

DUT artists take part in International Art Exhibition

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TWO former Fine Art students of the Durban University of Technology (DUT) have been selected, together with three other South African artists, for the highly prestigious 54th International Art Exhibition known as 2011 Venice Biennale, which opened on June 4 and will run until November 27 in Venice, Italy.

Zimbabwean national Berry Bickle and Siemon Allen, one of four South Africans, are DUT alumni artists who exhibited their work at this world event.

The South African exhibition, titled "Ideal Narratives in Contemporary South African Art", features South African artists whose work explores a range of realities, memories and fantasies. The artists produce imaginary truths, or rather narratives, that reflect on South Africa, a country that is simultaneously "adored and detested".

The Venice Biennale is an appropriate international forum for South African artists and curators to share and engage with what their country has offered them – the gift of making possible democratic ideals.

Allen said: "I am an artist whose current work is in many ways rooted in interests that go back to my childhood in



Siemon Allen with one of his graphic artworks

Durban. I always loved artifacts and had a boyhood stamp collection and lots of records, old and new, that I would arrange in grids. I cannot speak for all artists, but to me the way to be recognised is to not concern oneself with recognition, but follow your deep interests. Even if those interests seem eccentric or difficult to translate into conventional art forms."

Allen makes digital prints and has a searchable data base web site as a project, and builds large-scale display structures using a range of construction techniques. He also works with non-traditional materials and has done quite a few pieces using videotape as a raw material to weave large panels that are then configured into room-size spaces.

"I feel very honored that

people find the projects interesting and join me in my fascination with history as told through these visual artifacts. I am grateful that my projects allow me to dig up and share things that might otherwise be lost or overlooked," he added.

Allen presently has a show in the United States curated by Tumelo Mosaka, a South African curator at the Kranert Museum in Illinois. He also

has a show scheduled at Goodman in Cape Town in September. He is constantly working on his web data base project, which is a visual archive, a searchable data base that is essentially an ongoing web catalogue of the items in his South African audio artifact collection.

(www.flatinternational.org)

A proud alumnus, Allen said DUT was an excellent place to learn how to merge technical skills with conceptual rigour and commented that while at DUT, he learned not just to think about art and study theory, but also to make and build things.

After completion of his studies he was able to work as an art fabricator to support himself. He said the skills he learned at DUT have served him well in the USA in his teaching career and in his involvement with fabricating large-scale sculptures with his wife, sculptor Kendall Buster, and in realizing his own work.

Allen has a Master's Degree in Technology Fine Art and a National Higher Diploma in Fine Art from DUT. He previously received a Merit Award in the 1992 Volkskas Atelier. He was twice selected for participation in the VITA Art Now Exhibition and has recently received a grant from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.