

NP Van Wyk Louw (1906 – 1970)

Ek kry 'n klein klein beitelkje,
ek tik hom en hy klink;
toe slyp ek en ek slyp hom
totdat hy klink en blink.

Ek sit 'n klippie op 'n rots:
– mens moet jou vergewis:
'n beitel moet kan klip breek
as hy 'n beitel is –

ek slaat hom met my beitelkje
en dié was sterk genoeg:
daar spring die klippie stukkend
so skoon soos langs 'n voeg:

toe, onder my tien vingers bars
die grys rots middeldeur
en langs my voete voel ek
die sagte aarde skeur,

die donker naat loop deur my land
en kloof hom wortel toe –
só moet 'n beitel slaan
wat beitel is, of hoé?

Dan, met twee goue afgronde
val die planeet aan twee
en oor die kranse, kokend,
verdwyn die vlak groen see

en op die dag sien ek die nag
daar anderkant gaan oop
met 'n bars wat van my beitel af
dwarsdeur die sterre loop.

Poetry is personal. The words are sparse and the idea is that the reader or listener thinks about the meaning and interpret it in their own way.

When we discussed the rock and the extract of the poem of NP Van Wyk Louw in the Faculty, it was clear to me that people had different connotations and meanings when they look at these words as well as at the rock it was mounted to.

- For some people the harshness of the symbol of the chisel and the rock was upsetting.
- For some people the idea of a weapon that cleaves and destroys was problematic, for other this was not a problem.
- For some people it was problematic that only Afrikaans is represented on the rock.
- For some people the idea of a dark rock with a hard texture in front of our faculty was symbolic of something solid and unchanging.
- There were also people who appreciated the symbol of the chisel – the mightiness, the impact and the force of it. The impact that either

a person or a language or a way of thinking can have on the world around it.

In my opinion all these views are ok. We do not all see the world the same way – we come to these symbols with our own background and meaning and personalities.

But, because of some of these issues, we thought it is time for a change. However, we did not want to throw out the rock and start fresh.

Why?

In South Africa we did not have a war. We did not destroy everything and then rebuilt it on fresh ground . We simply started to rebuild on the foundations of the past.

We have a history of tolerance and non-violence despite so many unfair and inhumane practices that happened in this country. At some point we knew that things had to change. But we did not want to change it through war or through violence.

We changed this country with other methods:

- we bent some things
- we cut certain parts
- we dissolved sections
- we sometimes boiled or melted to change its nature
- **but we always tried not to destroy**
- **we tried to simply focus on change**

The Faculty wanted to do something similar with this symbolic rock.

We did not want to destroy our history. But we wanted to show that something has changed. Part of the change we needed was the perception created when people enter our faculty.

We did not want our students and staff to only think of themselves as a hard harsh chisel that does things with huge impact.

We also wanted them to see the brokenness of the world and focus on how they can help to heal it.

So the new rock has almost an opposite meaning of the past rock. Where the chisel opened the rock and broke the rock into two, the reconstructed rock is a symbol of healing and bringing broken parts together. The gold thread that runs through the rock shows how something as hard and as uneven as a rock, can also be changed and healed. And the sound installation in the rock brings an additional new perspective.

Not only should we heal things superficially and on the surface, we should heal it to be better than before, well rounded and with more nuance.

When we experience pain we grow as a person. When we look at our patients we should look at them in all complexity and variation and help them to heal to a more fully rounded person than before. And for this we should also focus on our own personal growth. This rock is now a symbol of this change and also of growth – our own and the growth of the Faculty.

The new installation have several poems and words around the rock in different languages. And we hope that these words will be meaningful to different people. That people will be able to find something personal there that inspires them. That there would be more identities represented than the original singular Afrikaans identity. And that there would be distinct words that can speak to many different personalities and cultures.

I believe our predecessors would be happy with the change we have brought about. That they would see that times have changed. That we cannot have a symbol of destruction or of a single language in front of our building anymore, but that we also honoured the work and the words of our past.

That we did not destroy, but that we changed and cut and melted and boiled. That we brought you something that is more complete, more nuanced and therefore more inclusive.