

For Art is Never Silent ...



Bathed in the peace of the morning air, the light of dawn flames the bronze feathers of a fish eagle, ready to take flight, a fresh catch in his steely grip. Tranquillity and solitude swirl with the sounds of the stream that runs here. At the foot of the stream, an entire garden of African animals begins to take shape.

This is an African paradise of a different nature – the fish eagle has been brought to life by an artist, and the open ground is an art garden in the making. The idea is that, in years to come, those who wander through these places, will be inspired; that the art will speak.

For art is never silent. It speaks the mind of the person who created it; it conveys whatever atmosphere is desired wherever it is placed; and, it communicates the philosophy of the person who chose to place it there.

The art in our School is never silent. It makes bold statements about our School philosophy – “The environment in which you place a child determines the atmosphere and expectancy of learning”. It is our Rector, Father Morgan Ellis, who has most understood and elevated the importance of this philosophy – the importance of art in a School.

I am grateful that, as a teacher, in this harsh city, that I live and work in a place where our leader takes time to carve out a niche of peace and beauty; a place where children can experience these essential ingredients to a happy childhood.



When I walk through the St George’s Close in the mornings and see the fish eagle, I am reminded again, as the plaque states, “Those who wait on the Lord will rise on wings as eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint.” Before my day starts then, I am called again to spend time with God and renew the foundation of my life.

I am also reminded that life is transient. Here too is the bronzed torso sculpted by the hands of a former Head Boy, Ryan du Plooy. The piece entitled “Youth”, embodies the beauty and anticipation of the age: Youth about to embark on the exciting journey that is life. The piece is particularly special to us – Ryan was killed a month after he left school. The piece reminds us to appreciate every moment we have and to remember all that a fine young man of our school stood for.



The African animals and running water here and at other points in the School – especially the klipspringer fountain in the Avli entrance – remind me that I live, work, breathe, sleep and eat in Africa – I am an African child – and must care for my home and its natural heritage. The pieces tell me to be grateful and to be careful.

In the open quad stands the magnificent bronze by Estelle Valli of St George and the Dragon – our school's patron saint. St George reminds me to stand firm, to be courageous, to fight the schemes of evil, and to put on the armour of God. St George reminds me that this is my calling as a teacher – to bring enlightenment and conscientious independence to the children in our care.



As I walk through the school the statues continue to communicate important lessons and core values for life. I stand at the foot of the life-size cross and an African Jesus gazes down so tenderly I have to catch my breath. The piece speaks to me of sacrifice and humility. It was lovingly carved by an old African man in a different province and was purchased on the side of the road by our Rector over fifteen years ago. The Rector paid him in full, but had no space to carry such a large piece. The old man promised he would bring it to the School. It was a matter of trust. A few months later the old man did indeed arrive, carrying his cross. Of him as an artist we know very little – just an old man – but his Jesus and his own sacrifice and truthfulness live on in the

piece that stands at the end of our Corpus Christi Way. The way of the body of Christ. I touch the side of Christ and feel the warm wood come to life beneath my hand. The old man speaks to me. Jesus speaks to me. Take up your cross. Make the sacrifice. It is a matter of trust.

The little boy at the fountain outside the Morgan Ellis Centre reminds me that every child is special. The voice of that fountain mixes with the shouting and shrieks of delight from the nursery school playground. I am reminded that children are everything. Every one of them deserves the best chance in life and each one can teach me something. I am privileged to be with them all day. I am called to become one of them if I am to understand anything about the Kingdom of Heaven.



At the entrance, another piece echoes a further deep philosophy of our School. It is of two children reading a book together. On their faces is the delight of discovery, the joys of sharing knowledge. The plaque beneath simply states: "If you can read this, thank a teacher." As one enters our School what is immediately communicated is that here the profession of teaching and the gift of education are to be honoured. The work of a teacher is important and should not be underestimated, but held in high esteem. The piece reminds us to be grateful for the privilege of education; to stop for a while and be thankful that someone cared enough to help us learn to read the world.



The day passes. When its frantic business is over and the last learner has been collected, the School once again is bathed in the peaceful atmosphere of evening. I come to stand at the fountains outside the Herbert Baker entrance. Beautiful geese, symbols of the power, peace and presence of the Holy Spirit, take their flight over the water. Lower down, four horses churn through the waves. I am struck again by the unique beauty of this School and its waters that have a way of streaming into to my soul. Perhaps the horses speak the classical ideas of ancient Greeks and Romans, whose philosophies we still follow today in our schools. To me, the

horses speak in the accents of Apocalyptic writers – that there will be a time when all this shall pass and we shall come face to face with God. Will I be ready?



In this atmosphere and expectancy of learning, I look up to the figure of Bishop Timothy Bavin – our eponym – for inspiration. He looks down at me and says, “Look to the stones, the stones at my back and feet. The stones of this School, so lovingly laid and proudly standing. A century has passed. The stones are saturated with the warmth of a thousand Africa suns and the love of those who have moved beneath these arches. The buildings themselves are beautiful monuments, speaking truth to live by.” I reach out to touch them and they are indeed warm. They tell me Christ is my foundation stone that will not be moved or shaken. They tell me to be at peace. They tell me to be grateful.

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