

## **Diamond Fields Advertiser, pg 5, 26 Jan 2018**

### **Art at risk as dept 'procrastinates'**

Art at risk as dept 'procrastinates' NORMA WILDENBOER STAFF REPORTER A RESPONSE from the Department of Public Works, regarding the "crisis situation" at the William Humphreys Art Gallery Whag in Kimberley, where thousands of priceless artworks are at risk of damage due to a broken air conditioning system, yesterday indicated that the problem would only be fixed by the middle of 2020. Concern was expressed earlier this week about the looming disaster by Whag Director, Ann Pretorius, who said that the gallery's collection of thousands of artworks was under threat of damage and eventual destruction as a result of the facility's air conditioning system being out of order for more than three years.

Pretorius added that numerous pleas to the Department of Public Works for the air conditioning system to be properly serviced, maintained and repaired, and thus prevent damage to the art collection, had fallen on deaf ears. The Whag is a national gallery owned by the state and the maintenance and upkeep of its climate control systems is a competency of the Department of Public Works. The Department of Public Works yesterday responded to media enquiries about the situation at the Whag which has been described as "catastrophic" by Grace Welsh, an oil painting conservator who has worked with the Whag collection for 25 years by saying that it had "registered the project as a major piece of work to completely overhaul the air conditioning system at the art gallery".

"The department will soon commence with the appointment of the consultants," Department of 4' THEY SHOW ABSOLUTELY NO SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY OR URGENCY WITH REGARD TO THIS VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM Public Works spokesperson, Thami Mchunu, said. "There have been repairs that were undertaken under unscheduled maintenance to ameliorate the situation but after it became clear that the system is no longer fixable, a decision was taken to completely overhaul the system. The specialisation needed on this work and the extent of the required work has necessitated the overhaul of the system." Mchunu said that work was only expected to start during late May and that it would take two years to complete, while the department would be "intervening for short term solutions whilst the permanent solution is being put together".

Pretorius, however, raised further concern about this extended time frame by saying that "for every day that this situation is left unattended the risk of deterioration and damage continues". "Evidence of damage to the entire collection is already visible, and each day that the DPW officials procrastinate, results in more damage occurring. They show absolutely no sense of responsibility or urgency with regard to this very serious problem," Pretorius said. She added that while she was "appreciative" of the current attempts to rectify the problem, she had been pleading with the DPW for the past five years to act urgently "This problem could have been averted if they had listened to expert advice and taken their responsibility seriously Given the record of the lack of understanding and commitment of the DPW officials, I trust that their intention is to have an experienced, qualified firm on site by late May 2018 to commence with installation. "However, if their intention is to commence with planning,

designing and procurement in May 2018, it will be far too late and we will face another summer from hell before a new system is installed and commissioned. "This while the Whag's priceless art collection continues to deteriorate," Pretorius said.