



The guiding force behind the creation of Vulindlela is international arts consultant Hennie Boshoff. An Afrikaner who lived in exile in Europe for many years, Boshoff returned to his place of birth in the late 90s, determined to help foster empowered creativity among South African artists. During his self-imposed exile, he established a not-for-profit entity, the Azazel Institute, based in the South of France, and sponsored works by international artists.

Boshoff was 'appalled,' on a return trip to Paris, to note how cleverly African art was being appropriated and marketed to an international clientele, without the artists themselves deriving any significant benefit.

"Walking around Paris last summer I saw a shop selling only South African work; very stylish and minimalist, at exorbitant prices. 'It's just not right,' I thought. 'The artists should have access to that sort of market themselves.'

Boshoff point out, though, that the 'exploitation' issue isn't a cut and dried one. Artists become complicit with hungry art dealers because they lack the adequate business skills and marketing experience. Networking is also a rarity, with many working in debilitating isolation.

"Unlike the artists I dealt with in Europe, many South African artists are critically deprived of information," Boshoff continues. "Even the few who have been through tertiary institutions haven't been provided with the requisite tools to market themselves; to create a platform for their work and forge strong careers. All too often white people are still the 'pimps' in charge of authentic artwork.

"If you haven't been taught how, even something as simple as compiling a CV to present to prospective clients, can be daunting. Applying for grants and loans is an absolute minefield.

"That said, I discourage artists from believing that their difficulty in finding a market for their work is due to their ethnicity. If one is only exposed to the South African context it is easy to ignore the sad reality that no artist, anywhere, makes a name for him or herself without a great deal of hard work and self-belief."

The germ of the idea that was to result in the formation of Vulindlela, was planted when Boshoff hired Danca as part of a team of artists he commissioned to decorate his home in Umhlanga Rocks.

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Vulindlela was the flowering of Danca's desire to form an independent company to market his own and colleague's work professionally, and assist other artists to gain recognition and skills. The company's name, says Danca is a tribute to his mentor.

Many years ago, Boshoff was given the honorary Xhosa name, Vulindlela, meaning, 'he who opens the door.' When I heard of this, it seemed the natural choice for the company. We have had a huge amount of support from Boshoff, who has shared his time and resources with us very generously. My thanks to him will be making a success of the company, so that others will follow our initiative.

If Boshoff's home is any measure of the talents of the Vulindlela artists, then they have a very promising future indeed ahead of them. What was formerly a fairly bland, ranch-style house, is now an Aladdin's Cave – a suburban artscape reminiscent of that created by the late Helen Martins.

Whereas Martins' was an inward-focused creation, feeding on her sense of isolation, the work that Vulindlela has done on the Boshoff home is exuberant, expressing a tremendous sense of energy and joy. It was a committed to pleasure to all who visit this property.

*Metro Beat*