

C. L. BELL AND LISA JOHNSTON



SECRET JOHANNESBURG



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MASTERPIECES IN THE MAGISTRATE'S COURT

⑩

Hidden in plain sight

Johannesburg Magistrate's Court
Corner of Fox and Ntami Piliso Streets
Ferreirasdorp

Transport: Take the Rea Vaya C3 route. Exit at the Carlton Centre on Commissioner Street. Head west towards Kruis Street then turn left on to Ntami Piliso.

Open: Monday—Friday 8am—3:30pm

Overlooked by most visitors and employees, two large and beautiful paintings hang opposite each other across a stairwell in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court. One depicts Johannesburg as a mining village in 1886, the other a more developed cityscape of the 1930s.

To the untrained eye, these paintings may appear as mere illustrations of the city's history. But look closely at the emotive skies, flat geometric planes of the (natural and manmade) landscape and the formalised composition and you might recognise the brushwork of an old master.

Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef is considered one of the South Africa's most influential artists. He was commissioned to paint the pieces in 1940 to commemorate the opening of the court. Unfortunately, the 4.3m x 5.4m paintings are hung at an inconvenient height for viewing.



It's only if you happen to turn back and look down on them from the top of the stairs that you get a decent view. But most people are too busy scurrying to or from court to pay much attention.

Julian Gous, a fine art restorer who was commissioned to restore the paintings at the Magistrate's Court in 1987 and again in 2012, told *The Star* newspaper in 2012, "Most people don't even notice the paintings are there. Others think I'm the artist [working on a new project] so they stop to compliment me."

The paintings' anonymity may well be their saving grace. In June 2017, the auctioneers Straus & Co. sold the previously unseen Pierneef *Farm Jonkershoek with Twin Peaks Beyond, Stellenbosch* for a record R20 million. The painting is a fraction of the size of the Pierneefs in the Magistrate's Court, which have hung opposite each other for nearly 80 years.

"No one knows they are there, and the people who notice them don't know the value of what they are looking at," says a Magistrate at the court. "They had a burglary a while back and the computers were stolen. I reckon the thieves would have been better off taking the Pierneefs."

In a nod to Johannesburg's more recent history, a sculpture of Nelson Mandela by Marco Cianfanelli, *Shadow Boxing* (2013), was installed on Fox Street between the court and Chancellor House — the law practice shared by Mandela and Oliver Tambo, and the first African law practice in South Africa. The offices have been preserved as an informal street museum with information and photographs displayed in the windows.



TWIST STREET BENCH

25

A bench to change your perspective

Corner of Kapteijn and Twist Streets

Hillbrow

Transport: Rea Vaya C3 bus, Bathhouse stop



On the eastern edge of this busy Hillbrow thoroughfare, teeming with taxis and people hurrying to make a living and a life, is a bench with a surprising view. Stop for a moment, sit down and look up. Behind a thick stone wall, three storeys above the street, is a giant glass window through which you can watch the rehearsals of the dancers of the Outreach Foundation.

Built in the grounds of the Lutheran Church (a 120-year-old Gothic Revival sandstone structure), this slick new building, designed by architects Local Studio, already counts the Cuban Ballet and Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre among its performers. The bench was specifically situated for passers-by to pause and add a touch of art to their harried lives.

Of course, the idea of pausing for even a moment in Hillbrow is an idea too far for many South Africans. Though once Johannesburg's most bohemian suburb, where white and black intellectuals, artists and activists rubbed shoulders as the collapse of apartheid gathered speed in the late eighties, the authorities rebranded Hillbrow a "grey area" (an area with a significant illegal black, Indian and coloured population) and rumours of rising crime rates in other grey areas prompted the white residents to flee to the suburbs.

By the early nineties, many apartment blocks lay empty and the neighbourhood fell into decline. When South Africa began to relax its border controls with other African nations, these abandoned inner-city apartment blocks fell into the hands of some of Africa's most enterprising businessmen — illegal landlords, drug dealers and pimps — and the once hippest neighbourhood in Africa had become a dangerous, urban slum that soon earned the sobriquet "Killbrow".

Today, the neighbourhood is changing again. Young businessmen, many of them Jewish, have bought up the squatted buildings, turning them into safe, affordable housing for lower-income families. And it's generous donations from these same businessmen that have funded the new dance centre.

Vibrant, creative communities are good for business. Bigboy Hadebe, 18, agrees. "This place is like a second home to us. We get to express our emotions. You learn about life in this place. So many kids in Hillbrow are addicted to nyope (a drug concoction that mixes anti-retrovirals with a selection of rat poison, battery acid, cleaning detergents and marijuana). Here you get to understand who you really are."

So next time you're passing, stop for a moment and watch the next generation discovering itself.

MINIATURE RAILWAY OF OBSERVATORY

④

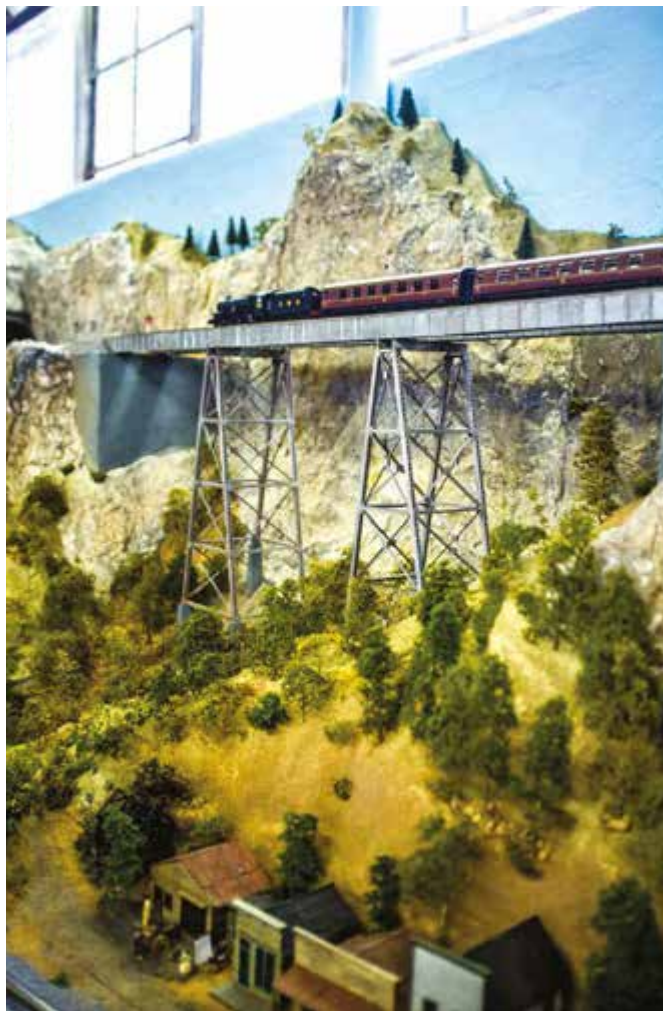
The Rattlesnake River and Bear Mountain Railroad

Observatory Driving Range

5 Steyn Street

Open: Saturday 11am—3pm by appointment only

Tel: Clive 011-974-7425



In a dull brick building with slit windows at the far end of the Observatory Driving Range is a tiny world that will take your breath away.

Mountains made of sculpted polystyrene, rivers and waterfalls made from PratiGlo, logging factories, train stations, bridges, gold mining towns, and a lighthouse in a turbulent sea. Snaking between it all, a railway track, everything painstakingly hand crafted by the members of the Rand Model Railway Club.

The club has been going since 1946, a hobby that arrived in South Africa with the British immigrants who came post-World War Two.

“It was the sort of recreation that a non-sporting dad would do to spend time with his land,” says club chairman, Clive Shepherd.

The club’s first home was at the agricultural grounds of the Rand Easter Show, but when that land was appropriated for Wits University’s West Campus in the early 1980s, the club relocated to this old sports changing room. Back then, Observatory was a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood. Nowadays, when the club meets for their weekly Saturday sessions, the streets are shared between orthodox Jews with their large brethren, prostitutes, and boy racers, who like revving their fast cars around the hilly roads.

“It’s a most surreal situation,” says Shepherd of his medley of neighbours. “But once you’re inside here, you don’t care what happens out there.”

The eight club members are mostly in their sixties, except for Gareth Knowles, an IT specialist by profession, who inspired the older guys to get rid of the railway’s old British and German toy towns, and create, from scratch, an American mountain wonderland.

That said, British locomotives still ride these lines, including a miniature replica of the Black Five, the 1945 steam locomotive that transported British soldiers back to their homes in England and Scotland after World War Two — its magic enhanced by the ‘choo-choo’ sound effects and the squeal of brakes when it pulls in to stations. Other trains in the collection include a replica of the Orient Express and the train on which Hitler made the French sign their surrender.

Olivia Menhinick, the co-owner of the Observatory Driving Range, who had been on site for six years, had no idea that it was there. “This is absolutely amazing,” she said, entering the shed for the first time. “We normally take the kids to Knysna to see something like this. You don’t expect to see this kind of thing in Jo’burg.”

TROYEVILLE'S "BEDTIME STORY" ⑩

A concrete bed on a roadside

*Corner of Albertina Sisulu and Viljoen Streets
Troyeville*

A strange sight greets anyone passing by the grassy corner of Albertina Sisulu and Viljoen Streets in Troyeville. A bed with an impressive, plushly quilted headboard, draped with white, silky sheets and pillows lies as if waiting for Sleeping Beauty or some other mystery slumberer to return to its folds.

On closer inspection, it's not some old bed left on the pavement to rot, or to be reclaimed by a student or homeless person, but a cleverly crafted cement slab with concrete sheeting that mimics the drapery of an unmade bed.

The bed has an unusual back story. Installed on the corner in 2011, it was the brainchild of the late public art consultant Lesley Perkes. Perkes reportedly drove past the corner almost daily on her route to drop her children at school. At that time, there was a pile of facebrick



rubble on the site, so Perkes decided to take matters into her own hands and replace the eyesore with something quirky and creative.

She approached artist and photographer Johannes Dreyer. Together they came up with the concept of a bed as a place for dreams to be realised. Dreyer in turn approached designer Damien Grivas and they modelled the bed from a cheap headboard they picked up in Primrose.

The original post from Perkes blog reads, "The truth is, even when it wasn't rubble, the irredeemable yellow facebrick (my worst) object made no sense: It was just an inexplicable platform with an equally inexplicable thing on top of it; of no apparent use and never good to look at it.

"Local hitman Johannes Dreyer is conspiring with concrete form worker Damien Grivas of Bez Valley to ensure the view will, at the very least, soon become more interesting. In pursuit of their plan, #lesmiserables and the hitman spent some rainy afternoon time in Primrose this week sourcing a suitably kitsch headboard. Found for R450.00 in the first second-hand shop on the right. Watch this public space."

For a number of years the bed was used as a site to hold poetry readings, pyjama parties with bedtime stories, and art installations; it was even yarn bombed once. All of which was recorded on a blog maintained by Perkes.

The artist sadly passed away in 2015 after a long battle with cancer, but Troyeville's Bedtime Story remains on the corner where it will continue to serve as a play space for children and to provoke curiosity and imagination among passers-by.



VILLA ARCADIA

17

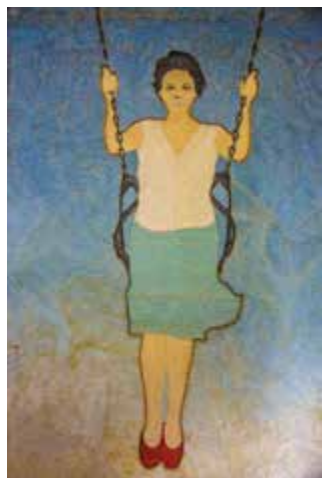
A contemporary art gallery in a Randlord's home

22 Oxford Street

Parktown

Open: The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation conducts tours that include Villa Arcadia

Check their events page for details: www.joburgheritage.org.za



The Villa Arcadia mansion in Parktown retains an aura of good taste usually reserved for the culturally well-heeled. It's hardly surprising, given that the house was commissioned in 1909 for Randlord socialites Sir Lionel and Lady Florence Phillips, colloquially known as the king and queen of Johannesburg.

From their high vantage on the ridge, the couple would have enjoyed views over the developing suburb around Saxonwold, extending as far as the purple haze of the Magaliesburg Mountains in the distance. Lady Florence was a well-known patron of the arts and was pivotal in establishing the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), donating the "Founding Collection" to the gallery and rallying support for a number of cultural and patronage projects.

She also took a hands-on approach to the design of Villa Arcadia, frequently consulting with its architect, Sir Herbert Baker, over design details. Baker was revered as being meticulous, and custom ordered the red Spanish style roof tiles and other details of the estate. The couple lived in the house until 1922 when it was sold. It went on to serve as the South African Jewish Orphanage for 81 years.

In 2003, it again passed hands, this time to the Hollard Insurance company, which developed the property as its main health-conscious business campus. It has a health centre and exercise facilities for staff, while the carefully landscaped gardens host bats, Koi fish and peacocks. The campus also runs owl release and water purification projects. The villa was beautifully restored and the Italian Palazzo style marble flooring in the entrance and exquisite delft tiles of Lady Florence's bathroom remain. It now functions as a venue for meetings and events.

In keeping with the patronage of Lady Florence, Villa Arcadia showcases an impressive collection of contemporary South African artists that could rival any gallery.

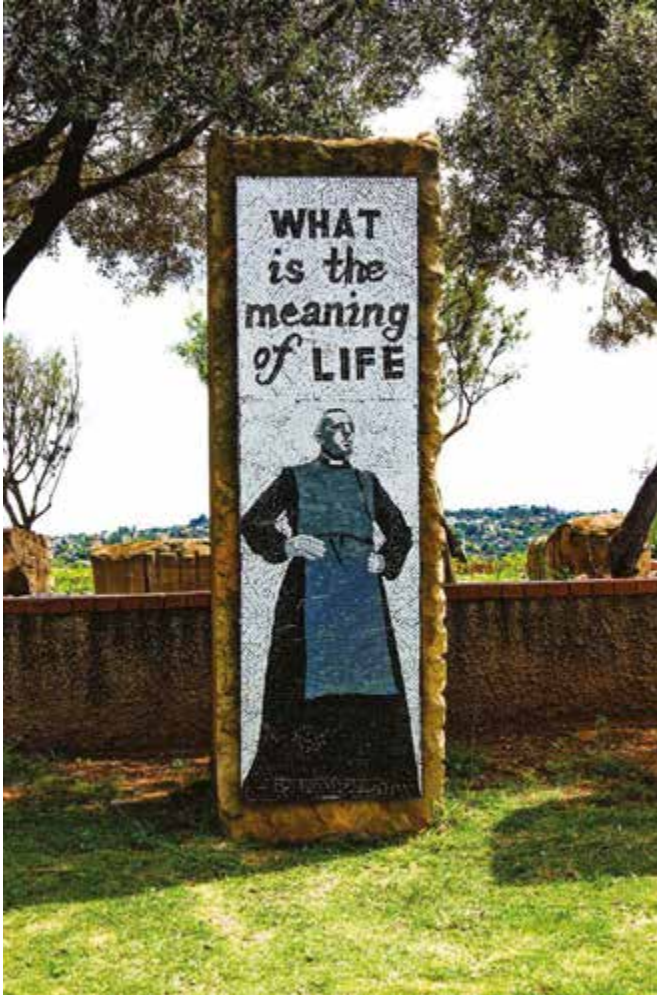
Works by artists such as William Kentridge, Paul Edmunds, Conrad Botes and Jane Alexandra are shown alongside those of lesser-known artists, including a collection from Creative Block — an arts initiative for emerging artists to show and sell their works. The aim of the collection is to merge the old and the new. In acquiring works for the villa, a number of interesting collaborations were commissioned. Some of the works in the entrance, for example, were the result of a collaboration between Qubeka, a beading company, and Doreen Southwood.

TREVOR HUDDLESTON'S CENOTAPH

29

A community saint sleeps among multiracial angels

Church of Christ the King
49 Ray Street
Sophiatown
Tel: 011-477-8410



At the highest point in Sophiatown, within the Church of Christ the King, a mosaic cenotaph depicting Archbishop Trevor Huddleston in his black robes is inscribed with the words: *What is the meaning of life?* It is a wonderful spot to contemplate the past and the present; Sophiatown was the place that the apartheid government first flexed its muscle, forcibly removing the black, Indian, Chinese and coloured residents in the years between 1955 and 1962, sending them to live in newly created, racially designated suburbs. In their wake, their homes were destroyed and a whites-only suburb named *Triomf* (Triumph) was built in its place.

In the years leading up to the forced removals, then Reverend Trevor Huddleston, a white Anglican minister from England, was regarded as the defender of the people of Sophiatown.

From 1943 to 1956, Sophiatown was a hotbed of political activism, where a young Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo would frequently meet in the home of Dr. Xuma, then president of the ANC. From his church — where the altar was framed by a mural of black and white angels sitting together at the feet of Jesus — Huddleston fought to stop the removals, earning himself the nickname *Makhalipile* (the dauntless one). His outspoken protest led church authorities to fear for his safety; in 1956, he was recalled to England, where he went on to lead the anti-apartheid movement in the UK.

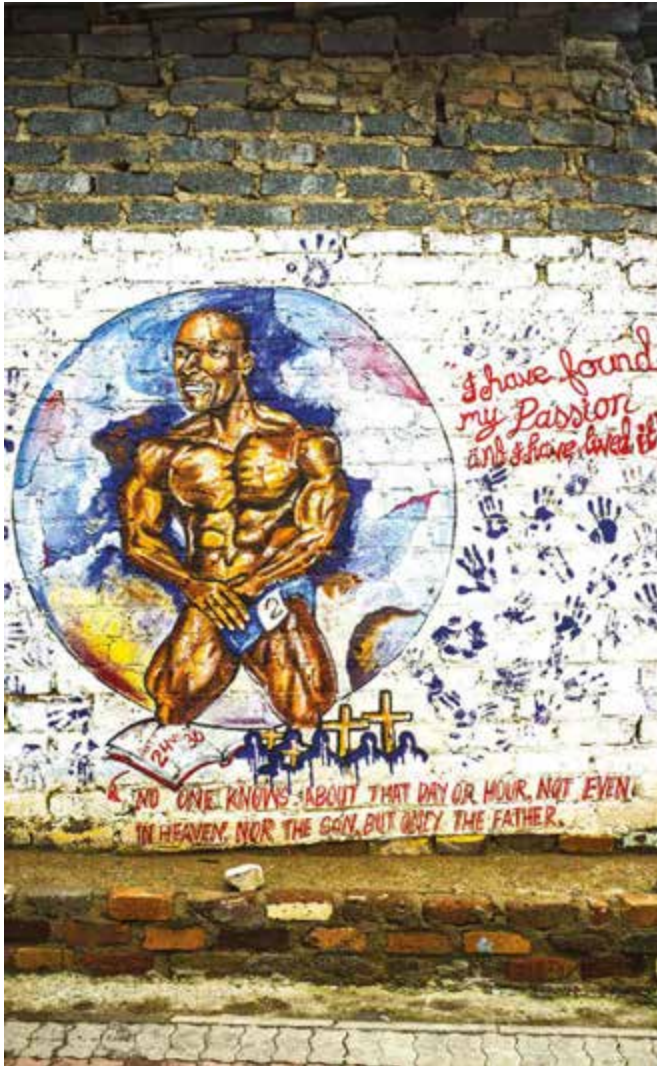
After the area was demolished, Huddleston's church was deconsecrated and turned into a recreation hall for the new whites-only community. Today, the beautiful multiracial mural seems to be lost forever, defaced by the members of the Triomf boxing club and hidden beneath a coat of white paint. But some of the old faces are back; behind the altar is a mosaic of a black Jesus surrounded by the many characters of 1950s Sophiatown, jubilant and hugging, depicting the long journey to reconciliation. Every Sunday, a bus brings in the former community from Meadowlands to worship in their old church. And then there is Huddleston who returned for the last time in June 1998, after his death, to become the eternal guardian of Sophiatown.

IKASI GYM PAINTINGS

②

First Virgin Active in Alex

Richard Baloyi Street
Alexandra
Tel: 071-144-2252



It all began with Tumi Tumelo Masite's mother. When Masite was a teenager, Alexandra was a tough place. Constant gang violence made the streets unsafe, so Mama encouraged him to clean up the yard and turn it into a makeshift gym. It was this dedicated space (and Masite's growing muscles) that caught the eye of Reg Park, personal trainer to Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Park was in Alex visiting the first home of Nelson Mandela (also on Richard Baloyi Street, marked by a blue plaque and a garden of murals). As a young man, Mandela had run away from the Eastern Cape and an arranged marriage, and arrived in Alex to seek his fortune, getting a first job as a night watchman at the Crown Mines. Samora Machel, the late president of Mozambique also lived briefly across the road from Mandela.

Park donated some dumbbells and federal barbells to Masite's garden gym, and arranged a meeting between Masite and the British entrepreneur, Richard Branson, who was in South Africa setting up the Virgin Active fitness chain.

Branson not only donated more equipment to the fledgling gym, he also invited Masite to train at the Virgin Active in Morningside, and funded him to study sports science, nutrition, and personal training.

His muscles, confidence and determination grew. In 2006, Masite competed in the Rainbow Classic body building championships, placing in the top three.

The walls of the gym are full of newspaper clippings that document the story of Masite's success, while the television cabinet of Mama's front room strains under the weight of his trophies.

Remarkably, like so many of Alex's residents, Masite is also an artist. Masite uses brightly coloured paints to channel township and jazz scenes. "You don't have to just look at my muscles and judge me," he says. "I am so much deeper inside."

While he is working on his next canvas, the iKasi gym is a treasured hub, not only for aspiring body builders, but also for recovering nyaope addicts, former prison inmates, and those trying to manage health conditions such as diabetes.

Masite believes, like many other young people, that the time has come to put Alex on the map.

"We want good things here, just like in Soweto," says Masite. "We want to create our own Vilakazi Street right here."

During the month of September, the many artists of Alex open up their homes, many of them small shacks, and exhibit their work.