

REAR VIEW: ART

Light relief

The Bank Gallery's new exhibition is a cornucopia of contemporary vice and concept, writes **Claire Angelique**

SO THE WHEEL OF ART HAS started to turn again, with new exhibitions opening all over town. It's exciting stuff, and a welcome break from the iconography of the festive season.

One of the most sophisticated and dynamic offerings on the local front is the *Light Show* exhibition, currently running at the Bank Gallery (the old Standard Bank premises) in Florida Road.

Curated by Vaughn Sadie, Henrietta Hamilton and Robert Fraser, the show "looks at the exploration of light as both medium and metaphor".

The gallery's interior has been transformed into a minimalist cantonment harbouring the various spaces which display the works of the nine artists participating in the exhibition.

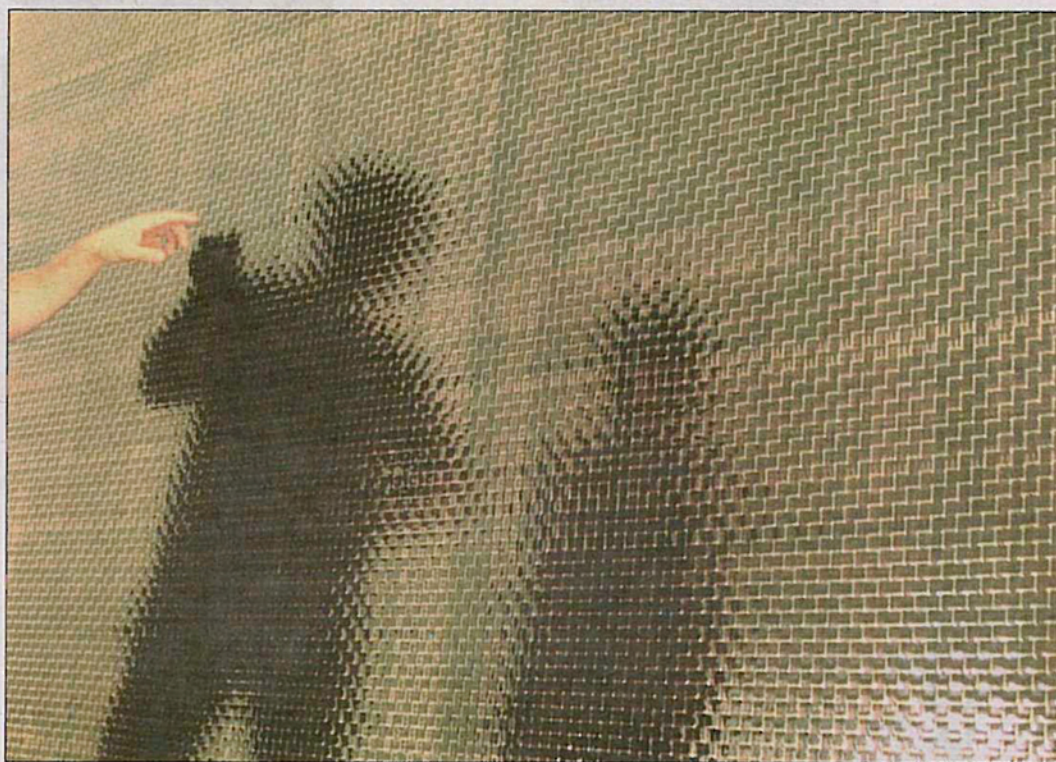
Each one, working in their chosen medium, has formulated concepts around the *Light Show* theme with some mind-blowing results.

On entering, you are instantly overwhelmed by the audacity and refinement of Siemon Allen's, *The Birds*, made of recycled strands of 16mm film, apparently sourced from a rare print of Alfred Hitchcock's 1962 film of the same title.

The hand-woven work complements the hypnotic light that the celluloid gives off, creating an eerie and slightly disturbing effect, while appearing to be some space-age material you might use to cover your car seats.

Priced at R90 000, which, when one considers that the skill, material and magnitude of the project is a bargain.

It's one of the most specific, focused and enchanting pieces I've



The Birds by Siemon Allen is made of recycled strands of 16mm film

seen, and an object of desire, form and technological bravery.

In the vault section of the Bank, there is yet another laudable work on display. It's Stephen Hobbs's *A point in space; containing all points*, priced at R16 000. Hobbs took his inspiration from Jorge Luis Borges's book, *The Aleph*, and quotes, "Truth will not penetrate a recalcitrant understanding. If all the places of the world are within the Aleph, there too will be all stars, all lamps, all sources of light."

Hobbs has concocted a delicate

and strange alien-like object, resembling some kind of condensed constellation, and placed it in a corner of mirrors. With piercings of light that slice through the dark, it's a captivating form that appears to breathe wisdom into space.

The concept of no beginning or end elicits a feeling of uncertainty and wonderment.

But, by far the most outrageous and post modern-everything piece in the exhibition has to be James Webb's *The World Will Listen*. It's a four minute, 33 second power failure

that takes place in the gallery.

The release reads that the work "swamps the space and the audience in unexpected darkness for the duration of the artwork, forcing them into a new state of awareness.

"Operating as a performative intervention, *The World Will Listen* brings the medium of light into play through its sudden and dramatic absence."

WELL, ON THE OPENING NIGHT this blackout caused many to leave the gallery, complaining about Eskom's incompetence. Art students milled around laughing at the absurdity and paradox of a display around light without there being any.

But the joke was on them. The piece ultimately speaks for itself, but one thing I can't wrap my head around is that it is for sale – at R20 000. Apparently you buy the piece and receive a signed certificate of authentication with your purchase; so at your next dinner party you can ceremoniously kill the mains and after the obligatory four minute and, 33 seconds are up, wave the certificate and say, "Hey, that was a James Webb".

It's certainly an improvement on the two-hour power shedding pieces by Eskom which you have no control over.

I loved it for all its boisterous rebellion and ability to shatter traditional attitudes of what art is and the lengths to which appraisal can be manipulated.

I left the exhibition feeling inspired and excited, but only for about four-and-a-half minutes.

The show closes on February 21. For more information visit www.bankgallery.co.za or call 031 312 6911.

Some of the other artists participating in the exhibition include Simon Jaques, Vaughn Sadie, Greg Streak, Bronwen Vaughan-Evans and Jeremy Wafer.

The concept of no beginning or end elicits a feeling of uncertainty and wonderment