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WITSReview

The magazine for **ALUMNI** and friends of the University of the Witwatersrand

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Sculptures at Wits • Danny K

WITS90
Be part of our anniversary





Convocation War Memorial by Moses Kottler



Medical School memorial sculpture by Laurence Chait



The Miners by Ernest Ullmann

Through the years
Wits has installed
or acquired many
sculptures in
public spaces on
its campuses.

*By Katherine Munro
and Natalie Knight*

Photos: Peter Maher

April 2012

Mindshapes

Sculptures at Wits



Stone bird-bath in memory of Raymond Dart by Marco Cianfanelli



Man and His Soul by Herman Wald
Photo: EYEscape

The Unknown Miner by Herman Wald



From top to bottom:

The Pioneer and
The Family Group by Ernest Ullmann
Relief panel by Edoardo Villa
Guardian Angel by John Baloyi



The University recently received a major donation of two large bronze sculptures created by the late Herman Wald - the Unknown Miner and Man and His Soul.

The donation was made by the artist's son Louis Wald, a Wits alumnus, and throws the spotlight on the public sculptures in the Wits collection.

These works include freestanding three-dimensional outdoor sculptures, incised relief panels on exterior buildings, and indoor wooden art benches for use by students.

A diversity of materials is in evidence in the Wits sculptures – bronze, stainless steel, travertine, clay, concrete, and wood have all been used.

The East Campus has the Convocation War Memorial sculpture by Moses Kottler. This is perhaps the most dominantly visible and meaningful to Wits. The sculpture consists of three linked bronze nudes larger than life, male and female figures with the left figure raising a hand to the heavens. They represent the sacrifice of war.





Lawson's Pinnacle, Unknown Artist. Photo: EYEscape

Sculptures at Wits

This work is positioned to the right of the Central Block, overlooking a flowerbed. It commemorates the students, staff and alumni who gave their lives during the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. Their names are inscribed in a book in the Wits archives. These figures have watched over the changes and transformation in student life over many years.

Kottler was born in Lithuania and was active as a sculptor in South Africa after arriving here in 1915. Together with Anton van Wouw and Lippy Lipschitz he became a leading sculptor of the time. He was a member of the New Group and a close associate of artists such as Terence McCaw and Gregoire Boonzaier. He lived in Johannesburg from 1932 and died here in 1977.

Wits is fortunate to have a major body of the work of Edoardo Villa which contains examples of his development. Villa, one of South Africa's pre-eminent sculptors, was born in Italy in 1915. After being sent as a prisoner of war to South Africa, he made this country his home on his release in 1947. An artist who kept working and developing until his death at age 94 in 2011, he worked in many different styles.

The earliest Villa owned by Wits is the St Apollonia (the patron saint of dentists), a bas relief figure cast in artificial stone. Dating from 1948, this work was commissioned by John Fassler for the then new and very modern Dental Hospital (now the School of Arts). His relief panels relating to mining activities, embedded over the entrance on the east side of the Geology and Mining Engineering building (now Geosciences building) were added in the early 1960s.

Close to the Wits Theatre are two major works by Villa - "Reclining Figure" (1969) and "Two Figures". These works are massively robust and are among Villa's largest bronzes. Two large Villas will also be permanently on display in the entrance foyer of the new Wits Art Museum.



Reclining Figure and Two Figures by Edoardo Villa



A smaller sculpture by Villa is housed in the Chalsty Foyer of the School of Law. “Red Madonna”, donated by the Chalsty Trust, is an abstract representation of the female form.

On the outside patio close to Senate House are several sculptures by South African-born sculptors.

Malcolm Payne (born 1946) won the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year award in 1984. His sculpture “Arc Angel: Homage to Harold Bloom” is in mild steel and dated 1977. It is a circular motif with sharp juxtaposed attachments of flat iron and angled iron.

In close proximity is the work of Johann Moolman (born 1950). “Bourke’s Luck” is made of welded steel plates and is an abstract composition.

Also in the piazza are two works by Gavin Younge (born 1947). “To the Dark Rising”, a figurative and powerful work made of welded steel, won the Afrox competition of 1978. A second work, “Umkhonto”, could represent a spear or a new anchor of the future, date from 1979, a time when Younge was keen to portray current political challenges.

Willem Strydom (born 1945) is represented in two untitled works. One is in mild steel (1977) and the second in mild steel and wood (1980).

The redesign and modernising of the foyer of the Great Hall in the Central Block in 2001, by the architect Henry Paine, saw the installation of three powerful abstract wooden works by the sculptor Geoffrey Armstrong. These sculptures, carved from the bluegum tree, make tactile, substantial backdrops for public functions.

Two other works not yet installed are by Alan Crump and Marco Sante Cianfanelli.

Moving over to the West Campus, near the School of Law is the temporary installation of a bronze sculpture by Neels Coetzee commissioned by Wits.

“The Bier” represents a hollowed skull and was part of a series from the mid 1980s, an intensely productive period for Coetzee. The artist was born in 1940 and was a member of staff in the Wits Fine Arts Department for much of his career. He studied skulls in the Wits Department of Anatomy and made casts from real skulls. Originally intended



Dig Man by Robert Legatt

“The sculptures at Wits are a rich reminder of our difficult and contested past; they celebrate life and achievement and, set in the gorgeous gardens of Wits, are a fine tribute to the University’s people.”

to rise above a circular pond, this work has been relocated as the pond concept was not sustainable.

The two bronze works by Herman Wald are situated in different areas of the West Campus. Wald, an immigrant to South Africa, was well known in Johannesburg between the 1940s and his early death in 1970. In his day he was a popular and celebrated sculptor. His best-known work was the “Stampede of Impalas”, now located in 44 Main Street, commissioned by Harry Oppenheimer in honour of his late father, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer.

Wald was also commissioned by the Oppenheims to create a work to mark Ernest Oppenheimer’s life and work in Kimberley. He produced a plaster cast of a miner three metres high. The Oppenheims selected the work in a smaller dimension and a group of five figures became part of the Diamond Digger’s fountain in Kimberley. The original 3-metre figure was donated by Louis Wald, and funds were raised to cover the cost of casting by the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment. Titled “Unknown Miner”, the work was installed at the east entrance of the Chamber of Mines building.

The striking, detailed figure recalls the mining roots of the University, noting that the South African School of Mines established in Kimberley in 1896 was a forerunner of Wits.

Mining engineering, metallurgy, geology and geosciences were key disciplines from the earliest days of Wits. Human endeavour of both mental and physical varieties and representing miners of diverse backgrounds is personified in the male form, exhibiting energy, muscle and brain power.

The second work by Wald is “Man and His Soul”, a sensuous semi-abstract work in circular form, showing interlinked male and female figures. It is cast in gilded bronze and rises above a plinth. It was acquired by the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management (CLM), and complements the West Campus art collection built up over the last four years under the curatorship of Natalie Knight. It is located at the main crossroads below the sculpture Concatenation by Paul Stein.

“Concatenation”, a stainless steel abstract sculpture dating from the development of the West Campus