

VOORTREKKER MONUMENT BOASTS UNIQUE, NEW EXHIBITION ON MARBLE FRIEZE

Pretoria, 9 Desember 2016. After more than two years of research, restoration and preparations, the Voortrekker Monument boasts a brand new exhibition of 27 original gypsum panels that were completed between 1941 and 1949 by four sculptors as studies (maquettes) for the final marble frieze in the Hall of Heroes.

The architect, Gerard Moerdijk, donated the original gypsum panels to the Board of Control in 1956 where they have been stored ever since. It is especially interesting to note how some panels differ from the marble frieze that is considered to be the longest in the world.

The history and run-up to the creation and installation of the frieze that had to be 're-worked to a dramatic unit' according to Moerdijk, is in itself extremely interesting. As a matter of fact, it has been the subject of various articles and publications, the most recent being a doctoral thesis as well as an international publication that should see the light within the next two years.

Moerdijk requested that the artist W.H Coetzer, who was an expert on the cultural history of the Great Trek, prepare and submit a number of preparatory sketches to serve as guidelines for the sculptors. In 1940 four sculptors, Peter Kirchoff, Frikkie Kruger, Laurika Postma and Hennie Potgieter were appointed to create bas relief panels.

Work commenced in 1942 in Moerdijk's studio in the 'Harmonie hall' (later the Breytenbach-theatre) in Sunnyside, Pretoria. The sculptors had to complete 1/3 sized panels in potters' clay on wooden bases followed by gypsum casts. It took close on a year to complete the panels on display here. Subsequently a large frame with steps, platform and a pulley system was built on which the small panels were enlarged. The large panels were then shipped to the studio of famous Italian sculptor, Romano Romanelli in Florence, Italy at the end of 1947.

Postma and Potgieter joined Romanelli in 1948 to oversee work done by the 40 chisellers and the finer detail on the panels. Back in South Africa these marble panels were mounted in the Hall of Heroes by Hennie Potgieter during 1949 and 1950.

Artist Elize Cilliers made casts of all the gypsum panels in 2013 in the event that the original panels on display might get damaged. These are safely stored away.

The exhibition was mounted by Balthi du Plessis and his team and was made possible by funds generated by the 2013 prestige golf day and funds received from the Dagbreek Trust. The exhibition will be open to the public from 17 December 2016.

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