

Rich, complex works show a return to nature

EXHIBITION

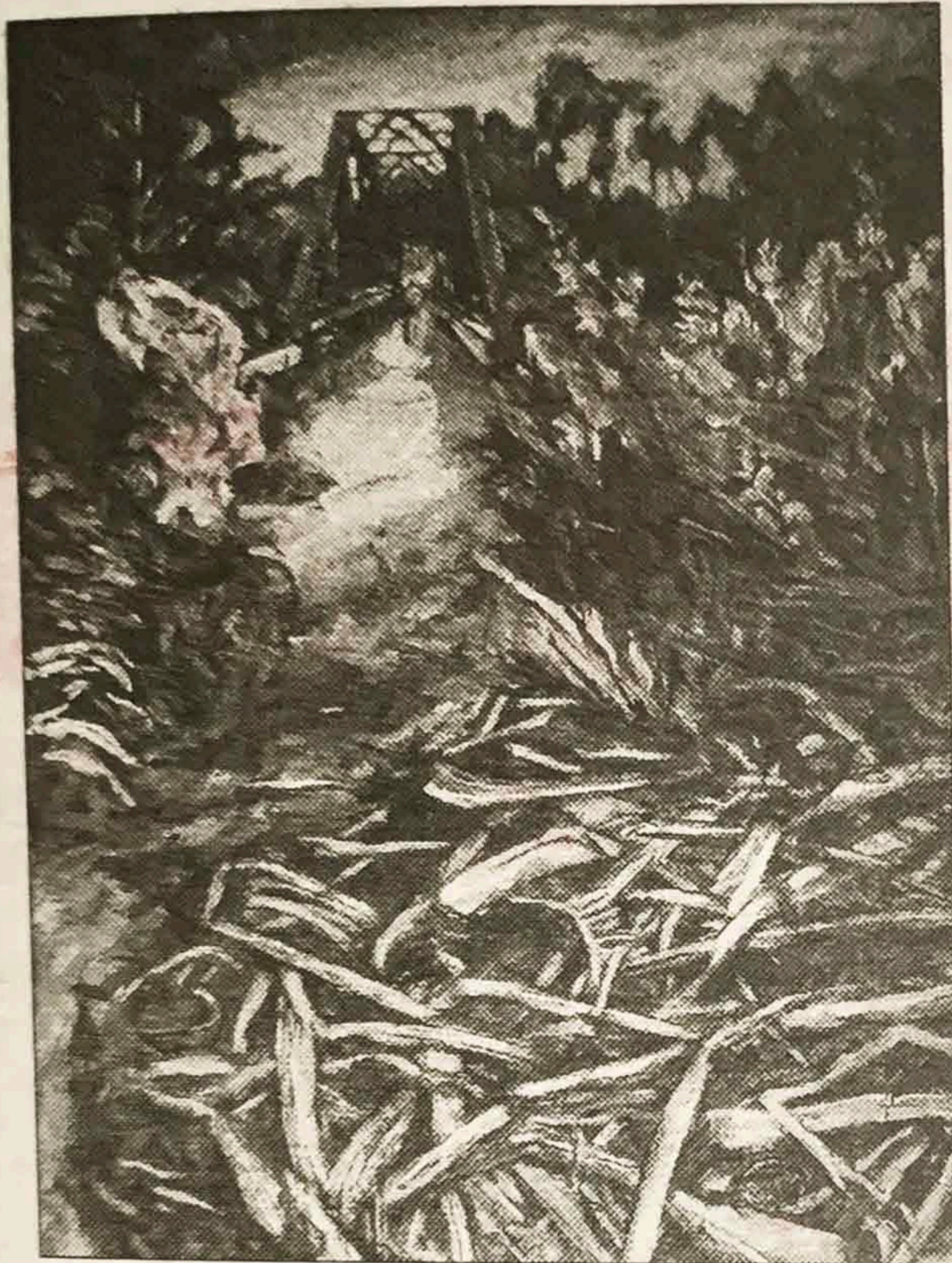
Gwenneth Miller,
Master's Exhibition

VENUE

Old Arts Gallery,
University of Pretoria

DATES

Until October 17



One of Gwenneth
Miller's works on
exhibition at the
Old Arts Gallery,
University of
Pretoria.

Muffin Stevens

Gwenneth Miller's Master's exhibition is based on nature, which since Romanticism, has been a source of the sublime for many painters, a source of an ideal, a purity, a symbol of spirituality and innocence, renewal and hope.

Nature is all this for Miller, but hers is a postmodern vision that must simultaneously acknowledge loss of innocence, irony, fracture and the disillusionment of much contemporary experience.

To achieve this message, which is at least dual, or even multiple, Miller makes complex and innovative works. Firstly, nature is present in the materials on which and with which she constructs these "paintings". Her grounds are wooden panels that are bent, joined, worn and aged, as well as sticks, twigs, materials that are redolent with Earth, that make one aware of their *nature*, their "woodliness".

On to these she works in ways that reveal something of her *nature*. Her lines, marks, carvings, paintings and scratchings are layered and show the process by which the artist arrives at a final statement. Here is certainty and hesitation, knowing and searching, finding and rejecting in the struggle for image-making that can express the complexity of her ideas. This method reflects the ambiguities and dynamics of contemporary life.

The actual images are varied. Some are of nature in its pictorial aspects: woods, streams, waterfalls, trees, herbs. This is the nature of hope and a more perfect world. But these images are perpetually interrupted: an idyllic stream has a bar of broken wood suspended over its surface, woodlands are fractured with words and half-formed images. Here is fecundity and growth, whirls and whorls, spirals and spouts, expanding and eddying across surfaces. Other images always intrude: figures, bridges and walls, towers, chopped wood and more vital magic symbols such as fire and flame. So nature is in flux, constantly worked into by human activities.

These are rich and complex works, innovative in their use of materials, aesthetic and expressive of a contemporary consciousness.