

Deurdagte Reis – 'n viering van vrouekunstenaars Thoughtful Journey – a celebration of female artists

Stern is op 2 Oktober in Schweizer-Reineke in Noordwes-provinsie gebore. Haar ouers was Duits-Joods. In 1900, gedurende die Anglo-Boere-oorlog, is haar pa en oom deur die Britte gevange geneem en, na hulle vrylating, het die familie na Duitsland verhuis. Teen die einde van die oorlog het hulle na Suid-Afrika teruggekeer en hulleself in Wolmaransstad gevestig.

Vanaf 'n vroeë ouderdom het Stern saam met haar gesin deur Duitsland en die landelike gemeenskappe van Suid-Afrika gereis. Tydens so 'n reis, in 1910, het die gesin die Victoria-waterval besoek en dit was Stern se eerste ervaring van die tropiese Afrika-plantegroei.

Stern het haar formele opleiding en kunsstudies in Duitsland voltooi. Sy het by 'n private ateljee in Berlyn begin en in 1913 by die Weimar Academy onder Gari Melcheris ontvang. In 1914, by Studio Levin-Funcke, onder Martin Brandenburg, het sy met olie verf begin skilder. Sy het ook Weimar besoek, waar sy onder leiding van vroeë Bauhaus-skilders gewerk het tydens haar verblyf in Europa gedurende die Eerste Wêreldoorlog. In 1916 het sy met Max Pechstein, 'n Duitse Ekspresionis, wat 'n rol in haar artistieke filosofie en styl gespeel het, kennis gemaak. Dieselfde jaar was sy 'n stigterlid van die November Groep.

Net voor haar terugkeer na Suid-Afrika het Stern in 1919 haar eerste solo-uitstalling in Berlyn in die Fritz Gurlitt-galery gehou. Gedurende haar loopbaan het sy meer as 100 solo-uitstallings in Suid-Afrika, Duitsland, die VSA, Frankryk, Italië en Engeland gehou. Sy was 'n baie produktiewe kunstenaar en daar is gemiddeld tussen 80 en 100 van haar werke by hierdie uitstallings vertoon.

Na haar terugkeer na Suid-Afrika het sy in 1922 haar eerste solo-uitstalling in Ashbey Galery in Kaapstad gehou en, in 1926, die eerste in Johannesburg. Dit was die eerste van 63 solo-uitstallings wat sy tydens haar loopbaan in Suid-Afrika gehou het, terwyl haar eerste werk eers in 1931 verkoop is.

Aanvanklik het Stern 'n ateljee in Muizenberg en 'n gesinswoning in Oranjezicht, Kaapstad gehad. Sy het vanaf 1922 in Duitsland en Suid-Afrika gereis en uitgestal en in 1927 is sy by die Bordeaux Internasionale Uitstalling met die Prix d'Honneur bekroon. In 1931 het sy 'n lid van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kunstvereniging geword. Dieselfde jaar is haar 7 jaar lange huwelik met prof. Johannes Prinz beëindig. In hierdie stadium het sy met gereelde en intensiewe reise deur Suid-Afrika, die Natalse Suidkusstreek, Swaziland, Zoeloeland, Mosambiek, die Kongo, Zanzibar, Dakar, Senegal, Turkye, Madeira, Spanje en ander dele van Europa begin. Gedurende haar reise het sy artefakte versamel wat voorwerpe in haar stillewekomposisies sou word, sowel as gekerfde houtwerk van Arabiese geboue as rame vir haar skilderye. In die daaropvolgende jare het Stern ekspedisiejoernale saamgestel wat haar romantiese reaksies op Afrika weerspieël het. Die joernale is in 1943 as *Congo* en in 1948 as *Zanzibar* gepubliseer.

Van 1935 tot die veertigerjare het haar werke oor stamlewe- en Maleier-onderwerpe in Suid-Afrika 'n hoogtepunt bereik. In hierdie tyd het sy ook met beeldhou- en keramiekwerk geëksperimenteer. Stern se werke het stillewekomposisies, landskappe en veral portretwerke van die verskillende streke en kulture ingesluit – olie verf, waterverf, gouache en houtskool.

In teenstelling met haar tydgenote, soos **Maggie Laubser**, **Dorothy Kay** en **Maud Sumner**, wat selfportrette geskilder het, het Stern haarself nie in haar werk verbeeld nie, maar dit is die kunstenaar se empatie en emosie, 'n projeksie van die self, wat in werke met spesifiek vroue as onderwerp kan waarneem. Tydens haar Europese reise het besoeke aan uitstallings van werke deur Tintoretto, Van Gogh en Picasso haar geïnspireer.

Aan die begin van haar loopbaan het Stern se werk onder ongunstige kritiek deurgeloopt. Eers vanaf die middel-veertigerjare het haar reputasie as kunstenaar in Suid-Afrika minder kontroversieel geword, en vanaf 1948 was sy deel van alle belangrike nasionale uitstallings en het sy Suid-Afrika by verskeie internasionale uitstallings verteenwoordig, soos die Internasionale Joodse Uitstalling, Zurich, Empire Art Exhibition in Londen, Exhibition of South African Art in die Tate Gallery, die Venice Biennale van 1950 tot 1958 en die Sao Paulo Biennale (grafies). In 1952 het sy die Cape Tercentenary Grant vir uitmuntende werk ontvang, in 1959 die Molteno-prys, in 1960 die Regional Award of the Peggy Guggenheim International Art Prize, in 1963 die Oppenheimer-toekening en in 1965 die Erepenning vir Skilderkuns van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns.

Stern is op 23 Augustus 1966 in Kaapstad aan hartversaking oorlede. Haar testament het bepaal dat haar boedel in trust gehou moes word en dat die inkomste daaruit vir die bevordering van kuns in Suid-Afrika aangewend moes word. Vandag word haar versameling en haar huis 'The Fris' in Rosebank, Kaapstad onder administrasie van die Universiteit van Kaapstad as *Die Irma Stern Museum* bewaar.

Stern het vanaf 1957 verskeie oorsig-uitstallings gehou, maar die grootste is in 1967 postuum gehou, gevolg deur 'n reisende gedenk-uitstalling, *Homage to Irma Stern*, in 1968, deur die Rembrandt Kunststigting.

Stern se historiese belangrikheid spruit uit haar bydrae tot Modernisme in Suid-Afrika. Deur dit onder die publiek se aandag te bring, het sy persepsies oor Kuns in die land verskuif terwyl sy 'n professionele en onafhanklike vrouekunstenaar was.

Stern was born to German Jewish parents in Schweizer-Reineke, North West Province on 2 October 1894. In 1900, during the Anglo-Boer War, her father and uncle were detained by the British and upon their release the family left for Germany. By the end of the war they returned to South Africa and settled in Wolmaransstad.

From an early age Stern travelled with her family through Germany and rural communities of South Africa. In 1910, during such a trip, the family visited the Victoria Falls and Stern had her first experience of the tropical African vegetation.

Stern completed her formal training and art studies in Germany, starting at a private studio in Berlin and, in 1913, at the Weimar Academy, tutored by Gari Melcheris. In 1914, at Studio Levin-Funcke, under Martin Brandenburg, she started to paint in oils. She also visited Weimar, working under early Bauhaus painters while staying in Europe through World War I. In 1916 she met Max Pechstein, a German Expressionist, who was influential in her artistic philosophy and style. During the same year she was a founder member of the November Group.

Stern held her first solo exhibition in Berlin in 1919 at Fritz Gurlitt Gallery, just before her return to South Africa. During her career she held over 100 solo exhibitions in South Africa, Germany, the USA, France, Italy and England. She was a very prolific artist and, on average, between 80 and 100 of her works were on show at these exhibitions.

Upon her return to South Africa she held her first solo exhibition at Ashbey Gallery in Cape Town during 1922 and, in 1926, the first in Johannesburg. These were the first of 63 solo exhibitions she held during her career in South Africa, to sell the first work only in 1931.

Initially, Stern had a studio in Muizenberg and in a family home in Oranjezicht, Cape Town. She travelled and exhibited in Germany and South Africa from 1922 and was awarded the Prix d'Honneur at the Bordeaux International Exhibition in 1927. In 1931 she became a member of the South African Society of Artists. During the same year her 7-year marriage to Prof. Johannes Prinz was ended. At this stage she started regular and intensive travels through South Africa, the Natal South Coast, Swaziland, Zululand, Mozambique, the Congo, Zanzibar, Dakar, Senegal, Turkey, Madeira, Spain and other parts of Europe. During journeys she collected artefacts that were to become objects in her still life compositions and carved woodwork from Arab buildings as frames for her paintings. In the years that followed, Stern compiled expedition journals portraying her romantic responses to Africa. The journals were published as *Congo*, in 1943, and *Zanzibar*, in 1948.

From 1935 to the 1940's her work on tribal life and Malay subjects in South Africa reached a high. During these years she also experimented with sculpture and ceramics. Stern's works included still life compositions, landscapes and especially portraits from the different regions and cultures – these were executed in oil, watercolour, gouache and charcoal.

In contrast to her contemporaries, such as **Maggie Laubser**, **Dorothy Kay** and **Maud Sumner**, who painted self-portraits, Stern refrained from depicting herself in any work, but it is the artist's empathy and emotion, a projection of the self, that one could observe in works with specifically women as a subject. During her European trips, visits to exhibitions of works by Tintoretto, Van Gogh and Picasso inspired her.

In the beginning of her career, Stern's work suffered under unfavourable critical reviews. It was only from the mid-1940's that her reputation as an artist in South Africa became less controversial, and from 1948 onwards she was part of all major national exhibitions and represented South Africa in various international exhibitions. These included: International Jewish Exhibition, Zurich, Empire Art Exhibition in London, Exhibition of South African Art at the Tate Gallery, the Venice Biennale from 1950 to 1958 and the Sao Paulo Biennale (graphic). In 1952 she received the Cape Tercentenary Grant for outstanding work, in 1959 the Molteno Prize, in 1960 the Regional Award of the Peggy Guggenheim International Art Prize, in 1963 the Oppenheimer Award and, in 1965, the Medal of Honour for Painting from the South African Academy of Science and Arts.

In Cape Town, on 23 August 1966, Stern passed away of heart failure. Her will stipulated that her estate be kept in a trust and the income directed towards the promotion of art in South Africa. Today, her collection and her home 'The Fris', in Rosebank, Cape Town, are preserved as *The Irma Stern Museum* under administration of the University of Cape Town.

From 1957 Stern held several retrospective exhibitions, but the largest was held posthumously in 1967, followed by a travelling memorial exhibition, *Homage to Irma Stern*, in 1968, by the Rembrandt Art Foundation.

Stern's historical importance rests on her contribution to Modernism in South Africa. By bringing it to the attention of the public she shifted perceptions about art in the country while being a professional and independent woman artist.

Bronne / Sources:

Arnold, M. 1995. *Irma Stern: A feast for the eye*. Rembrandt van Rijn Art Foundation: Stellenbosch.
Berman, E. 1983. *Art & Artists of South Africa*. AA Balkema: Cape Town.
Irma Stern Museum. 2015. Website. Available: www.irmasternmuseum.org.za

Photo: Irma Stern by Leon Levson, Johannesburg, 1930's. Courtesy of the Irma Stern Museum collection and the Trustees of the Irma Stern Trust

Artworks featured (no images due to copyright)

Stern, Irma (1894 – 1966)
Still life, 1943
Olieverf op doek / Oil on canvas

Stern, Irma (1894 – 1966)
Untitled, 1943
Olieverf op doek / Oil on canvas

Versameling / Collection:
Universiteitsmuseum / University Museum, Stellenbosch

www.la-motte.com

Irma Stern (1894 – 1966)