



### Still lifes

Beyond the evocation of a domestic vignette or the focus on the subtle beauty of colours and textures, the still life seemingly does little to provoke debate or controversy. In art criticism the still life is often relegated to the lowest rung of the hierarchy of genres, of which history, portraiture and landscape take precedence. In each of these artworks the artist takes a commonplace image in the domestic vocabulary – a vase of flowers – as subject matter. However, in their diversity of expression, all speak to the historical context of both artist and subject through the portrayal of material culture. Born and trained in Rotterdam, Frans Oerder was versed in the stylistic preoccupations of the 17th century Dutch still-life tradition. His *Peach Blossom* (undated) recalls this historical emphasis on meticulous detail and a focus on the textures and play of light on the objects portrayed. Florence Zerffi was a founding member of the New Group. *Flower Arrangement* (1934) displays a vase of shocking pink blossoms doubled in the reflection of a mirror. In *Art and Artists of South Africa* (1970), Esmé Berman notes Zerffi's dislike for the harshness of the South African sun, and her consequent choice to paint mostly indoors, where the darkened interiors allowed her to retain an intensity of colour.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Oerder and Zerffi works, Johannes Meintjes's *The White Jug* (1978) is an assimilation of European technique and South African sensibility. Through its position at the window, the jug is located within a larger milieu: Three women wearing *doeks* [head scarves], sitting with their heads bowed in an arid South African landscape. In an echo of the turbulent politics in South Africa in the late 1970s, the visual saturation of floral vitality in the white jug stands in quite dramatic contrast to the pious and barren environment outside the window.

Left:  
Meintjes, Johannes (1923-1980)  
*The White Jug* 1978  
Oil on board, 61 x 52 cm

Right:  
Zerffi, Florence Louise Josephine (1882-1962)  
*Flower Arrangement* 1934  
Oil on canvas, 48 x 37 cm

Opposite and detail overleaf:  
Oerder, Frans David (1867-1944)  
*Peach Blossom* Undated  
Oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm