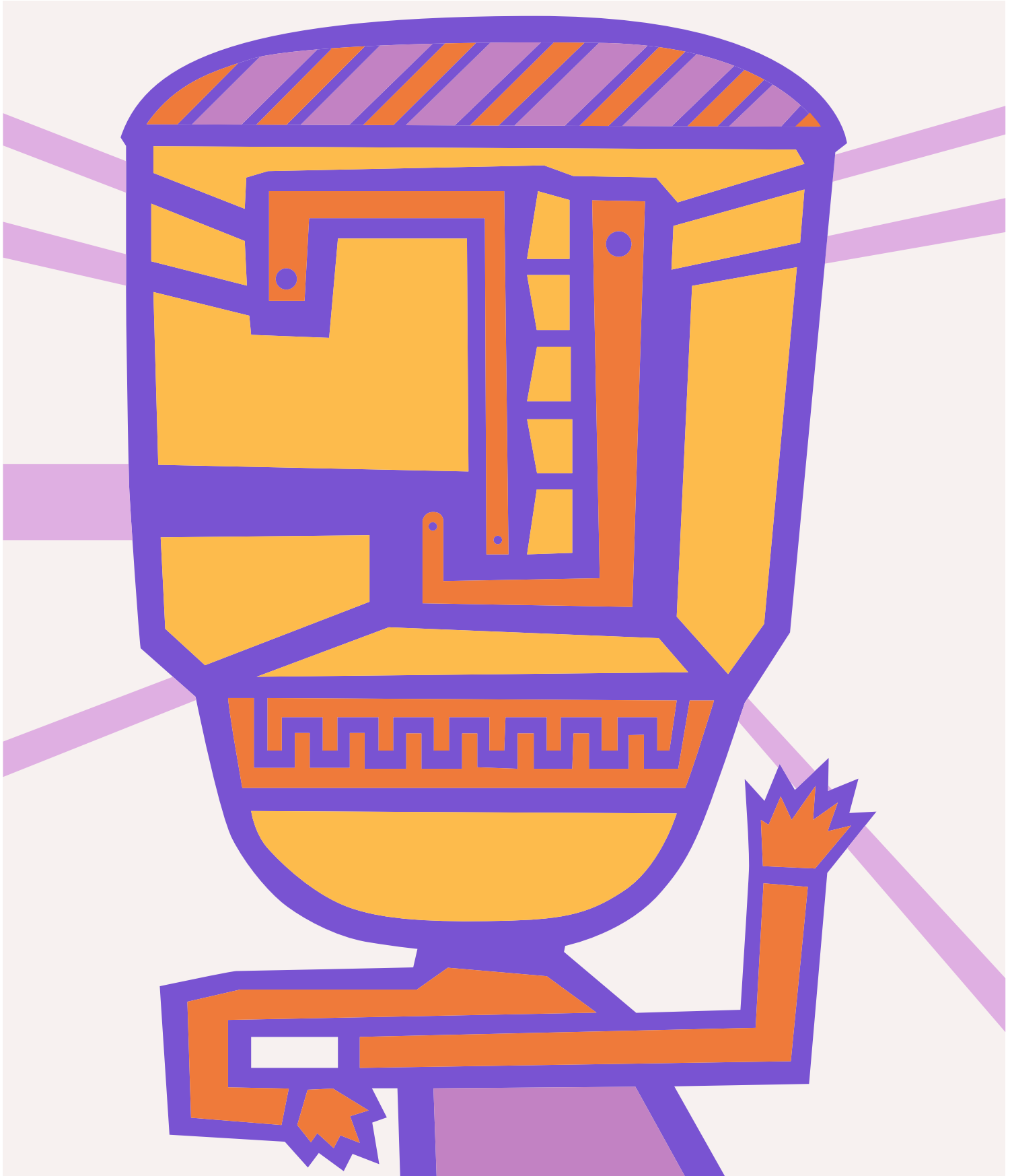


the Soapbox

Issue 17 / October 2014



The Engineer by Derrick Erasmus

Disclosure of Deftness

Underculture's Cedric Vanderlinden interviews Derek Erasmus.

It's a warm spring afternoon at the Underculture Contemporary Art Gallery. Gallery owner, Cedric Vanderlinden, interviews respected local artist, Derrick Erasmus.

"So Derrick," asks Cedric over a sip of coffee, "this is something I've always wanted to know: when did you first pick up a pencil?"

Derrick sits back in his chair thinking, and after a moment replies: "Cedric ever since I can remember, from the time I was a tiny tot, I used to draw in the sand and to such an extent that my fingers would start bleeding. Then my mother would put plasters on them and then I'd start drawing again with a finger that was still functional. In order to make me happy and spare my fingers, my mother then bought me a little blackboard. I would draw on the blackboard for a while, and then go on to complain that I didn't like it. That the blackboard was too dusty! I mean," he laughs, "I don't know what I must have thought about drawing in the sand as that too, was dusty! But that's in fact the earliest memory I have from way back then."

"Which would be in what year?" asks Cedric.

"This would have been, let me think now," says Derrick, deep in contemplation, "about, let's say nineteen thirty eight. But then if I may insert one more little memory here about the greatest compliment that I was ever paid in primary school: I happened to overhear a conversation between two little schoolboys. The one said to the other one 'are you going to play ball at playtime? Or are you going to watch Erasmus draw?' You see, it became a tradition where all these little boys would gather around me and say: 'draw a cowboy chasing a crook!', 'draw a train smash!', 'draw an elephant!' So at the time I heard these two deciding on what they were going to devote their precious playtime to, I thought 'hell, if it's a choice between watching me or playing ball I'm not doing too badly!'."

Cedric chuckles. "That's very cool. So when you were a teenager and you started developing your real drawing abilities, I mean, that must have been at the time that the new wave of British abstraction and the American painters must have come on to the field. So those are your Pollok's, your Klee's. And how did you feel when you first saw those kinds of works emerging into the public arena? When you first saw a Klee in a magazine or a museum, I mean did it have an immediate impact or did it take years before it filtered through?"

"Cedric it's interesting that you ask me that because when I went to England in 1957 I didn't know the existence of Paul Klee. I went over in 1957 with Hunter Nesbit and I taught at a school there. I was forever doing little drawings, and one of the female teachers, an elderly woman, said to me 'have you ever heard of an artist called Paul Klee?' She wrote it down for me and I said 'no, I've never heard of him. When I asked her why, she said 'your work reminds me a little bit of him.' And of course when I eventually started looking at Paul Klee it was like love at first sight. Hell, it knocked me sideways! He has since remained my favourite artist. But today a lot of contemporary artists also do things for me like Keith Haring. Remember, Cedric, we chatted about Keith Harding in Brussels? You showed me, well, you actually took me to a Keith Haring on display there. It had a lot of character, and I rather enjoy his work. I also love Pollok's work. Picasso I thoroughly enjoy. But if I had to choose that one 'desert island' artist it wouldn't be Pablo, it would be Paul Klee."



© The Soapbox

"I think Pablo would end up just getting killed by anybody who had spent more than like, a day with him. By all accounts he was an insufferable a-hole," muses Cedric.

"Definitely!" laughs Derrick.

"Did you always draw masks, or is it something that just emerged out of your consciousness? I'm assuming that the schools back in the 40's and 50's must have been quite traditional and classical in their approach," asks Cedric.

"Yes, very much," replies Derrick. "No, the mask theme came about as a result of my working at the Arboretum at Kew Gardens and the Natural History Museum. At the time I was working with botanists on scientific illustrations. It involved a lot of scientific accuracy, and was a heck of a lot of round-the-clock work. You had to produce a completed botanical plate every two days in order to earn a living. While I was there I noticed that many of these scientists were working with themes. For example I did illustrations of grasses for a Dr. Ball, an Irish botanist, and I was astonished by how many different kinds of grasses there are! It's never ending! I thought that I would love to find some sort of linking theme for my work that I can play around with. My works will be radically different, but will nevertheless have a theme running through them like little beads on a necklace."

"Anyway, so I started by using abstract squares. I started playing with proportions and colours and so on, and then I came across one of these manhole covers on the street. You have a big square, with a smaller square next to it for a tap or something. That manhole cover gave me an idea which resulted in three squares: a big background square, with a medium one then a smaller one, so that was my theme was for a while, using those three squares."

"So you were just playing on the formal elements?" asks Cedric.

"Just playing on the formal elements," confirms Derrick. "And then lo and behold! I find, in an art magazine, an almost identical painting! I thought 'what the hell is my painting doing here?' It turns out it wasn't my painting. It was a piece by Burgoyne Diller, an American artist, but only he was born in 1900. So a lot older than me, and I think he had already passed on by then. So I thought 'Burgoyne my friend, you were there before me. I'd better change my mind and look for something else'. And then one day I was making a salad in the kitchen. Just by chance I cut a green pepper in half and there was a mask! I mean two eyes, a nose, the little pips formed teeth. A perfect little mask. I thought 'Eureka! My theme! Masks!' And in fact I have a photograph of this at home."

Cedric jumps in: "As a guess, if you had to put a

number on it, how many masks have you drawn; painted; doodled? Are we talking hundreds? Thousands? Have you ever repeated a mask?"

"I think we can safely say a thousand and beyond," replies Derrick. "I'll give you an example, you asked me a moment ago if have ever repeated a mask? Every morning I put out vitamin pills for my wife, Christine and myself on the kitchen table. One day I thought, just for the fun of it, I thought I'd make masks out of these little pills. And every time I laid out these pills I ended up making a different mask from these few little pills. Eventually Christine said 'why don't we photograph these?'. So we started photographing them and then I started drawing each mask in a little book. A couple of days ago I reached 800 and something drawings and have never repeated a little pill mask! It's since become a habit to sketch them."

"That's very impressive!" exclaims Cedric. "Now, one of the things about this exhibition is that we are doing a bit of a retrospective. So we've got some of your older works, and interspersed among all of that we've got new digital works. Why the transition to digital work? And how do you find it?"

"Cedric, I'll tell you what I enjoy there about digital work. First of all if you take a typical painting of mine, I don't use texture. I'm not a Karel Appel. I

love texture and I have nothing against it, but for myself I'm a man who uses visual texture rather than physical texture. So if I want texture I will use lots of little images. I'll activate the background in that way, rather."

"So it's a lot purer for you if you work digitally?" asks Cedric.

"It's a lot purer," says Derrick. "Also I can get to my result very quickly. If I have an idea it plays out almost immediately. Whether with a canvas you first have to prepare it, etcetera. If you've run out of a certain colour and you haven't any at home, then by the time you find the damn colour the magic has begun to fade a little. With a pc, you have any colour you want at your fingertips, it's there. You can make things bigger, smaller. But that's not to say that I've given up painting. I'll never give up painting. I've got a whole lot of blank canvases waiting for me to fill them up."

"It does worry me that more children aren't drawing nowadays. I am a great believer in child drawing. Studies show that kids and teenagers who draw have a better problem solving ability when they become adults. Drawing is a problem solving process. Like I often said to my students whilst you are drawing, you are reasoning."

Derrick Erasmus' exhibition "Unmasked" is cur-

rently on display at the Underculture Contemporary Art Gallery until the 17th of October 2014. Showcasing one of South Africa's most consistent and prolific painters, you have a rendezvous with a triumph of color and form highlighting more than sixty years of tireless artistic investigation. Part retrospective, part unveiling of new work - Derrick invites you to join him on a journey to make visible a reality of endless masks, rendered in breath-taking colour. This exhibition is a wonderland of the playful, the grotesque, the beautiful, and the mischievous, and one that you simply cannot miss.

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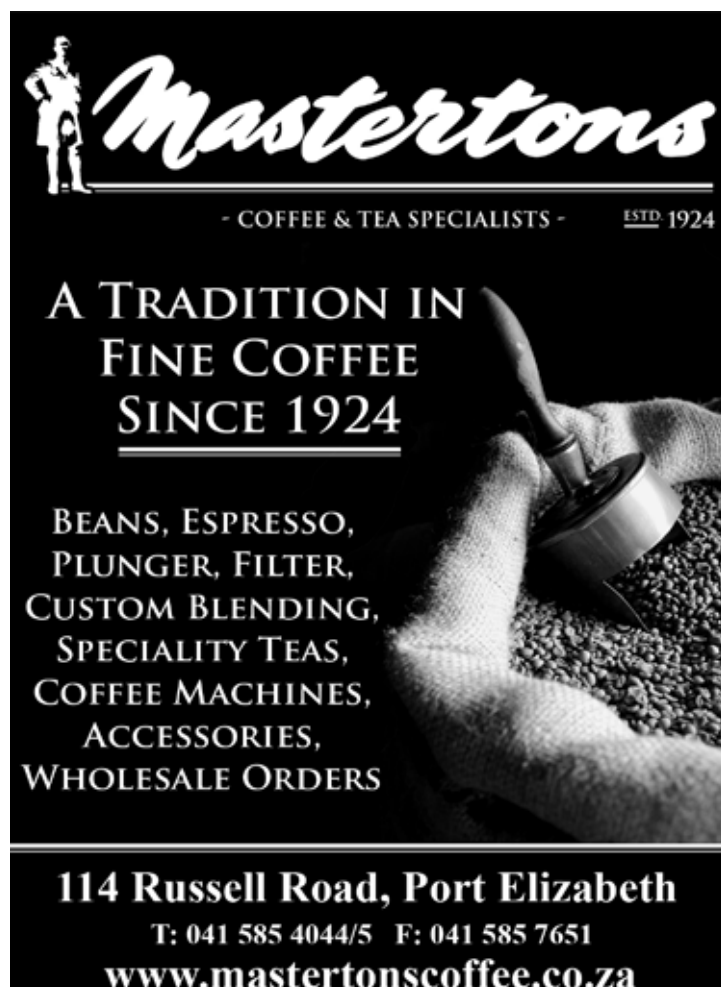
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The Bleeding Edge

NMMU defines the future one mobile application at a time.

Computing Science Postgraduate Students; Amirsaleh Salehzadeh (Left) and Kirsty Joubert (Right).

By Bianca Wicks

Gone are the days when a mobile phone was just something you kept in your pocket that allowed other people to call you. Thanks to mobile applications, our phones put the power to do virtually anything in the palm of our hands. But apps don't just drop out of the sky. Someone has to make these amazing little programmes that allow us to find directions to an awesome party, post pics of that party to all our jealous Facebook friends who weren't invited and make every other aspect of our lives that little bit easier.

Students studying Computing Sciences at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University have the opportunity to do exactly that. It is the only university in South Africa with a dedicated Mobile Computing postgraduate module.

NMMU's Computing Sciences Department launched its Mobile Laboratory on 18 March last year. Sponsored by Open Box, the facility has 15 tablets and 15 smartphones so students can test out their apps on actual devices instead of emulators. In 2012, the department won the "Best Department in Mobile Computing" award at the Vodacom Student Symposium.

Students interested in mobile development start learning how to work the Android operating system in third year as part of the Advanced Programming module. If they decide to continue to honours, they can choose the Mobile Computing module, which includes design aspects.

In order to study Mobile Computing at honours level, students first need to complete a basic three-year Computing Sciences degree. Depending on whether their interest is in science or commerce, this will either be a BSc in Computing Sciences or a BCom in Computing Sciences and Information Systems. Besides Mobile Computing, honours students can choose from an array of other excit-

ing electives which include Usability Engineering, Graphics and Virtual Reality.

One of their projects is to develop a small app in teams of two. In just ten months, they are required to design, develop and evaluate an app. This may include deploying the app on a small scale internally, "but not really out in what-they-call 'the wild'", explains Professor Janet Wesson, head of the Department of Computing Sciences' Telkom Centre of Excellence.

The students mostly develop Android apps. There is equipment available which allows them to develop for iOS (formerly iPhone OS – a mobile operating system) too, but this tends to be more expensive because the operating system isn't open-source and Apple requires every student to be licensed as a developer at \$99 a year.

Apps developed by this year's students ranged from a simple squash scorer to more complicated applications. One student developed an app that monitors the level of distraction while driving, using artificial intelligence and combining at least 20 variables such as outside noise, speed, orientation and even the ambient noise and lights. If the distraction level is too high, incoming calls are postponed and a message is sent to the caller. When the distraction level has dropped, the app will re-initiate the call. When a text message arrives, a built-in speech interface reads you the message and you can then reply using your voice.

But developing an app is only half of the story. Post-grad students also need to write a dissertation which has resulted in fascinating breakthroughs. Bradley van Tonder, a software development engineer at Amazon, completed his PhD at NMMU in 2012. His research was on tilt-based interaction. Some apps allow users to access additional features by tilting the device in any direction. However, there has always been a problem with accuracy, especially when working with maps. Thanks to Bradley and a built-in clutch mechanism, the new tilt interface can determine whether a user is sitting or walking and adjust the angle, attract to the nearest target when selecting a location, and be switched on or off to avoid annoyances when typing.

The purpose of the programme is not only to churn out new professionals armed with, ultimately, masters degrees and doctorates, but also to develop intellectual property that would be beneficial to industry partners and users alike. The research done within the department focusses on new ways to use technology like mobile phone applications, powered by the Internet, to make people's lives easier. "Technology without application is pretty useless and what we're trying to do with our

research is explore how to make this technology useful; how to make it more intelligent and personalised," says Janet.

The department also boasts a 42-inch multi-touch table, the first of its kind in the country. The table had to be specially designed because, although the technology exists, Microsoft doesn't sell it in South Africa. To overcome this setback, they bought an overlay from PQ Labs in Europe and put it over a 42-inch screen. This was then embedded into an adjustable table.

The point of this amazing device is to encourage collaboration. "People who are interacting with other people do it really quite easily; you don't need any technology for that," says Dr Lester Cowley, Senior Lecturer & CoE Vice-Head.

Using the multi-touch table, researchers are exploring new ways of streamlining this natural process. "Instead of having to print stuff out, the agenda is available on the table for everybody to share," Lester explains. "Different people can bring their own documents. It would be really fun if people could just flip their documents onto the table which they can then choose to partially or wholly share with other people." A multi-touch table could be used in all kinds of group situations – be they boardroom meetings, war rooms or even group meetings for working on an assignment around a coffee table. All this reminds one of elaborate and far-fetched scenes in Hawaii Five-0 or Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. "Some of that is real, but some is made up," says Lester. "We're doing the made up part."

Being able to conduct such exciting research is what drew both Janet and Lester to Computing Sciences, but they entered the field by very different routes. Lester studied science and mathematics initially and became a teacher. One year, the university offered a course called Computing Sciences for Teachers or Computing Sciences 1. Lester found it so interesting that he wanted to stay. "I asked my lecturer, 'Can I do the second year part time?' He said, 'No, you can't, but why don't you just do honours?' So I jumped from first year to Computing Sciences honours and the rest, as they say, is history."

"I did a conventional matric at Collegiate," says Janet, "Then I heard about this new field called Computing Sciences. When I matriculated there was no Computing Sciences or ITS [Information Technology Systems] course. So it just sounded so exciting and so different so I thought I'll try it." She also studied Accounting, but after spending one holiday auditing she decided to stick to computers. She loves the challenges the field presents as well as the fast pace at which it changes.

Lester explains the rapid technological advancement brought on by the recent mobile revolution as follows: "Computers until very recently have been like somebody sitting in a dark room with a telephone. A human being outside would talk to them on a telephone and the computers had no clue of what was happening outside the room." Today phones and tablets are becoming filled with sensors which are now able to open the room's door and get to know the person on the other side by learning their likes and dislikes, determining which way they're facing or even what the weather is like around them."

Another wall Janet would like to knock down is the one that seems to be preventing women from studying Computing Sciences. On average over the past few years, only 20% of the students studying Computing Sciences at honours level at NMMU have been female. "Women have a feeling for people, and computers are used by people," she says, "The user's experience when dealing with computers needs to be more humane, more gentle. And that takes a woman's intuition." The top two students in the honours classes are, in fact, women. "But there's not enough of them. Out of 25, we've got five."

It's not like they'll struggle to find a job. There are currently over 75 000 vacancies in the field. There is a need for creative individuals who can develop solutions; not only for current problems, but especially for future problems. Students don't need to restrict themselves within national borders either. "Our students are working all over the world and that includes the UK, America, Europe and Australia," says Lester. "With their qualifications they can go anywhere in the world. And they've gone on to really fill some very senior positions and make a difference."

If, 40 years ago, you made a film about a handheld device that allows the hero to access a storehouse of the entire world's knowledge in one touch, you'd have had an instant hit. If you added a table with a special screen where the hero could instantly share and discuss everything he found with the head of his agency, you'd have knocked Star Wars off the charts.

It's because of visionaries like Janet, Lester and the hundreds of students that have passed through their more than capable hands that what was no more than science fiction a few decades ago is now an intrinsic part of our modern reality. But this is definitely not where it ends. Thanks to the research done in places such as NMMU's Computing Sciences Department, the future will be more stupefying than we could possibly imagine.



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Yoga as a term is derived from the literal meaning of 'yoking together' a span of horses or oxen, but came to be applied to the 'yoking' of mind and body. "Yoga has many obvious health benefits after a single class, such as lowering your stress levels and improving your brain function," says Feel Good Yoga Instructor Michelle Stanyon. "Few people realise how beneficial it can be in the long run. It can help increase bone density in older adults; reduce your levels of chronic back pain, and even help to lower blood sugar levels in diabetics."

Michelle believes that yoga is just as relevant today as it was centuries ago. "Our modern lifestyles often leave us feeling swept away and harassed. I practice yoga because it leaves me more self-aware. It helps me to slow down and smell the roses. It gives me a thrill to be able to share that calmness with people who come to the studio." Michelle also caters for children with her special 'Feel Good Yoga Kids' classes, which helps with their physical and mental development.

There is a misconception that yoga has a religious component attached to it. "Modern Yoga as I teach it is a purely physical discipline, much like taking an aquarobics or spinning class."

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For more information or to book a lesson, please contact Michelle:

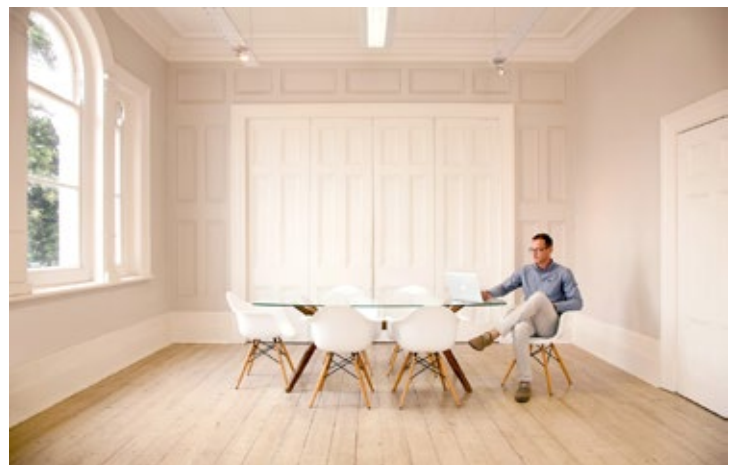
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Camden, a Place to Shop

Camden carries a signature ensemble range of homewear and decor personally chosen by owners Donn  and Nikki. Of particular interest is their range of bespoke African designer craft brands, which represents a fresh new interpretation of what constitutes 'modern Africana'. From uniquely South African silver pendants by Symbols on Silk; to high quality hand-made bags by Mongoose; and expertly crafted pottery and porcelain by South African design houses Urchin Art and Wonki Wear.

Think of Richmond Hill, and you think of Camden. Sisters Donn  and Nikki were part of the first wave of young and edgy entrepreneurs prepared to risk it all in what has become PE's lifestyle hub. It took a lot of hard work, but what started as a little slice of retail heaven has since grown into one of the Eastern Cape's best kept secrets.

Camden has also started selling nationally with their exciting 'A Place to Shop' online store. "It gets pretty hectic at times dealing with the sheer volume of orders that come in," says Nicky, "but we focus heavily on keeping our clients happy by giving them the levels of service we feel should be the norm in South Africa." "After all these years I still get goose bumps when we get emails from happy customers," smiles Donn . "It's like 'yeah man!' and high fives all around." Delight your senses by visiting Camden the next time you're in Richmond Hill, or check out their online store, Facebook and Pinterest pages.

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Off the Beaten Track

La Brillance's Fringe Exhibition Bucks Tradition.

The Colonial Antiques building is a veritable Aladdin's cave of hidden gems, but the brightest of them all can be found on the top floor. This coming Saturday the 4th of October local artists will join together with the La Brillance Gallery; Colonial Antiques and Classic Bookshop to host a 'Fringe-style' exhibition. Similar in format to the Fringe events of the Grahamstown Arts Festival, in that it is not a formally curated exhibition. It was open to all artists who wish to contribute and works are generally exempt from a selection process.

Aside from raising funds, this exhibition hopes to start a trend towards more public engagement with art. We sat down with gallery owner Blanché Fisher and her team consisting of Zanne Nieuwoudt and Luvuyo Kiti, as well as local artist Sharon Boyd to discuss the need for more events like these.

There is a growing perception that Port Elizabeth's non-art aficionados, the regular Joes, find art to be a terribly daunting prospect. Perhaps in part because the City's culture of visiting art galleries is no longer a part of mainstream entertainment.

"A visit to an art gallery is no longer considered something fun to do in your spare time," said Sharon. "And those who do venture into an established gallery come away with this feeling of intimidation. They harbour thoughts like 'do I actually belong

here? Ooh, maybe this is too fancy for the likes of me.' Which is silly. Why should you feel intimidated in your own backyard?"

Sharon is not too far off the mark, because if you'd travelled all the way to the Louvre in Paris I'd bet you'd have no problem cornering a staff member demanding to know where snack bar and gift shop was. So what stops us from being art appreciators in our own City? How do we begin to bridge the divide? Perhaps the answer lies in making art easier for the general public to approach.

"One of our aims with this exhibition is to promote art development and creativity in a way that is much more casual and accessible. We'll have food for sale; a professional mixologist will be making virgin cocktails; as well as the more traditional cheese and wine on offer. Throw in some great music and you've got a relaxing event where art becomes much more approachable to the layman," says Blanché.

"Emerging artists often lack confidence in their own work. Especially those who aren't part of the mainstream art scene. As such they don't necessarily promote their work to the fullest extent possible. Perhaps it's a fear of rejection that stops them from approaching galleries, which is sad because PE has many artists that are 'off the grid'."

It's worth taking a moment to consider that one of PE's most celebrated artist/historian, the late Ron Belling, never had any formal art instruction.

So with that in mind, a grassroots event like this starts to make more sense.

"Artists that are off the grid need to be more proactive in how they market their works. Without representation by an art agent, you then need to do your own networking and marketing. It may seem like a daunting prospect to get your artist's statement written up, as well as all the associated paperwork that goes with it, but it has to be done. It is entirely necessary. Gone are the days where you finish a canvas, slap on a price tag and wait for a buyer to beat a path to your door. You need to be active and go through as many traditional and non traditional channels as you can." Says Sharon.

"The proceeds from auctioned paintings will be donated to a very worthy cause, namely the Port Elizabeth Animal Rescue organization (P.E.A.R)." says Blanché Fischer.

P.E.A.R consists of a team of volunteers who rescue; rehabilitate and re-home homeless dogs in Port Elizabeth. All P.E.A.R dogs are sterilized; inoculated; dewormed; deflea'd; micro chipped and provided with whatever vet care they need.

Exhibition: Saturday, 4th October. 11am 4pm
14 Todd Street, North End. (Entrance in Market Steet)

Your Support and Attendance is highly appreciated.