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# Catch a good slap

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There's an ethereal joy in the maturity with which Pauline Gutter handles the subjects of the drawings she currently has hanging at Everard Read Gallery in Rosebank, northern Joburg.

Gutter forms part of a group exhibition that includes painter Walter Voigt as well as Zimbabwean-born illustrator Brennan Seward.

Her contribution to the show are three oil paintings which comprise two studies relating to the bovine; a larger-than-life portrait titled Honorary President and a series of charcoal-on-paper drawings.

These are portraits of frail and elderly figures, however, they are in fact her strongest work yet.

As if to confirm that indeed "a drawing should have the decisiveness of a good slap" – something the great modernist Henri Matisse once said – the work displays a refreshing clarity of vision.

This is precisely because a slap is a time-honoured remedy to most childish troubles and other such puerility.

Hence it is here so eloquently deployed. Gutter is, after all, addressing that mature and sobering subject – the idea of death as the eventual outcome of all human life.

She uses charcoal sticks and some black-coloured water to make her marks. By studying her subjects' facial lines and textures – and the fading light of their life force – Gutter manages to not just capture but channel the meaning of a disintegrating person in the waning years of their lives.

So that, perhaps, through contemplating these drawings, we may come closer to understanding or confronting our fear of old age and death itself.

Her drawings are larger than life in scale and lend themselves to the iconic. Their grand size is their strength, as if they are designed to dwarf audiences as metaphors for the gravity of their theme.

In the piece titled Departure, Gutter represents a man returning the gaze of the viewer, or more harrowingly staring back at his imminent death and the reality of his mortal departure.

It's a portrait that convinces us we're really with the subject in that charged moment.

Another drawing, Fading Memories, confronts us with the smirking face of another old man beaten by time. The aspect of imminent death is not as chilling here.

There are also the two mangled faces titled The Listener and Pirouette. These are faces without a discernable identity, like those decomposed by death.

Perhaps this is an attempt to codify the idea that death equalises all men into one amorphous mass.

As for Gutter's three oil

paintings, they stand out as an artist's attempt to see her pictorial vocabulary transcend beyond her drawing medium: charcoal on paper.

With the exception of the one painting of a cow in a desolate landscape, the other two almost succeed.

Gutter approaches her mature theme with convincing intimacy even with a mere 32 years of life in her.

Hence, as the artist Marlene Dumas proposed, a portrait is not about capturing a single identity, rather it's about the relationship

between two subjects – the artist and his model.

It's that place where attraction and distrust meet. In this sense, Gutter's youth and the age of her models complete Dumas' proposed duets to create a refreshing meaning.

Gutter's fellow exhibitor Voigt shows a series of oil paintings of different skylscapes.

In the work, the artist has undertaken a study of clouds under different light conditions. Voigt is an able painter and just as much a highlight of the show.

There's also Seward, who's

concerned with drawing as a discipline. His works deal with light and the human figure. His background as an illustrator is apparent in his ink-on-paper drawings.

The exhibition is on until August 30

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