

NIROX PROJECTS

STONE CIRCLE

2017

STONE CIRCLE consists of twenty natural breccia stones placed unevenly in a circle roughly thirty metres in diameter. The heaviest stone in the group weighs about eight tons, the average weight of a stone being two tons.

This prominent land art installation is at the entrance to the NIROX Sculpture Park, situated in the Cradle of Humankind. It reflects on the story of the Cradle and brings homage to the unique treasure the Cradle has to offer.

The Cradle of Humankind is a paleoanthropological site about 50 km (31 mi) northwest of Johannesburg, South Africa, in the Gauteng province. Declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1999, the site currently occupies 47,000 hectares (180 sq mi) and contains a complex of limestone caves. The registered name of the site in the list of World Heritage sites is *Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa*.¹

The Sterkfontein Caves were the site of the discovery of a 2.3-million-year-old fossil *Australopithecus africanus* (nicknamed "Mrs. Ples"), found in 1947 by Robert Broom and John T. Robinson. The find helped corroborate the 1924 discovery of the juvenile *Australopithecus africanus* skull known as the "Taung Child", by Raymond Dart, at Taung in the North West Province of South Africa, where excavations still continue.¹

Nearby the site, but not in the site, the Rising Star Cave system contains the Dinaledi Chamber (chamber of stars), in which were discovered fifteen fossil skeletons of an extinct species of hominin, provisionally named *Homo naledi*.¹

Sterkfontein alone has produced more than a third of early hominid fossils ever found prior to 2010. The Dinaledi Chamber contains over 1,500 *H. naledi* fossils, the most extensive discovery of a single hominid species ever found in Africa.¹

Professor Lee Berger, Chair in Palaeo-Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand leads the excavation and processing of fossil finds in the area. He compares the rarity and value of these skeletal deposits to finding a diamond more than twice the size of the Cullinan, the world's largest diamond.

The stones used in STONE CIRCLE are from the Cradle of Humankind and were identified as fossil-bearing breccia by Professor Frans Waanders, director of the School for Chemical and Minerals Engineering at the North-West University of South Africa. They form a circle of sentinels, watching over the central stone, which is opened up like a book, or a butterfly with its wings splayed.

The circular format is derived from prehistoric stone circles found in Europe and elsewhere. Those circles, like the well-known Stonehenge, are from the Neolithic period dating from approximately 15,000 years ago. Breccia stones are composites of mud, silt and debris formed over millions of years. Their conglomerate makeup includes fossils such as parts of bones from birds and animals.

STONE CIRCLE is directly related to a series of six earlier granite sculptures installed in various sites in the Cradle of Humankind. These, known as the CHILDREN OF THE STARS (2008-2009), are in reverence to the Vredeford asteroid and its paleological contribution to Earth's history. Professor Waanders stresses the effect

of the Vredefort asteroid of two billion years ago on the landscape of the Cradle of Humankind. The massive impact of this ten-kilometre-diameter asteroid left concentric circles that can be seen from outer space. It is the largest object ever to hit Earth from outer space. Like a pebble hitting the surface of a pond the asteroid left ripples that stretch for hundreds of kilometres in all directions. These shockwaves created thousands of cave-like structures in the Cradle by flipping over horizontal bedrock of stone to form caverns that offered suitable shelter to early man and animals. In the many millions of years that followed the impact, floods and sedimentary deluges created the breccia substructures that captured layers of fossilised remains.

For *CHILDREN OF THE STARS* I used Belfast black granite, or more correctly gabbro; an igneous material formed by magma or lava (molten volcanic rock) which cooled and solidified. This means that, at some point in the past the gabbro was liquid. By polishing the natural rock I took it back, in a symbolic way, to its former, molten, state. The ultimate character of my stone sculptures echoes the rock's history, with the 'memory' of its liquid essence being moulded and settling in place. Soil, bedrock and earth contain a record (some would even say memory) of past events. The land artist Andy Goldsworthy says: "A stone is ingrained with geological and historical memories."

STONE CIRCLE reflects on the aftermath of the immense circles of stone and earth of the Vredefort asteroid, part of which became the Cradle of Humankind. Its circular configuration follows in the wake of these immense concentric circles.

For *STONE CIRCLE* I used rough incidental boulders of breccia with their small cemented prehistoric fragments embedded into a prehistoric soup calcified into limestone and dolomite on the Gauteng Province Highveld. Looking at one of the breccia boulders, the bits and pieces are clearly visible and are, oddly enough, scientifically known as 'chocolate breccia', invoking a sense, according to Professor Waanders, of the textured Swiss chocolate known as Toblerone. In the centre of *STONE CIRCLE* one of the larger stones is sliced through its central axis and opened outwards, like a book. This book-like piece reveals a textured surface of whitish limestone. The Cradle's breccia with its fossil deposits needs decoding by special 'reading' skills. In the same way as we read a complex text, the cryptic nature of the Cradle's fossils can be deciphered to give us an insight into the story of life on Earth and also of our own heritage.

Sponsor: Claire and Eduardo Villa Trust

Dividing of central stone into two halves: Frans Haarhoff

Transport and placement of stones: Trent Wiggle

¹ Wikipedia

WAILING WALL (previously known as JERUSALEM JERUSALEM 2) 2017

A free-standing wall 2000 mm (height) X 12000 mm (length) X 1200 mm (width)

The wall is made of three adjoining wire cages mounted on a concrete plinth resting on a foundation of 24 steel legs, encased in concrete. The cages comprise sheets of wire grid filled with building rubble chips – in the building industry such a structure is known as a gabion. Debris left behind when a barrage of bombs hit built-up neighbourhoods gave rise to the choice of building rubble in WAILING WALL. Each rubble chip is roughly between half brick and three quarter brick in size.

The lighter greyish rubble chips form the background to the word JERUSALEM. The first three letters (JER) and the last three letters (LEM) are stacked in black chips obtained from breaking up a tar road surface. The central three letters of JERUSALEM (USA) are stacked in reddish metal chips and slivers to create the appearance of shrapnel. The word JERUSALEM is repeated on the other side of the wall in the same way.

The installation at NIROX SCULPTURE PARK forms part of the lush landscape on the edge of a lake and creates a mirrored reflection in the water. The full text is clearly visible from a distance across the lake, but the spiked nature of the central letters, the 'USA' becomes clear only on closer approach.

An earlier and much smaller version of the work (2003) was exhibited at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg. This early work was titled JERUSALEM JERUSALEM. The use of the word 'Jerusalem' twice is taken from the gospel according to Saint Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee ..." To differentiate it from the earlier work, the 2017 piece is called WAILING WALL.

A research visit to the historical Wailing Wall in the city of Jerusalem was undertaken in 2011. The installation of the artwork WAILING WALL was prompted by walls like the Berlin Wall, the wall between Palestine and Israel and the proposed wall between the United States and Mexico. These contentious contemporary walls apparently serve the purpose of dividing and of protecting political interests. The NIROX WAILING WALL, on the other hand, may be approached from both sides and provides an occasion for repose and contemplation.

WAILING WALL was completed in time for the opening of the WORDS festival at NIROX Sculpture Park on 3 November 2017. On 6 December 2017 President Donald Trump controversially announced the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Sponsor: Claire and Eduardo Villa Trust

Manufacture and installation of wire cages on a concrete foundation: Johann Eloff, Agilwolf Enterprises

Related work: CRUSADE. Tilder Collection, Paris:

<https://www.wilemboshoff.com/product-page/crusade>

Composition management of rubble in wire cages: Martin Boshoff

Lettering and stencils: Karen Boshoff

YOU NEVER KNOW

2017

YOU NEVER KNOW is an adage 'written' as an embossed grass surface on the upper edge of the open air amphitheatre situated at NIROX Sculpture Park to the north west of Johannesburg.

The phrase 'you never know' stands about twenty-five centimetres above the surrounding kikuyu lawn and is planted in a darker, evergreen grass. Underground stainless steel plates keep the two types of grass apart. This earth art installation measures sixty metres around the outer curve of the lettering, each letter being two metres in height.

YOU NEVER KNOW was completed in time for the opening of the WORDS festival on 3 November 2017 at NIROX Sculpture Park.

The phrase YOU NEVER KNOW was chosen for its ambiguity. One normally associates words and books with clarity of research, wisdom and insight such as might be engendered by the WORDS festival event. In a way, the text 'you never know' wishes to be a philosophical stumbling block to the intelligentsia. "You may think you know, but is it not true that you never really know?" Of course the term also applies to the anticipation one feels in taking risks that might pay off: "Let's put our money on number sixteen, *you never know*."

The NIROX amphitheatre is a huge man-made mound of grass seating 600 people. Nestling in lush, idyllic surroundings, it has its own distinct shape. It looks natural, having a gently curved surface that slopes at a fairly steep angle much like a high sand dune. Towards the back, at its higher end, the amphitheatre drops down steeply. This presents a slight problem in that one might tumble down a few metres if not paying attention. The embossing of YOU NEVER KNOW creates a barrier that makes the outer top rim safe. It is meant to be an unobtrusive, gentle accompaniment to the music concerts offered at the park and people have been observed falling asleep within the folds of the letters.

Sponsor: Claire and Eduardo Villa Trust

Letter stencils: Karen Boshoff

Manufacture and installation of large letters on grass: Tinus Eloff