

The City figo's Watermark Liberty

The Fire Walker will be a truly joburg sculpture, always changing and in constant fear of vandals, writes ALEX DODD

THE internationally acclaimed artist William Kentridge is adding, in collaboration with Gerhard Marx, his artistic flair to upgrading Johannesburg's public environment for the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

When Marx declares that "it is always falling apart and it's always coming together", he might be speaking about Johannesburg, which seems to undergo physical metamorphoses almost as frequent as its inhabitants' dramatic mood swings.

But he is describing a 10m-high public sculpture being installed on the southern side of Queen Elizabeth Bridge linking Braamfontein to Newtown.

The Fire Walker is a sculptural collaboration between Kentridge and Marx, and will create the silhouetted image of a woman carrying a burning basket on her head. Women selling roasted breads and "smilies" (sheep's heads) to pedestrians in the city are often seen carrying their burning briars on their heads.

"They were even present in the very *apartheid* where the work will be installed on the day of the first site visit," says the artist. "In this sense, the work is a monument to the everyday, the overlooked, and to the activities that have taken place on that site for so many years."

The work is being constructed from laser-cut steel plates, evocative of torn bits of paper.

"If one approaches the work from the direction of the bridge, these loose steel fragments combine to create the cohesive image of The Fire Walker," says Kentridge and Marx. "This image then 'regresses' into loose individual fragments and abstraction as you move around it."

The Johannesburg Development Agency has ensured the inclusion of public art in all of its urban upgrade projects, which include Mary Fitzgerald Square, the New Street market, and the Drift Hill, Constitution Hill and Metro Mall.

Newman's public sculptures have been commissioned by Marcus Neustetter and Stephen Hobbs of the Trinity Trust in conjunction with Npeedi Design and installed as part of the city's

public environment upgrade in the run-up to the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

Marx has been working on and off with Kentridge since his production of The Magic Flute at the Fire Walker commission came about by chance when the artist Neustetter and suggested a collaborative work with Kentridge for the city.

"And it just so happened that, at that moment, there was budget available for the Queen Elizabeth bridge, and things took off from there. It is all kind of happened on the sidewalk in Diagonal Street," says Marx.

For about a year Marx has been working with Kentridge, who is currently in Naples, on a series of sculptural forms. They began as a part of a project for the commission by Teatro La Fenice in Venice, which will be preceded while the orchestra warms up.

"William wanted to create something that collapses into abstraction then finds a moment that makes sense, then collapses again - it's a cycle that finds its pitch every now again, then it jells it again," says Marx.

"But the great thing about working with William is that things enter into a mode of serious playfulness where they just *space* out. So these forms started off as twenty bits of wire with little bits of paper stuck to them, but soon we started thinking: What if we could cut them in bronze?"

It was out of this series, some of which were integrated into the video piece for Teatro La Fenice and some of which were exhibited at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice, that The Fire Walker found her genesis.

When seen in a fractured state, the work becomes almost animated. "As opposed to the monumentality you associate with traditional public sculpture, The Fire Walker will have a relational quality," says the artist's statement. "It'll be up to you as the viewer to find the point of coherence in the sculpture, because as you move, the sculpture changes."

"At times it seems as if she strides ahead with great certainty, at times she seems about to trip and fall and at times the work is



METAMORPHOSIS: Images of The Fire Walker, the brainchild of William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx. The statue is a play between abstraction and figuration. Picture: WOLFF FERNANDES

evocative of a rioter or perhaps joyous mass of people, just before she walks *flies* into complete abstraction."

Marx says motorists heading into town from the Braamfontein side should get the most perfect point of view. "Also, if you're in the front corner of the island as a pedestrian or as you cross the road, the image will slide into coherence," says Marx.

But South African public sculpture has been hard hit by vandalism and theft.

In the late 90s, artist Luan Nel made an ingenious public sculpture in a country where the raw materials are more valued by some citizens than the aesthetics of the artwork.

Many of the public sculptures installed as part of the nationwide Sunday Times Heritage Project, including Angus Taylor's much-lauded bronze of Brenda Fensie in Newtown, have been vandalised, stolen or defaced.

"Well, that's part of the irony of making public sculpture in Johannesburg," says Marx.

"Artists are trying to build

sculptures that are about making the city more hospitable and friendly, but a huge part of making public sculpture in Johannesburg is about questions of whether someone can hide inside the piece or how far from the intersection it's (of an "it's within 10 metres (of an intersection), then it's a possible hiding place for hijackers. Can the CCTV see above and behind it? These considerations are all part and parcel of the planning that goes into these works.

"We're trying to make it as solid and strong as possible, but there is the chance that parts could get stolen. But there is only so much we can do, short of not having public sculpture."

After consultation with engineers John Munday and Julie van der Walt of Este Automation on architectural welding, the sculpture is being installed under the watchful eye of project manager Stewart Barnfoot.

Unless she is carried off by metal thieves, this metal meller with a fire on her head will evoke the image of the Statue of Liberty at the entrance to Johannesburg.

"But she is a very particular Statue of Liberty, Johannesburg's, which carries with it, at every point, either the history or the threat of its own collapse," says two artists.

Design changes affect matric class

SARAH HULLSTON

THE 360 000 matriculants from the class of 2006 will have to wait longer than expected to receive certified proof of their success.

Mafu Rakometi, CEO of Umabusi - the statutory body responsible for certifying the new National Senior Certificate - says she was instructed by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshega to change the current design to ensure the country's coat of arms is given more prominence on them.

Matriculants usually receive their certificates by the end of May, but this year they will get them only at the end of August.

However, it seems the delay will not have a big effect on matriculants' success, as copies of the National Senior Certificate are seldom accepted by potential employers and educational institutions because of widespread credential fraud.

The cosmetic changes to the certificates - which Motshega insists must be made this year, will not make the documents more acceptable. Language and construction institutions have their own processes for verifying matric results.

Rakometi says in a press release that Motshega had raised the matter of a new watermark on the certificates with the chairman of Umabusi's council, Prof John Mkhomo.

For security reasons Umabusi's certificates use a patented watermark paper obtained from overseas. The new paper will arrive in the country only by the middle of August, Rakometi says.

"This delay could have been avoided, as it is only a couple of months to all learners who have suffered as a result," he says.

"I can assure you that I will give my best attention to ensure delivery of the certificates by the end of August," he says.

This is the first year that the new National Senior Certificate are being issued.

The director-general of the Department of Education, Duncan Hentle, says the purpose of the new watermark is to give the documents a much stronger sense of the national identity of the Republic of SA.

"The certificates had to be reprinted and no additional cost was incurred," he adds.

"We regret the delay but as matriculants - have already received their results from us, it should not affect anybody adversely."

The leading firm of employment consultants, says the delay in issuing the certificates is not a problem for them. They will receive a statement from their schools on the day that they receive their marks.

"Koly uses this statement for the verification process to find out whether they in actual fact did pass matric," says Dana Quinn, a Kelly executive.