

History of the Old Merensky building

This impressive building houses the Edoardo Villa Museum and the sculptural gallery, as well as other library collections. In 1933, it was decided to construct a separate building for the library, which was originally located in the Old Arts Building. With a contribution of £5000 from the mining geologist Dr Hans Merensky (1871-1952), it was constructed on 11 October 1937 with General Jan Smuts laying its foundation stone and the building being officially opened on 15 April 1939. In its design, the architect Gerard Moerdyk (1890-1958) was influenced by a number of styles, including Art Deco, Neo-Classicism, as well as local styles such as Cape Dutch and Regency. Moerdyk described this building as a study in Persian style, with influences from Africa, including the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and Ancient Egypt.

Moerdyk made use of local materials and incorporated symbols of African origin. The prominent chevron (or zigzag patterns) visible on the exterior were inspired by Great Zimbabwe motifs, symbolising water and fertility, and the curvature of the walls represents an open book. The green, bevelled glass windows were imported from Italy that help to minimise heat from the sun and also protected paper from ultraviolet light. The design of the building remains controversial, speculating that Moerdyk used its construction as a practice design for the Voortrekker Monument, as there are many similarities between these two historical buildings. The Old Merensky Library Building, including the entrance stairs on the western facade, was declared a national monument on 31 August 1990.



UNIVERSITY of PRETORIA MUSEUMS

Department of UP Arts

EDOARDO VILLA MUSEUM

Sculpture Gallery

Admission - Free of charge

Hours - Open Monday to Friday 08:00 -16:00

Closed: Weekends, Public Holidays and December

Contact - 012 420 2178 / 012 420 6419

Email - museums@up.ac.za

Tours - hcstours@up.ac.za or Tel: 012 420 5155

Group bookings and schools: hcstours@up.ac.za

Visit - www.up.ac.za/up-arts

Location - Hatfield Campus, Old Merensky Library building

GPS Coordinates: 25°45'15.76"S 28°13'47.87"E



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



The Edoardo Villa Museum

Officially opened in 1995, the Edoardo Villa Museum is situated in the Old Merensky Library building on the University of Pretoria's Hatfield campus. The museum exhibits a broad range of sculptural objects by the Italian-South African artist Edoardo Villa (1915-2011), works by Anton van Wouw (1862-1945) as well as sculptures by a few other South African artists. Edoardo Villa came to South Africa as a prisoner of war during World War II. Villa spent several years in a Prisoner of War camp in Cullinan, east of Pretoria. Upon his release after the end of the war, Villa chose to stay and live in South Africa as a full-time artist.

While some of Villa's works reveal the influences of his European background, he was also strongly influenced by African sculptural traditions and, together with Cecil Skotnes and Sydney Kumalo, was a member of the Amadlozi group which sought to popularise traditional African sculpture. The museum also includes many smaller sculptures in maquettes which Villa designed while planning larger public artworks. On the lawn in front of the museum building are Villa's large cement works. One is also able to appreciate his distinctive steel sculptures exhibited publicly across the University of Pretoria campuses.



The Sculptural Collections

The western, eastern and central wings of the museum house some of the finest sculptural works comprising more than two hundred and eight classic and modern sculptures on public display. The oldest sculpture is titled "Bird catcher" by Anton Van Wouw dated 1881. Many of the new additions to the museum gallery share a particular enriched narrative and reflection in relation to sculpture within a South African context. Such narratives are evident in the newly-acquired works such as the art by Collen Maswenganyi (1977), Lwandiso Njara (1987) and Jan van der Merwe (1958). This open public display and ever-expanding collection is considered one of the largest permanent sculptural collections at any university in South Africa.



Beyond the museum walls, dispersed across the main campus, as well as on other campuses, is a public sculpture collection consisting of more than 41 works that serve as memorable landmarks of the University of Pretoria. These include sculptures by Mike Edwards, Guy du Toit, Mary Steinbank, Fanie Eloff, Thijs Nel, Ike Nkoana, Andre Otto, Noria Mabasa, Rhona Stern, Lucky Sibiyi, Anton Smit, Coert Steynberg, Angus van Zyl Taylor, Isaac Seoka, Berco Wilsenach, Dorte Berner, Elly Holm, Danie de Jager and many other notable South African artists.

The museum aims to promote the cultural, artistic, and aesthetic vitality of sculpture within the University of Pretoria and the wider Capital City. This diverse sculptural collection celebrates the creativity of the artists who created them in the form of abstract expressionism, realism, and constructivism. The museum offers guided tours to visitors and scholars for exploration, research, and knowledge to evoke the culture of art appreciation, art understanding, and to foster an ongoing dialogue between art and diverse communities.

