



Original public landscaping structure uses Lafarge cement

At the Baobab Tollgate, 60 km north of Louis Trichardt, stands the first-ever public-commissioned sculpture at a South African Toll Plaza. The 3.5 m-tall structure with four cast concrete panels, was constructed out of Lafarge cement to symbolise a specific indigenous element – the Baobab tree.

Marieke Prinsloo, currently completing her Masters in Fine Arts at Wits, majoring in Sculpture and Public Art, was commissioned by Mathews & Associates Architects on behalf of Tolplan Consulting and The National Roads Agency. Prinsloo said: "It was such a privilege to have been involved in a project that epitomises my passion."

Mathews and Associates Architects were responsible for the architectural and landscaping design of The Baobab Toll Plaza and utilised the relocated Baobab trees, Impala lilies, Carissa's and natural veldgrasses to echo the strong architectural graphic shape of the building and canopy.

Pieter Mathews, of Mathews and Associates Architects, rationalised the construction of the Baobab statue: "A tollgate is a portal into a new space, a place that should give a sense of arrival. We wanted to emphasise the travellers' entrance into a new region by bringing public art into

the public space through a symbol that is distinctively unique to that region."

"For the new toll road, the existing Baobab trees had to be carefully removed by crane. It was a very special moment witnessing the transplanting of the Baobab trees to their new home at the Toll building," said Prinsloo.

The architect and sculptor worked closely together during the design stages and also worked directly with TolPlan's structural engineers to ensure that the statue was suitably erected.

Prinsloo admitted that the initial design stage was the toughest part of the process. Her initial task was to study the basic structure of the Baobab tree, observing those features that make it unique. "In a nutshell, it looks like it's a tree that's been planted upside down!" she said.

The technical development and structural consideration phase took two months. This stage involved the implementation of ideas from the original design stage. Prinsloo created four panels from one prototype silicone mould. "Once all four panels were complete they were transported to the tollgate, where a base with a central core had been created by TolPlan's

engineers who then proceeded to weld the four panels onto the core."

Prinsloo said, "Since my early days at varsity I have found it fascinating how cement, when combined with different aggregates, enables one to create an entirely new form of stone.

"For this project I used Lafarge's 42,5 Powercrete Cement," she said. "I chose this specific product because it is a strong cement that sets extremely quickly. It is also very

durable. Apart from Powercrete's more commonly known usage in the building of bridges, it is also ideal for sculpting because it offers a unique range of shadings when combined with different aggregates and works specifically well with delicate structures." ■

Further information is available on: www.lafarge.com



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