



Stones and words

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What do these have in common?

In **Wor(l)ds Stenen** they bring together people from the North and the South - from Belgium and from South Africa - who, using words, have created something beautiful.

Wor(l)ds is the name given to the collaboration between Belgium and Southern Africa which began when a young stone carver named Maud Bekaert (www.lettersinsteen.be) visited South Africa in 2005. Maud fell in love with Africa and her people, but also was moved by the AIDS pandemic and how it was affecting families and children. I think that at this point a seed called **Wor(l)ds** fell into the dry and dusty sands of Africa. Later on, in 2006, Maud returned to South Africa, linked up with some calligraphers in Cape Town and ran a course on lettercarving in stone. This was something quite strange and new to many calligraphers and lettering artists in South Africa.

At this time, whilst Maud was staying at the beautiful home of Heleen de Haas, a lover of things beautiful and a fine calligraphy teacher, the **Wor(l)ds** seed began to poke its head above the

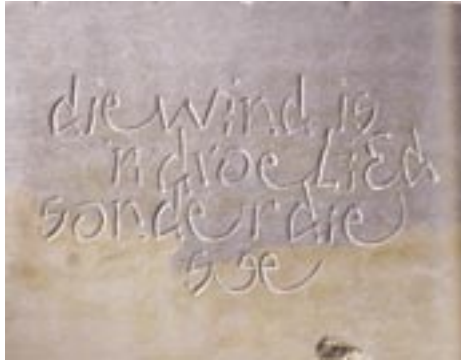
sand. This was the seed that carried Maud's dream: a collaboration between artists from Belgium and Southern Africa working together in an artistic way that would ultimately benefit and assist the children of Southern Africa and make their lives more beautiful and meaningful. The two organisations who were responsible for input to the social side of the project and for making sure that the funds raised were well spent were Breadline Africa (www.breadlineafrica.org.za) in South Africa and Sprinkle, a Belgian NGO.

The process in South Africa

In South Africa people interested in words and letters were brought together in a week-long workshop to develop new and interesting scripts that reflected the continent. Maud Bekaert contributed over 30 'word-fragments' from Belgian and South African poets and songwriters. About 40 people from various places in Southern Africa and from the refugee community in Cape Town worked with each other for a week. This required skilful teachers and facilitators whose purpose was to challenge, inform and encourage each person's unique letters and how they interacted with the poetry or song fragment each was given to design. So, for example, Maklone, a local graffiti artist took us through the first day of the workshop and let us loose with tagging and bombing, using the instrument of



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the spray can, to make marks and letters. Andrew van der Merwe provided sticks and ink and helped us look at some of the scripts from the central and northern part of Africa. Heleen de Haas brought us all back to the page and design, through making us dance together so we could understand how letters need to not only talk to each other but can actually dance across paper. In between Maud had to advise from the point of how the designs would look carved in stone.

By the last day of the workshop Maud had over 40 designs: unique and very different, which she took back to Brugge (her home town, and one of the main sponsors of **Wor(l)ds**). Now the South Africans could only wait and imagine what would happen: whose designs would be chosen and how would they look in stone.

The process in Belgium

Then it was left to the Belgian artists. The best designs from South Africa were chosen. For 14 months the carvers worked on their stones (which you can now see displayed on the stone path, in Zeebrugge). About 20 stone carvers worked in an unused school in Damme throughout the winter and spring in order to have them ready by summer 2008. One has to note that forty stones were sponsored by various individuals and organisations and that all the

carvers donated their time to carving the stones. Some carved more than one stone: true generosity of spirit.

Special effort was put into the placing of the forty stones to be ready for the opening.

In June 2008 the stone pedestrian and cycle trail, starting at the Concert Building and Information Centre in Brugge and winding through the beautiful villages of Damme and Lissewege, ending up at the beach in Zeebrugge was opened.

These stones were available for viewing and to be admired throughout the summer of 2008 together with a very beautiful catalogue. In September they were all brought back to the centre of Brugge where they were auctioned. All the stones were sold and close to R900 000 was raised for vulnerable children in South Africa. See a snippet of this on *youtube*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxr9RkVRJJA>.

Maud returned to South Africa and spends her time teaching a group of young students letter-carving on stone. They worked in the Castle in Cape Town where they took commissions for nameplates and house numbers. The quality of their work was amazing.

Wor(l)ds Stenen can be obtained by phoning 021 434 1264.