

Heritage Statement: Robben Island Museum

A new visitors Experience



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Executive Summary

Robben Island Museum and World Heritage is a layered, iconic and highly significant cultural and natural landscape with outstanding universal value. The layers of history that accreted on the island collectively represent triumph of hope over adversity. As a World Heritage site, Robben Island is governed by the 1972 UNESCO Convention, the Operational Guidelines developed by UNESCO to implement the convention and the South African World Heritage Act of 1999. Nationally, Robben Island is a National Heritage site gazetted in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999. Robben Island is managed following the provisions of these laws. In addition, the Robben Island Integrated Management Plan, a document developed with the full participation of stakeholders, offers an operational blue print for the conservation, management and presentation of the cultural and natural elements making up the site.

While emphasizing the need to protect heritage for present and future generations, the provisions of these international and national legislations and standards of best practice make it explicit that heritage must benefit contemporary communities. In so doing, heritage must be adequately interpreted to unlock its full value to stakeholders such as tourists and school children. This makes interpretation and narratives crucial elements of the management of heritage. It is on this basis that Zanenza Consulting requested on behalf of Robben Island, Millennium Heritage Group (PTY)LTD an Independent Heritage Consulting establishment to assess the heritage sensitivity of the proposed minor interventions aimed at enhancing the visitor experience at Robben Island Museum and World Heritage site. The interventions include the installation of signage on Murray Harbour to orient visitors to the island, installation of audiovisual equipment in the visitor center, and an installation of audiovisual equipment in Block B in the Maximum Prison. Furthermore, in the spirit of adaptive re-use, Zanenza proposes to use materials that are washed up the shores of Robben Island in artworks for exhibition in the departure gallery at Nelson Mandela Gateway on the mainland. The materials are an eclectic collection of whale bone, planks, and shell of unknown provenance. There is a possibility that a few items that are washed up the beaches are from Robben Island shipwrecks. However, some of the planks and broken pieces of wood have no diagnostic characteristics. Taken together,

the proposed interventions are aimed at enhancing the communicating of the narratives at Robben Island. They do not interfere with the fabric of the built environment such as buildings and other features in physically and visually significant way.

The significance and sensitivity of Robben Island motivated for the use of a multi-stepped methodology that combines best practice from national and international legal frameworks and ancillary regulations. To begin with, a desktop study was carried out to situate and understand the nature and character of Robben Island. Published plans of the site were also studied together with architectural designs of the proposed interpretation amendments. Furthermore, the study was supplemented by visual analysis guided by the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 and SAHRA Minimum Standards for impact assessments. Because the study is on a World Heritage Site, it made recourse to the ICOMOS Guidelines for Assessing Impact on World Heritage Sites, the Venice Charter and the Burra Charter. All these were considered within a framework provided by the Robben Island World Heritage Site Integrated Management Plan, fieldwalking and stakeholder consultation.

The study reached the following conclusions:

1. The proposed interventions are aimed at enhancing the visitor experience on the site by providing additional information which is not available.
2. The interventions are reversible and will not interfere with the fabric of the built environment and original features making up the site.
3. The proposed interventions will use colors that blend with the environment within the buildings and the sites.
4. In a few cases such as Block B, audiovisual equipment was previously installed. The proposed intervention will use this existing infrastructure
5. The material that is washed up on the beach is eclectic and is of unknown provenance. It is currently exposed to the elements.

6. The buildings on Robben Island have electricity cables and other facilities that were added over the years. The proposed interventions will use such existing infrastructure.

Flowing from these conclusions, this heritage statement recommends the following:

- a. Because the proposed interventions are aimed at addressing needs arising out of the implementation of the Integrated Management Plan, and that they address an important need without compromising the integrity and authenticity of the site, they must be permitted.
- b. An evaluation must be performed after installation to ensure that any unforeseen impacts are addressed.
- c. The final installations must be monitored and inspected by a competent heritage authority.

1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps, notorious for most of its known history, Robben Island (Fig 1) - a 2-kilometre-long rocky island outcrop in Table Bay, 11 km off the coast from Cape Town (33° 48' S 18° 22' E) is now a world-famous tourism destination (Robben Island Integrated Management Plan 2013 – 2018). Nationally, it is a beacon of reconciliation and nation building. Listed as a National Monument in 1996, Robben Island became a World Heritage site in 1999. The spatial extent of Robben Island is approximately 507 hectares. On this rocky island are numerous interdependent but isolated built spaces which were built at different historical moments. These spaces are associated with layered history stretching from the 17th century onwards. The symbolic value of Robben Island lies in its sombre history; as a prison and a hospital for unfortunates who were sequestered as being socially undesirable. Robben Island was inscribed as a World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1999. In its Application for Inclusion on the World Heritage List the last paragraph of its Statement of Significance reads as follows:

With its history of banishment, imprisonment and suffering it has come to symbolise, not only for South Africans or the African continent, but also for the entire world, the miracle of the triumph of the human spirit over enormous hardship and adversity (Robben Island Nomination File: World Heritage Status 1999, p.164). Very few places in the world have such an exceptional history of human suffering, the fight for freedom of mind and body, and of subsequent triumph (Robben Island Integrated Management Plan 2013 – 2018).

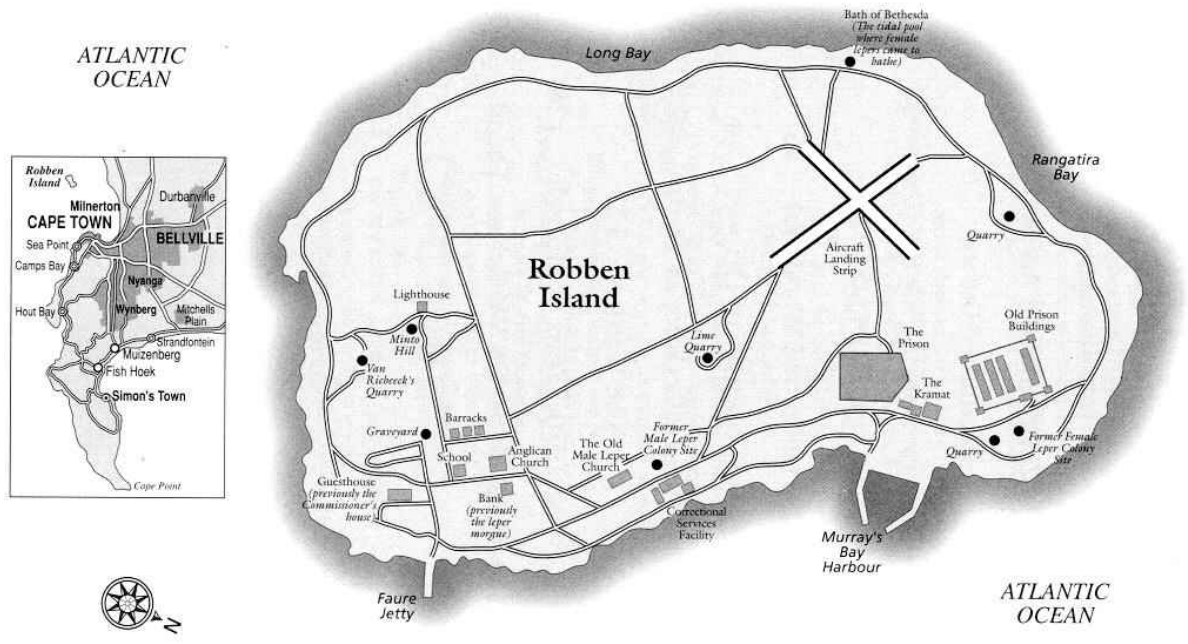


Fig 1: Map of Robben Island showing Murray's Harbour, and the Prison which are some of the sites for the proposed interventions (source: <http://www.cape-town-heritage.co.za/heritage-site/robben-island.html>)

Robben Island is now a top tourism destination in the world. The Robben Island Integrated Management Plan makes it explicit that enhancement of the visitor experience is one of the major goals of the plan. Specifically, the Robben Island ICMP states that “the promotion of awareness and knowledge about the site to visitors, relevant stakeholders and other interested parties; ensuring that the Island becomes a source for economic development and contributes to the empowerment of communities” is a major goal of enhancing the visitor experience at the site.

According to the Robben Island Integrated Management Plan, the standard tour of the Island includes the Maximum Security Prison with an ex-political prisoner (EPP), and a bus drive around the Island. It includes stops at a Prison Wardens House, Robert Sobukwe's House and the Murray Bay harbor precinct attractions, including the Kramat, the seabird colony and the museum shop. The Robben Island experience also includes the opportunity to visit Jetty 1, a

Political Prisoner holding area, which hosts an interpretation center. Also included in the tour is an experience of Nelson Mandela Gateway, itself a museum hosting exhibitions and other interpretation activities.

In order to enhance the visitor experience at the site and to promote access to information, Robben Island Museum and World Heritage site proposes to install interpretation aids in the form of audiovisuals to connect the visitors to some of the activities, events and experiences that took place in various spaces. They contracted Zanenza who in turn contracted Millennium Heritage, an independent heritage consulting company to assess the proposed impact of the interventions. The assessment considered the internationally and nationally significant nature of Robben Island which underscores the need to sustain and conserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the RIWHS while making site accessible and unlocking its full value and relevance to humanity in accordance with the Mission and Vision Statements of the Robben Island Museum (RIM) (ICMP 2013 – 2018). The heritage statement was prepared in line with the principles and requirements of the bodies such as ICCROM, IUCN, ICOMOS and UNESCO. The ICOMOS Guidance on Impact Assessment on World Heritage Sites was consulted together with the Venice and Burra Charters. Locally, the world Heritage Act of 1999 and the National Heritage Resources Act and supporting regulations were also consulted together with the National Environmental Management Act.

The assessment reached the conclusion that the proposed interventions are aimed at sustaining and enhancing the values of Robben Island. There is little or no intervention with the fabric of the built environment. All the proposed work is reversible which satisfies major tenets of documents such as the Venice Charter. To comply with above mentioned legislations, the applicant (Zanenza Consulting) requires information on the heritage resources, and their significance. The study enables the applicant to take pro-active measures to limit adverse effects on historic buildings and their fabric. The aim of this document is to provide a heritage statement that integrates the individual and cumulative impact assessment of the proposed activities.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Zanenza on behalf of Robben Island proposes to install interpretive installations that are reversible and minimally interventive on four major areas of the World Heritage site. This is aimed at providing additional information to enhance the experience of visitors and was a major objective of the existing Robben Island Integrated Management Plan. The terms of reference for the study involves the development of a heritage statement to be submitted to the South African Heritage Resources Agency in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999.

3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The nationally and internationally significant nature of Robben Island dictates that it is protected by international and national laws, conventions and guidelines. Furthermore, Robben Island is a cultural and natural landscape and is thus protected by Environmental and Biodiversity legislation. Some of the applicable laws include:

- a. National Heritage Resources Act of 1999
- b. World Heritage Convention Act of 1999
- c. National Environmental Management Act
- d. National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act
- e. Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations
- f. Western Cape Nature Conservation Laws Amendment Act
- h. Disaster Management Act

The National Heritage Resources Act mandates that no one must alter, destroy any part of the national estate without permission from the relevant authority. The act further stipulates that

all work with potential to alter the fabric of buildings and elements of the cultural landscape must be assessed for impact. The spirit of the legislation is captured in the World Heritage Act of 1999 and the National Environmental Management Act. Other than these laws there are also international conventions and charters such as the 1972 Convention, the Underwater Convention and the Venice and Burra Charters which have provisions that guide how heritage must be managed and utilized. Furthermore, ICOMOS published guidance on impact assessment near World Heritage places (ICOMOS 2011). These laws and ancillary regulations were considered in assessing the potential impact of the proposed work.

4. Description of the work

Zanenza on behalf of Robben Island proposes to install interpretive installations that are reversible and minimally interventive on four major areas of the World Heritage site. This is aimed at providing additional information to enhance the experience of visitors and was a major objective of the existing Robben Island Integrated Management Plan. The current visitor experience is as follows:

According to Robben Island Integrated ICMP,

“the standard tour to Robben Island lasts 3.5 hours, including an hour spent on the returning ferry. Visitors travel from the NMG at the V & A Waterfront in Cape Town to the Island by ferry. Upon arrival on Robben Island, visitors are driven to the maximum-security prison (MSP) by bus in groups of 54 on average. Visitors are given a guided tour of MSP, accompanied by ex-political prisoners (EPPs). After moving about freely for some time visitors regroup in collective prison cells to share the experience of the former political prisoners. The visit continues with a visit to the main functional buildings and prison quarters, and culminates in a visit to former President Nelson Mandela’s cell. EPPs next direct visitors to the bus for a 45-minute ride to places of interest on the Island. A new auditory guide provides information via a microphone at each location. Visitors remain on the bus at the first stop, Robert Sobukwe’s House, which is followed

by a halt at the Limestone quarry. The bus drives through the village with the guide providing information about the Garrison Church, the leprosarium and the cemetery with the leprosarium graves. The tour bus goes as far as the Bluestone quarry, the Kramat and the museum shop. Visitors then return to the jetty at Murray's Bay harbour for embarkation on the ferry back to Cape Town".

Based on the above, most of the stories about Robben Island are derived from the experiences and memories of Ex-Political Prisoners. This motivates for the addition and introduction of interpretation panels and or audio-visual equipment that will show additional experiences. The Ex-political prisoners are also retiring with some passing on. Motivated by this thinking and by the vision crystalized in the ICMP, Zanenza on behalf of Robben Island propose to make interpretive installations that are reversible and minimally interventive as follows:

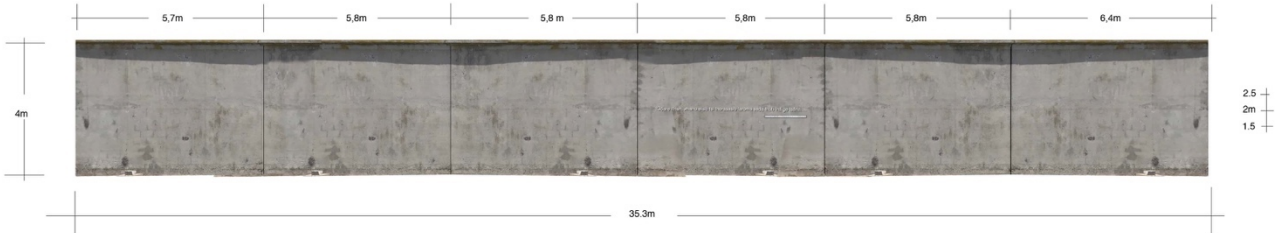
1. Murray's Harbour Wall

The aim of the intervention on Murray's harbor wall (Figs 2 & 3) is to mount text made up of laser cut metal. *The text will be in Nama, with a smaller plaque below, translating the Nama text into English "!*

Gôare //nan, #hanu-eisib tsi !norasib !aroma sada !hub !nâ ge tsâna." The materials will include marine Grade (316) Stainless Steel. The text will be mounted with 5mm fasteners to the wall. and spaced approximately 10 mm from the wall. The text will be chemically fixed to the wall. Approx. 185 fasteners with a quantity of approximately 185 holes in the wall. The holes will be small, 5mm in diameter and easily filled should the text be removed.



Fig 2: Detail of wall with text & plaque



Wall dimensions & position of text & plaque on the wall



Fig 3: Artist Impression: courtesy of Zanenza

2. Visitor Centre: Visitor Cubicles

The visitor booths (Figs 4, 5 & 6) are an important part of the Robben Island story. The intention is to adapt the current booths to house monitors. The process will involve the installation of replica booths with sound proof fronts to house the monitors for showing audiovisuals on what was happening at Robben Island when it was a prison. The replicas will be fixed in front of the existing fronts. Adjusting bolts will be used to keep the replicas in place. The adjusting bolts will not be screwed into the original booth but will be pressed up against the horizontal top and bottom shelf. The original wiring conduits will be used for the wiring of the monitors. The work will be done on 8 booths leaving 7 to maintain authenticity. As far as materials are concerned, wood, enamel paint, adjusting bolts, electrical wiring will be used. The replica booth fronts can be easily removed if the monitors require maintenance. The adjusting bolts can be loosened for

the replica's removal. It is important to note that no holes will be drilled either into the walls or existing booths. There will be no visible footprint if the replica fronts are removed in the future.

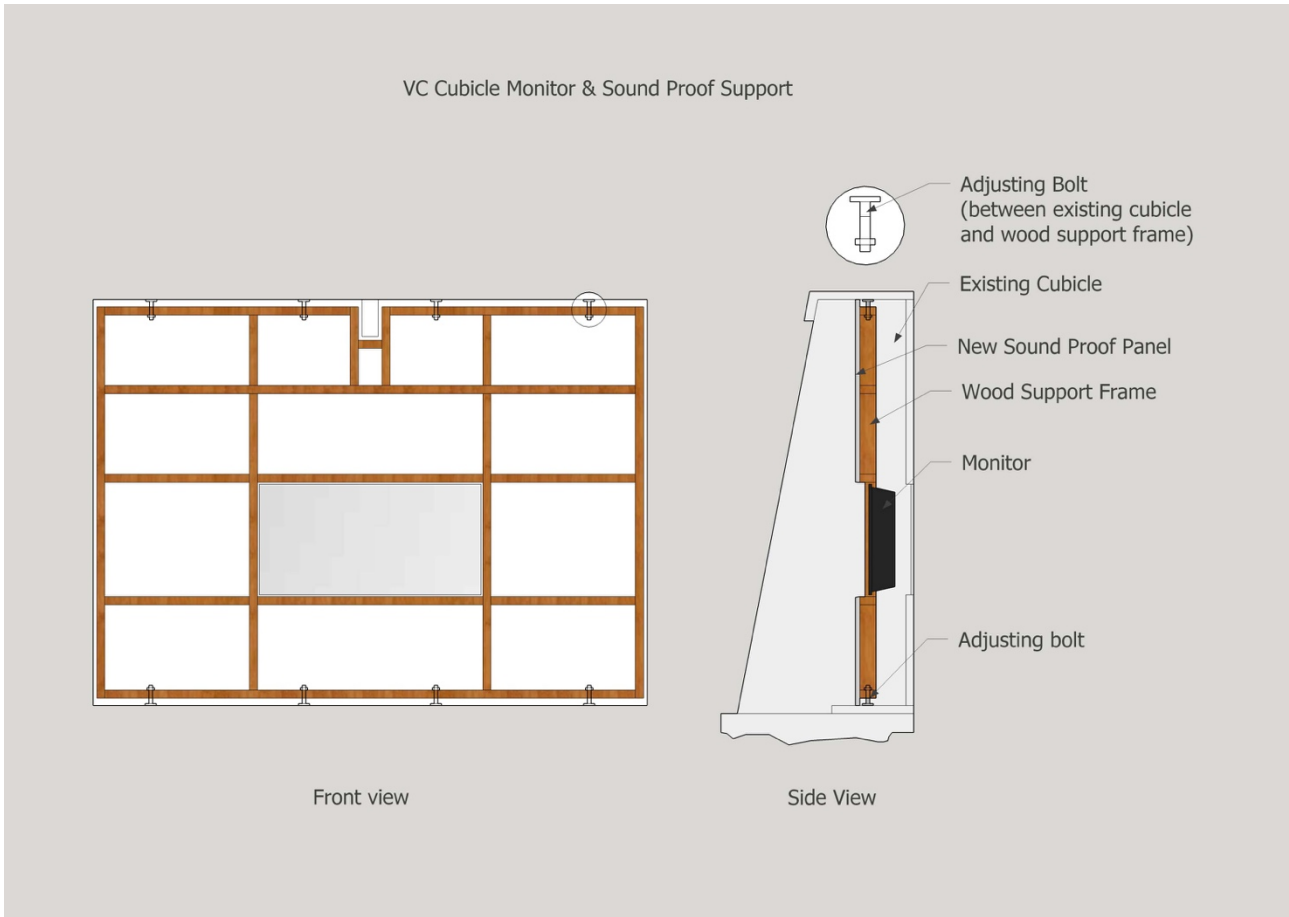


Fig 4: Replica booth front installation sketch.



Fig 5: Sketch of replica front with monitor.



Fig 6: Current view of cubicles

3. Visitor Waiting Room

The waiting room (Fig 7 & 8) is yet another very important space at Robben Island. The proposed work will involve the installation of a wall in the Waiting Room. The monitor will be framed in a wooden frame. The wood frame will be to the look of the display cabinet on the adjacent wall.

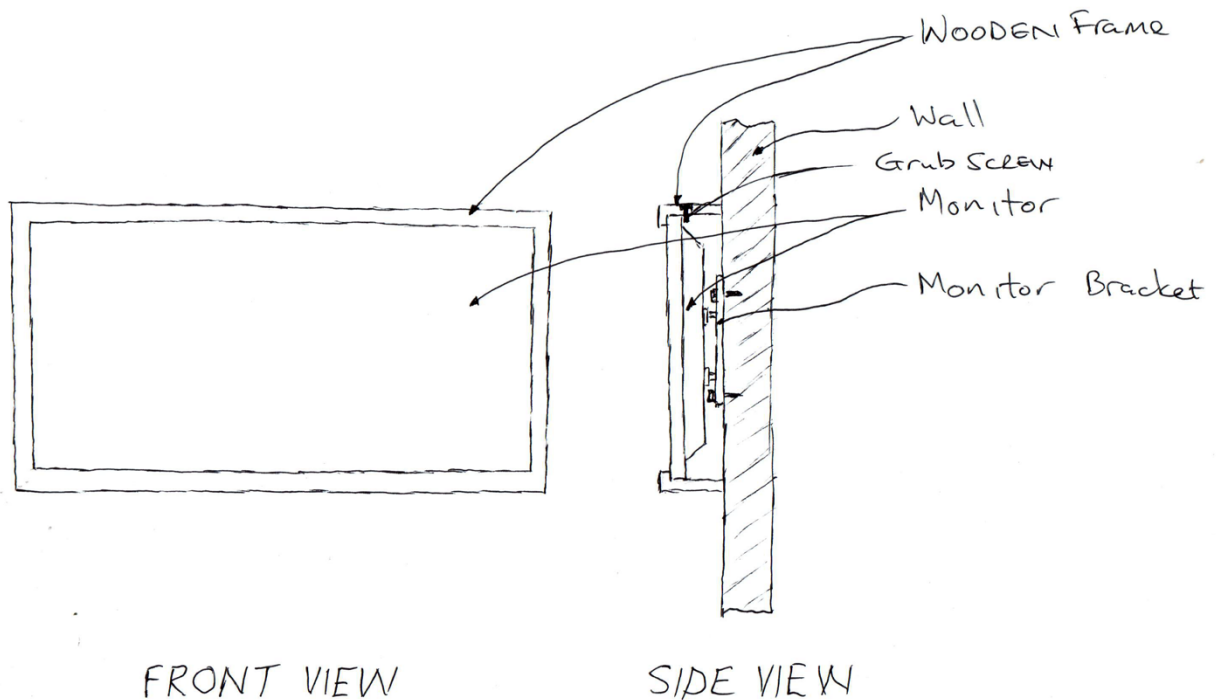


Fig 7: The Waiting Room display cabinet.



Fig 8: Wood frame surround for the monitor.

VISTOR WAITING AREA.



Not to scale

Fig 9: Sketch Showing Fixing Method

As far as materials and fixing methods are concerned, monitor brackets will be secured to the wall with 4x 6mm screws, (drill depth of 40mm) using Fischer fasteners and wall plugs. The lead wire will be glued to the wall and painted to wall color. The electrician will connect monitor power supply to existing wires in roof. The small 5mm holes for the four screws will be neatly finished by painter. The wood frame will be fixed to the monitor using grub screws. The 1 cornice and 4 wall drill holes will leave a minimal footprint as they can be easily filled and repainted if the monitors are uninstalled in the future.

4. Site: Dankie Hek 1 Window



Fig 10 Entrance to Robben Island



Fig 11 Dankie Hek 1 Window

The proposed work (Figs 10 & 11) will involve fitting a glass window on the wall to the outside of the bars of the room window to protect the bars from further corrosion and to allow for the window shutters to be open for visitors to look into the room. A projector is to be installed inside the room projecting a film onto the window facing wall. Visitors will look through the barred window to view the film. Speakers will be fitted outside the window. The materials for this work will include meranti wood, non-reflective glass, galvanised screws, wood primer & enamel paint (Fig 12 & 13). A meranti wood frame is to be screwed to the walls of the window. 6 Fischer screws and wall plugs will be used, 2 at the top and bottom and 1 each on the sides of the frame. The screws are to be countersunk into the frame. 5mm non reflective glass is to be fitted into the frame. The frame is to be primed and finished to the same color as the metal bars.

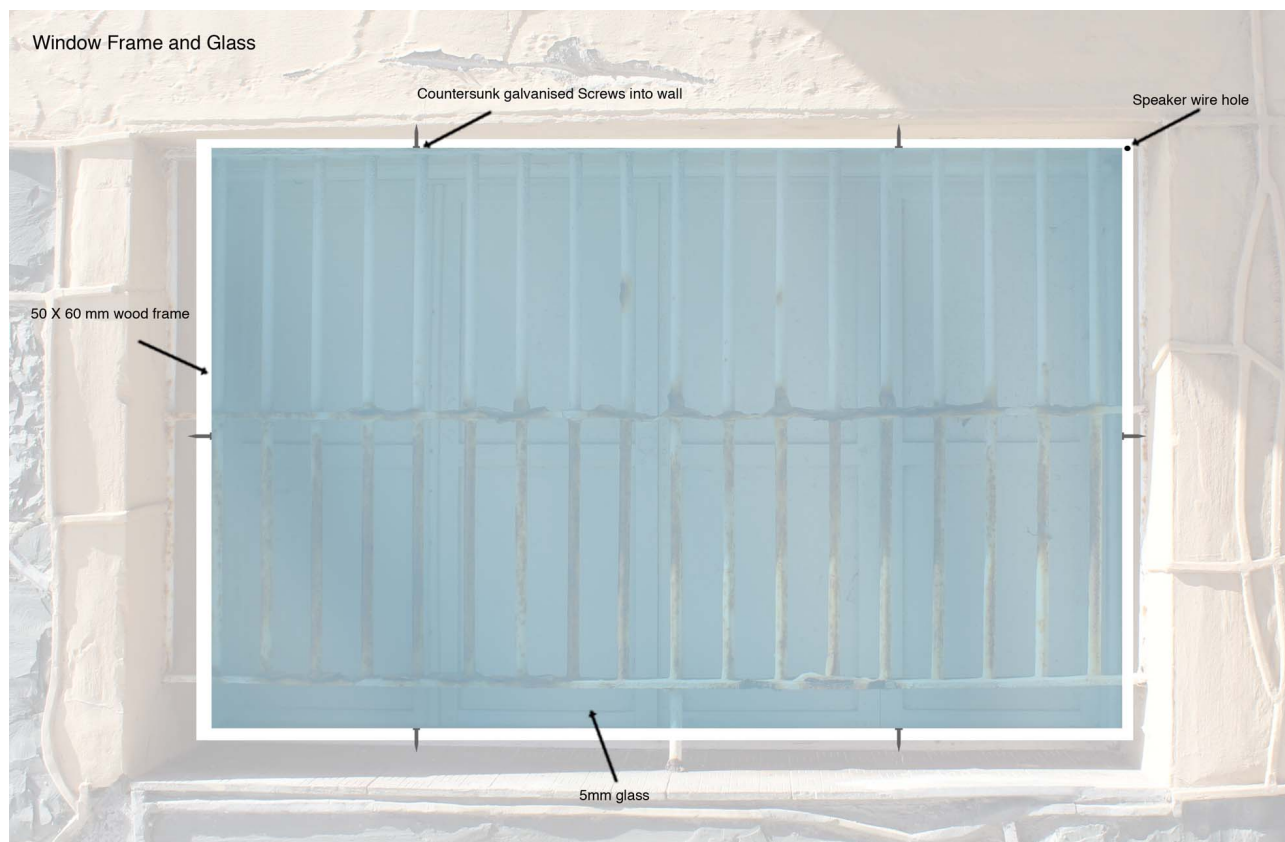


Fig 12: Window Installation Sketch



Fig 13: Artist sketch showing projection seen through the window

The 6 drill holes will leave a minimal footprint as they can be easily filled and repainted if the glass be removed in the future.

In summary, the proposed work is aimed at enhancing the visitor experience at Robben Island. The team from Millennium Heritage conducted a physical inspection on the sites of the proposed interventions. The conclusion was that the proposed work is minimally invasive and is reversible.

4. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The project implemented an inter-disciplinary methodology that considered the potential impact of the proposed work on the receiving cultural and physical environment as guided the South African Heritage Resources Agency's Minimum Standards for Impact Assessments and the ICOMOS Guidelines for Assessing Impact on World Heritage Sites. The following elements constituted the project methodology for implementing this project:

A. Desk-top study

To begin with, a detailed desktop study was performed to fully understand the heritage resources and to provide a background and context to the study. The desktop study involved consulting previous literature on relevant aspects of the study area, legislation and international guidelines. Accordingly, our team consulted the following sources:

- Unpublished and published literature on the history of Robben Island and its architectural designs,
- Published and unpublished maps (Top cadastral Maps)
- International guidelines and conventions published by UNESCO, IUCN, ICMM and ICOMOS
- Robben Island Integrated Management Plan 2013 - 2018

The desktop study created a list of known structural designs and historical building fabric, possible and actual impacts as well as providing best practice from other places. This study enables the development of robust field assessment protocols.

B. Inter-disciplinary Field survey

An interdisciplinary team carried out fieldwork throughout the earmarked areas and associated buildings. The field work was aimed at assessing the areas proposed for interventions. Work plans and sketches were discussed at the different sites of work.

C. Stakeholder consultation

For any project to be successful, stakeholder engagement is crucial. Stake holders could be defined as a subgroup of the public whose interest may be positively or negatively affected by a proposal or activities and/ or who are concerned with a proposal or activities and its consequences. The term includes the proponents, authorities and all interested and affected parties (Fransen, 2004). Stakeholders were such as the South African Heritage Resources Agency, Robben Island Museum Custodians and the Ex-political prisoners were consulted. The Ex-political prisoners were consulted before and after assessment. Meeting were organised in Johannesburg where the draft heritage statement was workshopped (see Appendix 1). The stakeholders felt that the project was essential for enhancing visitor experience at the site.

D. Data synthesis and analysis

Informed by the fieldwork data flowing from all sources and techniques were combined to develop the heritage statement report. The final report contained among others, the following key aspects:

- Site condition (conservation status, accessibility and current utilization)
- Site description
- Documentation of building fabrics
- Significance valuation (socio-cultural, aesthetic, research value and output)
- Application of the minimum standards set by Section 38 of the National Heritage Resources Act.

5. 9.ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE: MURRAY’S HARBOUR WALL, VISITOR CENTRE CUBICLES, DANKIE HEK 1 WINDOW

As a World Heritage site, Robben Island possesses Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Nationally, it is a national heritage site. For these, and other reasons, the cultural landscape is highly valued by the national and international communities. Robben Island has historical, social, cultural and spiritual significance as well as architectural merit. The assessment of cultural significance was

aligned with Section 3(3) of the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 (Act 25 of 1999) and the ICOMOS Guidance for Assessing Impact near World Heritage sites.

Some of the elements of significance are as follows:

- Social and cultural significance
- Historical significance
- Architectural significance
- Aesthetic significance
- Scientific and technological significance
- Group and relationship significance
- Landmark significance
- Associative landscapes (e.g. events, memories, beliefs etc.)
- Spiritual significance

Based on these values, a questionnaire was completed during the field walking and based on information from all the available sources. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the results of the significance assessment.

Table 1: Significance criteria in terms of Sub-section 3(3) National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 and ICOMOS Guidance on Assessing Impact near World Heritage sites

1.	The importance of the cultural heritage in the community or pattern of South Africa's history (Historic and political significance)	Yes
2.	Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage (Scientific significance).	Yes
3.	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage (Research/scientific significance)	Yes

4.	Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of South Africa's natural or cultural places or objects (Scientific significance)	Yes
5.	Importance in exhibiting aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group (Aesthetic significance)	Yes
6.	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (Scientific significance)	Yes
7.	Strong or special association with a community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons (Social significance)	Yes
8.	Strong or special association with the life and work of a person, group or organization of importance in the history of South Africa (Historic significance)	Yes
9.	The significance of the site relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.	Yes

Table 2: Significance criteria in terms of historical, architectural significance

1.	Are any of the buildings or structures an important example of a building type?	Yes
2.	Do any of the buildings outstanding examples of a particular style or period.	Yes
3.	Do any of the buildings contain fine architectural details and reflect exceptional craftsmanship?	yes
4.	Are any of the buildings an example of an industrial, engineering, or technological development?	Yes
5.	What is the state of the architectural and structural integrity of the buildings?	Excellent
6.	Is the building's current and future use in sympathy with its original use (for which the building was designed)?	now tourism destination
7.	Will the alterations be done in sympathy with the original design?	Yes

8.	Were the additions and extensions done in sympathy with the original design?	Yes
9.	Are any of the buildings or structures the work of a major architect, engineer or builder?	No information

10.ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT (including justification):

This section contains the results of the heritage impact assessments /finds assessment as aligned with section 3(3) of the National Heritage Resource Act and provisions of the ICOMOS Guidelines for Assessing Impact near World Heritage sites. Notwithstanding the values of Robben Island, the proposed work does not in any way interfere with the fabric of the spaces. The visual impact is very minimal while the proposed additions are reversible. The work is aimed at enhancing the narratives that are broadcast to visitors. It will enhance the values of Robben Island.

13. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The project implemented an inter-disciplinary methodology that combine several techniques adopted from various disciplines namely: civil and structural engineering, historical and visual approach, the South African Heritage Resources Agency's minimum standards for impact assessments and the ICOMOS Guidelines for Assessing Impact on heritage sites. Based on the above studies the following recommendations were reached:

The study reached the following conclusions:

1. The proposed interventions are aimed at enhancing the visitor experience on the site by providing additional information which is not available.
2. The interventions are reversible and will not interfere with the fabric of the built environment and original features making up the site.

3. The proposed interventions will use colors that blend with the environment within the buildings and the sites.
4. In a few cases such as Block B, audiovisual equipment was previously installed. The proposed intervention will use this existing infrastructure
5. The material that is washed up on the beach is eclectic and is of unknown provenance. It is currently exposed to the elements.
6. The buildings on Robben Island have electricity cables and other facilities that were added over the years. The proposed interventions will use such existing infrastructure.

Flowing from these conclusions, this heritage statement recommends the following:

- a. Because the proposed interventions are aimed at addressing needs arising out of the implementation of the Integrated Management Plan, and that they address an important need without compromising the integrity and authenticity of the site, they must be permitted.
- b. An evaluation must be performed after installation to ensure that any unforeseen impacts are addressed.
- c. The final installations must be monitored and inspected by a competent heritage authority.

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