



Entertainment

Going on an Art-Safari to achieve peace and unity

Mercy Omuntu

Can ferocious wild animals inspire peace and unity? According to an exhibition which opened last week, the answer is yes.

A lion alongside an antelope or a zebra? That would only be possible if the latter were dead and being devoured by the big cat. Yet in the joint exhibition *Art-Safari* by artists Epaphrodite Binamungu and Arlette Vandeneuken, which opened last week at Laico Hotel Umubano and is sponsored by the Rwanda Development Board, they are drinking side-by-side at the waterhole.

In other paintings, a lion is seen peacefully in the company of elephants, and a white dove is flying around the head of a gorilla. Many works show mothers and their offspring.

The exhibition features 80 paintings of wildlife from the different habitats that can be found in Rwanda – gorillas from the Virunga Mountains, monkeys in Nyungwe forest, elephants in Akagera, numerous birds and many more animals.

Yet these are not naturalistic paintings – in the realm of Binamungu and Vandeneuken, the hunter and the hunted coexist peacefully. Also adding to the serene mood are the colors – in one work, for instance, no more than three colors are used: browns, light greens, golden hues, applied with minimum strokes. A depiction of a herd of gazelles consists only of blue and brown, differentiating the sky and the animals, in a cubist approach.

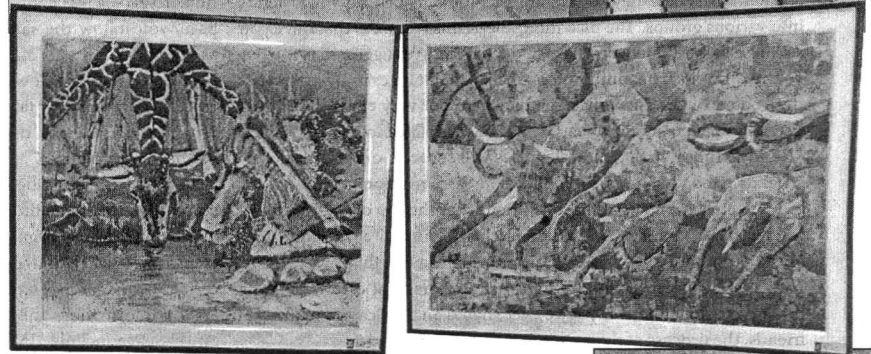
According to Arlette Vandeneuken, the winner of this year's "Art Peace," the exhibition is meant to evoke peace and unity. "We chose the animals because they contribute to the beauty of Rwanda and besides they are good to have around, so they suit the purpose of this exhibition," she said.

That is also the reason why, apart from predators living in peace with their prey, the artist also focused on family bonds. Females with their off springs prevail in the choice of her subjects – which is also in line with her last exhibition in June, which looked at women as actors in society.

Veteran painter Epa Binamungu – he has been in the profession for 36 years – for his part explained that the aim of the exposition is to give a lesson to the public through the animals. "To begin with, they are a source of attraction, and whoever looks at these pieces gets a message, which includes love, reconciliation, unity and maternal love, social cohesion and cohabitation," he said.

He added that the work on exhibition has been made in the last two months, with most of them being finished within just one day. "When I begin painting, I like doing it quickly," he explained. "When I am gripped by the desire to paint, I have to work as quickly as possible."

Many visitors during the opening night of the exhibition were certainly moved by the paintings. "That's my favorite," said Christine, looking at a depiction of a



gorilla mother with its baby. She added that it is a good thing to have such exhibitions, because it's a sign that Rwandans are starting to notice some neglected areas.

And this exhibition should not be

neglected. In the words of Vandeneuken, *Art-Safari* is not only a journey through Rwanda, but also a step towards a unified society. That is indeed something that should not be scoffed at.

(photos Timothy Kisambira)

