

tonight art

Retrospective sees Goldblatt get his dues

DIANE DE BEER

DAVID Goldblatt is one of South Africa's most-widely admired photographers and, indeed (although he dislikes being described this way), one of the country's most influential artists. That's precisely why guest curator, the Goodman Gallery's Neil Dundas, felt that he would be honoured to pay homage to someone who deserves it thoroughly, yet hasn't had that kind of nod from home.

Dundas is as elegantly eloquent when speaking about the photographer and his work in more detail. "This exhibition – like Goldblatt – favours plain speaking, brave and forthright opinions on seeking social justice and demonstrates his tireless pursuit which reveals South Africa's values," he explains.

Illuminating the artist's work, he says he combines documentary photo-journalism, socio-political commentary, narrative and historiography in creating iconic portraits, vivid landscapes and gritty cityscapes as those pictured here show.

Goldblatt was the one who turned the Dundas head about photography. "It's a moment in time," says the curator.

But he also believes that what Goldblatt has done (and is still doing at 85!) is creating a social document of our time, our history, in essence. And here he includes his moral purpose and empathy visible in the pictures.

"It's about what people do with photography," he says as a final word on that topic.

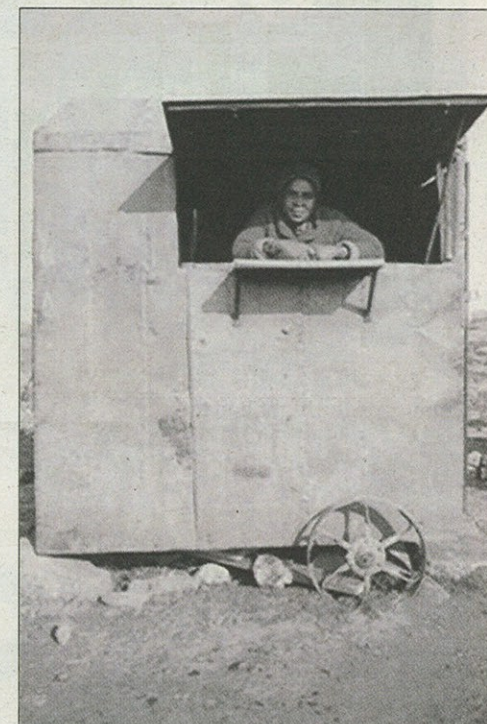
For almost seven decades, Goldblatt has been paying fastidious attention to South Africans: their individual stories and collective histories, their homes, their



Left, The brothers Stappies and Kloof Corder challenge me to a shooting competition. The target was a brown stone on a brown field about 50m away. As prize, they put up a watermelon and I, a couple of cans of beer. Gankaskloof, Cape Province (Western Cape), December 1967.

Below, Cafe-de-Move-On, Croesus 1964.

PICTURES: SUPPLIED



DAVID GOLDBLATT: THE PURSUIT OF VALUES

CURATOR: Neil Dundas
VENUE: Standard Bank Gallery, cnr Frederick and Simmonds streets, Johannesburg
UNTIL: December 5

journeys, their workplaces.

He never shied away from the grim realities of apartheid – on the contrary, he captured these on film so that they could become more widely known – but he also

sought and found moments of redemption, sympathy and even humour. Nothing is ever simply black or white and that's what his work captured as he moved into the present and simply kept taking pictures.

Over the past 20 years his camera has been trained on the paradoxes of development and decay, liberty and instability, opportunity and chaos in post-apartheid (or, as some have described it, says Dundas, "neo-apartheid") South Africa.

Even though he does not consider himself a political activist, he has been active in politics nonetheless – whether as a critic of exploitative labour practices, a powerful documenter of systemic poverty and

structural inequality, or, more recently, a protester against censorship and limitations on freedom of speech.

Perhaps that's why his pictures speak volumes, because of the authenticity, the place he comes from. He's not trying to make a predestined point, he's simply showing what is.

"He is constantly reminding people about their environment, marks in the landscape and his portraits are both powerful and intimate," says Dundas.

In this retrospective exhibition, the curator has taken the opportunity "to examine how Goldblatt's life's work has explored and expressed the values of South Africa and its peoples".

"He, more than anyone, let's me look with a fresh eye," he notes. "It's the strangeness of

his paradox, his attention to detail which he combines with a painterly eye."

That is why this exhibition, Dundas feels, is long overdue. Goldblatt has been celebrated all over the world and ranks with the best, he believes.

The Pursuit of Values includes photographs from Goldblatt's twin projects, *South Africa – The Structure of Things Then* and *Structures of Dominion and Democracy*, as well as a number of images that have not previously been exhibited or published.

"The exhibition is intended as a survey of Goldblatt's powerful and large body of work; also to pay tribute to his skill and excellence as a photographer and his pursuit of humane, honest, egalitarian moral values often in the face of sharp criticism of the dark threats of suppression and a hostile political environment."

Dundas (with the help of colleague Nikki Berriman who has a close relationship with Goldblatt) intends the show to reveal a set of stories and surprises behind the image which will inform our view of Goldblatt and demonstrate our respect and endorsement of the man and what he stands for.