

# Crisp, cerebral sustenance

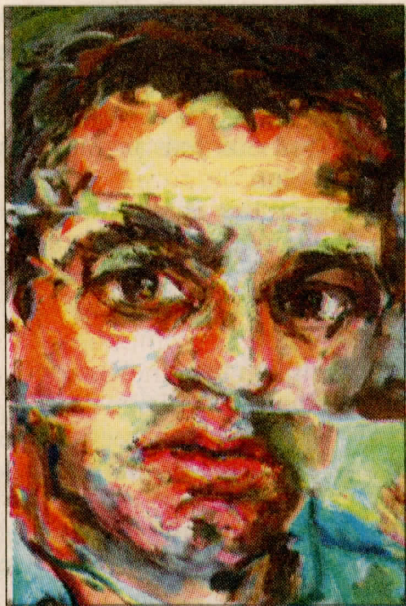
Exhibitions: **Mary-Rose Hendrikse** at the AVA Gallery; **Friha Langerman** at Bell-Roberts. Both run until July 27. **MELVYN MINNAAR** reviews.

FOR the quick passer-by they may seem worlds apart, but the exhibitions (if that is the right word to use in this case) by these two thoughtful artists have much in common.

Each also provides, for the observant and equally contemplative visitor, perceptive pleasures and crisp, cerebral sustenance.

Both provide fierce demonstration that skills, honed in the execution of art-making – in Langerman's case a magician's bag of modern and old media tools; for Hendrikse, the obsession of the so-called old fashion of painting on canvas – can drive a serious message home.

But the two artists also set out to explore what we see and what we think, or ought to think, when we encounter the very physicalities of artworks. In other words, they question and analyse the way art works



**EXPLORATION:** *Mark Divided* // by Mary-Rose Hendrikse at the AVA Gallery.

in signs and as language.

If it all sounds a tad academic, the reality in the galleries is quite playful.

One easily gets caught up in the chirpy energy with which Hendrikse splashes about strokes to conjure up mood and emotion, and to construct from such energy and colour a vari-

ety of close-up portraits.

Of course, her game is one of irony. Subtly hinted at in the witty title *Mostly Portraits* (they may or may not be such), her preoccupation is to validate the opposite of traditionally-painted portraiture: carefully-plotted specks of oil paint on canvas giving way to a grandiose, hyper-real image of the person depicted.

Her painterly efforts – not all as punchy, contained or successful as she'd probably hoped for – make a compelling case for the traditional medium to be reinvented as visual language for a traditional purpose. She successfully puts both the themes of portraiture – a welcome move – and painting in the spotlight.

Langerman, too, takes traditional art media – classic etching, photography and that favourite “local” method, the zippy linocut – and fiddles with it, very skilfully, for newer purposes.

But she also takes to hi-tech in the form of pieces made out of chromed plasma-cut steel and sand-blasted mirror.

All for use in her installation called *The Knowledge Chambers*. The “knowledge” that is referred to is the kind that is recorded – in signs, in print – in taxonomic systems such as an encyclopedia.

We read that Langerman took as point of departure the famous *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (encyclopedia, or a systematic dictionary of the sciences, arts, and crafts) published by the French philosopher Diderot in 1751.

In her wide-ranging installation, Langerman sets out to show how such systems eventually collapse.

Of course, she draws a direct and pointed parallel to the “systems” and language of contemporary art-making – which often leaves the viewer to provide the meaning to what the artist offers.

It is quite hectic, intimidatingly cool and bordering on overload – but then that is probably also the point.

Like Hendrikse, she forces us to work a little harder at the art that we wish to know.