

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

Hillhouse is in die Strand, Wes-Kaap gebore. Terwyl sy nog 'n dogtertjie was, het die gesin na Bloemfontein verhuis en later na Durban, waar sy die meeste van haar kinderdae deurgebring het. Van 1922 tot 1926 het Hillhouse aan die Natalse Kollege vir Tegniese Kuns gestudeer, met onderrig by prof. Oxley.

Sy het twaalf jaar lank as 'n kommersiële kunstenaar gewerk en geld gespaar om Londen te besoek en 'n tyd daar deur te bring. Terwyl sy in Londen was, van 1938 tot 1939, het Hillhouse onderrig van Martin Block ontvang. Tydens hierdie studies en deur haar deelname aan Block se kleurwetenskap-navorsing, is sy deur sy teorie en wetenskap t.o.v. kleur beïnvloed, soos waarneembaar in Hillhouse se oeuvre.

In 1940 het sy na Suid-Afrika teruggekeer en haar inkomste verdien uit die illustreer van boeke, met inbegrip van werk vir die Afrikaanse Kinderensiklopedie en Nasionale Pers. In dieselfde jaar het Hillhouse, bekend as 'n eselskilder, 'n lid van die *Nuwe Groep* geword.

Sy het aspekte van die omgewing waar sy gewoon het as onderwerp vir haar werk gebruik. Dit het boemelaars, blommeverkoopsters en tonele in en om Kaapstad ingesluit. Sy het in 1944 haar eerste solo-uitstalling in Kaapstad gehou.

In die vyftigerjare is Hillhouse se werk deur haar uitdagende kleur-integrasies gekenmerk wat haar werk, in teenstelling met haar vroeë figuratiewe toespeling, gedomineer het – haar 'nuwe styl' was meer abstrak.

Sy het aan die 1952 Van Riebeeck drie-euuefees-uitstalling in Kaapstad en, van 1956 tot 1960, aan die eerste en tweede Vierjaarlikse Uitstalling van Suid-Afrikaanse kuns deelgeneem. Daarna is sy vir 'n jaar se verblyf na Europa terug om haar kuns daar te beoefen.

Terug in Suid-Afrika, in 1957, is sy aangestel as deeltydse lektre in Kommersiële-kuns aan die Michaelis-kunsskool, waar **Eleanor Esmonde-White** ook onderrig gegee het. Elke tweede jaar, van 1959 tot 1966, het sy by die Sao Paulo Biennale (grafies) uitgestal en, gedurende dieselfde tyd, by die Venice Biennale.

Gedurende die sestigerjare het Hillhouse verder met haar komposisies en kleurkeuse geëksperimenteer. In 1960 self het sy saam met **Eleanor Esmonde-White** en Katrine Harries aan 'n grafiese uitstalling in die Modern Homes-galery in Kaapstad deelgeneem. Die daaropvolgende nege jaar het sy ook voltyds onderrig in Ontwerp aan die Michaelis-kunsskool gegee.

In 1965 was Hillhouse 'n stigterslid van die Artists' Gallery aan Adderleystraat in Kaapstad. Die galery is kort daarna, in 1970, gesluit.

Na haar aftrede het sy 'n voltydse kunstenaar geword en gedurende die volgende drie jaar, tot 1971, reise na Mali, Europa en Jerusalem onderneem. Die inspirasie wat sy uit hierdie reise geput het, is in verskeie werke waarneembaar, soos wat dit haar tot die benutting van nuwe onderwerpmateriaal aangevuur het. Hierdie werke is by haar hoogs suksesvolle uitstallings in Kaapstad, in 1973 en 1974, vertoon.

Gedurende 1976, tydens 'n reis na Durban, het Indiërvroue in hul kleurryke en eksotiese drag as inspirasie vir haar werke in verskeie media gedien. Hierdie werke was by 'n verdere suksesvolle uitstalling in Kaapstad te sien.

In 1978 is 'n klein oorsig-uitstalling van die verskillende media waarin sy gewerk het saam met die Suid-Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging se Worcester-tak gehou, gevolg deur nog een by Die Kunskamer in Kaapstad. Sy het in 1979 die Cape Arts-medalje van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kunsvereniging, Wes-Kaapse streek, ontvang.

Hillhouse is in 1989 op 81-jaar oorlede, terwyl sy in die Wes-Kaap gewoon het.

Hillhouse was born in Strand, Western Cape in 1908. While she was still a little girl, the family moved to Bloemfontein and later to Durban, where she spent most of her childhood years. From 1922 to 1926 she studied at the Natal Technical Art College under Prof. Oxley.

For twelve years she worked as a commercial artist, saving money to be able to visit London and stay there for some time. While in London, from 1938 to 1939, Hillhouse studied under Martin Block. During these studies and through her participation in Block's colour-science research, she was influenced by his theory and science of colour, as is evident from her oeuvre.

In 1940 she returned to South Africa and earned a living as a book illustrator, including work for the 'Afrikaans Children's Encyclopedia' and Nasionale Pers. In the same year Hillhouse, known as an easel-painter, became a member of the *New Group*.

She used the surroundings in which she was living as subject matter for her work – amongst others, the waifs, flower-sellers and scenes in and around Cape Town. She held her first solo-exhibition in Cape Town in 1944.

During the 1950's Hillhouse's work was marked by her daring colour-integrations that dominated her work in comparison to the earlier figurative allusions – her 'new style' was more abstract.

She participated in the 1952 Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Exhibition in Cape Town and, from 1956 to 1960, in the first and second Quadrennial of South African art. She returned to Europe for a year to practise her art there.

Back in South Africa, in 1957, she was appointed part-time lecturer in Commercial Art at the Michaelis School of Art, where **Eleanor Esmonde-White** also lectured. Every second year, from 1959 to 1966, she exhibited at the Sao Paulo Biennale (graphic) while, during the same period, she exhibited at the Venice Biennale.

During the 1960's Hillhouse experimented further with her compositions and colour choice. In 1960 she exhibited with **Eleanor Esmonde-White** and Katrine Harries in a graphic exhibition at the Modern Homes Gallery in Cape Town. The following nine years she also taught Design full-time at Michaelis School of Art.

Hillhouse was a foundation member of Artists' Gallery at Lower Adderley Street in Cape Town, in 1965. The gallery was closed down shortly afterwards, in 1970.

Upon her retirement she became a full-time artist and, during the next three years, till 1971, undertook trips to Mali, Europe and Jerusalem. The inspiration gained from these trips can be seen in various works as it sparked off new subject matter. These works were shown at her very successful 1970 and 1973 exhibitions in Cape Town.

During 1976, on a trip to Durban, Indian women in their colourful and exotic garb served as inspiration for her works in various media. These works were shown at yet another successful exhibition in Cape Town.

In 1978 a small retrospective exhibition of the various media in which she worked was held with the South African Association of Artists, Worcester branch, followed by another at Die Kunskamer in Cape Town. She received the Cape Arts Medal from the South African Association of Arts, Western Cape Region, in 1979.

Hillhouse passed away in 1989 at the age of 81, while she was living in the Western Cape.



May Hillhouse (1908 – 1989)

Bronne / Sources:

Berman, E. 1983. *Art & Artists of South Africa*. AA Balkema: Cape Town.
 Absolut Art Gallery. 2015. May Hillhouse page. Available: www.absolutart.co.za
 Photo: May Hillhouse, 1978. Courtesy of SANL (Cape Town) - CTN 27486 Cape Times Negatives Collection.



Hillhouse, May (1908 - 1989)
Three Figures, 1959
 Olieverf op doek / Oil on canvas

Versameling / Collection:
 Rupert Kunststiging / Rupert Art Foundation, Stellenbosch