

goodbye to big on bronze

When the Sunday Times turned 100 last year, it decided not only to celebrate, but to ‘give back’ by getting into the heritage business.

By Charlotte Bauer

On Thursday 9th of March last year a life-size bronze statue of Brenda Fassie was unveiled outside the Bassline Club in Newtown, Joburg. Well, Brenda wasn't a big man, and she's not on a horse. Still, there's no getting away from it: she is a figurative statue and she's cast in bronze. Inspired by Jose Soberon Villa's bronzes of John Lennon on a park bench and Ernest Hemingway propping up a bar – both in Havana – Brenda's creator Angus Taylor has made an unconventional memorial that is every bit as inviting and playful.

At the time of her death on 9 May 2004, Fassie was this country's top selling local artist. She may not have been everyone's idea of a role model, but then, The *Sunday Times* Heritage Project is not about role models.

Brenda Fassie was a stellar newsmaker. Her work is part of this country's musical and social history, and two years after her death, both her life and her music continue to excite emotion and curiosity.

This is why we chose her as our “poster girl” to launch the *Sunday Times* centenary heritage project.

The *Sunday Times* turned 100 on 4 February 2006. As part of our centenary celebrations and under the baton of the paper's editor, Mondli Makhanya, we set out on an ambitious journey across what – for us – was virgin tundra.

My brief was to, in some way, mark the spot where some of the significant news events of “our” century (from 1906) happened while also recognising the remarkable newsmakers who stood at the heart of these actions.

The blue plaques that pepper the streets of London – “Sylvia Plath lived here” etc – were mentioned as a point of departure.

But it was the far more engrossing “memory” signs on the streets of Schöneberg, Berlin which informed our early thinking.

The Schöneberg project, by Renate Stih and Frieder Schnock, consists of 80 small signs. Each sign has an image on one side and text on the other, usually quotations from Nazi laws that limited the freedoms of Jews in the period between 1933 and 1945.

It is only when the viewer reads the images – blonde braids; a clock's hands set at 7pm – together with the text – eugenics; curfew – that the meaning of these stylised, even pretty, images, becomes clear.

This memorial making was neither grimly explicit ➡



Lenore Cairncross

The Olive Schreiner memorial by Barbara Wildenboer

The *Sunday Times*' decision to commemorate Olive Schreiner's contribution to the women's suffrage movement required a different approach to the “event-linked-to-a-location” yardstick that we set for ourselves in choosing most of our other sites and stories. We believed that while Schreiner's contribution as one of South Africa's finest writers is widely acknowledged, far less well known was her participation in the movement to give women the vote. Her book *Woman and Labour*, published in 1911, was acclaimed internationally and regarded as a bible of the women's suffrage movement. Schreiner argued that the vote was “a weapon by which the weak may be able to defend themselves against the strong, the poor against the rich”. In the light of this, it is not surprising that she objected to the decision of the Cape Women's Enfranchisement League (of which she was a member for several years) to campaign for the right of only white women to vote. What led us to the Main Road, Kalk Bay location was our discovery that a meeting of the Women's Enfranchisement League was held at the English Church Schoolroom in March 1913 which used to stand opposite the Anglican Church in Kalk Bay. There is nothing to mark the demise of this old stone building which is now a parking lot. In the photograph artist Barbara Wildenboer puts finishing touches to the memorial.



men horses

*The Brenda Fassie statue
by Angus Taylor*

outside the Bassline in Newtown, Johannesburg.

Debbie Yazbek

*The Teboho Tsietsi
Mashinini memorial
by Johannes Phokela*

opposite Morris Isaacson High School
in Mputhi Street, central western
Jabavu, Soweto.



Debbie Yazbek





Gary Horlor

Enoch Mgijima and the Bulhoek Massacre memorial by Mgcineni Sobopha

between the N6 and the R392 at Queenstown, Eastern Cape, was unveiled on 22 April 2007.

The Mannenberg memorial by Francois Venter and Mark O'Donovan

The memorial whose chief “protagonists” is a song. Or more aptly, the marabi-meets-cape-jazz composition that became a beloved anthem of hope and resistance, called *Mannenberg*. Composed by Abdullah Ibrahim, *Mannenberg* was recorded here, at the UCA studios, at 21 Bloem Street, Cape Town in June 1974 with a stellar cast that included Robbie Jansen, the late Basil Coetzee and the producer Rashid Vally. We were intrigued by the idea that a piece of music could speak to the experience so many people at a particular time in our history. *Mannenberg* spoke of the destruction of District Six and of forced removals. Abdullah Ibrahim, who has taken a great personal interest in helping us to make this memorial happen, says people have come up and told him they would sing *Mannenberg* as they were being bundled into police vans. The artwork, by Mark O'Donovan and Francois Venter, is quite spectacular: seven pipes of different heights that, when “played” by the visitor’s car keys in sequence, will sound the opening bars of *Mannenberg*.

nor sentimental, and ideas began to swirl for what might inform the look and feel of our first 40 public, permanent and site-specific, “narrative” memorials.

The decision to give a selection of local artists pretty much free reign to make their own unique pieces evolved over time and with the guidance of many people who know a lot more about art than we do – notably the arts management company we work with to source and manage the artists and the artworks.

By no means all of the news history we wished to mark was shocking and painful. Our researchers set out to identify and develop a number of stories, characters and sites across the news board – eureka moments in science, the arts, sport, politics, and society. A range of memories, often proud, even playful.

We wanted to show how today’s news is tomorrow’s history. We wished to add a small stitch to the fabric of dozens of streets and communities; to shine a light on a singular moment in 100 years of news time which, subtly or significantly, helped to shape the diverse ‘us’. We wanted to show that history is interesting because it is always, in some way, driven by fascinating humans – whether they are fearless, flawed, heroic or badly behaved – or a mixture of the above.

To date we have installed 19 narrative memorials in three provinces – Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape. By the end of this year – and the end of the project – we hope to have 35 in total.

Journalists are storytellers of a particular stripe. Typically newspaper stories are personality driven and action-orientated. The *Sunday Times* is a popular paper, so our angle on these narrative memorials is to hook the viewer by making the historic news events we are asking people to remember, worth remembering; not because we should but because we can’t resist a good story.

In the identification and development of these stories our dedicated team of senior researchers has trawled through books and theses, original court documents, inquest papers, letters, banning orders, manifestos and commissions of inquiry; they have triple checked facts and tracked down people connected to the story whom we didn’t know were dead or alive; they have established exact sites where events happened and found and interviewed people who were there to make sure no version was left unturned.

Our Cape Town researcher Sue Valentine spent months looking for Philip Kgosana, the chief character of one of our memorials in Langa.

In 1960 Kgosana, a PAC member, was a student at UCT. Thanks to leaders like Robert Sobukwe being jailed at the time, it fell to his young shoulders to lead a march of 30 000 people into the city to protest the arrests that followed uprisings in Sharpeville and Langa. Kgosana led the march in short pants and a pair of borrowed shoes he had to cut the toes out of.

Bloodshed was narrowly avoided that day through the 22-year-old Kgosana’s disciplined hold over the crowd and the actions of a single police officer, Colonel Terry Terblanche, who defied orders to shoot Kgosana and negotiated with him instead.

The process of tracking down Philip Kgosana owes a lot to a hefty dose of luck. Starting out we had no idea if he was alive or dead. We knew he’d lived in exile for many years, working for Unicef, but we had no direct links with anyone who knew if he’d returned to South Africa and if so, when and where he lived.

The first stop was a visit to Langa to check out the site with the company contracted to commission the artists for the memorial sites. On approaching Langa circle our researcher decided that, seeing as she was so obviously not from the area, the best

thing to do was to admit her total ignorance and ask the first elderly people she could see sitting at the shops that surround the circle whether they knew anyone who remembered the march in 1960.

The grey-haired man she approached responded enthusiastically. He had been there and he confirmed that the marchers had gathered for the march into the city at that site. Mr Mngqibisa, as he introduced himself, also told us that the former leader of the PAC, Clarence Makwetu, (Mlamli Makwetu as he prefers to be known) had been actively involved in the politics of the day and offered to set up a meeting with him.

Another early PAC activist joined our conversation, and we discovered that Mr Sakauli had spent years on Robben Island for his part in the Poqo (an armed offshoot of the PAC) uprising in Mbekweni near Paarl in 1962.

During our interview with Makwetu at his home in Fish Hoek, we realised that he himself had not been part of the march because he had been detained by police during the protests that brought Cape Town to a standstill in the week after the Sharpeville shooting on 21 March leading up to the 30 March Langa march. He also could offer us no information about reaching Philip Kgosana.

In looking for further information about oral history sources at the UCT African Studies Library, our researcher discovered a student video which proved that Kgosana had returned to South Africa and had been interviewed about the march in recent years. While watching the credits regarding which students had made the video, our researcher recognised a name – a friend of her partner’s. A phone call to him confirmed that Kgosana was indeed alive and well and living in Pretoria and we eventually were given a phone number for him....

And so one warm winter’s afternoon last July, Valentine and I finally caught up with Philip Kgosana. We met him in the lounge of a Pretoria hotel and drank tea while he told us the story of that day – and of what happened next – in his words. It was mesmerising.

Finding Philip Kgosana, however, was – is – not the end of the story. At the time of writing, we are still battling to get permission from all parties (in this case, political) to install this memorial in Langa.

Of all the sources – original and archival – consulted in pursuit of fleshing out our research, the one source we hardly used at all was The *Sunday Times*.

Since 1906 The *Sunday Times* has called itself “the paper for the people”, but this catchy slogan rather depended on who “the people” were at the time.

For instance, in 1947 – around the time one of our story characters, the painter George Pemba, was coming to terms with the loss of his friend and mentor Gerard Sekoto, who had fled to Paris, The *Sunday Times’* art critic du jour HE Winder wrote: “There is a disturbing new trend to take black art seriously.”

So, we have the story plaques, on or alongside each artwork which briefly describes the action: the plaque text is as short, sharp and adjective-free as a good news report should be. Those whose curiosity is piqued by the anecdote, are invited to find out more via our new heritage website, whose address is on the story plaques.

Our branding on the plaques is discreet: this is not a branding exercise for the *Sunday Times*, it’s a self-funded “give back” project. The small logo on our plaques is there partly to direct visitors to our heritage website and, as importantly, to announce that we are accountable for the choices we have made.

Then we have the memorials themselves: floor and wall pieces, signage, 3D sculptures, etc. Each one is unique, our chief command to artists



The Duma Nokwe memorial by Lewis Levin

outside the High Court in Pritchard Street, Johannesburg. In the photograph, from left to right: Lewis Levin; Vuyiswa Nokwe, widow of Duma Nokwe; and George Bizos, who illegally shared his chambers with Nokwe.

Debbie Yazbek



The Cissie Gool memorial by Ruth Sacks

in the Longmarket pedestrian mall between Buitenkant and Plein Streets in Cape Town.



Garth Stead

being that their artworks be made as time-proof, weather proof and people proof as possible.

The sites themselves are obviously a big part of the story. Across four provinces, they include a railway station (Raymond Mhlaba), a mosque (Mohandas Gandhi), several schools (Bessie Head, Alan Paton), courts (Duma Nokwe, Nontetha Nkwenkwe), a boxing stadium (Happy Boy Mxgaji) and two beach-fronts (Ingrid Jonker; Eastern Beach).

The great thing about the sites is that they are all freely accessible and visible to the public. It would be antithetical to the spirit of this project to close off the memorials to free public view. Indeed many of the artworks invite the viewer to touch them or sit on them (Cissie Gool; Race Classification). They are meant to look approachable.

The not-so-great thing is that we have had several cases of vandalism. The Gandhi memorial outside the Hamidia Mosque in Fordsburg was vandalised twice. Our memorial to Enoch Mgijima and the Bulhoek Massacre was vandalised shortly after its unveiling, though in this case the church community which has taken ownership of this piece found the vandals within days and handed them over to the police. We are currently repairing this memorial.

As journalists it is our democratic right to publish what we like under law in our newspaper each Sunday. But it is our privilege to build memorials on the streets of South Africa.

It probably goes without saying that getting the necessary permission, buy-in and blessings to erect 40 public memorials across the country is a massive yet delicate undertaking.

Temperamentally, journalists tend to have low boredom thresholds. Our jobs require us to work accurately, yet as quickly as possible. Final decisions are made by one person – the editor. Deadlines are sacred. Pressure is our friend.

Government departments and committees tend to have high pain thresholds. Their jobs require them to work accurately, even when that means quite slowly. Final decisions are seldom made by one person. Reaching consensus can be like waiting for Godot, but consensus is the oft-stated aim. Due process is their friend.

I believe the mutual learning curves and resultant chemistry between these two personality types have served the project very well.

Of course we started blind, with no idea about the reach, complexity and number of roads and relationships we would need to travel, the caravans of consultation, negotiation, form-filling, pitching and pleading that would be required to put up even one memorial. Actually, we don't plead: there are



literally hundreds of stakeholders on this project in progress and their blessings – be they of the rubber-stamp kind, the political kind or the personal kind – are essential to the successful installation of any and all of our memorials. For the most part the officials we’ve met have liked the project and have taken great pains to help us make it happen in their neck of the woods.

Ethically speaking we decided that without the support of this project’s first ring of custodians – the families, and some of our chief characters (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Bruce Fordyce, Abdullah Ibrahim) who are still living – we would not proceed.

We do not change or censor the angles of our narrative memorials to accommodate the agendas of particular interest groups, but we have walked away from a couple. And one was a close call. There may be more in future.

After protracted though polite discussions with members of the Rand Club in Johannesburg, they voted against allowing us to install a mosaic-ed “painting” on their Commissioner Street side façade about the mining magnate Lionel Phillips.

We also walked away from a story we were developing about James Mpanza who, depending on one’s point of view, was a Godfather-like thug and/or a champion of the poor and landless in early Soweto. In 1944 Mpanza, a convicted murderer with a bit of a Messiah complex, seized a tract of vacant municipal ground and settled thousands of landless people there. A keen horseman, Mpanza and his men helped Soweto’s first squatters to erect temporary shelters – then galloped round charging them rent. To this day he is seen by some as the Father of Soweto and by others as a dodgy figure whose “disciples” later formed the Sofasonke Party which was seen as a stooge of the apartheid government.

Many people still ask us why we’ve left Mpanza out of our project. Simply put, we were informed by local ward councilors after meetings with the stakeholder community that anything we put up was liable to be dismantled. More than 60 years later, the most straightforward account of Mpanza’s historic actions remains “too hot for dialogue”.

But our most politically and technically challenging site to date remains our ongoing attempt to erect a memorial marking the deaths in detention which occurred at John Vorster Square police station in downtown Joburg. Between the early 70s and 1990, seven men died there while in the custody of the security police on the 10th floor of the building. Some were tortured, others “jumped” or “fell” out of the window of the interrogation room. Today the station has been transformed into Johannesburg Central Police Station and the bust of then

prime minister John Vorster has been removed to the police museum.

Hundreds of ordinary men and women work here now. Many of them were children or not yet born when apartheid made the law unto itself. A building that was once a symbol of fear for many law-abiding citizens now pledges to serve and protect those same people’s rights.

How might we mark the terrible things that once happened within the station’s precincts without offending and upsetting those who work there now by association? How to do it without sanitising the facts? It gave us – and the artist – sleepless nights.

The artist on this story, Kagiso Pat Mautloa, came up with a powerful first concept – four huge metal cut-outs of the human body that would ‘fall’ down the outside wall of the police station. It was rejected by all stakeholders – including the *Sunday Times* – though with varying degrees of reluctance. Mautloa’s second concept was considered by us to be too sentimental – though I don’t blame him for overcompensating this time.

Six months after Mautloa submitted his third concept, it has been approved by the South African Police Service’s national office and other vital city stakeholders. It is a 10-ton rock, sourced in Mpumalanga, which will be mounted on a concrete plinth and bound with wire. It variously suggests resilience, confinement and strength. The story on the plaque will remain as it was.

After all that, we were told we still needed to comply with the Johannesburg Roads’ Agency’s Wayleave rules for anything that requires drilling beneath street level to a depth of more than 50cm. This involved seeking individual permission from each of the following service providers whose pipes run beneath our site: Telkom, Eskom, Rand Water Board, Sasol, City Power, Egoli Gas and City Parks.

As I write this – in July 2007 – this memorial is in the process of being installed outside Johannesburg Central Police Station.

In choosing 40 memorials to show and tell we are of course inviting criticism, especially concerning the many, many significant events and amazing people we have left out.

The *Sunday Times* heritage project makes no claim to be definitive. The stories and people we have chosen to commemorate are not the only ones; our way is not the only way. But we have made a start. This is our contribution to “storytelling” our heritage, one we’ll document through our website (www.sundaytimes.co.za/heritage) and through the memorials still to go up.



Race Classification Board memorial by Roderick Sauls

Remembering the effects of the Race Classification Board outside the High Court Annex in Queen Victoria Street, Cape Town.

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