

## Vote of Thanks at the unveiling of the Rhodes University Tapestry

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Rhodes University

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Chair of Council: Honourable Judge Jones;

Members of Council;

Vice-Chancellor: Dr Saleem Badat;

Members of the Keiskamma Trust;

Honoured Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good afternoon

It is a great pleasure and a signal honour for me to extend a vote of thanks to all those who have made this historic event possible.

As you have all heard, it all started with the Gender Action Forum, a sub-committee of Senate, writing a letter to our Vice-Chancellor, Dr Badat, requesting that the portraits in the Council chamber be removed and replaced by artwork “with thematic content which is pertinent to the core purposes of the institution”. As is always said, the rest is history! We are deeply indebted to GenAct for their leadership and courage in raising, with due sensitivity, what was potentially a divisive or polarising issue.

When the Vice-Chancellor received the letter from GenAct, he did not simply dismiss the concerns therein raised as nothing more than frivolity of some misguided, rabble-rousing gender activists bent on destroying the rich and venerable history of Rhodes University. He, instead, accorded the contents of their letter all the seriousness it deserved and ensured that the whole of Rhodes University community had an opportunity to discuss and debate the issue of portraits. Thank you, Dr Badat, for your steady, exemplary and inspirational leadership.

The Faculty Boards, at the direction of their Deans, vigorously debated the proposal on portraits. Senate minutes record that three Faculties were in support of the proposal while the other three were opposed to it. Our hearty thanks and appreciation to our Deans of Faculty for providing strong and steadfast leadership, in general, and on this matter in particular.

Senate minutes also record that, instead of forcing a decision on the matter, Senate, in its wisdom, recommended that the discussion on portraits be deferred and picked up at the Institutional Culture Colloquium scheduled for October 2009. On that score, we wish to thank the Convenors of that Institutional Culture Colloquium, Prof Hendricks and Dr Fourie, where further vigorous and lively debate on the portraits was had.

We also wish to place on record our profound appreciation and deep gratitude to our University Senate and Council for the dignified manner in which they handled what was potentially an emotive matter.

We wish to convey our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Portraits Working Group, under the convenorship of Professor Brenda Schmahmann, for the inspired and fitting choice of the artwork that we have just unveiled. I have no doubt that Professor Schmahmann's considerable artistic insights, unrivalled perfectionist nature and her meticulous attention to detail would not have allowed her to settle for anything less. Thank you, Brenda and your team for a job well done. Your Working Group showed an even greater sense of sensitivity by not recommending that the portraits that had adorned the Council Chamber walls for so long be consigned to the dustbins of history but that they be appropriately displayed in appropriate public spaces. These now hang outside the Council chamber – a wonderful example of the dialectic of continuity and change of an institution in perpetual change, defining and redefining itself.

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, the work of art that we have just unveiled was produced by the Keiskamma Art Project. Our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Keiskamma Art Project for this fine piece of artwork that you have produced for us. You have, in your own unique and special way, helped our university engage creatively and imaginatively with its history. *Sithi Enkosi kakhulu ngomsebenzi wenu omhle. Maz' enethole, Ukwanda kwaliwa ngumthakathi. Nangamso!*

Many thanks to Prof Maylam for so ably directing proceedings of this afternoon.

We are also immensely grateful to the Keiskamma Music Academy for the musical performances.

Lastly, an event of this stature and magnitude requires detailed planning a good time in advance. It also requires meticulous execution that leaves nothing to chance. We wish to convey our sincere gratitude and appreciation to our colleagues in the Communications and Marketing Division who have worked very hard to make this event a success that it has been. Lebogang, Debbie, Robyn and the rest of the team, take a bow! We did not expect any less from you.

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, we have come to the end of our proceedings. Once again, many thanks to you all for sharing this special and historic moment with us. We wish you and your loved ones a safe, peaceful and enjoyable holiday season.

Thank you.