

New gallery brings art to eastern CBD

Downtown Joburg has trendy revamped loft apartments, a fashion district, a cultural precinct and, now, a new art gallery. The Seippel Gallery, brother of the Cologne exhibition space, has opened in End Street.

February 23, 2007

By Lucille Davie

A NEW art gallery opened this week in downtown Joburg – the Seippel Gallery.

It is owned by German art historian and dealer Ralf-P Seippel, who has an art gallery – also called the **Seippel Gallery** – in Cologne, in Germany.

It is on the ground floor of August House, a recently revamped former factory building on End Street, on the eastern edge of the city. Seippel says he looked for the right venue to open a Joburg branch of his Cologne gallery, which, according to the website, exhibits "non-trendy, innovative, international contemporary art".

He didn't fancy Rosebank, where there are already several galleries. Newtown was another location, but "there is too much speculation in Newtown".



The striking photographic display of Jurgen Schadeberg at the gallery

Seippel is excited about the possibilities of opening a gallery on the more depressed east side of the inner city. "You must go where you can develop something," he says, referring to the gallery's proximity to Ellis Park with its 2010 soccer world cup possibilities, the fashion district, and the Central Johannesburg College.

He has known Bie Venter, the art curator and cultural developer, for 13 years; when she became a part-owner of August House, they started talking about the spacious, 1 000m² ground-floor space last year. Venter was involved in the revamp of August House, which has two levels of loft apartments, plus several art studios and workshop spaces.

Five South African artists are showing work at the opening exhibition: Bonile Bam, Mbongeni Buthelezi, Jurgen Schadeberg, Linda Shongwe and Fikile Shosana. But Seippel also wants to give the gallery an international flavour, and so has work on show by artists from Australia, the United States and Germany: Tony Clark, Julie Dowling, Eckhard Etzold, Andreas Kaiser and Robert Klumpen.

The white room, with its fat, fluted columns and large industrial windows, is in sharp contrast to the many rundown buildings in the vicinity. Some are residential, others are small-scale clothing factory spaces.

"This is a wonderful space. There's room for a workshop, for showing documentaries, for dance." Seippel points out that there are no international art galleries in the CBD. "This is a vibrant art space in downtown Joburg."

And true to the international flavour of the gallery, he is planning to exhibit an international Dutch artist towards the end of the year.

He is particularly excited about a new artist, Linda Shongwe from Nelspruit, who is exhibiting for the first time in Johannesburg. Shongwe was invited by Seippel to exhibit his works at the opening, after the gallery owner saw some of his art at a workshop in Nelspruit.

Seippel has commissioned 13 drawings from Shongwe for a German client. The artist says he was drawing before he could write, and he sold his first artwork to Danie Jordaan in 2004.

A close friend told Seippel that there was "very interesting art in South Africa", prompting him to take his first trip to the country – back in 1997. Since then he has visited all the major art centres in South Africa, and describes Joburg's art scene as "exciting".

Since his first visit to the country, Seippel has been involved in various non-commercial exhibitions and artists-in-residence and exchange programmes, in which some 15 000 learners have taken part.

Corporates make up part of his client base, most of which are based in Joburg. "This city gives you an idea of contemporary South Africa, which you don't get in Cape Town."

He describes Joburg as "vibrant, much rougher [than Cape Town], but my town".

The gallery, with ample parking, is at 76-82 End Street, in the city. It is open by appointment; phone Ralf-P Seippel on 082 299 0550 .

Permission to use web site material

Publishers may use material from this site free of charge, as long as:

- Credit is given to either the "City of Johannesburg website (www.joburg.org.za)" or to "Johannesburg News Agency (www.joburg.org.za)";
- If the article is used online, a link is provided to the original article on this website;
- The name of the article's author is acknowledged;
- The webmaster is informed of how and where the material is used ([fill in this brief online form](#)).

Johannesburg News Agency is operated by **BIG Media** at 011-484-1400
