain full force at the beginning of this century, were not felt in South African art for many years. This country was largely unaware of the changes wrought by Monet, van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso and Braque, Dada and Surrealism; and the other "isms" had not then become "wasms".³⁹ In Europe they had left their residue of constructive contributions to what may be called the mystical body of art. They had established the autonomy of colour, and as Venturi⁴⁰ put it, the autonomy of art itself. Painting and sculpture are no longer dependent on or subservient to literature, religion or politics. Art is an activity nearly as old as man and can stand on its own feet, proud and free; confident in the knowledge of its own great traditions; and the rightness of its cause - which is to serve and feed the spirit of mankind. Just as the true Christian spirit of humbleness, love, faith and hope has always existed side by side with the horrors of religious wars, corruption in Church councils and the Inquisition, so art has kept its values and purity in spite of politicians, charlatans/ ...

charlatans and poseurs.

In South Africa before the Second World War the dominating figures were the realist-romantic painters Roworth and Gwelo Goodman. The avant-garde was represented by Irma Stern, François Krige, Terence McCaw, Frieda Lock, Gregoire Boonzaaier, Lippe Lipschitz, Maude Sumner, Maggie Laubser, le Roux Smith le Roux, Battiss and possibly Pierneef.⁴¹ In 1937 these younger painters formed an association called the New Group. "This marked the turning point in favour of the young new artists in South Africa and for the first time the young artists had a voice and used it", writes Battiss.⁴² The name New Group was suggested by Terence McCaw.⁴³ With the exception of Frieda Lock, Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser who were Expressionists, most of the other artists in this group, except Pierneef, were Impressionists. Battiss took a leading role in the organization of the group and in the struggle against the oppressive conservatism of the ruling hierarchy in South African art. They held a number of exhibitions in the Cape and in the Transvaal. In ~~Cape Town~~ they sold practically nothing, while in the Transvaal they sold fairly well.

Irma Stern and Hendrik Pierneef had strong links with Europe and had received a solid training there. But to a great extent they painted in styles owing much to their teachers and in my opinion never really escaped them. Irma Stern who is a painter in the best sense of the word had already by the end of the 1930s developed her tremendous gift for handling pigment and colour. Her draughtsmanship

was/ ...

was superb. Her art created the strong impression that she was very much a European expressionist looking at Africa; rather than an indigenous artist speaking in the language that comes most naturally. Pierneef, whose spirit was certainly South African, and as everyone knows who had the pleasure of meeting him, a "ware Afrikaner" of the finest type, nevertheless did not acquire a technique uniquely his. His flat, geometric style did suggest strongly the vastness and grandeur of South Africa; but his methods remained to my mind unexceptional. These two artists are very important figures in the history of art in this country and it is because of this fact that I have dared to suggest that they had some problems. When we stop looking at things critically we stagnate and die. I believe it to be our duty to say what we believe to be true even if we appear somewhat irreverent towards some of our sacred images. Irma Stern and Pierneef and a handful of others were monoliths in the landscape of painting in our country. All honour to them,

The time had come to move on and a new torch-bearer had to be found. He was to be Walter Battiss. In terms of handling of paint, texture, tone, line and colour; and more importantly in the creation of a new set of symbols born out of Africa - I say that he is the leader, with the faults of a leader, fragmented and incomplete. But still, the transition from impressionism to a more modern approach had not taken place in his art, when in 1937 he helped form the New Group. Although there were very few artists at that time who could be considered popular/ ...

popular, apart from Roworth and Goodman, it is true to say that Battiss's works then had an appreciative public, just as the early Blue and Rose Picasso's were appreciated in Europe. The reader must forgive me if I appear to suggest in what follows too close an affinity between Battiss and Picasso. I wish the comparison that I make only to go as far I actually say here, and no further. Battiss has become known as the Picasso of South Africa and it is for this reason and for others I stated here, that I am drawn to write of their links with each other. In the early years of this century Picasso looked to Africa for inspiration and the result was his "Les Damoiselles d'Avignon" and cubism. Now Battiss was to reverse the process and look from Africa to Europe for his inspiration. At the age of 32 in 1938 he made his first visit to Europe. For him "it was like a visit to the moon".⁴⁴

From the comfortable world of a pre-war South African existence he was projected into a world of strange and violent forms. Forms which seemed to him a destruction of the human image and of all that he had been lead to believe to be authentic. In his travels from London to Paris to Florence and Tangier, he encountered alongside the ruins of ancient monuments, people with ideas and attitudes largely alien to him. Like many people the world over he had not fully appreciated the uniqueness and quality of some of the things around him. Bushman art is mainly realistic but the art of the negro to the north is expressionist; and Battiss now realized for the first/ ...

first time that "European artists were stealing from Africa the vital forms and colours",⁴⁵ which he and the other contemporary artists of his own country had ignored. Matisse had worked in North Africa⁴⁶ and had taken the bright, lambent colours of the deserts, mountains and lush growth of the sun continent and had simplified them to produce a new direction in European art. Battiss recognized in the paintings of Picasso and Modigliani the debt they owed to the ancient art and natural forms of Africa. For Battiss this was probably the most important lesson he was to learn: he must open his mind to everything that contemporary European painting had to offer, and he must open his eyes to the autochthonous forms of the whole of Africa with its multitude of tribal cultures. There were many questions for which he sought answers, but he now saw quite clearly that what had seemed revolutionary was really evolutionary. The styles of art and the attitudes towards so-called reality, had continuously changed as had man himself. Art had never existed in a vacuum even though it must have appeared so in Ancient Egypt. Those static flat forms changed to the dynamic three-dimensional forms of Greece: but each of these styles mirrored ways of life and the fundamental attitudes of those civilizations. In this 20th century the story of man's loneliness and uncertainty is told in the many different styles and approaches of its most powerful artists. Scientific excellence and moral hopelessness is to a large extent the theme of our lives. Artists are trying/ ...

trying to suggest ways out of this impasse. It is natural, however, that their work should reflect some of the chaos, which has marred the great achievements of this age. As Battiss realized and ~~for~~ accepted the fact of change as a basic factor of our cosmic existence, his own course of action became clear. On his return that year to South Africa he was to begin his experiments with oil painting specially and art forms in general.

The 1940s proved to be the years of experimentation. The artist was to continue drawing and painting in a realistic style as well as to develop more radical ideas.

During World War II he continued to teach at Pretoria Boys' High School as art master, after joining up to be a War Artist with Terence McCaw and François Krige, and being refused by the Transvaal Education Department to leave education.⁴⁷ He had been there since 1936 and in 1940 he married Grace Anderson, the artist and art lecturer. He and his wife built a delightful house out in the veld a few miles from Pretoria. The design of the house was based on a building to be seen in the background of one of Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes. The Battisses showed a print of this painting to their friend the distinguished architect Norman Eaton and asked him if he ~~could~~ would design something in that genre.⁴⁸ It is a simple house of charm with its white-washed walls and blue shutters; a place where they lived with their son Giles, their dogs and cats. It is appropriately called Giotto's Hill. To-day it is surrounded by many other houses and
has/ ...

has been incorporated into Pretoria. But within the boundaries of the plot it retains its rural charm. In the garden the Battisses have left untouched the original koppie - a part of the natural veld in the heart of a Pretoria suburb. The artist has also collected a variety of aloes, succulents and small African trees and shrubs, which he has let grow in another corner of his garden. They form a living reference library, always present and often studied as they change over the years.

Just prior to his overseas visit the artist painted a number of portraits including LENA.⁴⁹ This bold portrait in oils of a young coloured girl I find not altogether satisfactory. Its size - about $1\frac{1}{2}$ times life-size - is incompatible with the subject and at the same time the head seems to confine and to crowd the edges of the canvas. On the other hand it captures the youthfulness of the subject without any suggestion of sentimentality. The colours are rich, even somewhat crude; ~~and~~ the tones are in places at variance with the form. The painter is obviously a disturbed person and is not entirely at one with his subject. Perhaps the painting of a dark skinned person is one of the problems of form in painting, which remains to be solved.

Some of the fairly conventional types of paintings he continued to produce after his return were LANDSCAPE AT TULBAGH. FOUNTAINS VALLEY and PORTRAIT OF A FREE STATE YOUTH. But in 1940 he was to begin figure compositions, which were to become a major theme in his art. Some of

these/ ...

these were in watercolours and many of the subjects were inspired by the schoolboys he taught. He saw boys painting in the art room, swimming in the school pool and on their bicycles. These paintings form a delightful record of the numerous and typical attitudes and situations that boys get into. Highly representational in style ~~they are~~ nevertheless bear the stamp of the genuine artist. The groupings are original and full of movement, forming pleasant and often exciting compositions.⁵⁰ In spite of these qualities they remain a by-product of his main theme - the pattern of African life. However, these more or less straightforward sketches lead to some much more interesting oils like FIGURES IN A MOUNTAIN AERIE; BOYS IN A MOUNTAIN POOL AND THE HOT SPINGS.⁵¹ ~~Here the figures are~~ simplified and elongated with small heads and are shown in a variety of different postures. They seem to lead a pagan existence; the emphasis is not so much on their humanity as it is on their nearness to nature and the earth. The Nankin BOYS has its origins in these paintings - but is a more sophisticated example. The seated figures are in harmony with the earth and are only separated from it by the broken line that delineates their form. The artist has used the knife to create a patina, which implies earth, foliage and sky. Only the boys are clearly defined for they are the lords of this ~~operation~~ and nature is their servant.

⁵²
 BOY WITH A MELON of 1940 was a much greater departure from his pre 1938 style. Here the boy is reduced almost/ ...

almost to his extremities - his neck is as large as his torso, his arms and his legs. His feet are almost non-existent and his hands are indicated by only a few crude strokes. The body is twisted into an unbelievable posture. But the IDEA is of prime importance and the figure is distorted to make clear the meaning of the picture. Pagan delight and the paramountcy of the desires of the flesh are symbolized by the supreme position in the picture of the slice of melon, with a big bite taken out of it. It is like a primitive sacrifice of the partly eaten melon to the gods - perhaps an offering to Bacchus. Rhythmically we take our clue from the melon itself, for its shape is repeated in the slice and again in the legs and is implied in the shapes in the background. The knife is related to the slit in the melon, while the pips in the slice and in the melon, and those spewed out onto the floor, are decoratively linked to the eyes of the boy. The colours of the background are flat but vital and glowing, warm and sensuous; while the boy is a warm pink painted over a cold blue - a traditional colour scheme for painting nudes.

In the same style, which I call the BRUTE or ZIMBABWE STYLE, is MANDOLIN PLAYER AND BAOBABS⁵³, which depicts a large heavy figure with an enormous neck and gross torso playing on a very frail-looking mandolin. The head, behind which is a shape which might be a hat or a slice of melon, is contorted, and may be trying to play and at the same time see what appears to be her child, as it disappears off her lap. In the background are

two/ ...

two crudely drawn representations of baobab trees, from which hang a few fruits from the paper-thin branches. The flattening of form, the distorted and contorted figures of this BRUTE period with its crude drawing and barbaric disregard for civilized sentiments must surely have a significance of the kind found in dreams. Psychoanalysis may throw considerable light on this group of paintings. I am not qualified to do that; but I suggest that in other terms these paintings must be of great interest to overseas critics, if not a positive influence in the field of painting. For they are a serious attempt by a highly civilized artist to understand and penetrate beneath the surface of the "primitive" blacks; to come to grips with his soul. The incredible overlapping of cultures in South Africa - between the YELLOW, WHITE and BLACK - so close to each other physically and yet so distant psychologically, ~~remains~~^{presents} a problem yet to be solved. But Battiss in these paintings was the first artist to try to find a meeting ground for them - especially the WHITE and the BLACK. In order to do this it appears that he had to temporarily bury his "WHITENESS" in order to comprehend the BLACK. But this is obviously true only up to a point, for the methods he used owed everything to European culture.

In ZIMBABWE MOTHER AND CHILD⁵⁴ we reach the supreme example of this period. In this almost savage painting we feel the artist has himself become a primitive African; one who was perhaps enslaved in the prisons of one of those architectural/ ...

architectural complexes in Rhodesia of which Zimbabwe is the greatest surviving example. Michelangelo's Christ in his last Judgment⁵⁵ is outrageously gross even as a symbol of supreme power. In Battiss's picture we are apt to recoil in horror from the de-humanized mother with her emaciated and puny child. I am reminded of Goya's frightening "Saturn devouring one of his children",⁵⁶ It shows the same disregard for accepted associations about this sacred theme. Again a mighty neck, a face and torso of Zimbabwe stone and the mother's arm shaped in the chevron pattern of the ancient culture of the ruins. The influence of Picasso is strongly felt in the drawing of the mother's legs,⁵⁷ while her hair or head-dress reminds one of the golden head of Tutankhamen,⁵⁸ but without its elegance and grace. I regard this as one of the artist's most important works; for this painting in particular shows the complete merging of his spirit with that of Africa's. In this respect I feel it perhaps goes further than did Picasso in Les Damoiselles d'Avignon.⁵⁹

Bushmen art researches continued to occupy much of the artist's time. He discovered new caves and copied hundreds of paintings. He pointed out in 1941 that there were lessons to be learned from the bushmen:- "They used no landscape background or foregrounds; there was no chiaroscuro, sunlight or even natural colours; and they also painted mythological and even surrealistic creatures."⁶⁰

In 1944 he held an important exhibition in Johannesburg of his copies of African rock paintings.⁶¹ In opening the exhibition Prof. van Riet Lowe said that

Battiss/ ...



27. THE DELILA RHEBUCK. Watercolour copy by the artist. From 'The Artist of the Rocks'.
Pl. II.

Battiss had shown an understanding of these paintings not achieved by any previous copyist. On the professor's advice he visited the Abbé Henri Breuil while he (Battiss) was overseas in 1938. While there he studied the prehistoric paintings in the classic caves of France.⁶² Later he observed that in South Africa's ancient paintings there were clearly 4 phases - archaic, transitional, climax and degeneration.⁶³ Two years after this exhibition of copies, Battiss discovered a Prehistoric Art Gallery in the Free State.⁶⁴ It was a large rock shelter in an almost inaccessible position in the extreme South of the Zastron district.

It was discoveries like this that lead to Battiss becoming in the popular mind always associated with the Bushmen. To a certain extent his reputation as a painter has suffered because of this; for people do not like to acknowledge more than one talent to any one man; he must either be a good painter or a good copyist or a good researcher - but not all of them at once. I think Rachmaninoff disposed of that false theory as pianist, conductor and composer; and of course the artists of the Quattrocento should have put paid to that long ago. But prejudices persist in spite of proven facts - the id is more powerful than the ego; ~~yet~~ ~~but~~ I am confident that whatever judgment is finally proclaimed Battiss will certainly go down in history as a painter - artist first and researcher second. But he was and is much more than has been indicated so far. He has been a fighter for art, for cultural values and for the rights of young artists/ ...

artists. Speaking at a meeting in 1949 he said:

"The economic stress which the country as a whole is feeling does not frighten us. When the material kings fell from their thrones, the arts came into their own. Governments could be of assistance to the arts with money and encouragement, but never by controls and laws. The arts were the last independent values left and it ~~was~~ ^{is} our duty to keep them free from material powers." ⁶⁵

BOY AND ROCKS of 1944 ⁶⁶ was another attempt at extreme simplification, but, by its very nature it does not lend itself to the same extreme distortions of the Zimbabwe Brute style. Patches of flat dull colour symbolize the rocks which are set in variegated, strongly textured background reminiscent of the surface of rock shelters. The boy, except for his protruding head and Egyptian style arms is squashed into a similar shape to the rocks. "I wanted to steam-roller everything to the thinness of tissue paper", writes Battiss. "It became quite an obsession. Complete elimination of sky and the third dimension" ⁶⁷. The artist was to change this painting some years later. He wiped out the boy and substituted a FATHER AND SON EMBRACING. Its ⁶⁸ title became THE PRODIGAL SON. The theme of flattened figures obviously held for him a powerful fascination - or as he says "an obsession". As a painting this work lacks the sureness of most of his canvases before and after. There is hesitation in many of the contours of the rocks and the surface of the background seems strangely insensitive. ⁶⁹

Nonetheless/ ...

Nonetheless the artist must have thought highly of it for he submitted it for exhibition at the Venice Biennale of 1950 and it was accepted.⁷⁰ There was an outcry in the House of Assembly in Cape Town about it and I find myself⁷¹ regretfully somewhat in agreement with the popular view of the painting. It was just not good enough. I say regretfully because in South Africa those who paint or sculpt are very often told by unqualified people what they should or should not paint. They must paint this and not that. Art illiterates or art morons tell artists that they have no right to exhibit their work: I mean influential art morons - people in high places who can influence others solely because of the responsible positions they hold. And yet they have had absolutely no training in the arts. They have absolutely no conception of why the Mona Lisa is held in high regard by responsible⁷² critics; they would confuse a Bandinelli with a Michelangelo⁷³ and they even, incredibly, confuse a brush-stroke with a knife impasto. And yet they will lay down the law about the duties of the artist to his public. They forget entirely the duties of the public to the artist; and these are considerable. They seem unaware that when they attack the artist they are threatening the whole cultural fabric of the future. It is sad but they really cannot distinguish between the charlatan, the amateur and the artist. They make speeches, open exhibitions and generally tell the artists, those who swim in art all day long, just how they should paint and what. But it was worse in 1938 and Battiss was a pioneer in the

struggle/ ...

struggle against the "arrogance of ignorance".⁷⁴

In the early thirties he obtained his Diploma in Teaching⁷⁵ but it was in 1941 that he received his Degree in Fine Arts from the University of South Africa. (he did not complete the straight B.A. at Witwatersrand University).⁷⁶ The period during the war was centred around his teaching and painting. I have little idea of his reaction to war, except that I do know he abhors the whole conception of brute force. Perhaps he externalized his his feelings on the subject by painting those BRUTE paintings.⁷⁷ However, at the end of the war when many of his former pupils returned from active service, he was there at the airport to sketch their welcome. He published a few of them in a small book called HOMECOMING.⁷⁸ These lively sketches remain evidence of his continued interest in drawing from life.

By the mid-forties Battiss's exhibited work was all thoroughly "modern" and Anton Hendriks, Curator of the Johannesburg Art Gallery remarked to the artist "I see you have made the change".⁷⁹

The Nankin CATTLE AND EGRETS of 1947⁸⁰ was exhibited at the TATE Gallery that year, in the travelling exhibition of South African art. It is in the style of "Figures in a Mountain Aerie",⁸¹ but a much more classical composition. The diagonals at the lower corners formed by the shepherd's stick and the tree stump are too obvious a device to enjoy. But the gentle curves of the trees and the placing of the cattle and birds almost overcome this

one/ ...

one jarring note. The general impression of rural tranquility is strongly suggested, and there are some lovely shapes made out of the cattle in perspective.

The van Schaik FLOWER STILL-LIFE of the same period is an interesting example of the artist's ability to control a multiplicity of detail. Its success depends on that and in the subject itself. The brushwork is lively but there is only a suggestion of the colour he was to use within a few years time.

GRACE AND GILES is a lovely unfinished work in which tone in colour is well handled. Although at first glance there appears to be an alarming amount of detail, a closer look shows that this is only suggested. The half-tones always impregnated with colour, balance with the flashes of orange scattered at intervals over the surface. The picture is signed "To Giles with love from Daddy".⁸²

In 1949 he took an exhibition of paintings to Italy under the blanket title ART CLUB OF SOUTH AFRICA.⁸³ At this time he was painting such subjects as STAMPEDE (which was related to the MOUNTAIN AERIE series), WOMEN GATHERING RUSHES, I and II, and ZEBRAS IN THE GRASS⁸⁴ which was reproduced in the London STUDIO.⁸⁵ Other works he did at this time were in complete contrast to these paintings. He was experimenting with the complete destruction or tearing apart of form in such pictures as "Women combing their hair"⁸⁶ and "Boy with Cat".⁸⁷ In the latter work the boy is reduced to a paperlike structure which is grotesquely twisted, turned and tugged as if he had been

put/ ...

put on the torture rack. The cat which sits between his emaciated legs is pulled up to meet the egg-sized head which thrusts down from the shoulders.

These two pictures show a strong relationship with Picasso's "Dancers" of 1925, both in the disregard for solid form and in the consequent reduction of the flat figures to their basic articulations. The free and loose technique in which they are painted is reminiscent too of the above painting. Battiss has in many ways a strong affinity with Picasso. They are both researchers and experimenters; they both have painted in numerous and different ways; and they both proceeded from realism to more abstract work and at the same time have never completely abandoned references to visual reality. Battiss admired Picasso as the world leader of modern art and I think it fitting to record here the meeting in 1949 of the two artists - the one little known at that time outside his own country and the other long acclaimed as the greatest draughtsman and innovator of the 20th century. Sabartes, Picasso's secretary, had a copy of "The Artist of the Rocks" for Picasso. Battiss writes: ⁸⁹ "One morning when I was in Kahnweiler's Gallery, Sabartes said to me, Picasso wants to see you. You are from Africa. He is very interested in what you are doing there. Kahnweiler phoned Picasso who said I was to come immediately, which I did. I visited him quite a few times. He was most friendly. We sat on the floor and looked at his latest lithographs. He put on show the clay oxen, I had given him/ ...

him. He gave me a proof of an unpublished lithograph.
~~I realized he was not only a great artist but a very~~
~~friendly human being.~~" Battiss, in an article in The
Star of Johannesburg,⁹⁰ tells how he presented the two
clay oxen, done by his servant, to Picasso; and how
pleased the great artist was to receive them. They
talked of art generally, and particularly of new methods
of lithography which Picasso had just invented. Battiss
was then 43 years old while Picasso was already 68. We can
imagine the two of them together, surrounded as they
were by "many treasures of modern art - immense abstract
paintings in black and white, a portrait in emerald
green and violet, famous pieces of sculpture including
Picasso's baroque cock, his large heads of women and
his great shepherd carrying a lamb. On the floor were
many of his new etchings and lithographs. There were also
two Matisse paintings, the "Forest" of Henri Rosseau, a
coloured lithograph by Braque and a head of a chamois by
Courbet. Among these valuable works were scattered
surprising odds and ends - a bicycle tyre and an African
stringed instrument hanging on the wall; below them a
bath, a pram and netting wire near a roll of coir matting;
little queer-shaped pieces of wood, unusual stones and
pieces of metal, nails, brushes, pens, bottles of coloured
inks, chalks and various small sculptures and two
bronze casts of Picasso's hands."

As they talked, mainly through sign language
- as Picasso speaks no English and Battiss no French or
Spanish, above them, "next to a long central table rested
a furled flag of red, yellow and violet stripes - a

magnificent/...

magnificent flag. Beside it was an enormous Spanish lithograph of a bull fight which looked like one of those popular coloured lithographs that were so common 50 years ago." For a long time they sat and deciphered each others signs and gestures and Battiss watched as Picasso "made it clear that he had done things with the lithograph that had never been attempted before." "I realized he was not only a great artist, but a very friendly human being. He let me wander round his studio as if I was one of the family. It was a great experience to taste the homely atmosphere of a giant at ease."⁹¹ Picasso was in a very good mood and the two of them were thoroughly enjoying themselves when M.Kahnweiler, his dealer came in to discuss an exhibition. This more or less terminated the meeting and after being introduced to Picasso's wife and 4 year-old son, Battiss said good-bye and walked out into the Paris streets excited and elated.⁹²

This elation was to stimulate him from then on. In the next decade his paintings were to show that an astonishing transformation had taken place in his art. Hesitant strokes of the brush and knife sometimes seen in his transitional work of the forties were now almost completely to go. The artist described himself as an African chameleon⁹³ and perhaps this aptly described his constant changing from one style to another - from expressionism to abstraction to naturalistic work and back again. His constant changing of approach, however, is limited to a few directions, all of which he has developed/ ...

developed to a high degree of perfection. I could list them as follows: 1) NUDE FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE, ANIMALS WITH FIGURES: - EXPRESSIONIST IN STYLE. 2) NUDE OR CLOTHED FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE - IN A MORE REALISTIC STYLE. 3) . ABSTRACT SYMBOLS OF AFRICAN FORMS. 4) CALLIGRAPHIC ARABESQUES.⁹⁴ In addition he has continually worked at WOODCUTS, painted wood constructions which remind one of Arp, TOTEMS, ETCHING, LINO CUTS and SERIGRAPHS. In 1961 he turned to POTTERY as well (these vases and plates were meant always to be seen in relation to flowers or fruit)⁹⁵

Whichever medium or style the artist uses from 1950 on, the essential characteristics are evident. Whether it be watercolours, oil or woodcut, the Battiss stamp is there. His masterly use of colour, with its power, translucence and vitality; the sensuously vibrant impastoes of thick pigment, combined with his rhythmic and supremely sure calligraphic line - these are now become hall-marks of his art. His exhibition in Johannesburg after a Central African journey in 1953⁹⁶ was to evoke ecstatic praise from critics and public alike. Errol Wilmot put into words what many of us felt about this exhibition.⁹⁷

He wrote: "Walter Battiss has splashed the walls of the gallery with an astonishing and lively display of colour in fifty paintings in the new familiar Battiss idiom, which combines delight in colour and movement and form with an almost impudent wrenching of
curious/ ...

curious and unexpected pattern from the material of observed phenomena. The vitality of this exhibition is such that upon its crowded walls, it is at first difficult to fix one's attention upon individual paintings; but after the shock of the initial impact has been taken, it is possible to discriminate, to enjoy and to begin to analyze. Not that it is easy to put into words the things that really matter in these paintings, for it is sheer enjoyment of the physical and sensuous qualities of paint that is the chief characteristic of his work. No other South African painter is so daring and yet so successful in the lavish use of bright, contrasting colours. And the range of the Battiss palette is extraordinary. There is as great a variety in the ways in which he has approached his subjects, gathered mostly during a recent journey through Central Africa. He can at times, appeal to a gentle conservative taste with a single pictorial composition like "PIPING HERDBOY" or echo the landscape painters of China in "FISHER FOLK, LAKE NYASA", or make an apparently random (yet inevitable) arrangement of figures, as in "LIWONDE MARKET". However, he seeks to interpret the fruits of his observation, there is underlying everything a spirit that is indefinable, but nevertheless, incontrovertibly Africa. Yet at the same time nothing could more eloquently pronounce the universality of an idiom that has been adopted and transformed into the Western European tradition. Battiss in this exhibition seems with complete success to have achieved a synthesis of apparently diverse and

hostile/ ...

hostile elements - barbarism and the ultimate refinements of civilized taste, vitality and contemplation, extreme individuality of expression yet clear and uncompromising communication." This review, which appeared in a Johannesburg newspaper has admirably captured the essence of the mature Battiss. and to show clearly the magnitude of his achievement. The words used here are similar to those used by overseas critics some years later and it is for this reason that I have quoted Mr. Wilmot at length.⁹⁸

The artist's experimental woodcuts of the late 40's and 50's were to receive immediate recognition overseas. In 1951 his NATIVE AND LIZARD and BLACK AND GRAY NATIVE FIGURE were acquired by the State Graphic Museum, Albertina, in Vienna; while in 1948 he received an award in the Olympics Art Section in London, for another coloured woodcut.⁹⁹ During the IIInd World War he had experimented with different woods and was the first artist to use South African boxwood. He used ~~nails~~ as normal factory made tools were unobtainable during the war.¹⁰⁰ His experimentation in this field has so far proved extremely fruitful - but it is the colour-woodcuts that are uniquely his, rather than the black and white prints of the war years. In his PEOPLE AND BIRDS,¹⁰¹ which has been exhibited in Europe and is now in my possession, we see a particularly successful example. In this monoprint woodcut the artist has combined successive layers of muted and rich earth colours, arriving at an overall textural quality suggestive of weathered rocks in the afternoon sun. The klee-like figures and the simplified birds, each contained in cocoon-like shapes

and/ ...

and linked together by an abstract reed and thorn structure, conjure up a pagan image of African innocence. The family group on the right, ~~absorbed~~, it seems, in its own private world of natural pleasure, suggests a universal and harmonious existence as old as the earth itself. In this woodcut we have a fine specimen of Battiss's power to integrate formal aesthetic principles of design with a strong visual and philosophic idea.

In FRAGMENTS OF AFRICA published by the Red Fawn Press in 1952, the artist presented a number of prints and drawings in which he clearly showed his mastery of the gouge and chisel. Several of the prints have exceptionally unusual textures, in which the ink is mixed with a gravel-like substance, as in CHILD UNDER LIGHTNING and THORN TREES, SPIDER WEBBS, FROST. This whole group is a testimony to the fertility of his mind and the power of his inventions. The noted painter Eugene Labuschagne asks the question: "Has Battiss ever repeated himself?" and then immediately proceeds to answer "I don't think ¹⁰² he ever has". Other titles here are worth quoting merely for the images they evoke. FIGURES IN SAND, AFRICAN PIETA, ANIMATED CONVERSATION, UNDER THE BAOBABS, FOUR WHITE ROCKS, ¹⁰³ BOY WITH HIS PETS, ^{103a} SWIMMERS UNDER WATER, THE NEWBORN KID, BICYCLE CONVERSATION and SONG OF THE COUCAL!

In 1953 the artist was appointed Head of the Pretoria Art Centre. This placed him in a position in which he was able to influence not only the young, but the old. He was able to organize exhibitions like that

of/ ...

of the paintings of 60 Rhodesian schoolchildren in 1955; ¹⁰⁴ paintings from the Congo; ¹⁰⁵ an exhibition of Transvaal Contemporary Art in 1953 and individual shows by such artists as Gordon Vorster ¹⁰⁶ and Cecil Skotnes ¹⁰⁷ (now President of the S.A. Council of Artists).

In those days the Art Centre was a meeting place for most visiting artists; and ideas were generated there which made their impact on a very much wider circle. In 1954 Battiss was made a member of the Executive Committee of the International Association of Plastic Arts and in the same year he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. ¹⁰⁸ He had already exhibited at the Venice Biennale on two occasions; ¹⁰⁹ and on the second occasion he represented the Union of South Africa at an art congress on St. Georges Island, Venice. He addressed numerous audiences on numerous aspects of art. These lectures inevitably contained many provocative statements designed to make people react; ¹¹⁰ and consequently the South African public became more alive to the concept of art than at any time since Jan van Riebeeck landed here in 1652. In 1955 he painted the Ivan Solomon mural "Animals of Pretoria" for the Pretoria City Hall; ¹¹¹ and he had already painted a number of murals for the Culemborg Hotel in Pretoria. None of these were a great success and we await with interest the completion of his large 40 foot mural for the Provincial Administration Building in Pretoria this year. ¹¹²

In 1956 he painted a prophetic series of eight

oils/ ...

oils called FLAMES OF AFRICA. In these he tried to predict the chaos, violence and complete anarchy which was to overtake large parts of this continent and in particular the Congo. In great slashes of swirling and vivid colour he brilliantly caught the excitement and terror of the holocaust to come. Reds and yellows in aggressively thick impastos seem to rage across the background of blueish-greenish-black. There are no individual forms apparent and no focal point - and I might add no apparent composition either. These flames could go on beyond the frame, just as the anarchy of the Congo itself could spread to other parts of Africa. In this painting the lack of composition is deliberate and symbolizes the absence of law, justice and government in the real thing. ¹¹³

In 1956 Battiss exhibited 40 coloured woodcuts, serigraphs and drawings, and 22 oils at the Imperial Institute in London. Among these was an oil "The Old Chief" which was reproduced in the STUDIO. ¹¹⁴

The two serigraphs reproduced in this book, ¹¹⁵THREE LIONS and ¹¹⁶FELINES AND ROCKS were also exhibited there. In these he has created animal abstractions which combined with the even colour of the silk-screen process has the effect of an African heraldry. In both examples the rocks are less original than the animal shapes which, however, I believe are in advance of Picasso's dog in his "Las Merinas" of 1957 and of which one is strongly reminded. ¹¹⁷

Perhaps one of the most significant branches

of/ ...

of Walter Battiss's art is his development of a hieroglyphic-type script. In this and in the calligraphical shapes based on Bushmen figures he becomes a part of a phenomenon of post war art in a number of countries. In his great publication "The Artist of the Rocks" he asks how arts poles apart can resemble one another.¹¹⁸ He discusses the ways in which this can happen under the headings PROXIMITY, MIGRATION, RADIATION, INTRUSION AND CONQUEST, EXTRUSION and PARALLEL DEVELOPMENT.¹¹⁹ Under the latter heading he writes: "Different groups who live in caves, hunt animals and fish, who paint with earth colours or engrave on the rocks will produce similar autochthonous arts without any contacts".¹²⁰ To-day could we not say that different groups who live in different countries but who live in the same kind of society with its newspapers, radio and books; who use the same manufactured oil colours; and who are all threatened by the same bomb, "will produce similar arts" even without any of the contacts which modern forms of communication make possible. For a glance at calligraphs of Michaux, Alcopley and Miro,¹²¹ to speak of only a few, shows a very strong affinity between each others work, although their personal handwriting is immediately discernable. The calligraphs of Michaux¹²² strongly suggest the cave figure paintings in the ancient caves of Eastern Spain.¹²³ With Alcopley there is an even greater similarity between his work and Battiss's. Both their work in this genre is usually small and in the nature of/ ...

of private aesthetic letters; the calligraphs are often superimposed over blocks of colour; and both have the same kind of decorative surface quality of Eastern calligraphy.¹²⁴ In a recent broadcast, which was transcribed by the Art journal FONTEIN,¹²⁵ Battiss said: "A very strange thing happened to me, a parallel development to me; it was in Paris and I met a man, Alcopley, and I had my sketchbook and he had his, and he took it out and showed it to me, and it was full of calligraphic drawings. He had been much influenced by the East. There is a certain branch of painting in Europe today which is Calligraphic. What had happened to me was this - I had been to Driekopseiland in Griqualand West, and there I had found strange drawings and strange symbols on the rocks. I had seen hundreds of them, thousands of them, and I had quite an itch to make my own kind of things. Now what happened was that I filled my sketchbook with them, all kind of peculiar shapes and then I had an idea to make my own kind of writing. I had been amazed when I saw Alcopley's work, that other people had been working on the same lines in Paris. This shows that Calligraphy is an international kind of art. I got very excited about it because I think it is very difficult to do. If you make one mistake on the canvas you have spoilt the painting, and if you make one mistake with your Indian ink brush you have spoilt the paper". Willi Baumeister,¹²⁶ whose undeciphered script formed an important element in his personal fight against

the/ ...

the brutality of Hitler, was another calligraphist whose work has a strong affinity with that of Battiss. In an age of automation and where power politics and "isms" tend to overwhelm the individual, the artist is often lead to believe that his own soul is in a constant state of siege. Can it be that it is on this account that abstraction is the style of 20th century art? And in these personal, undeciphered and undecipherable (?) calligraphs do we not find the most personal offerings of the artist. In a sense they are insular, introvert and narcissistic; but they also speak the universal language of the spirit that is spoken by Bach, Mozart and Debussy. To those who are receptive they speak volumes about man and the raison d'être of his existence.

Battiss's personal line language finds its roots in the bead work of the Mapogga¹²⁷ and in Bushman designs and paintings. I have noted an astonishing similarity between the famous DIANA'S VOW at RUSAPE¹²⁸ in Southern Rhodesia and the artist's CALLIGRAPHIC FORMS, 1957.¹²⁹ It seems that unconsciously he has completely absorbed the basic design elements of the VOW, transforming them into a new and exciting abstraction; an abstraction which says in rhythmic line much more than is said by it original inspiration, just as Debussy's "La Mer" tells us infinitely more than would a recording made of the surf. The earliest of these calligraphs dates back to 1955.¹³⁰ These are more rigid abstractions of animals and figure signs

reminiscent/ ...

reminiscent of the Mapogga beadwork. After this he painted dozens of similar works - black on a white or a soft blue background. His brushwork loosened up and sometimes it would be merged with the not quite dry surface of the painting ground. By 1962 he had introduced slashes of half-mixed colour put on with the knife while still wet; and sgraffitoed-out signs and symbols reminding one of the hieroglyphs of ancient scrolls. In his PASSPORT TO A PLANET¹³¹ he has started with a deep blue black background of thick paint which he has allowed to dry. Then with his knife loaded with orange he has swept across the canvas with a speed we might associate with a meteor. A light passage of green - and then over and around these impastoes he has scribbled secret signs in white, ochre-white and violet. The whole thing suggests an aesthetic offering to the gods of space - and is in this sense and also in terms of technique very much a product of 1962. His LOVE LETTER TO THE QUEEN OF SHEBA¹³² gives an impression of a relief map of the Upper Nile. The red "desert" which dominates the picture, is allied to the "river" of secret signs on the right by a superimposition of "hieroglyphs" surrounding a green stone or jewel. What the letter is about must remain a secret of the artist - and I suppose the Queen. But aesthetically the combination of different textures - oil paint, woodstone and sandare completely satisfying; while the dominant ruby colour with its complementary green and the neutral white of the signs make a strongly oriental image/ ...

image. Similar in feeling, but using only oil, is the tachist ¹³³ SECRET SIGNS (very similar in style to Alcopley's). Both these works must be regarded purely aesthetically - as being beautiful in themselves; as lovely objects which we treasure in the same way as we do precious stones. In the same year he began a number of ¹³⁴ LADDER ideographical compositions in which the signs now become more insect-like. The suggestions are: eternity, movement and hopelessness in the face of the future. Man is like an insect under the shadow of his future, struggling, working, yearning and getting no-where. A warning to us all?

Oil painting has remained the major field of Battiss's artistic endeavours and it is in this tradition that he will be finally judged; and consequently it is here we must look for his masterpieces. ¹³⁵ AFRICAN FIGURES WITH GREEN BACKGROUND is a superb painting of an everyday African subject - a woman selling fruit. Brush and knife are supremely confidently controlled. The story is told without any sacrifice of aesthetic value. First comes the painted visual image, then its detail and finally and permanently the Battiss idiom. ¹³⁶ FIGURES (1962) and ¹³⁷ BOYS (1962) show his technique to be equally sure - but in both these the colour is more intense and the areas of light and dark have been more equally balanced. In the ¹³⁸ BOYS the colour is related but considerably departed from the FAUVE experiment; a highly erotic and dynamic colour construction integrates with/ ...

with the static, almost classical arrangement of the figures. The colour in these paintings is much more intense than in AFRICAN IMAGE¹³⁹ (1955) and THE ETERNAL PALACE¹⁴⁰ in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. But the latter two paintings, so similar in treatment and content are among the artist's masterpieces.

André Malraux has written:¹⁴¹ "An artist's supreme work is not the one in best accord with any tradition - not even his most complete and "finished" work - but his most personal work, the one from which he has stripped all that is not his very own, and in which his style reaches its climax. In short, the most significant work by the inventor of a style." Battiss's AFRICAN FORMS¹⁴² in the National Gallery in Cape Town must accordingly rank, at this date, 1963, as his finest single work. Against a boldly patterned background of earth browns, and blues, are pictured in superbly coloured patches, elongated figures of the African, his family and his tribe. The work is built up in Battiss's characteristic method - firstly in patches of colour, big and small; and then when the paint is sometimes wet and sometimes dry, he delineates with a fine brush, the individual characteristics of each figure. Perspective is generally abandoned except where it does not interfere with the composition. The whole picture is dominated by the enormous father and mother figures and is a magnificent saga of the African kraal. The truth of the following words by a prominent/ ...

prominent Dutch critic, is amply supported by this painting: "Walter Battiss can easily hang in the company of the great European painters". Stylistically it contains all the elements of Battiss's art - with its complexity of figures subordinated to a simple overall scheme; the calligraphic delineation of form over patches of brilliantly coloured impastoes; the sgraffito scratches, which elsewhere is a major, and here a minor motif; the arbitrary use of perspective; the disappearance of the horizon and of shadows; and the magnificent sense of pattern, which is controlled and woven as it were into a tapestry of African culture and life. Perhaps this century will see the end of the neolithic type of culture still to be found all over Africa. If this is so then this picture, and the rest of Walter Battiss's oeuvre will be a worthy testament to the beauty and vitality of the mysterious and magical pattern he has observed and continues to observe, in this so-called barbaric continent.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES
SECTION.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS SECTION:

W.B. = WALTER BATTISS

W.B.S. = Information supplied by
the artist to the writer
by means of the spoken word.

W.B.WR.= Information written by
Walter Battiss for the
writer in answer to
specific questions.

<u>PAGE:</u>	<u>NOTE:</u>
1	1 letter dated 19-11-58 in the possession of W.B.
1	2 Exhibition of South African Art sponsored by the State Information Service.
2	3 Ex-pupils of W.B. are proud owners of ties with original Battiss ideograms painted on them. Usually black dye on a white material.
2	4 Any example of Cézanne's art would illustrate this point, but perhaps none so clearly as VIEW OF THE ARC VALLEY (no. 41 in the Cézanne published in 1947 by The Phaidon Press, Ltd., 41 Museum St., London, W.C.1).
3	5 W.B.WR.
3	6 These titles are from the artist's exhibition at Lidchi's Gallery, Johannesburg, October 1959.
3	7 In the possession of Dr.F.C.L.Bosman, 100 Brook Street, Brooklyn, Pretoria.
3	8 W.B.organized an exhibition of these works at the Galerie Nicol, Pretoria in September, 1955 (See reference to this on Page 43).
4	9 Dr.Lore Schatten, Cologne.
4	10 W.B.WR.
5	W.B.WR.
6	11 W.B.S.
7	12 W.B. has the following tuition: (i) 3 weeks at the Witwatersrand Technical College Art School, May, 1929 (Drawing); (ii) Etching lessons from Miss Emily Fern, 1931. These were private lessons which took place at irregular intervals during this year (1931). Woodcarving, wood engraving, handwriting, lettering, scraper-board, water-colour painting, lino-cutting and the experimental techniques seen in "Fragments of Africa" (see page 42), and oils - these were all self-taught techniques. W.B.S.
7	13 From an inscription by W.B. to his mother in her copy of "The Artist of the Rocks" (see page 16): "To my little Mamma (signed Walter 1949)
7	14 W.B.WR.
8	15 LEONARDO DA VINCI by Sigmund Freud. See page 87 and also General Bibliography.
8	16 From biographical notes by Mary Packer, The Art Critic, in "The Star"library, Johannesburg, 4-4-1961.
8	17 From autobiographical sketch in "Fragments of Africa", page 3.

NOTE:

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- 18 See "Velasquez" published by The Phaidon Press, Ltd, 41 Museum St. London W.C.1 (1943). Plates 119 and 120.
- 19) See "Tintoretto", published by The Phaidon Press, Ltd., 1 Cromwell Place, London S.W.7 (1948). Plate 244.
- 20) Plate 243, of the Phaidon "Tintoretto" see previous note (19).
- 21) W.B.WR. The artist has the habit of writing his opinions (stimulated by the text) in the margins of books he reads. NOTE 21 on page 10 is written on a blank page of "Renoir" by Ambroise Vollard, which is in my possession. Full quotation: "Today to keep my colours clean and see the exact relationship of tones I used 37 brushes on a small landscape of the Limpopo 11" x 15"."
"Often used": W.B.S.
- 22 As for note 21. Date of quotation is written after it, thus: 8-3-1953.
- 23 Titles from an exhibition catalogue: Galerie Vincent, Pretoria, November, 1951.
- 24 W.B.S.
- 25 In the possession of the artist.
- 26 Owned by Mr.Cecil Skotnes, President of the Council of S.A.Artists.
- 27 "Three lions" and "Felines and Rocks" reproduced on page 43a (see page 44)
- 28 Published by Red Fawn Press, P.O.Box 706, Pretoria (1939).
- 29 W.B.S.
- 30 Copy of this given me by W.B.. Title:"THE CITY".
- 31 Published by Red Fawn Press, P.O.Box 706, Pretoria (1948) This edition (the only one) was limited to 500 copies.
- 32 See NOTES 21 and 22 for the sources of this statement and of that referred to as NOTE 33.
- 33 See NOTE 32.
- 34 W.B.WR.
- 35 From a speech by W.B. to the Rotary Club, Pretoria (10-5-1953) Pretoria News 11-5-53.
- 35a And Mythological subjects or creatures.
- 36 The first five titles mentioned are of paintings exhibited at the Galerie Vincent, Pretoria, November 1951. The five last mentioned were paintings exhibited at Lidchi's Gallery Johannesburg, May 1956. See catalogues of those exhibitions.
- 37 W.B.S.

- 38 In the possession of Mrs. E.Mallows, Orchards, Johannesburg. Reproduced in black and white in Fontein, vol.1 No.3. Page 47 (1960).
- 39 The Art Critic, The Star, Johannesburg, 14-5-1956:
"When the "isms" of today have become the "wasms" of yesterday many paintings by W.B. will remain to perpetuate his name as an artist of outstanding originality who knew and loved Africa and got something out of it."
- 40 "Four Steps toward Modern Art" by Lionello Venturi, published by Columbia University Press, New York, 1956. See page 58
"The autonomy of art based on pure vision was the meeting point of both art and aesthetics at the end of the 19th century."
- 41 It must be mentioned that in the Transvaal both Pierneef and Maggie Laubser were already, in the 1930s favoured by discerning art lovers. Transvaal connoisseur's were not, in my opinion being parochial when they favoured their artists over those of the Cape. This holds good today as well. The reasons may be many but I believe the following to be specially significant: (i) The Transvaal, being land-locked, had developed a culture more truly African than Cape Town, a port which has always been more "European" in its tastes and way of life. Hence in the Transvaal there is to be found a younger, more vigorous attitude towards South Africa and towards living in general. This vitality is expressed not only in painting and sculpture but more obviously in architecture - especially in Pretoria. (ii) The "trade-routes" have shifted considerably since World War I. The Pretoria-Johannesburg complex and Cape Town may be compared with Florence and Siena during the Quattrocento. Siena, being somewhat off the main route between Rome, Florence and the rest of Europe, remained conservative and its art static, clinging to the old Italo-Byzantine style. Florence, the centre of the banking world, attracted many travellers from afar who brought new ideas. E.g. the visit to Florence of Emperor John Paleologos and his retinue of philosophers, poets and artists in 1439 stimulated the Florentine intellectuals (artists, poets) with their knowledge of Ancient Greece. Hence the mythological paintings of Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo et al. Florence thus became the leader in artistic and cultural matters in Italy. The Transvaal with its gold mines has likewise attracted men of ideas, especially to Johannesburg. Pretoria, the Administrative Capital of South Africa, being close to its larger neighbour has similarly been stimulated culturally and shares the vigour and enthusiasm of the bigger city. This vigour, I repeat, is reflected in the work of the artists of the Transvaal and must partly account for the more progressive attitude, not only of the artists but also of the art loving public in general. That is why it was possible for the New Group to "sell fairly well" in the Transvaal, and not at all in the Cape (see page 21).
- 42 W.B.WR.
- 43 W.B.S.

NOTE:

- 44 W.B.S.
- 45 W.B.WR.
- 46 Matisse made two trips to Morocco during the period 1911 - 1913. (See Encyclopedia of Painting edited by Bernard S.Meyers, published by Hutchinson, London, 1956).
- 47 W.B.WR.
- 48 W.B.S.; and the architect Norman Eaton to me.
- 49 See Page 25a
- 50 Miss Sampie de Wet of Pretoria has some excellent examples of these water-colours.
- 51 These three paintings are in the possession of W.B.. BOYS IN A MOUNTAIN POOL has unfortunately been spoiled during an attempt at over-painting. The photograph reproduced here (page 26b) is however of it in its original state.
- 52 In the possession of the artist (see reproductions page 27a).
- 53 Since destroyed by the artist (see reproduction on page 28a).
- 54 In the possession of the artist (see reproduction on page 28b).
- 55 See Plate 179 in "Michelangelo" by Ludwig Goldscheider, published by the Phaidon Press, 5 Cromwell Place, London S.W.7 (1953).
- 56 See Plates LX and LXI in "Goya" by Dino Formaggio, published by The Oldbourne Press, 121, Fleet Street, London E.C.4 in 1960.
- 57 The thinness of the form and arbitrary sketchiness of detail is what reminds one of Picasso - particularly of the 1925 "Three Dancers" and "Seated Woman". (These two may be seen in the catalogue of the Picasso Exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, 6 July to 18 September, 1959. Plates 28b and 29a).
- 58 See Plate 117 in "EGYPT" by Roger Viollet - Jean Doresse. Published by Thames and Hudson, London, 1957.
- 59 See plate on page 69 in Sir Herbert Read's "A Concise History of Modern Painting" published by Thames and Hudson, London.
- 60 From "The Star", Johannesburg, Battiss File. Cutting 4-7-1941.
- 61 From "The Star", Johannesburg, Battiss File. Cutting 25-10-1944.

NOTE:

- 62 W.B.S. See letter by W.B. on the death of the Abbé in Appendix ONE.
- 63 From "The Star", Johannesburg, Battiss File, Cutting 25-10-1944.
- 64 From "The Star", Johannesburg. Battiss File. Cutting 2-2-1946.
- 65 W.B. to the Annual General Meeting of the South African Association of Arts (Transvaal Branch). Technical College, Pretoria. 23-9-1949 (The Star. Battiss File).
- 66 See page 31a and The Prodigal Son reproduced on page 32a.
- 67 W.B.WR.
- 68 See page 32a for reproductions.
- 69 This painting presents however, a powerful image both in its original form and in its final form. It is only with the execution that I find myself out of sympathy.
- 70 "The Star", Battiss File. Cutting 14-4-1950
- 71 "The Star" Battiss File. Cutting 20-4-1950.
- 72 See "Classic Art - The Great Masters of the Italian Renaissance by H.Wölfflin, published by The Phaidon Press, Ltd., London S.W.7. Reprinted 1959. Pages 29 to 32.
- 73 See Filmstrip - "Michelangelo Buonarrotti" issued by Common Ground and edited by M.Alexander. Plate 12. Also "STONES OF FLORENCE" by Mary McCarthy, published by William Heinemann Ltd., London, Toronto, Melbourne. Page 25.
- 74 W.B.S.
- 75 In 1932. W.B.S.
- 76 W.B.S.
- 77 On page 29 a hint has been suggested as to the unconscious origin of these paintings - belonging to the Brute or Zimbabwe style. Another source may well be the 2nd World War itself. These paintings may have been the means for Battiss to retain his emotional balance while millions of people - women and children included - were undergoing the most dreadful privation and suffering. South Africans saw little or nothing of the war - but nevertheless psychologically were quite deeply affected; and an artist of the calibre of Battiss perhaps felt more keenly than others less sensitive, the horror of this appalling conflict. The tremendous need the average person had to externalize their feelings of love, hate and fear aroused by this great conflict was clearly demonstrated by the enormous queues that formed outside the concert halls of the major cities of South Africa. While the general populous was able to sublimate their emotions through music, the artist was able to create (as well as sublimate his feelings) works of art, which depended on his psychological involvements

in/ ...

NOTE:

- See also Jacob
- ment in the war for their visual power to shock. Epsteins "Let
be Sculpture", Michal Joseph, London, "DAY" for another possible influen
- 78 Published in 1945 by Red Fawn Press, P.O.Box 706, Pretoria.
Six of these sketches are reproduced on
pages 33a, 33b, 34b.
- 80 Owned by Mr. H. Nankin of Pretoria.
- 81 See page 26a for reproduction.
- 82 See page 34c for reproduction (slide in colour).
- 83 Referred to in Pretoria News, page 2, 3-12-1949.
- 84 ZEBRAS IN THE GRASS on page 35a.
- 85 London "Studio", April 1950.
- 86 See page 35c for reproduction. Painted in Rome, 1949. W.B.S.
- 87 See page 35b for reproduction. Painted in Rome, 1949. W.B.S.
- 89 W.B.WR.
- 90 "The Star", October 22nd, 1949. Two complete pages with
photographs of Picasso's works and a caricature by Battiss
of Picasso presenting him with a lithograph of a bull.
(reproduced on page 36a + lithograph)
- 91 W.B.WR.
- 92 A personal note intrudes - my wife, then Miss Christine
Frost, quite by chance met Battiss in a Paris street a
few moments after his leaving Picasso. She speaks of his
tremendous excitement and happiness at that moment. He
waved the Picasso lithograph in the air and kissed her
on both cheeks.
- 93 W.B.S.
- 94 For example of 1) see page 38a,
2) see page 38a,
3) see page 41,
4) see page 46b.
- 95 These vases and plates were exhibited at W.B.'s Pretoria
exhibition in 1961 at Vorster's Gallery. See catalogue
- 96 Gainsborough Gallery, October 1953. See catalogue
- 97 Ernst Wilmot was at that time the Rand Daily Mail Art critic
and is now a writer living in London.
Extract from Rand Daily Mail, 23-9-53. see Battiss File
cutting.
- 98 For similar critiques see that by Titus Leiser on page 1;
that by Dr. Lore Schatten of Cologne on page 4; and that
by Dr. A. van Duren of Arnhem on page 51.
- 99 This award was: Third Prize (bronze medal with diploma)
in Section 11 (b) of the Fine Arts Competition of the
XIVth Olympiad (1948) for "SEASIDE SPORT" (reproduced on
page 41a). Battiss also received an Honourable Mention
in Section 11 (a) for his painting "The Quagga Race".

NOTE:

- 100 W.B.WR.
- 101 Reproduced on page 41a.
- 102 Said to the writer.
- 103 Reproduced on page 12a.
- 103a Reproduced on page 10a.
- 104 See Art File cutting dated 8-8-1955,"Pretoria News".
- 105 September, 1956. See Pretoria News Art File cutting 7-9-1956.
- 106 May, 1956.
- 107 February, 1957.
- 108 See South African "Who's Who"-Walter Battiss.
- 109 1949, 1954.
- 110 Battiss has always provoked people with statements calculated to make them act as well as think. See appendix four.
- 111 Size 9" x 11". Probably the first mural in South Africa to be painted with a palette knife. The animals depicted all bear a relation to the farms on which Pretoria was built or which are in the immediate vicinity of the city: Dassie (DASPOORT); eland (ELANDSPOORT); kudu (KOEDOESPOORT); zebra (QUAGGASPOORT); Hartebeest (HARTEBEESTFONTEIN); monkeys (AAPIES RIVER).
- 112 The Provincial Building mural awaits completion. Battiss insists (justifiably) that the main work on the mural must be done in the building itself for the lighting is naturally of prime importance and this cannot be reproduced in his studio. A better solution would have been to paint it directly on the wall.
- 113 owned by W.B.
- 114 "Studio" - October 1956 (London). Alongside this reproduction was a critique which included this observation: "...Bushman motifs have not unnaturally found their way into many of Walter Battiss's paintings and graphic works; in many cases he has employed them decoratively or in dynamic compositions that nevertheless contain the basic elements of African art. The man, the animal (hunted or hunter) the plant life the thin elongated figure which is the African symbol of man in general."
- 115 Reproduced on page 43a.
- 116 Reproduced on page 43a.
- 117 See the catalogue of the Picasso Exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, 6 July to 18 September. Plate 49a.

NOTE:

- 118 See "The Artist of the Rocks" page 19.
- 119 See "The Artist of the Rocks" page 19.
- 120 See "The Artist of the Rocks" Page 19.
- 121 For illustrations of calligraphic works by these artists see:
 For Michaux - Drawing, page 253, "A concise History of Modern Painting" by Sir Herbert Read, published by Thames and Hudson, London.
 For Alcopley - Baroque Memory, page 286 (as for Michaux above).
 For Miro - The Hare. page 132 (as for Michaux above).
 see page 88 of "A Dictionary of Modern Painting", general editors Robert Maillard and Carlton Lake. Published by Methuen & Co., Ltd., London W.C.2 - for similarities between Battiss and Raoul Dufy.
- 122 Battiss met Michaux in 1956. W.B.S.
- 123 See: Helen Gardner "Art Through the Ages", 3rd Edition. Page 36. "Reindeer". Cave of Font-de-Gaume, France. Oddly enough, on page 38 "Hunters", from the caves of Eastern Spain shows a closer relationship to Battiss's calligraphs than the French one - although he has not visited Spain. The "Hunters" are, however, even more closely related to the "Drawing" of Michaux (referred to in NOTE 121).
- 124 For a remarkable similarity of style, compare the Battiss SECRET SIGNS (reproduced on page 48a) with the Alcopley "Painting with Collage", shown on page 120 of "A Dictionary of Abstract Painting" by Michel Seuphor, published by Methuen & Co., Ltd., 36 Essex Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.
- 125 Fontein Vol.1 No.3. Summer 1960. page 45.
- 126 See "Two Lanterns" 1955, reproduced in Sir Herbert Read's "A Concise History of Modern Painting" for an example of his script incorporated into painting (lower left-hand corner).
- 127 See "Beadwork Abstract" reproduced on page 47a.
- 128 Reproduced on page
- 129 Reproduced on page
- 130 As for NOTE 127.
- 131 Reproduced on page 47a.
- 132 Se NOTES 135, 136 and 137 (as for).
- 133 Reproduced on page 48a.

<u>PAGE:</u>	<u>NOTE:</u>
49	134 Reproduced on page 48a.
49	135) These paintings were very suddenly whisked away before
49	136) they could be photographed. However, they will be
49	137) appearing in the book on Battiss to be published later
	this year by Simondium Publisher's, 407 Rascher's Corner,
	70, Loveday Street, Johannesburg.
49	138 See pages 76 and 77 in "Modern Painting" by Maurice
	Raynal, published by Skira, Switzerland;
	for two paintings showing FAUVE influence to those
	referred to under NOTES 136 and 137. (Portrait with
	a green stripe, 1905, by Henri Matisse,
	and
	Figures in a Meadow, 1906, by André Derain).
50	139 Reproduced on page 49a.
50	140 Painted in 1949 and bought by the Johannesburg Municipal
	Art Gallery in that year.
	141 See page 19 (lines 2-6 in "The Voices of Silence"
	142 Reproduced in Fontein, Vol.1 No.3, Summer 1960, page 44.

APPENDIX ONE

W.B. and the Abbé Henri Breuil: A LETTER.

The relationship between the Abbé Breuil and Walter Battiss, which covered a period of some twenty years, was an enriching experience for both of them. On the one hand the artist shared in the secrets, learning and wisdom of one of the greatest men ever to work in South Africa; and on the other hand the scientist was stimulated in the classical manner by the gifts of a supremely sensitive and talented pupil. The following letter, written by the artist on the death of the Abbé reveals not only the reverence the pupil had for the master but also the intelligent, questioning attitude of the honest seeker after truth. It also shows that Battiss's gifts are not limited to the visual arts but that he is as well a writer of considerable stature.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE STAR"

Sir, - The death of the Abbé Henri Breuil removes from our physical world, but not from fame and memory, one of the most magnificent men who ever enriched South Africa.

I recall with special pleasure and lasting gratitude his wonderful generosity to me.

One day he sent for me and at dusk, sitting on a bench in a Johannesburg garden, he said: "I am going to make you one of my three students: there is Miss Mary Boyle, the poet, there is Professor Burkitt and now there is you. I shall show you my methods."

And off we went in a party down to Ladybrand where, in the now famous Rose Cottage rock-shelter, with Professor van Riet Lowe, Mr. Bernie Malan and Miss Boyle, the Abbé Breuil showed me how to work a painted cave. This was one of the

most/ ...

most exciting periods of my life.

I discovered the Abbé had a forthright yet charming manner. Apart from spilling his wisdom among the listening rocks sometimes he did fantastic things at unexpected times.

At the hotel I saw him pour tea on his plum-pudding. I saw him put unwanted things from the table under our feet on the floor.

Once a fork shot through the withered flowers at breakfast time and away went the toast from my plate.

We forgive this great man all his extravagant theories about our prehistoric art. He inhabited a world of wonder and magic and let us share it with him.

The Abbé Breuil had not lived for 70 odd years. No! He had been living since the Quaternary Ice Age, and he knew the mammoth, the bison and the Magdalenian cave painters as well as he knew us. He was in truth the guardian of the many millenia of art.

There are numerous legends about him. One runs something like this: A new acquaintance asked him why, if he were so famous, he had not been made a bishop instead of remaining merely an abbé. His withering reply shot forth: "My dear friend, don't you know I am the Pope of Archaeology!"

Women have been the downfall of many great men and it was the White Lady of the Brandberg that did the Abbé in. He waxed so lyrical about this painted lady in the Maack Rock-shelter in South West Africa that he claimed she was a White woman who came from the Mediterranean some thousands of years ago.

This started the most fantastic archaeological polemic that has ever been known. When all of us were asking him to

prove/ ...

prove his case he came forward with many unusual arguments. He never gave in but he never really convinced us.

I once said to the late Professor van Riet Lowe: "Perhaps it will take 50 years to put right what the Abbé has said, and out of politeness one will have to wait till he is gone." Professor van Riet Lowe was at that time an extremely worried man.

Of course to understand the Abbé one must realize he was a bit of a Leonardo da Vinci. He was both an artist and a scientist. When these two extremes meet they spawn strange visions. Leonardo painted his visions, the Abbé proclaimed his.

Probably we will never be able to prove the Abbé wrong, so he wins his points. In archaeology, that no-man's-land situated uncomfortably between the Truth and the Lie, the chances are always 50 per cent right or 50 per cent wrong.

May the Abbé's spirit wander through the great caves of eternity, discovering for us who follow the art of the Creator he so firmly believed in.

Walter Battiss.

Pretoria.

FROM "THE STAR" MONDAY, AUGUST 28, 1961 (Page 6).

APPENDIX TWO

1ST REFERENCE.

THE FOLLOWING NEWSPAPER ARTICLE IS THE FIRST RECORDED REFERENCE TO THE ARTIST AND REPRESENTS AN AUSPICIOUS BEGINNING TO HIS LONG CAREER NOT ONLY AS AN ARTIST BUT ALSO AS A PUBLIC FIGURE.

(NOTE: This cutting arrived by post only a few months ago - sent anonymously)

FROM: THE RUSTENBURG HERALD, FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 1927.

A NEW RUSTENBURG ARTIST

EXHIBITIONS OF PAINTINGS BY W. W. BATTISS:

If we think of the peculiar charm of the Rustenburg district which has so often been praised by tourists, it is rather astonishing that of the many South African artists hardly any have ever made use of the infinite variety of fine landscape scenes of which this beautiful part of the Transvaal abounds.

It is quite a number of years since H.J. Pierneef, the leading Transvaal landscape painter, paid a few short visits to Rustenburg and created some of his finest works near the famous Kloof and on the citrus farms around Olifant's Nek. And of Erich Mayer, who even chose to live in the Magaliesberger not far from Rustenburg for the last 16 months, very little work is ever seen in our town, as he prefers to sell pictures in Pretoria and Johannesburg where our fine scenery is greatly appreciated, or to send it to the greater art exhibitions at Durban, Pt. Elizabeth, Cape Town, Bulawayo etc. Yet the great success which attended the exhibition this artist held here in the Masonic Hall about a year ago, proves that the Rustenburg public does not stand back in the appreciation of South African Art.

Therefore/ ...

Therefore it will come to many of our art lovers as a very pleasant surprise to hear that a real artist has arisen in our very midst in the person of young Mr. W.W. Battiss, +) known to many only as a very modest and obliging official in the Receiver of Revenues' Offices.

If we may believe the enthusiastic judgment of his older fellow artist Mr. Erich Mayer, this young adept is not only gifted with a rare talent and observant eye for the peculiar beauties of our South African nature, but also possesses the much rarer qualities of selfcriticism, strength of purpose, thoroughness and perseverance which go to the making of the real artist.

Though with only his spare hours at his disposal; part of which are taken up by faithful voluntary service to his church, and only one longer vacation in the year, Mr. Battiss, occasionally encouraged by his much older artist friend, made such excellent use of all his available time, of the few hints he could get, and the carefully selected art books placed at his disposal, that within little more than a year he reached a standard of efficiency in some branches of art, which many full time students of our art schools do not attain within the same short period.

And during the last few months he succeeded in producing quite a number of water colours and black and white drawings of such surprising quality that several friends who saw these works encouraged him to hold an exhibition of his work.

This unexpected appreciation of his untiring efforts stimulated the budding artist to some still finer work, and now we have the pleasure of seeing quite a notable collection of

the/ ...

+)} MR. WALTER WAHL BATTISS

the firstlings of his muse exhibited at the Masonic Hall, an exceedingly suitable and centrally situated room for such purposes.

Since Rustenburg does not often get a chance of witnessing such interesting display of South African art, and this exhibition of a strong local talent being quite an event that should interest every one of our cultured citizens. - as is recognized by his worship the Mayors consent to open the exhibition, (on Friday at 3 p.m.) - we may hope to meet there every one interested in art and the advancement of South African culture, and to see at least all the best works, which by virtue of their modest prices, purchased at this occasion, while even the least perfect earlier attempts shown contain such qualities that they will at least serve as tasteful souvenirs. There can be no doubt that Mr. Battiss will by and by leave his mark in the South African art world. But it is at this critical stage of having produced the first mature works, that the coming artist needs more than ever the encouragement and support which will enable him to follow his thorny path to the highest stages of his calling. May Rustenburg show that it has a heart and a true understanding for the real needs of a genuine South African culture.

APPENDIX THREE

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE PLATES:

Plate No.:

- 3 Compare the lower left-hand figure in this picture with the principal figure in Picasso's "Dancers", 1925, reproduced in the Picasso Exhibition Catalogue, Tate Gallery, London (1959). Plate 28b.
- 8 This painting, like the Skotnes "DRIFTWOOD" ON SAND" is related to, but departed from the calligraphic paintings referred to on pages 46 and 49; and also to the serigraphs reproduced on page 44a.
- 28 Compare this painting with its modified condition as "THE PRODIGAL SON" reproduced on page 32a (No.29 and No.30).
- 46 Battiss received THIRD PRIZE for this work in Section II(b) of the Fine Arts Competition of the XIVth Olympiad (1948)

APPENDIX FOUR

NOTE 110 "provacatove statements designed to make people think"

The following are some of the latest examples of the
artists' questions and statements:

INSECURITY IS THE ARMOUR OF THE ARTIST.

A SICK SOCIETY IMPOSES ITS REMEDIES ON THE INNOCENT.

A SICK FATHER CENSORS HIS SON.

THE CAPRICIOUS IS PHANTASY BEING LIVED.

DO YOU AGREE THAT RAOUL DUFY IS A GENIUS HIDDEN BENEATH
THE SUPERFICIAL IMAGES OF GENTEEL SNOBBERY?

ARE OUR ARTISTS MAKING ANY PROPHECIES?

WHERE CAN WE FIND THE COMMITTED ART CRITIC?
I KNOW THREE.

IS A WORK OF ART, ONE OF ITS KIND MADE BY HAND, NOT WORTH
THE PRICE OF A MOTOR CAR?

WHY ARE OUR ART GALLERIES SO POORLY ENDOWED? WHERE IS
A GOOD BRAQUE, A MATISSE?

EACH AGE SACRIFICES ITS VICTIMS. WHO HAS HEARD OF
LEQUEULT? YET HE IS A REMARKABLY GOOD PAINTER.

FROM: GESTURES OF CONTACT (for private circulation -
by Walter Battiss).

February, 1963.

LIST
OF
EXHIBITIONS

1. First ONE-MAN, Masonic Hall, Rustenburg August, 1927
2. With Coetzer and Lauson at LEZARD's, Johannesburg 1927
3. Herbert Evans Gallery 1928
4. Durban City Hall Art Gallery (with EMILY FERNES) 5-17, October, 1943.
5. South African Association of Arts Gallery,
Cape Town May, 1945
6. Scheickerdt's Gallery, Pretoria 16-31 June, 1948
7. Constantia Gallery, Johannesburg 1-14 October, 1949
8. Galerie Vincent, Pretoria 11-25 November, 1950
9. Galerie Vincent, Pretoria 3-17 November, 1951
10. Gainsborough Gallery, Johannesburg October, 1951
11. Gainsborough Gallery, Johannesburg October, 1953
12. Pietermaritzburg - T.S. Taylor Gallery, 31 March -
13 April, 1954
13. Lorenço Marques September, 1954
14. South African Association of Arts Gallery,
Cape Town. March 1955
15. Gainsborough Gallery, Johannesburg 26 April - 9 May, 1955
16. Imperial Institute, London 1-14 August, 1956
17. Vorster's Gallery, Pretoria October, 1956
18. Lidchi's Gallery, Johannesburg 14-26 May, 1957
19. Lidchi's Gallery, Johannesburg September, 1958
20. Lidchi's Gallery, Johannesburg May, 1959
21. Laurence Adler Gallery, Johannesburg November, 1960
22. Egon Guenther Gallery, Johannesburg May, 1961
23. Vorster's Gallery, Pretoria September, 1961
24. Galerie Vermeer December, 1962

N.B. The exhibitions noted above which have specific dates are obtained from the catalogues. Those which only state the month and year have been supplied by the artist.

WALTER BATTISS

1. FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS (1955)
2. FELLOW OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS
AND LETTERS (25-5-60)
3. FOUNDER AND FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN
COUNCIL OF ARTISTS (NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PLASTIC ARTS, UNESCO,
PARIS (1953-62).
ELECTED TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE I.A.P.A.
(1953 - 1958).
4. FOUNDATION MEMBER OF THE NEW GROUP (1938)
5. AWARDED THE PRO ARTE MEDAL BY PRETORIA UNIVERSITY (1956)

PUBLICATIONS BY WALTER BATISS

	<u>Title and Publisher:</u>	<u>Date:</u>
1	THE AMAZING BUSHMAN Red Fawn Press, Pretoria.	1939
2.	SOUTH AFRICAN PAINT POT Red Fawn Press, Pretoria (Date of publication given by W.B.)	1940
3.	HOMECOMING (Sketches of returning soldiers at Voortrekkerhoogte Airport).	1945
4.	THE ARTIST OF THE ROCKS Red Fawn Press, Pretoria.	1948
5.	FRAGMENTS OF AFRICA Red Fawn Press, Pretoria.	1951
6.	BUSHMAN ART Red Fawn Press, Pretoria. (Date of publication given by W.B.)	1956

W A L T E R B A T T I S S
 =====

<u>Date:</u>	<u>BIOGRAPHY:</u>	<u>Age:</u>
1906	Born in Somerset East, Cape Province	0
1919 [?]	Family moves to Koffiefontein, Orange Free State	9/11
1919	Family moves to FAURESMITH, O.F.S.	13
1923	He matriculates	17
1924	Begins working as a clerk in the Magistrate's Office in Rustenburg, the home of Paul Kruger.	18
1929	Studies art, during his holiday, at the Art School in Johannesburg	23
1930-1932	Resigns from the Civil Service. Begins studying for a Teacher's Diploma and B.A. Degree in Johannesburg	24-26
1933	Begins teaching at Park-Turffontein school (Salary £ 160-15-175)	27
1937 ^(6?)	Seconded to Pretoria Boys' High School as Art Master. Begins studying BUSHMEN ART seriously	31
1938	Makes his first visit to Europe. Meets Abbé Henri Breuil.	32
1939	Discovers a Prehistoric Art Gallery near Zastron, O.F.S.	33
1941	Obtains B.A. (Fine Arts) at University of South Africa	35
1942	Joins up as South African War Artist, but is immediately recalled by the Transvaal Education Department	36
1943	Exhibits with Emily Fern at Durban City Hall	37
1945	Works with Abbé Henri Breuil and Professor van Riet Lowe at Ladybrand.	39

1948	Wins OLYMPIC MEDAL and DIPLOMA OF ART	42
1949	Meets PICASSO	43
1950	Exhibits at Venice Biennale	44
1952	Exhibits at AGNEWS, London. Lectures on South African Art at London University.	46
1953	Appointed Principal of the Art Centre, Pretoria.	47
1954	Exhibits at Biennale, Venice	48
1956	Exhibits at Imperial Institute, London.	50
1958	Returns to Pretoria Boys' High School. Exhibits at Biennale, Venice.	52
1959	Appointed Professor of Fine Arts at Rhodes University	53
1960	Returns to Pretoria Boys' High School	54
1961	Begins huge mural 44ft x 11 ft for Provincial Administration	55
1963		57

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