

Powerful New National Monument Marks Nelson Mandela's Capture Site in Natal Midlands



Release by Marco Cianfanelli

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In 1962, on 5 August, an otherwise ordinary piece of road along the R103, approximately three kilometers outside Howick, KwaZulu-Natal, suddenly took on profound consequence. Armed apartheid police flagged down a car in which Nelson Mandela was pretending to be the chauffeur. Having succeeded in evading capture by apartheid operatives for 17 months, Mandela had just paid a clandestine visit to ANC President Chief Albert Luthuli's Groutville home to report back on his African odyssey, and to request support in calling for an armed struggle. It was in this dramatic way, at this unassuming spot, that Nelson Mandela was finally captured, and proceeded to disappear from public view for the following 27 years.

Marking the 50-year anniversary of what began Nelson Mandela's 'long walk to freedom' – and the piece of land that, quite randomly, irrevocably altered the history of South Africa – is a quietly powerful new sculpture, set into the environment of this silently potent space. Made possible by the Department of Co-operative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), the uMngeni Municipality, the Apartheid Museum and the KwaZulu Natal Heritage Council (AMAFA) in association with the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, this historic memorial site was inaugurated and unveiled on the 6th of August 2012 by President Jacob Zuma.

The sculpture, by artist Marco Cianfanelli, significantly comprises 50 steel column constructions – each between 6.5 and 9.5 metres tall – set into the Midlands landscape. The approach to the site, which has been designed by architect Jeremy Rose of Mashabane Rose Associates, leads one down a path towards the sculpture where, at a distance of 35 meters, a portrait of Nelson Mandela, looking west, comes into focus.

The 50 linear vertical units, line up to create the illusion of a flat image.

Cianfanelli comments on the deliberate structural paradox, that, "this represents the momentum gained in the struggle through the symbolic of Mandela's capture. The 50 columns represent the 50 years since his capture, but they also suggest the idea of many making the whole; of solidarity. It points to an irony as the political act of Mandela's incarceration cemented his status as an icon of struggle, which helped ferment the groundswell of resistance, solidarity and uprising, bringing about political change and democracy".

Cianfanelli's perceptive rendering of this meditative image of the international icon – a portrait achieved from interpreting composites of several portraits of Mandela is appropriately monumental, yet fittingly transient and delicate. From its main focal point, the sculpture reads as a familiar photographic image, structurally suggestive of his incarceration, while from a side view, the design and arrangement of the columns create a sense or moment of fracture and release.