

## OSTRICH RESURRECTED IN CLANWILLIAM



*A little whirlwind comes to their house, it blows the ostrich feathers into the air. One little ostrich feather that has blood on it, whirls high into the sky and then, when it falls, it lands in some water." - transcript from the Lloyd Bleek archive for the 2009 Clanwilliam project.*

The Clanwilliam Arts Development Project is an ongoing collaboration between the University of Cape Town, Magnet Theatre, Jazzart Dance Theatre and the Fairheads Financial Services Group, which has been taking place annually for a decade.

Some 600 pre-primary and primary learners in the Western Cape town of Clanwilliam work together with UCT students, and Magnet

Theatre staff, interpreting and re-enacting a story told by, the San (/Xam) people who occupied the area they live in today countless years ago. The story holds a modern-day lesson for the children, and is chosen each year from an archive of San narratives recorded by linguists Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek over 130 years ago.

Mark Fleishman, head of UCT Drama, says the narrative chosen for this year's project was the "resurrection of the ostrich." Part one of story is about resurrection and rebirth.. Part two is about parenting and the need for parents to take care of their children (see the transcript below).

This year learners explored the theme in a week-long workshop involving dance, storytelling, shadow puppetry, and arts and crafts, such as the construction of larger-than-life illuminated figures based on traditional San themes.

The workshop facilitators are from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, the UCT Drama department, the Jazzart Young Adults Training Programme and its rural offshoot Namjive, and from Magnet Theatre.

The workshops always end in a performance at which the results are enacted for the broader community, including parents, friends and family. The performance is based on /Xam storytelling elements, including fire dancing, music and mythical objects made by the learners. It is preceded by a lantern-lit procession involving some 800 children through the streets of the community in which they live.

Fleishman says the intention is to expose even more children to the arts and to encourage the project to become more sustainable through further support from schools and the community. He admitted that it was the long-term sustainability connected to long term, non-prescriptive support of primary funder that had been crucial in order to be able to qualify the impact on the community in Clanwilliam. For the first time, two graduates from the project were accepted this year onto the Jazzart Dance Theatre Young Adults Training and Job Creation Programme in Cape Town. According to Fleishman, it has taken the decade to grow, and entrench the event both in the community, and in the partnership between business and the arts.

Importantly Fleishman says that this kind of support acts as an excellent model for further growth as it has become a nodal point for other development; this in the formation of Comnet – the community organisation of young people using drama and the arts to engage with social conditions. A fieldworker provides skills and educational training and support, and Comnet now interacts with the local police forum, workshops with Bosasa - the local youth detention facility, and other West Coast youth communities. Clanwilliam has become a strong geographical and social leg of Magnet Theatre Educational Trust work, helping to address a broader network and focus on the rural and urban community challenges. As Fleishman says, whilst the Fairheads funding does not support these separate projects it has created a base and springboard from which to continue growing.

Richard Krepelka, CEO of sponsor Fairheads, says: “This year’s performance holds a particular poignancy for Fairheads as we remember Peter Fairhead who died tragically in March. The Clanwilliam project was very close to his heart and the company will honour an ongoing commitment in his memory.”

Fairheads also uses the event as an internal office motivator, bussing staff members from Cape Town to the evening’s procession and the final performance. The potential in the future for it to become a client-support event is on the cards as well.

*Please see notes on the project below.*

## NOTES ON THE PROJECT



1. The Clanwilliam project has been nominated for various Business & Arts BASA awards.

2. The body of San narratives is housed at the Lucy Lloyd Archive Resource and Exhibition Centre (LLAREC), a research centre at the Michaelis School of Fine Art of the University of Cape Town.

The centre was established by Professor Pippa Skotnes and colleagues.

3. This collection, compiled in notebooks in the 1870s and 1880s by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, is almost the only record we have of the /Xam language and of the ideas and world view of the people who spoke it.

4. The /Xam who taught Bleek and Lloyd their language came from the Kenhardt district, but there is historical as well as archeological evidence that the /Xam once inhabited most of the Western Cape where they painted in the rock shelters of the Cedarberg and the Northern Cape where they engraved on the boulders of the plains.

5. The archaeological heritage of the Clanwilliam area is a rich archive of potential information on long-term social and environmental history, and this is being used to enrich the school curriculum and create opportunities for small business, such as rock-art guides.

6. For the San, there once existed an Early Time, a First Order in which animals were people. Mantis was the head of the First Family and a central figure in the mythology who played a somewhat ambiguous role, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

*Transcript from the Lloyd Bleek archive for the 2009 Clanwilliam project below -*

## **THE RESURRECTION OF THE OSTRICH**

The Bushman kills an Ostrich at the Ostrich's nest, he carries the Ostrich's body back to his house. His wife prepares to cook the ostrich and takes off its short feathers. Some of the feathers are bloody and these she leaves on the bushes outside. The Bushman and his wife eat the ostrich meat.

A little whirlwind comes to their house, it blows the ostrich feathers into the air. One little ostrich feather that has blood on it, whirls high into the sky and then, when it falls, it lands in some water. The little feather gets wet and slowly it begins to change. As it lies in the water it becomes conscious and it turns into ostrich flesh, then it grows feathers, and these become wings. Next it grows legs, and then it walks out of the water, to bask in the sun at the water's edge. It is a young ostrich, its feathers are small and black, for it is a little male ostrich. He lies on the water's bank, drying his feathers, and when they are dry he walks away on his stiff / unstiffening his new legs. He must also strengthen his feet, as they have only ever been in water, and they become strong so quickly that he feels as if he's wearing ostrich's veldskoens. He eats small bushes and plants, because he is still a young ostrich.

It was his little feather which became the Ostrich, that one little feather was blown into the air, and while it was in the whirlwind, he thought of his old house, the nest where he was killed by the Bushman, which he scratched out of the ground; and because of this he lets himself become an ostrich again and grow up, so that afterwards he can go back to his old nest.

He thinks of building a new house where the old one was; and of adding new wives to his previous ones. He decides that because he has died he will marry three ostrich wives. His breastbone has grown and become hard and his lungs are large and so he roars, hardening his ribs so that they too will become bone. His roar is loud and strong and when his ostrich wives hear it, they come back to him. And because he left them when he died and hasn't seen them since then, he runs around them looking at their feather's which are fine and beautiful.

He is now a grown-up ostrich, his flesh is strong, his legs are big and his knees large, and he has grown great, long quill feathers. He roars loudly because his lungs are big, he is now fully grown. He decides to scratch a new nest with his strong claws, so that the females who he has called can lay eggs. Rain falls and the inside of the new nest becomes wet, the ostrich tries to make it dry. The she ostriches all look at the house and when it is at last dry, one of the females lies in it and makes the ground inside it soft, so that the eggs can be laid there. Now each female lays an egg and every time an egg is laid all the females flap their wing and peck at it. There is always someone looking after the nest.

The male ostrich is collecting more wives, galloping after them in the dark and driving them back to the nest. When he returns to the nest he sends all the females away. He sits on the eggs and looks after the house.

Soon the jackal and the hyena appear. They are both hungry and want to steal the ostriches' eggs. But the ostrich takes great care of the eggs because indeed they are his children. So the hyena and the jackal must come up with a plan.

The hyena, who is very sly, and who knows that jackal is a coward, tells the jackal that he must go out to the nest first to steal some eggs and prove how brave he can be. But when the ostrich sees the jackal he knows he has come to steal the eggs and he drives the jackal away by kicking his feet. The jackal is afraid, she runs away and the ostrich chases her through the bushes, his strong feet kicking out in front of him. The jackal, who is very frightened of the ostrich, tells him that stealing the eggs was not her idea, she tells the ostrich that it was hyena who wanted the eggs. The ostrich catches the jackal and picking her up by the tail, he gallops back to the nest. As he reaches the nest he finds hyena trying to steal the eggs. With one great kick of his strong feet the ostrich sends the hyena and the jackal high into the air, and when they land they run away. The ostrich counts the eggs in his nest carefully, they are all still there. Then he sits down on them again, to keep them safe.

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