



HOUSE OF MANY VIEWS

The Javett scatters its many riches across three floors, the basement an evocative exhibition space

A stride a busy road that cuts through the University of Pretoria, the Javett Centre, a museum complex of 4,500m² designed by Mathews and Associates Architects, adds a vocabulary of strong, basic forms and raw, honest materials to a campus with a tradition of daring modernist architecture.

The faceted concrete mound at Javett's entrance evokes Mapungubwe, a hill inhabited by a pre-colonial trading civilisation in northern South Africa, its makers the creators of the famous golden rhino and other treasures presented here. The darkened vault also houses the Barbier-Mueller Collection of West African gold pieces.

The public displays of family holdings and ambitious temporary exhibitions are spread across three floors. Interior balconies provide orientation and additional mezzanine areas ease the 7m ascent to the Bridge Gallery, with its heat-absorbing patterned concrete screens. If you can pass the biometrical hurdles, you can access student

exhibition spaces and a courtyard with a rammed-earth wall focal piece on the northern side of the bridge.

Alexis Preller's *Discovery* is the Javett's showpiece. A formidable painting completed in the early 1960s. Speaking to 1950s white fantasies of north Africa and an exemplar of exoticism, the work chimes with Norman Eaton's African-inspired mid-century modernist Pretoria Regionalist architecture, which is closely associated with the university's department of architecture. The Javett's pavement brickwork nods towards Eaton's Unisa Little Theatre and Pretoria's built heritage.

Javett has opened with a six-month exhibition of 101 iconic works of significant South African art from private, corporate and public art collections, at R150 a ticket for non-students – Zanele Muholi, Gerard Sekoto, Jackson Hlungwani, William Kentridge and Mary Sibande's purple-clad, life-sized Sophie walking, or unleashing, the hounds of hell.

In the Javett's naturally ventilated basement, a hidden, almost clandestine art-making operation took shape during construction.

Mathews and his team, the driving forces behind Pretoria's Cool Capital Guerrilla Art Biennale of 2014 and 2016, asked artist-conspirators for a sample artwork on a surface or space in the basement. Its deep shafts of light made for an evocative exhibition area. The Sample Workshop, as the exhibition became known, turned into a place where artisans and builders, usually excluded from white-box galleries, could engage with art.

Nazirite Tam made plastic-mould replicas of Pierneef's iconic station panels; Heidi Fourie reacted to the on-site play of light and dust and gathering rain clouds in her installation of canvas, plastic and pigment. A charcoal drawing by Lukhanyo Dyasi showed a textured landscape with a hand hovering like the bucket of a bulldozer crane. "I have contributed personally to the excavation of the site. I had a hand in its creation," says Dyasi, a construction crane guide on the project.

A catalogue of The Sample Workshop is available from maa.co.za

The work that trees do borders on pure magic. Every leaf is an experiment in form, and no two leaves are alike.

Their job is to make glucose, the waste product being oxygen. Without this tree sugar, much life on Earth would not have happened. Your brain runs on the stuff. The leaf thoughts you have as you read this are courtesy of a leaf.

Seeds know how to wait. A cherry seed can wait a hundred years. Beneath each step in a forest are hundreds of seeds, each marking

time. No risk is more precarious than a seed's decision to send down a root. For this moment it could have lain waiting for months, decades or even thousands of years. A rootlet has one chance to guess the right place and moment.

To survive it needs chlorophyll but has no leaves to harvest this from sunlight. Rooting uses most of the energy stored in the seed to push downwards. It then sends up two crude, temporary leaflets to start photosynthesis. If there are obstructions

DON PINNOCK'S

Terra
Bites



LEAF
MAGIC



or shade above, it loses the gamble and dies.

These two leaves make just enough glucose-rich sap to send down to the taproot, which captures water and sends it back up to begin making true leaves. These are built on a vague genetic pattern with endless room for innovation. There may be 100,000 leaves on an oak tree, each a unique embellishment of a rough blueprint.

Leaves are the only things that can make plant sugar from inorganic matter. Everything sweet you've

ever eaten began there.

In leaves, water is torn apart, using the sun's rays to capture carbon and liberate oxygen, providing a second gift to all life. Carbon is used to make sap, which heads for the roots to make more roots to gather more water to make more leaves. This process began 400 million years ago and made life on Earth as we know it possible.

Next time you pass a tree give thanks. Better still, plant one. They're quite literally the root of your entire existence.