



MOVING DAY: From left, Ruby Green, Ashleigh Russell, Tony Oates and curator Carol Brown apply the finishing touches at the Drill Hall. Photo: STUART WALMSLEY

Drill Hall lines up signs of the struggle

By Sally Pryor
Cultural Institutions Reporter

Art can shine through all forms of human struggle, and can survive even the most oppressive regimes.

That's the message of the powerful *Home and Away: A return to the South* exhibition opening tomorrow at the ANU Drill Hall Gallery, featuring works by Apartheid-era South African black artists, and international artists who supported them in their struggle.

The exhibition is made up of pieces from two collections – works by local artists that made their way into private collections and were later repatriated back to South Africa through the Ifa Lethu Foundation, and the Art Against Apartheid collection, founded as a rally point in the 1980s for international artists to show solidarity with South Africans.

Exhibition curator Carol Brown arrived in Canberra this week after overseeing the show's extended tour of South Africa, where thousands of locals were able to see these works for the first time.

She said while the two collections had not

previously been linked, the show was designed to explore the similarities and differences between art created by an oppressed people, and that done by outsiders who supported them.

"During the latter years of apartheid in the '80s, two French artists wanted to show their solidarity with the struggle in South Africa," she said. "They made a call to well-known international artists to donate works to a collection which would travel the world to raise awareness of apartheid and would never be shown in South Africa until there was democracy."

The collection, which includes works by Roy Lichtenstein and Saul Steinberg, travelled the world and was eventually presented to the South African government in 1995.

It was stored for a decade in the Houses of Parliament, and later in the Robben Island Museum archives.

In the meantime, retired Australian diplomat Diane Johnstone, who was posted to South Africa in the 1970s and now lives in Canberra, decided to donate her personal collection of South African art to the Pretoria Art Museum,

where they could finally be seen by local people.

Another former diplomat, Bruce Haigh, followed suit, and by 2005, the Ifa Lethu (Our Heritage) Foundation was formed.

The collection grew to include other private collections of South African Apartheid-era art from Australian donors, and now contains donations from private collectors in more than 14 countries.

Ms Brown said merging the two collections for the first time had been a fascinating curatorial exercise.

"I think there's an interesting parallel... in looking at how people from the outside were looking in at us, and how people from the inside were looking at themselves, and that was the main curatorial concept of the exhibition, to bring these two together," she said.

■ *Home and Away: A return to the South* will be officially launched at the Drill Hall Gallery tonight by former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and opens to the public tomorrow and will run until July 3. Curator Carol Brown will give a floor talk at the gallery tomorrow at 12pm.