

INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



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Sunday Times

Jg..... Nr..... P. 46... Dat. 87 6. 28.

A recent addition is a file enscribed "To my dear Mariannhill Studio — started under Trappist perspiration", which covers events of her life in Europe from 1980 to 1986. The file was brought over from Holland by her sister, Sister Dominica CPS, who is also a nun at the Mariannhill Convent, and who, until she retired last year, was the Headmistress of the St Francis College where Sister Pientia taught art.

Sister Pientia's easel, palette, tubes of paint and dozens of brushes are as she left them — but more than that, because of her thoroughness she took the time to catalogue and tabulate everything in the studio. Drawers and shelves are labelled, files have been placed in date order and numbered. Most important of all, her own prayers, thoughts, instructions and comments, either typed on flimsy sheets of blue paper or written in her own hand,

are there in abundance to fill the gap left by her enforced stay in Europe.

A large number of her personal collection of paintings and drawings (including several "Views from her Studio") have been taken overseas on the many trips which she has made (1951, 1956, 1971 and 1980), but dozens, possibly hundreds of excellent examples of her work remain in her studio, all awaiting her return.

Sister Pientia first came to South Africa in 1936, after studying art at the Order of the Precious Blood at Aarle Rixtel in Holland. She arrived in Africa full of new and exciting ideas. Much of her work was dubbed sensational, and caused a major stir in clerical and lay circles.

She did a BA in Fine Arts at the University of Natal, graduating in 1948, and taught art to black students at the St Francis Training College in Mariannhill. She also furthered her studies during her extensive travel excursions to Europe.

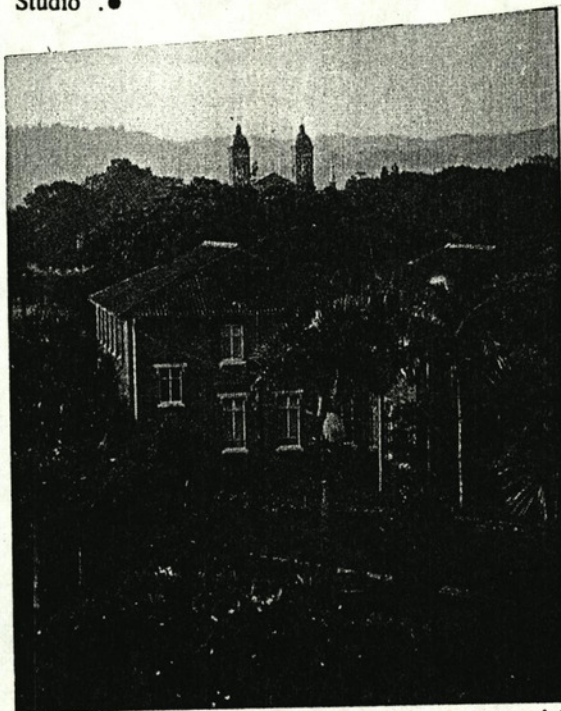
As she developed as an artist she became a controversial figure by attempting to banish kitsch from Catholic churches and was also strongly criticised for encouraging black students to depict Biblical figures in an African form.

Sister Pientia was even suspended from teaching for a time because of her views.

Today she is known throughout the country for her highly individual mosaics and her bold paintings of religious themes as well as for her secular work. At a retrospective exhibition of her work in 1979, the year before her departure for Europe, her secular work received high acclaim from the critics.

Although her studio is a treasure-house of her art, Sister Pientia's greatest works are spread throughout the country. The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Bloemfontein is decorated with stained glass windows and mosaics created by her in 1964. In 1956 she went to Queenstown where she spent 18 months engaged in decorating Christ the King Cathedral and other churches. Her mosaics and paintings also beautify churches in Durban (including St Mary's Anglican Church in Greyville), Bethlehem (OFS), Pretoria, Kimberley and Engcobo in Transkei.

Mariannhill awaits the return of Sister Pientia — acclaimed as one of South Africa's most competent living artists — to paint again the "Views from her Studio". ●



One of sister Pientia's favourite scenes to paint was the view from her studio window

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