

FINGERPRINTCOLLECTION

Showcasing a CLASSIC collection of
Investment ART

Article by:
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Koos van der Lende's intensely personal engagements with the environment underpin his status as a leading South African landscape photographer. Born in Pretoria, South Africa (1955), he emigrated to the Netherlands with his Dutch parents in 1971. After completing his studies at the School of Photography in The Hague, he visited the country



of his birth in 1977. The experience prompted him to return on a more permanent basis, and in 1983 he immigrated back to South Africa. He spent the next two decades working as a commercial photographer, in 2002 decisively abandoning the confines of a studio environment for the outdoors, where he spends most of his year photographing series of limited edition work. Van der Lende's portfolio is testimony of his formidable artistic talent and unrelenting dedication to the art of photography. Working from Pretoria, he mostly shoots in panoramic format using the time-honoured film and darkroom processing techniques. The large vistas his camera records are technically complex, Van der Lende spending days, sometimes even weeks researching the ambience of each potential composition. Typically, his pictures blend natural and artificial lighting sources, with minimal intervention afterwards during the printing and reproduction of his spectacular prints. The photographer imbues the picturesque quality of his landscapes with an added layer of spiritual intensity, although Van der Lende is by no means proscriptive in enforcing this view. Modesty is central to both his character and his work, which in itself records an awestruck moment of humility and wonder.



Martin Osner has a natural artistic curiosity for the world he inhabits, a fact that logically steered him towards photography at an early age. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa (1963), he opened his first photographic studio in Johannesburg in 1981 – establishing a solid reputation as a commercial photographer. By nature an entrepreneurial thinker, his move to Pretoria with his wife, Anita, and their three children, allowed him to pursue other ventures complimentary to his photography. In 1993 he co-founded the National College of Photography, which today is now one of Southern Africans premier training institutions, where he continues to lecture. As an artist Osner eschews pure registration photography, favouring a more expressive vision that accords with both his visual understanding and spiritual appreciation of the world. His photography, generally, is characterised by an urge to explore with the willingness to experiment. Abstraction, paired

with a necessary sense of restraint, bears out Osner's belief that simplicity is the cornerstone of a successful image. Rather than clutter his images with detail, he prefers to concentrate on elemental forms, patterns and shapes. Formally, Osner is happy to photograph in both the studio and outdoors, and he is able to work with both traditional and modern photographic technologies. The Fingerprint Collection, unveiled at two Pretoria galleries in 2006, is his first committed body of fine art photographs and represents a mature vision fully achieved.



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Friendship, it is this universal idea, as well as a mutual interest in photography as a fine art that prompted Martin Osner and Koos van der Lende to collaborate on the Fingerprint Collection. Asked about the origins of this portfolio of fine art photographs, they both refer to the profound sense of camaraderie that has developed between them over years – this and a photographic excursion they once made to a rural wilderness famed for its vast, atmospheric landscapes. “It happened many years ago,” explains Osner, an experienced commercial photographer and co-founder of the National College of Photography. “We were in Namibia shooting together and something gelled. You can talk to a lot of people about photography but they might not share your passion – Koos did. Basically, we have a similar outlook on art, on what we are trying to do.” At which point he laughs. “It took us almost a decade before we actually went ahead and produced this joint collection of collectible fine art photographs.” Unpretentiously described, the collection is a diverse showcase of work that juxtaposes the two photographer’s contrasting styles. The portfolio collects Osner’s abstracted (and at times lyrical) botanical studies, including his ghostly studies of arum lilies, pairing these with Van der Lende’s panoramic landscapes. The vivid (and at times monochromatic) quality of the latter’s lighting effects reveals the flourish of a meticulous craftsman. According to the photographer, it is the product of years of dedication to both photography and the landscapes being imaged. Trained at the School of Photography in The Hague, Netherlands,

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Van der Lende's first encounter
with Southern Africa's rural
landscapes was in

1977. "I came out from Holland when I was 21 to
do a 10-month trip on my own, just backpacking
through Southern Africa,

" he explains. "It was then that I decided
to do photography." Five years
ago, having established his reputation as a leading
commercial photographer, Van der Lende opted
to pursue his landscape photography as a
dedicated full-time occupation.





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Every year, for a period of two months, he will travel alone across vast wildernesses producing his signature landscape photographs. “For me it is the love of nature,” he says, “and photography certainly gives me purpose in the bush.” However, Van der Lende is not strictly a pastoral photographer. Underlying his photography, he explains, is an intensely spiritual engagement with his work. He says his photographs are an attempt to describe “the essence of the moment of grace”. Stylistically, Van der Lende’s work is very distinct from that of his friend, Osner. “I shoot only landscapes on a panoramic camera where Martin goes from the reality of a flower and straight landscapes to painterly abstraction,” explains Van der Lende. To which Osner adds: “Anything is a subject to me, I’ll do whatever it takes. I get ideas and I will follow whatever feels right. I will shoot anything from true black and white prints on selenium paper to hand-painted photographs using multiple exposure techniques.” Although the pair might differ aesthetically, this contrast gives their collection a unique rhythm, they are resolute and jointly immovable on the issue of quality. This extends to the way in which their portfolio has been produced. Each photograph is printed using only the best archival materials. The edition size has also been limited to a small number appropriate to the needs of the collector’s market. For those still apprehensive about collecting photography,



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an abridged historical synopsis is instructive. In 1999, in **London**, a seascape by pioneering French photographer Gustave LeGray, sold for **£507,500**. The sale formed part of the famous Jammes auction sales, idely credited for raising the **international** profile of photography as a **collectable**. A few years on and it is an incontestable fact that **photography**, in the art capitals of the west particularly, has mass appeal, easily rivalling more traditional arts like painting or sculpture. In February 2006, for instance, a moody photograph of a pond on Long Island, taken by Edward Steichen in 1904, fetched **US\$2.9-million** at a Sotheby's auction in **New York**. The photograph is one of three known prints, the other two are in **museum collections**. While the examples cited are not **South African**, it is worth mentioning that a South African photographer, David Goldblatt,



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was recently awarded the prestigious international Hasselblad Award; also, exhibitions showcasing South African and African photography have garnered increasing attention abroad in recent years. Not that the two friends wish their photographs to be viewed purely as financial objects, to be bought and stored away. Photography is a mercurial art. Osner explains: "The moment you photograph something it loses its three-dimensional contact with the world. Because of elements like contrast, compression, depth of field, focus and exposure, things look different when they're photographed." It is a fact that delights, surprises and sometimes even frustrates the photographer. "Some people see the camera as a means of recording an end result, but the camera changes things." To which one could add, it changes things in a way that illustrates the particular eye, worldview and expression of the photographer. It is an observation true of both Osner and Van der Lende, whose collection materialises very different ways of looking at the world. The flourish, though, emerges from their decision to show these contrasting ways of seeing together, to present them as a dialogue – one between two friends.



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