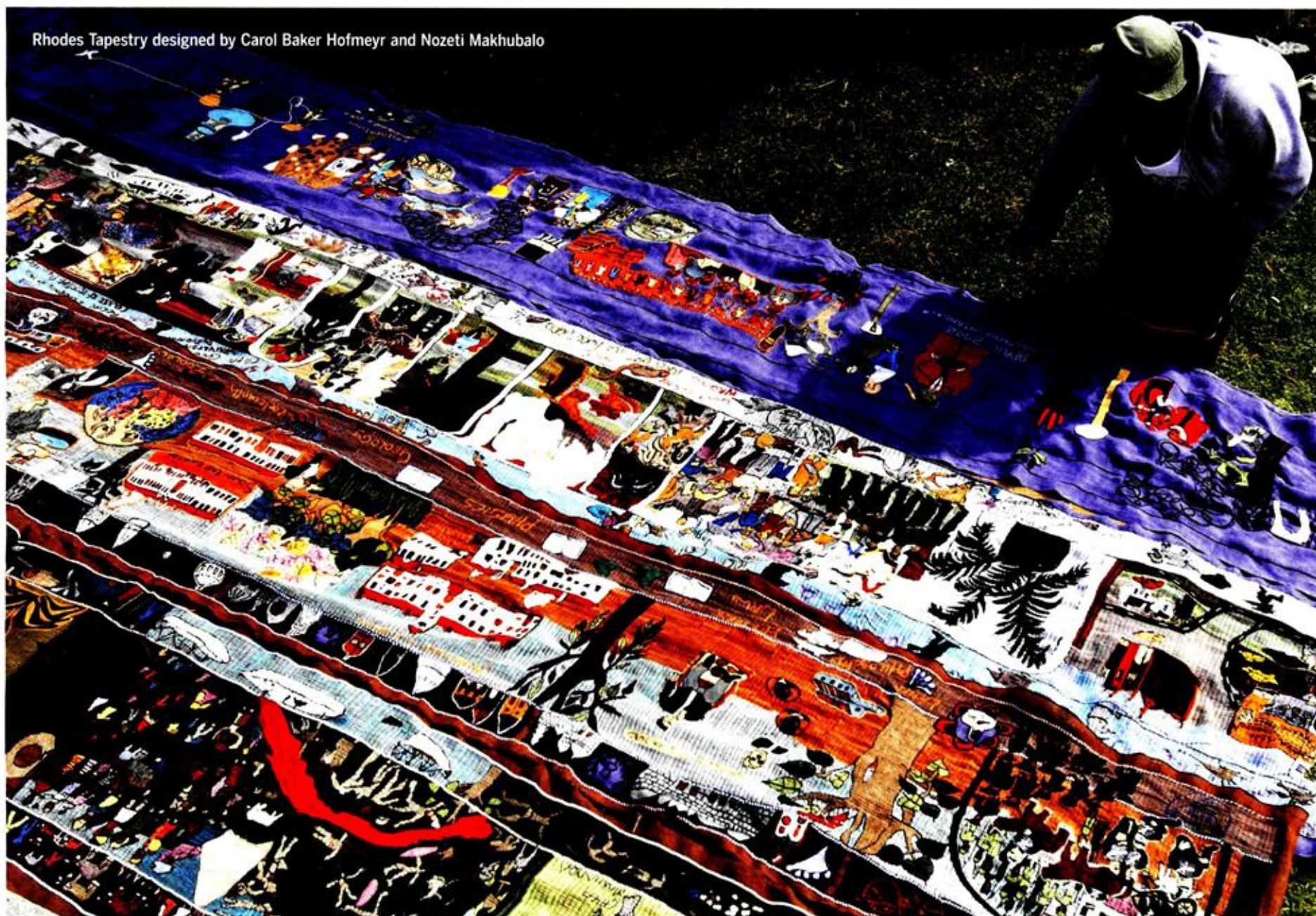


COMMUNITY

Rhodes Tapestry designed by Carol Baker Hofmeyr and Nozeti Makhubalo



# Threading a tale

The Keiskamma Trust's evocative tapestries have been the launch pad for cultural training and healthcare projects that are enriching an impoverished community

TEXT GWYNETH ROBERTS PHOTOGRAPHY MARK ANDREWS

THE KEISKAMMA TRUST HAD ITS earliest beginnings in 2000 when artist and medical doctor Carol Hofmeyr moved from Johannesburg to the rural Hamburg area of the Eastern Cape, and started the Keiskamma Art Project.

The trust has since stretched its wings into various areas, having a marked impact on the lives of many in the greater Peddie South region, and promoting health and hope through art, music, HIV/AIDS treatment, poverty alleviation projects and education initiatives.

"We are always developing," says Unathi Meslane, the trust's public and community relations co-ordinator, who left a career in Cape Town to move back to her home district. "If we discover something that people are really interested in, then we move into it." The art project is probably the Trust's best-known initiative. Its works have been exhibited around the world, with nine artists and 120 embroiderers producing major art pieces as well as smaller craft items on commission or for retail sale.

Early on, Hofmeyr financed formal art

studies for five community artists, and that early investment is having a multiplier effect: besides the needlework studio, today the project includes a ceramic studio, a felt-making studio and a book-binding initiative.

An early work, the *Keiskamma Tapestry*, is on permanent show at the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town, and the embroiderers are currently hard at work on an extensive piece to hang in the Rhodes University administration buildings in Grahamstown.

Last year's major work, the *Keiskamma Guernica* installation, was exhibited at the

National Arts Festival in Grahamstown and has since been bought by the Red Location Museum in Port Elizabeth. It draws on themes in Picasso's *Guernica* — first exhibited in Paris in 1937 — which brought the Spanish Civil War to the world's attention.

Similarly, Keiskamma's modern-day South African version visually displays the strength and courage of a community ravaged by HIV and poverty and yet aspiring to rise above it.

Having started out as an art project, the trust moved into healthcare in 2002. Today



the Keiskamma Health Programme employs 54 healthcare workers working in around 70 surrounding villages as far as the Great Fish River, each overseeing an average of five patients to ensure they are taking vital ARVs and TB medication. It has pioneered various other community health programmes despite ongoing financial challenges.

The newest initiative is the Keiskamma Music Academy, started in 2006 by Helen Vosloo, then principal flautist of the South African National Symphony Orchestra. Vosloo saw Keiskamma's visual art works on

exhibition and found a way for her and other talented musicians to play a role in Keiskamma's community transformation. Students are studying towards music exams and several have progressed to playing orchestral instruments, performing around the country.

Today, the music academy has 32 bright-eyed pupils, who, thanks to the bold Keiskamma dream, have been shown yet another avenue into how art can transform lives.

*The Keiskamma Trust, [www.keiskamma.org](http://www.keiskamma.org)*