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[melindabekker@hotmail.co.za](mailto:melindabekker@hotmail.co.za)

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Heritage Branch

Manager: Built-in Environment

Mr TG Ontong

PO Box 4637

Cape Town

8000

Dear Mr Ontong

**REQUEST THAT SAHRA INTERVENE WITH ALTERATIONS THAT ALREADY TOOK PLACE AT THE OWL HOUSE AND CAMEL YARD MUSEUM - NIEU BETHESDA WITHOUT A PERMIT**

**APPEAL TO SAHRA**

1. **PURPOSE**

To appeal to SAHRA to intervene regarding alterations that took place at the Owl House under the management of the Owl house foundation

Since the Owl House foundation insist that the Owl House is not a Heritage Site they believe that they are above the National Heritage Resource Act No,1999. Although they are informed about the act they continue developments without applying for permits.

1. **ALTERATIONS THAT ALREADY TOOK PLACE WITHOUT A PERMIT**

2.1Breaking down a historic wall to put in a gate from the back. (Attach a photo thereof)

2.2"Restored" sculptures and painted them  without a permit,

2.3  Change of entrance December 2014. Ref( The members accepted and authorized a proposal by the board that the ticket office and all commercial activity be removed from the Lion’s Den to the OHF office building in Martins Street. Memo of Owl house foundation. Terry Winship.Chairperson)  The Owl House foundation changed the entrance through their information office that is on the other side of the block. As a result of this the first thing you see is the camel yard from the back.

**3. THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE OWL HOUSE FOUNDATION CHANGING THE ENTRANCE TO THEIR INFORMATION OFFICE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BLOCK**

The Owl House, the sacred place of Helen Martins, is visited by people from all over the world due to the fact that she is internationally recognized as a foremost outsider artist. Alistair Boddy Evans describes the work of Helen Martins as follows:  “The Owl House and surrounding Camel Yard contain over 300 concrete and glass sculptures created by Helen Martins and her assistant Koos Malgas.  Almost all of the sculptures face towards the east, many depicting a pilgrimage to a suitably positioned nativity scene. Amongst the various sculptures Martins' totem animal, the owl (which she associated with intuition, insight, and wisdom), forms an underlying theme.”

By allowing the visitor to pass the Camel Yard from the back negates the intention of Helen Martins.

Changing the entrance means that visitors are exposed to Helen Martins's sculptures from the wrong angle: the sculptures specifically face “East” (Helens East) because this was of religious importance to Helen. Visitors are also denied the original, intended approach to this historic, unique Karoo-style cottage via it's front entrance and stoep, where Helen had created a world of magic and wonder. She had placed her owl sculptures in an "aviary" on the front verandah to welcome. It is unfathomable to imagine that the Owl House Foundation, who are tasked with prving the authenticity of the Owl House, could have approved such a design change.

**4. FUTURE DEVELPMENTS THAT ARE PLANNED AND HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE OWL HOUSE FOUNDATION**

According to the new design the entrance to the Owl House will be permanently in the information office of the Owl House foundation and the visitor will enter through their backdoor at the back of the  Camel yard walking through craft shops which will be closing the entire view from inside the camel yard. (Find attachment of plans.)

**5. MEETING WITH THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER OF THE CAMDEBOO MUNICIPALITY ON THE 25 NOVEMBER**

During a meeting with the municipal manager, Rev N Pieterson, where the concerned group of residents from Nieu Bethesda requested the MM that the AGM of the Owl House foundation not take place since they refuse to obey to the rules of the National Heritage Resources Act,  No, 1999), the MM undertook to take the matters up. However, he did not keep his promise.( Find letters attached that the MM wrote to the concerned group and their response after the AGM of the Owl House foundation, where the decision was taken to go ahead with future plans without a permit.) The Foundation also agreed to carry on with new developments and did not foresee the need to apply for permission to do so.  The representative of the Municipality at the meeting agreed with the Foundation. The implication of this is that the representative who should advise on the National Heritage Resources Act agrees with the foundation that the Owl house is not a Heritage site and that the 60 year clause is not even applicable. The concerned group wrote a letter to the MM stating their concern that the MM did not implement the promises he made in his letter. Instead his representative, Mr Sakkie van Zyl, agrees that the entrance move and other developments can take place without obtaining a permit.

**6. AUDIT OF HELEN MARTINS ARTIFACTS**

The Owl house foundation said it is the responsibility of the Municipality to audit the artefacts and not them. No audit was ever done regarding the artefacts. Some of Helen's personal articles had been donated to the foundation. However they were never placed in the Owl House but put it in the Foundation's information office since they claim it was donated to the foundation.

**7. CONCLUSION**

7.1 Request to SAHRA to implement the National Heritage Act regarding alterations that already took place as pointed out. The Owl House foundation must be held accountable for said alterations, done without a permit as already mentioned.

Ensure that no further development takes place without a permit

7.3 To declare the Owl house under the new act as National Heritage Site

7.4Owl house should be renovated

Regards

Melinda Bekker

Heritage and Museum Advisor

23 January 2015

**ATTACHMENTS**

►Breaking down a historic wall to put in a gate from the back. (Attach a photo thereof)

►Future developments that are planned and approved by the Owl House foundation (Attached the plans.)

►Letter to the concerned group from the MM of the Camdeboo Municipality on 25 November (find Reverend Pietersen's  letter attached.)

►Letter of the concerned group (7 December 2014) to the MM regarding the failure of promises the MM made in his letter dated 25 November 2014