

OPENING REMARKS

2 May 2024

How far back can a memory go?

Rocks remember when they were mountains.

And what do mountains remember?

Well mountains remember when they were ocean floors.

Members of Stellenbosch University's rectorate, Stellenbosch University's senior director transformation and social impact, the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences management team, staff, students, the media and special guests. Good afternoon, and welcome to the unveiling ceremony of our unique new art installation here at Tygerberg Campus.

Since time immemorial, human beings have fashioned vehicles from objects to preserve and activate memory. Like patches of sunlight in an overcast valley illuminating a particular point in time... before the wind seals it up and the world is in shadows again.

‘n Voorwerp of verskynsel soos ‘n klip – groot of klein – kan een so ‘n tuig wees. Klippe is die stille getuies en draers van miljoene herinneringe. Hul ouderdom beteken hulle is die mosbegroeide bewaarders van stories wat ons tot vandag toe nog gebruik in die konstruksie van die geskiedenis van ons planeet.

Today we celebrate the end of a long and fruitful visual redress journey with this three-ton rock. Placed here to mark the opening of the Clinical Building on Stellenbosch University's Tygerberg Campus exactly fifty years ago, this rock, which carried the Afrikaans inscription ‘n beitel moet kan klip breek as hy ‘n beitel is’, was given the lead in a reflective and practical theatre piece about mother tongues and memory. We learned so much along the way, including the beauty of our country's linguistic metaphors and the fragility of an imposing stone when it meets with a chisel.

Through a series of conversations spanning over a year, we came to see that the purpose of this rock was to afford us the space to conjure the myriad possibilities waiting inside it and on the tongues of all South Africans. Thank you for joining us today as we celebrate this enormous achievement.

- Ms Florence de Vries (visual redress project lead 2021 – 2024).