

# ART IN THE STADIUM

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DURBAN'S SKYLINE BY THE MOSES MABHIDA STADIUM'S SLEEK ARCHITECTURE HAS CREATED AN ICONIC LANDMARK THAT WILL LIVE LONG AFTER THE 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP. BUT IT'S NOT ONLY THE ARCHITECTURE WHICH WILL CATCH THE EYE: A SURPRISE AWAITS VISITORS WITH ITS EXCITING PERMANENT ART COLLECTION

Future visitors to the Moses Mabhida stadium will not only experience a building designed for sport and related activities, but also be able to encounter some of the best of South African art. This cleverly thought-out programme is no haphazard interior add-on afterthought (as is often the case in public buildings) but has been installed as an integral part of the architecture. It also marks a bold initiative to really bring art out of elitist specialist spaces into a wider audience.

The art was selected by a public process where calls were made through the media for proposals. These were open to any artist and the brief stated that the art should reflect the KwaZulu-Natal environment as well as the traditions of beadmaking, woodcarving, telephone wire weaving – all artistic media which have been particular to KZN while also influencing the rest of the country.

The brief also invited the artists to reflect upon the diversity of the province's cultures as well as the sub-tropical foliage and the environment surrounding the stadium, where the beach is dominant.

◀ *Beadswomen at the African Art Centre create a South African flag*





▲ Intricately carved woodwork ready for delivery

The initial briefing in April 2009 drew 92 artists who eagerly donned hard hats and safety shoes to visit the building site and gain inspiration from the emerging spaces, which so excited them that an unexpectedly large number of proposals was received.

The judging panel had a difficult task to filter through some excellent submissions but eventually a selection was made. There are two dominant areas in the stadium: the Presidential and Ocean Atriums. Each of these large, high volume spaces has a specific character. The Ocean Atrium, as its name implies, faces existing sporting amenities like Absa stadium, Kings Park pool and of course, the sea. The mood is a playful, young one which will cater for a large number of fans. The Presidential



◆ Xavier Clarice - figures for Pretoria Games

side, which faces the Beres and the railway lines, has a more serious atmosphere as its main visitors, especially during the World Cup, will be VIPs from all corners of the globe. The artwork in each area has been selected as appropriate to these sites.

Two larger than life portrayals of footballers made out of melted plastic greet the visitor to the Ocean side. These have been created by Mbongeni Buthelezi, who is fast moving into the international limelight. His use of throw-away materials is in line with the environmental responsibility of the city and his depiction of active, young soccer players sets the tone for the rest of the collection. Although the collection is not dominated by sporting images, some have obviously found their way into the spaces, but all images are creative and expressive. The Ocean side picks up on these as well as reminding sports fans of the exterior environment. A beaded wall mural of a shoal of manta rays, with the matching opposite wall showing palm trees and sand, give a playful reminder of the beach outside.

The murals, which sparkle and shine with glass beads, mirrors and wire, are made by the Umcebo Trust artists, a group which initially comprised mentally challenged



◀ The *Waga Moya* group at the Hillcrest Aids Centre with their impressive map of Africa.  
▼ The map in progress



learners at Ntugizimu School, and which has now extended to a sponsored studio at uShaka Marine World. Here, they have also drawn a larger range of people from different communities who benefit from the exposure and economic opportunities which have come their way since their work has become so highly sought after. They have made artworks for His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, the Oprah Winfrey School and many other such luminaries.

Mosaic work has also become a feature of the local landscape and a spectacular creation has been installed in the space by the Du Rand Mosaic group. The aqua and orange shapes echo the waves outside but have a wonderfully decorative effect and are even more special because most of the ceramic pieces have been individually crafted by groups of people who work together regularly under the leadership of architect Jane du

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Rand. The making of this commission has drawn people from all areas of the city, many of whom are physically challenged and have found a niche making these small ceramic pieces, which can be hand made while wheelchair bound. Past projects by this studio have nurtured many artists who now run their own successful businesses.

Moving into the Presidential Atrium a more serious mood has been created. On entering, VIPs will be greeted by the largest map of Africa they will ever have seen. Not only is it the biggest, but it is also the most spectacular. It’s fully hand beaded, and at 4m high the artists have had space to use their imaginations to create a vision of the continent you’ll not find in any atlas. Beaded and wire animals stand out in 3D, the stadium building is also a miniature sculpture and rivers meander through the vision of trees, houses and people in an Africa where the sun shines brightly. The map was made by about 200 people, mostly

women, who are part of the Wiza Moya group at the Hillcrest Aids Centre. All have been affected in some way by HIV/Aids and use their skills to generate an income as well as to get together with neighbours and share experiences. A visit to the centre shows a bustling community living positively, largely due to their new-found income through arts projects.

Opposite the map is another enormously ambitious beaded artwork – this time it is the South African flag which has been made by craftswomen at the African Art Centre. The women have used different beads within each colour band, giving the flag a glowing texture and a beauty testament to the pride of South Africans, for whom the flag has become such an important symbol.

Wood carving also has a long history in South African art and the forests of KwaZulu-Natal provide wonderful raw material. Many initiatives are under way to ensure sustainability, and the Isimangaliso Wetlands Project is one of these. A group of male carvers from the area worked with

**This article was written by Carol Brown, who is an independent art consultant working for the Stadium Art Project. She was formerly director of the Durban Art Gallery. Brown has overseen the commissioning process and ongoing mentorship programmes for the artwork, along with her Curate.a.Space team members, Cara MacCallum and Gabrielle Brown**

well known Durban artists Andries Botha and Andrew Verster, resulting in a wall of 3D carved wooden totems which hark back to African ceremonial staffs with a contemporary twist. The dark wood offsets the colourful beads of the map and both of these objects remind us we're part of a wider continent.

Soccer balls made from CD cases glint like chandeliers and woven copper wire figures made into mobiles are suspended from the ceiling. Although the major pieces are collaborative works, many individual artists have paintings, prints and photographs in the collection. Perhaps the most spectacular of these is a painting by Durban artist Derrick Nxumalo. It is more than 8m long and represents many years' work. Nxumalo created this, showing the road from Durban to the Drakensberg, as a personal ambition, unsure of who could ever buy such a long artwork. It has now found its home and will undoubtedly be one of the signature pieces of the collection and a great talking point for visitors from near and far.

▼ *African Art Centre flag project*



▼ *The Du Rand Mosaic group*



▲ Xavier Clartou's workshop

Picture: GABRIELLE BROWN

The collection is a wonderful representation of South African art and craft in all its diversity and energy and will certainly be an important legacy left long after the World Cup has come and gone.

Art tours for the public and even a publication are being planned, to boost the artists' reputations and allow visitors here and abroad to take home a little bit of

the stadium and a memory of Durban.

Finally, the project has allowed the artists to feel some sense of ownership of the building.

Mhleki Madabala, bead crafter and shop manager of Umebo Trust, says: "I feel that Moses Mabhida is my stadium now that Umebo Trust will have craft there." P

