

Art books restore pride at Sentinel

Special Correspondent

Hout Bay's Sentinel School has received a gift for their new library from Donvé Lee, a Noordhoek artist and author.

She donated a set of her recently-published children's books on South African artists to the school.

The anthology, *Great African Artists*, was endorsed by national education minister Naledi Pandor at the official launch at the Union Buildings in November last year.

Donvé believes that art is essential to our well-being, and particularly to the well-being of our children.

"Sentinel School encourages creative expression in the form of dance, music and art," says Donvé, "so I know that the books will be enjoyed by both the children and the teachers."

A generation ago, South African students at school and university were taught that great art came from Europe.

They learnt about Rembrandt and Michelangelo and Van Gogh and Picasso. They may have learnt about

one or two South African artists, like Pierneef, but he was an afterthought, tacked on to the mighty European art tradition.

"Traditional African art", was sometimes mentioned, but this was remote and exotic and definitely "other", and consisted mostly of woodcarvings from deepest darkest Africa.

Fortunately, much has changed since then. South Africa has abundant artistic talent, and books such as *Great African Artists* are changing the way South African children view their past.

Finally they are learning that great artists come from South Africa.

The books are aimed at young readers from around 10 to 14 years old. Each book ends with a practical art project relating to the work of the individual artist.

Although they are essentially children's books, they are so entertaining and informative that they appeal to students and adults of all ages, who are looking for an easy introduction to South African art.

The set includes an illustrated art

dictionary and showcases nine diverse South African artists from a variety of backgrounds.

The artists are Noria Mabasa, Dan Rakgoathe, George Pemba, William Kentridge, Gail Catlin, Dumile Feni, Peter Clarke, Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Willie Bester.

Willie Bester creates magnificent masterpieces out of junk, masterpieces which tend to be sobering reminders of our past. In the final chapter in the book on Willie Bester, Donvé writes:

"People sometimes say: 'Willie, stop making art about the past. Apartheid is over'. But Willie believes that we must not forget our past. If we do, we will repeat it. Also, the past is part of who we are today".

For Willie, art is a medicine that heals society. But art can also heal the person who makes the art.

Willie says: "I was brainwashed all my life to believe that I am worth less than other people. But art is strong. It states that you are also here; you are also somebody, and you are as good as anybody else. Art can restore your pride."



■ Carol Carolus, Sentinel School secretary (left), author Donvé Lee and Evelyn Masemola, chairperson of the Sentinel School governing body, at the presentation of the anthology on great South African artists to the new school library.