

**Deputy Minister of Public Works**  
**Rev KM Zondi**  
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## **Official opening and handover of extensions to the Oliwenhuis Art Museum's Gallery Bloemfontein**

Mrs Sharon Crampton and Mr Rick Nuttall from Oliwenhuis Art Museum  
Mrs Winnie Kunene, Head of the African Bank Foundation  
Father Frans Claerhout  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I indeed feel honoured to share this exiting event of opening the mysterious reservoir with you. I must admit that I had a previous sneak at the work done here on one of my visits to Bloemfontein and already at that stage of witnessing work in progress I felt the thrill of turning this find into something that will be preserved for posterity, someplace that will contribute to the appreciation and sharing of our precious collection of South African works of art.

In 1994, when the special carousel was constructed in the garden for the amusement of children, an underground reservoir was discovered. Very little is known about the reservoir, but inlet and outlet pipes in the southern corner clearly indicate that it was used as a water storage tank in earlier times. Lacking definitive records, it has been established that the reservoir was constructed in approximately 1904.

This makes the reservoir older than Oliwenhuis itself. The latter was designed by architect William Mollison in 1935. The stately building was constructed as the official residence for the Governor-General of the Union of South Africa. King George VI and his family stayed in Oliwenhuis during their official state visit to South Africa in 1947. When South Africa became a Republic, Oliwenhuis became the official residence of the State President during his visits to Bloemfontein. The residence was however not used on a regular basis and former State President P.W. Botha agreed to donate the residence to the National Museum. Oliwenhuis was converted into an art museum by the Department of Public Works during 1988 and 1989 and aspects such as climate control, lighting and security measures were introduced to the mansion.

But today our focus is on the reservoir. This 450m<sup>2</sup> reservoir had been primarily excavated into solid granite.

The roof of a structure of this size has to be supported. Two rows of 5 dressed sandstone pillars support concrete beams and a face-brick vaulted roof. The walls and floors were constructed out of cast concrete. The structure was not waterproof and water seeped from the surrounding rocks into the reservoir.

The discovery of this facility as well as the increased popularity of Oliwenhuis provided a unique opportunity for the expansion of the museum facility. Funds were made available by the Department of Arts and Culture to convert the reservoir into a multi-purpose exhibition space that could be used for exhibitions as well as functions and conferences. Part of the brief was also to convert the small tearoom into a proper cafeteria facility that would be in a position to cater for the current and future demands of the public that visit the facility. A bandstand to entertain visitors in the lovely Oliwenhuis garden, as well as to put the art gallery in a position to host music events in the garden, also formed part of the planning request from the Department of Arts and Culture.

Specific challenges with the conversion of the reservoir into an Art Gallery included the waterproofing of the reservoir. All the soil above the roofing of the reservoir had to be removed to waterproof the structure - and mind you, this had to be done very carefully without machinery in order not to damage the fragile roofing of the reservoir. The excavation of the new entrance section into the solid granite proved a major challenge because it had to be done by hand to prevent any possible damage. An advanced air conditioning system will regulate and control climate ensuring the correct temperatures and humidity in the gallery during art exhibitions. A lift has been installed to ensure full accessibility to disabled visitors as well.

Complementing the art experience at Oliwenhuis is the cafeteria that provides tea and snacks in the beautiful gardens of this stately mansion. The design of the cafeteria had to be done in a very sympathetic manner because of its position adjacent to the main building. Gable elements, for example, complement the historic gables, yet have been designed to reflect the contemporary nature of the new facility. The cafeteria and new bandstand has been positioned in a way to make full use of the garden area behind the art gallery.

The new facilities had been designed with the aim to leverage the commercial potential of the facilities and put the Department of Arts and Culture in a position to continue and improve their core function to collect, protect and exhibit South African works of art.

We at Public Works regard State assets, and particularly buildings, as national treasures which belong to all the people of South Africa. In our country today it is important that all of us should appreciate what we have accumulated over decades and centuries as part and parcel of our common heritage.

In respect of the great cultural, racial and linguistic diversity found in this country - it is precisely this diversity which is our unique source of strength and beauty rather than a weakness.

In the past we were in conflict, but now we work together in harmony. We have had a history of exclusion, but today we operate on the basis of inclusion, thus cultivating a sense of belonging to a common motherland. In the past we could not appreciate each other's backgrounds, achievements, cultures and customs, but now we are committed to learn from one another and to appreciate the other's culture and heritage. It is only in this way that we can promote nation building which works for everybody.

Ons moet saamstaan, saamwerk en saam vooruitgang in ons land skep.

Die Departement Openbare Werke wil vertrou dat hierdie fasiliteite ons suster department, die Departement van Kuns en Kultuur, in 'n beter posisie sal stel om ook hulle doelstellings te bereik.

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