

San cave art inspiration for Knysna exhibition

CONSIDERING THERIANTHROPE exhibition by Guy Thesen (Knysna Fine Art Gallery until May 26).

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THE cave art of the San is the inspiration for an exhibition of work by Guy Thesen, on show at the Knysna Fine Art Gallery.

It is called *Considering Therianthropes* – a therianthrope is a hallucinogenic fusion of man and beast, brought on by the altered consciousness of trance, a principal part of the spiritual life of the San people.

The San elevated themselves into the realms of trance by dancing with rhythmic intensity around their camp fires at night and much of their art is a record of the images seen in the spiritual world of the trance.

“My art and my ideas for

this exhibition owe much to the culture of the San,” said Thesen at the opening.

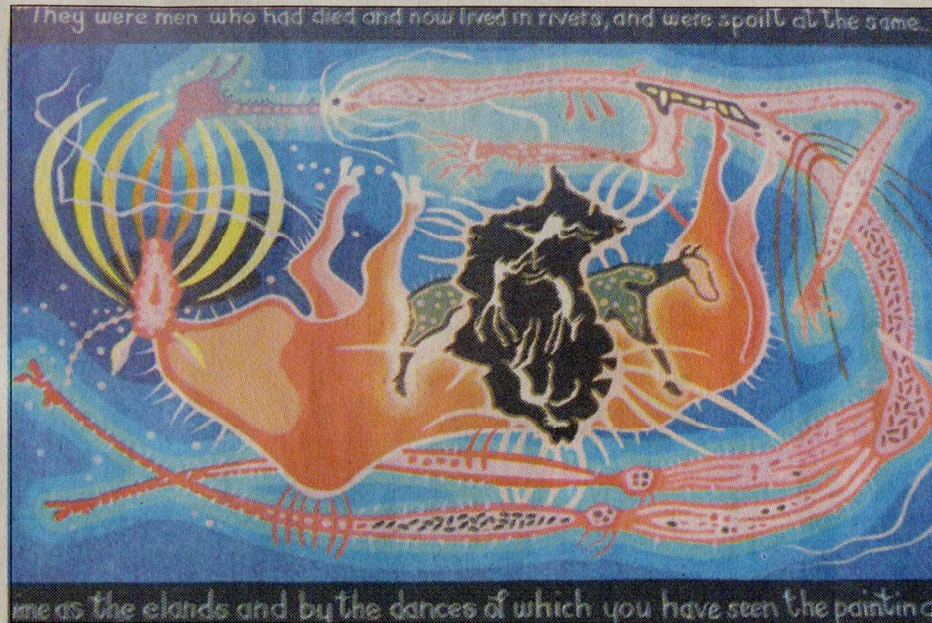
The other source of ideas for Thesen has been the archive of transcripts of the folklore of the San, assembled by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, in the latter part of the 19th century.

The archive which is the only recorded documentation of the customs and beliefs of the San, is now housed at The University of Cape Town.

Thesen has drawn phrases and sentences from the archive, to provide subject matter for paintings and the text is recorded in fine style, above and below each painting.

The exhibition comprises five sculptures in bronze and 13 paintings in oil, in reverse on glass.

The sculptures vary in size from 85cm to 1,60m, whereas the paintings are all of one size, being about 40cm by 25cm.



Guy Thesen's oil painting in reverse on glass, *Men Who Had Died*, is one of the works making up the *Considering Therianthropes* exhibition at Knysna Fine Art Gallery. Picture: TIMOTHY TWIDDLE

It took Thesen a year to prepare the work for this exhibition and the results bear

testament to his meticulous and methodical approach. The sculptures show

some lovely lines and are well massed where required.

All five sculptures are of fine quality and are proudly mounted on blocks of roughly hewn sandstone.

The paintings are a joyful explosion of line and colour.

In the *Medicine Man's Custom to Walk at Night*, clean flowing lines are offset by strong chiaroscuro.

Men Who Had Died is rendered in glorious technicolour, of the kind one would fully expect to see in a cataleptic, dream-like state of mind.

Thesen says: “This exhibition is an opportunity to represent the incredibly rich and deep history of the San images that surround us on rock surfaces and in caves.”

In that respect Thesen has succeeded admirably with this exhibition, but more than that his art is superbly executed and *Considering Therianthropes* is a display of achievement and merit.