

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

Laubser is op 14 April 1886 op die plaas Bloublommetjieskloof in die distrik Malmesbury (Wes-Kaap) gebore. Sy het van 1893 tot 1896 by 'n plaasskool op Klipheuwel skoolgegaan en daarna, tot 1901, verdere skoolopleiding aan Bloemhof Seminarium, Stellenbosch ontvang. Hier het sy haar eerste kunslesse ontvang, by me B Wilson. Met haar terugkeer na die plaas, van 1901 tot 1902, is die lesse onderbreek en in 1903 het sy in Kaapstad by prof. Edward Roworth verdere onderrig ontvang.

As lid van die South African Society of Artists (SASA) vanaf 1907 het sy veral met kunstenaars in die omliggende gebiede van Kaapstad kennis gemaak, onder andere **Ruth Prowse** en Hugo Naudé. Aan die einde van 1909 het sy haar eerste groeputstalling met SASA gehou.

Laubser se eerste Europese besoek, van 1913 tot 1914, het Nederland ingesluit. Sy het ongeveer sewe maande lank in Laren, naby Amsterdam, tuisgegaan. Die reis was ryk aan inligting – sy het verskeie kunsuitstallings en museums in Amsterdam en Den Haag besoek en werke van kunstenaars soos Anton Mauve, JH Breitner, Jacoba van Heemskerck, Wasily Kandinsky en Franz Marc besigtig. Met die jare het sy 'n bewondering vir Marc se skilderkuns ontwikkel.

Kort voor die uitbreek van die Eerste Wêreldoorlog het sy Nederland verlaat en na Engeland gereis. Hier het sy haar vir die volgende vyf jaar aan die Slade School of Art in Londen geskryf, waar sy tekenkuns onder die leiding van Henry Tonks en Ambrose McEnroy bestudeer het. Tydens hierdie studiejare het sy na veral die middellande van Engeland en Skotland gereis, spesifiek om daar landskappe te skets en skilder. In 1915 het Laubser haar ouers in Suid-Afrika op die plaas Oortmanspost naby Malmesbury besoek.

Na haar studies in Londen was sy agtien maande lank in Antwerpen gevestig. In dié tydperk het sy, as gasstudent, veral figuurtekenklasse aan die Academie voor Schone Kunste bygewoon. Met die landskap as 'n aantrekkingskrag het sy na die platteland van Vlaandere en Wallonië gereis om die omgewings en hul elemente as skilderonderwerpe te benut. Byna 'n jaar lank, van einde 1920 tot voor haar terugkeer na Suid-Afrika in September 1921, het sy deur Italië gereis en veral Milaan en Venesië besoek. Tydens die reis het sy museums en galerye in München besoek, waar veral Duitse ekspressionisme te besigtig was.

Laubser het Suid-Afrika weer 'n jaar lank besoek en in Januarie 1922 van haar werke by die jaarlikse uitstalling van SASA in Kaapstad vertoon. Die res van die jaar en tot 1924 was sy weer op reis in Europa. Sy het haarself in Berlyn, waar **Irma Stern** ook gewoon en gewerk het, gevestig. Hier het sy weer met kunstenaars, veral Duitse ekspressioniste, wat Max Pechstein en Karl Schmidt-Rottluff insluit, kennis gemaak. Sy het daar private skilderlesse by kunstenaar Willy Jaeckel geneem. Laubser se skilder- en tekenwerk tot daardie tyd het portretstudies, meestal van modelle, stillewes, naakfigure en landskappe ingesluit.

In November 1924 het Laubser vir permanente verblyf na Suid-Afrika teruggekeer en die volgende agtien jaar op haar ouers se plaas Oortmanspost gewoon. Sy het haar vriendskap met **Ruth Prowse** en Hugo Naudé hervat en met **Florence Zerffi** en **Cecil Higgs** kennis gemaak. Gedurende 1924 en 1928 het Laubser veral portrette en landskappe van die Swartlandse omgewing geskilder, volgens dieselfde ekspressionistiese styl as dié van haar werke wat in Duitsland geskep is. Tot 1932 het sy na kusdorpe soos Langebaan, Hermanus, Gansbaai en Waenhuiskrans gereis en veral watervoëls en die visserslewe as tema gebruik. Ander skilderonderwerpe wat ook deur die jare gevolg het, was haar katte (lewendig) saam met blomme in stillewes, asook werkers op die oesland, wat haar landskapskilderye gedomineer het.

Haar eerste uitstalling sedert haar terugkeer na Suid-Afrika was by 'n groeputstalling, in 1929, van die *Nuwe Brandwag* by die Nasionale Museum in Bloemfontein. Hier is haar werke deur die Staat aangekoop vir Suid-Afrikaanse ambassades in Nederland, België, Frankryk, Duitsland en Italië. Laubser het in 1930 haar eerste solo-uitstalling in die Ou Hoofgebou van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch gehou. Die volgende jaar het sy haar eerste Transvaalse solo-uitstalling gehou, in die Macfadyensaal, Universiteit van Pretoria.

Gedurende 1931 tot 1933 en 1937 tot 1938 het Laubser se werk deel uitgemaak van sewe jaarlikse nasionale groeputstallings van 'Hedendaagse Suid-Afrikaanse Kuns'. Tussen die uitstallings het Laubser deur die Transvaalse en Vrystaatse platteland en Natal gereis en vanuit 'n ateljee in Kampsbaai gewerk – portretstudies van swart vroue in tradisionele drag, Indiër-vroue en Kaaps-Maleise vissers en vissershuse was in daardie tydperk van haar prominente temas.

In die veertigerjare het Laubser vir die eerste keer algemene erkenning as kunstenaar ontvang. Tussen 1932 en 1950 het sy landwyd vyftien solo-uitstallings gehou. 'n Hoogtepunt was dat Laubser se werk vir twee buitelandse uitstallings van Suid-Afrikaanse kuns gekies is – in 1937, in die Royal Institute Galleries, Londen en, in 1948, in die Tate Gallery, Londen, Amsterdam, Brussel, Parys, Ottawa en Washington.

In 1938 het Laubser op uitnodiging 'n lid van die *Nuwe Groep* geword en by die tweede en derde uitstalling in Pretoria en Kaapstad uitgestal. Hierna het sy, tussen 1941 en 1952, aan die meeste van die groep se uitstallings deelgeneem. In 1945 het sy haar eerste solo-uitstalling in Johannesburg, by Constantia Booksellers, gehou.

Teen 1946 het sy vir permanente verblyf na die Strand in die Wes-Kaap verhuis, waar sy 'n huis laat bou het wat sy 'Altyd Lig' genoem het. In dieselfde jaar het sy die Erepenning vir Skilderkuns van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns ontvang en in 1959 is Erelidmaatskap aan haar toegeken.

Tussen 1950 en 1973 het Laubser landwyd nog 25 solo-uitstallings gehou, hoofsaaklik in Kaapstad en Pretoria. Sy het ook weer na Natal, Transvaal en die Vrystaat gereis. Groeputstallings het ingesluit: die XXVIste Venice Biennale, in 1952 saam met **Irma Stern**, die 1956, 1960 en 1964 'Vierjaarlikse Uitstalling van Suid-Afrikaanse Kuns', en sy was een van agt Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars (**Cecil Higgs** en **Irma Stern** ingesluit) wat in 1959 in Den Haag en Bonn uitgestal het. Voorts het sy in 1968 'n Erepenning van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging (Wes-Kaap) ontvang.

Laubser het in 1970 haar veertigste en laaste solo-uitstalling gehou, by Gallery 101, Johannesburg. Sy is op 17 Mei 1973 in haar huis 'Altyd Lig' in die Strand oorlede.

Laubser was born on the farm Bloublommetjieskloof in the Malmesbury district (Western Cape) on 14 April 1886. From 1893 until 1896 she attended a farm school at Klipheuwel. Further schooling, until 1901, was at Bloemhof Seminarium, Stellenbosch, where she received her first art lessons, from Ms B Wilson. On her return to the farm, from 1901 until 1902, these art lessons were interrupted and in 1903 she received further tutoring from Prof. Edward Roworth in Cape Town.

As a member of the South African Society of Artists (SASA) since 1907, she met artists in, particularly, the areas surrounding Cape Town – amongst them were **Ruth Prowse** and Hugo Naudé. At the end of 1909 she participated in her first group exhibition with SASA.

Laubser's first European visit, from 1913 to 1914, included the Netherlands. For approximately seven months she stayed in Laren, close to Amsterdam. During the visit she gathered a wealth of information – she visited several art exhibitions and museums in Amsterdam and The Hague and viewed works by artists such as Anton Mauve, JH Breitner, Jacoba van Heemskerck, Wasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. Through the years she became a great admirer of Marc's painting.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I she left the Netherlands for England. For the next five years she attended the Slade School of Art in London, where she studied the art of drawing under Henry Tonks and Ambrose McEnroy. During these study years she travelled to, particularly, the English and Scottish Midlands, specifically to sketch and paint landscapes of those areas. In 1915 Laubser visited her parents in South Africa, on the farm Oortmanspost near Malmesbury.

After the completion of her studies in London she lived in Antwerp for eighteen months. During this period – as a guest student – she attended figure-drawing classes, in particular, at the Academie voor Schone Kunste. With landscapes as an attraction, she travelled to the countryside of Flanders and Wallonia in order to utilise the surroundings and their elements as subjects for her paintings. For almost a year, from the end of 1920 until before her return to South Africa in September 1921, she travelled Italy and paid Milan and Venice special visits. During her travels she visited museums and galleries in Munich where, especially, German expressionism was on show.

Laubser spent another year visiting South Africa and, in January 1922, exhibited some of her works at the annual exhibition of SASA in Cape Town. The rest of the year and until 1924 she undertook travels in Europe. She settled in Berlin, where **Irma Stern** also lived and worked. Here she met artists, especially German expressionists, including Max Pechstein and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and received private painting lessons from artist Willy Jaeckel. Until that time Laubser's paintings and drawings included portrait studies, mostly of models, still lifes, nudes and landscapes.

In November 1924 Laubser returned to South Africa for permanent residence and lived on her parent's farm Oortmanspost for the next eighteen years. She renewed her friendship with **Ruth Prowse** and Hugo Naudé and met **Florence Zerffi** and **Cecil Higgs**. During 1924 and 1928 Laubser painted especially portraits and landscapes of the Swartland region, in the same expressionist style as the works she had produced in Germany. Until 1932 she travelled to coastal towns such as Langebaan, Hermanus, Gansbaai and Waenhuiskrans and used especially water-birds and the fisher-people as themes. Other paintings that followed through the years were of her cats (alive) together with flowers in still lifes, as well as workers harvesting, the latter dominating her landscape paintings.

Her first exhibition since her return to South Africa was at a group exhibition, in 1929, of the *Nuwe Brandwag* in the National Museum in Bloemfontein. Here some of her works were bought by the government for the South African embassies in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Italy. Laubser held her first solo exhibition in the Old Main Building of the University of Stellenbosch in 1930. The next year she held her first Transvaal solo exhibition in the Macfadyen Hall, University of Pretoria.

From 1931 until 1933 and from 1937 until 1938 Laubser's work formed part of seven annual national group exhibitions of 'Contemporary South African Art'. Between the exhibitions Laubser travelled through the Transvaal and Free State countryside and Natal and worked from a studio in Camps Bay – portrait studies of black women in traditional clothes, Indian women and Cape Malay fishermen and fisherman's cottages were prominent themes during that time.

During the 1940's, for the first time, Laubser was generally acknowledged as an artist. Between 1932 and 1950 she held fifteen solo exhibitions countrywide. A highlight was that Laubser's work was selected for two international exhibitions on South African art – in 1937, in the Royal Institute Galleries, London and, in 1948, in the Tate Gallery, London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Ottawa and Washington.

On invitation, Laubser became a member of the *New Group* in 1938 and exhibited at the second and third exhibition in Pretoria and Cape Town. Thereafter, between 1941 and 1952, she participated in most of the group's exhibitions. In 1945 she held her first solo exhibition in Johannesburg, at Constantia Booksellers.

By 1946 she moved to Strand in the Western Cape for permanent residence and had a house built, which she called 'Altyd Lig'. During the same year she received the Medal of Honour for Painting from the South African Academy for Science and Arts and in 1959 she was granted Honorary Membership.

Between 1950 and 1973 Laubser held another 25 solo exhibitions countrywide, mainly in Cape Town and Pretoria. She also undertook further journeys to Natal, Transvaal and the Free State. Group exhibitions included: the XXVIth Venice Biennale, in 1952 with **Irma Stern**, the 1956, 1960 and 1964 'Quadrennial Exhibition of South African Art', and she was one of eight South African artists (including **Cecil Higgs** and **Irma Stern**) who exhibited in The Hague and Bonn in 1959. In 1968 she received the Medal of Honour from the South African Society of Arts (Western Cape).

Laubser held her fortieth and last solo exhibition at Gallery 101, Johannesburg. She passed away in her home 'Altyd Lig' in Strand on 17 May 1973.

Maggie Laubser (1886 – 1973)



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Ballot, M. 2012. *Maggie Laubser: Altyd Lig*. Stellenbosch University Museum: Stellenbosch.
Photo: Maggie Laubser in 1936. Courtesy of the JS Gericke Library – Special Collections, Stellenbosch University, Maggie Laubser collection no. 79

Artworks featured (no images due to copyright)

Laubser, Maggie (1886 – 1973)
Kat met Jakobregops, 1934
Olieverf op doek / Oil on canvas

Laubser, Maggie (1886 – 1973)
Portret van 'n meisie, 1936
Olieverf op doek / Oil on canvas

Versameling / Collection:
Universiteitsmuseum / University Museum, Stellenbosch

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