

i ao
Â\$ Â«

2 Mail&Guardian October 12 to 18 2001 %

Putting art in the bag â\200\224

Kathryn Smith

The former Speedy Bag

Factory at 10 Minnaar

Street, Fordsburg â\200\224 a

stoneâ\200\231s throw away from

the Oriental Plaza â\200\224 is
an art pit stop where some of South
Africaâ\200\231s brightest art stars and guest
residents from around the world are
available for serious studio visits or a
bit of a laugh over lunch.

And now the Fordsburg Artistsâ\200\231
Studios, popularly known as the Bag
Factory, has been awarded this yearâ\200\231s
Arts & Culture Trust Best Practice
Project of the Year.

Stifling in summer and chilly in
winter, with all the appropriate
quirks and idiosyncrasies typical of
old buildings, the Fordsburg Artists
Studios, comprising 18 studios anda
gallery, has managed to establish

its position as an internationally-
renowned constant in a shifting cul-
tural landscape. Other spaces in
Johannesburg are floundering and
are being forced to re-evaluate their
operating strategies, but the Bag
Factory recently turned 10.

Global networking and identifying
points of creative connection and
exchange across different communi-
ties define the artistâ\200\231s collective,

which began with the activities of the Triangle Arts Trust founded by Sir Anthony Caro and Robert Loder.

Originally confined to the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, the network, fuelled by artists' workshops and the establishing of a charitable trust in the UK, expanded to include more than 15 countries worldwide. About 1 800 artists have participated in this growing network, which now boasts three

studio facilities: the pilot Bag Factory project, London's Gasworks Studios and Greatmore Studios in Cape Town.

While South African artists are ~ benefiting immensely from greater exposure on the global art scene, the local art scene is becoming increasingly less about paying lip service to the great secular cathedrals of art (museums and high-end galleries that are fighting for audiences) and more about engaging with street-level opportunities and artist-led support structures.

The Bag Factory is home to core resident luminaries Kay Hassan, Sam Nhlengethwa, Joachim Schonfeldt, Pat Mautloa, Ben Arnold and David Koloane. Dominic Tshabangu, Rookeya Gardee, Stephen Maqashela, Bongile Bengu, Tamar Mason, Verna Jooste and Paul Emmanuel are currently full-time residents. Three

additional studios house visiting residents for a period of about three months, who are then married with other institutions and projects ranging from universities to community projects to facilitate workshops. Koloane and coordinator Koulla Xinisteris are often asked whether such an initiative can be self-sustaining to the point of gathering real capital to allow them to realise plans for renovations, further facilities and so on. The answer is an emphatic no!

The local art scene is becoming more about engaging with street-level opportunities and artist-led support structures

Resident luminary Dave Koloane
in his studio at the Bag Factory

Realistically speaking, the market is
simply not big enough. ;

But while the studios have experienced an uncertain destiny, they have never been in real danger of closing, thanks to a list of (mostly international) sponsors in the form of embassies and trusts, as well as individuals sponsoring studio rental costs for artists.

The project has enjoyed support for some years from the Arts & Culture Trust of the President as well as the MTN Art Institute and Business Arts South Africa among others, but realising active, visible and sustainable links between art and business is still very irregular.

As a unit, the Bag Factory houses tangible skills and services that can benefit both the professional and educational art communities at large.

The Artists' Press operates from the complex, providing professional artists' printing facilities managed by master printer Mark Atwood. Printmaker Paul Emmanuel offers design and layout services.

Koloane and Xinisteris are aware of the need to make further facilities available to the public, including a planned photographic darkroom _ that could begin to generate revenue while filling a huge need for the artists who work there.

A 'free space' is under construction, to be used for workshops, seminars and events by both Bag Factory stakeholders and members of the public, taking this pressure off the gallery area to establish a full-time exhibitions programme.

With the residual insecurities around space and access created by old political and ideological structures still a reality, the establishment of the Bag Factory counteracts this. Attention is finally being paid to the protracted Newtown regeneration project. Koloane is convinced that the role of the Bag Factory is becoming increasingly more important, offering guidance and nuts-and-bolts advice to other

initiatives like Cross Path Culture.

â\200\234Our presence here, and that we have been here for so long, is significant for that very reason. Itâ\200\231s about foresight, being located in this precinct.â\200\235

An exhibition by resident Canadian performance artist Mara Verna, who also features prominently on the Joubert Park Public Art Project, opens on Wednesday October 17 at 6pm. In the next few weeks Magdalene Odundo (Kenya/UK), Marie-Angie Bordas (Brazil) and Veronique Tadjou (Ivory Coast) will move in.

MailGuardian

LLL NS RE EE ERE EEN

Message from the chairperson

The Arts & Culture Trust Awards recognise excellence in those strategic areas without which the arts cannot develop and thrive. All entrants and the finalists for the 2001 awards are therefore commended for their fine work and their participation. The winners, judged by an independent panel to represent the highest

levels of professionalism, dedication, leadership and achievements in their respective fields, are all warmly congratulated by the Arts & Culture Board of Trustees and our sponsors. We also thank the adjudicators for their time and expertise. â\200\224 Professor Andries Oliphant, chairperson of the Arts & Culture Trust

Thebe Mabanga on the players who are bringing arts and culture to the fore

The veterans
and the
blonde date

he nominees for this

yearâ\200\231s Arts & Culture

Trust Award for Arts

Journalist of the Year are

crusaders who have displayed enormous chutzpah to speak their minds and champion the cause of a sector that is besieged by troubles ranging from finding finance for innovative work or pulling in audiences if such works ever see the light of day.

Between them Michelle Constant, Robert Greig, Roger Lucey and Mike van Graan represent major electronic and print media outfits and cover most disciplines in arts entertainment and popular culture.

Constant is a self-confessed live-music junkie who has been in radio for most of her career. She

hosts two shows on SAfm â\200\224 Saturday Wired and Art on the Edge at midday on Wednesdays. Constant is also a contributing editor for menâ\200\231s magazine GQ and author of the Blonde Date column.

Three of the many events she has covered on Saturday Wired are the Pukkelpop Festival in Belgium, Arts Alive and World of Music Arts and Dance (Womad).

â\200\234At [Arts Alive and Womad] you get to see artists in a relatively intimate space,â\200\235 she says. â\200\234My issue with the festivals is their timing. Organisers do not talk enough.â\200\235

Constant adds that publicity for Arts Alive â\200\234was appallingâ\200\235.

She says that when it comes to arts coverage, â\200\234there is too much content but not enough contextâ\200\235 She emphasises that arts need to be covered in a

way that appeals to a wider audience. â\200\234My work with GQ has shown that there is a broader audience for music and arts in general.â\200\235 In this case the audience is made up of men and women who are turned on by style and sports.

The Sunday Independent's Robert Greigâ\200\231s career as an arts journalist stretches back to 1976. This was interrupted in the early 1990s by a five-year stint as a Standard Bank consultant. The post was not for the bankâ\200\231s arts sponsorship though â\200\224 â\200\234Oh God, they would not let me touch that,â\200\235 he says. Greigâ\200\231s tenure in the world of finance ended in 1995 when he became arts editor of the newly formed Sunday Independent.

What the arts need now, says Greig â\200\234are structures to ensure that the best work gets put on stage and funding for innovative workâ\200\235.

He believes that coverage of popular culture should depart from a premise that the broader arts and culture influence and are influenced by it. â\200\234It is like building a dam,â\200\235 says Greig. â\200\234You need to have a strong flow of current before you start constructionâ\200\235

When free-to-air TV channel e.tv decided to extend its prime-time news bulletin to an hour, long-time TV cameraman and news production

manager Roger Lucey saw an opportunity to cover the arts and present it to a broad, engaging audience.

“If sports get so much attention, I do not see why arts should not. For me there is no difference,” says Lucey.

When management approved his idea, the best support he got was a camera, three minutes on air and

Arts Journalist
of Year
Award-winner
Mike van Graan

When it comes
to arts coverage,
there is too much
content and not
enough context”

good luck wishes. Now Lucey compiles the Cape Town reports and edits and produces the segment, focusing mainly on grassroots arts projects in far-flung communities. Since his debut on February 5 Lucey has installed himself as an integral part of the news line-up and, thankfully, gets to be on air for far longer than three minutes.

It is hard to think of an arts journalist who has made more noise on cultural commentary over the past year than Mike van Graan. And it is he who has won this year’s Arts Journalist of the Year Award. The Cape Town-based arts consultant brands his Cultural Weapon, a column on the Artslink website which has also been nominated for an Arts & Culture Trust Award where he takes on everyone who has an influence in shaping the arts and culture landscape. This includes the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Ben Ngubane.

In a bare-nuckled open letter to the minister, Van Graan pointed out

that while the department is trying to implement the Cultural Indus-

tries Growth Strategy, â\200\234we have lost
an orchestra or two, a few dance
companies have closed, our national
gallery has been unable to purchase
art work, and the odd musician has
died as a pauperâ\200\235.

Since 1986 Van Graan has woven
himself into the arts landscape as com-
mentator and practitioner. He has
served on the executive of the Con-
gress of South African Writers and the
Theatre Action Group, and he is chair-
person of the Western Cape region of
the Performing Arts Network of South
Africa, which he helped set up.

Van Graanâ\200\231s talents as a theatre per-
former and director have seen him
take to the stage in works such as Some
of our Best Friends are Cultural Work-
ers, Dinner Talk and The Tables Tril-
ogy, all of which have featured at the
Standard Bank National Arts Festival.

The Mail & Guardian predicted
bigger things for Van Graan when it
named him as one of the Top 100
South Africans in 1997.

NEDBANK
ARTS

ee

oe

Weldecem. SEO.

reaching new frontiers

FOUNDATION