

## CCAC interview with Willem Boshoff in Kensington – transcript

Last updated: 21 June 2021

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**Project Name:** BoshoffWillem

**Date of interview:** 16 April 2021

**Location of interview:** Kensington, Johannesburg (at Willem Boshoff's home)

**Language/s of interview:** English, some Afrikaans

**Length of interview:** 02:16:10

**Interviewer name (and acronym):** Francois Lion-Cachet (FLC)

**Interviewee name (and acronym):** Willem Boshoff (WB), with input by Helene Smuts (HS)

**Name of translator, if applicable:** N/a

**Name of transcriber:** FLC

**Notes on access and use, if applicable:** N/a

**Mode of interview:** In person

**Number of recordings:** 1

**Audio file name(s) of interview:** CCAC\_int\_AUD\_BoshoffWillem\_20210416.m4a

**List of acronyms:**

CONTRALESA: Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa

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**START OF AUDIO RECORDING: 00:00:05**

**FLC:** We wanted to ask you about your works in our collection, being *Prison Sentences* and *Long Shadows*.

**WB:** The first one was, do you have the dates with you?

**FLC:** *Long Shadow* I think is...

**WB:** No, the other one.

**FLC:** The other one we have, *Prison Sentences*, is 2013.

**WB:** So in 2002, that man Krut,

**HS:** Oh, was David Krut involved?

**WB:** He asked me to make a suggestion for an etch. So I said, can you do photographic etching? He said no. I said, I have a good idea for a very big photographic etch, which is to count all the days that these prisoners, or Mr. Mandela at least as the starting point, that they were in prison. And they usually have this little gate, which is 1, 2, 3, 4, and one across or 1, 2, 3, 4 5, 6 and one across to make a week, either they do it in five, you can count it with hands. Or you could work with weeks, they do both. It's called a gate. So you can count quite easily how long you've been there. Or, if you're more clever you can count the weeks. And it's six, and one across. So I said I made this other artwork, called *Bangboek*. And that was more than 20 years before that, at the end of the 70s, and that work is also now at Javett. So I said, it would maybe be interesting to... They would look similar. But he [Krut] said that they don't do photographic etching. So I said, oh alright, I'll find another way. But he wanted an artwork. I said it could be fantastic, it should be really easy to get. We can print out a lot of them and everybody will have it. And then we could make an addition of 50, and then he didn't have photographic etching. We did photographic etching... What is that? [Looks at the audio recorder.]

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:07:33**

**FLC:** Ons neem jou op [we are recording you].

**WB:** Oh, [laughs]. I taught photographic etching when I was teaching printmaking at the technikon, from somewhere at the end of the 70s to sort of somewhere in the middle of the 80s. Then I had too much admin to do, to run the art school. So I knew about photographic etching, how to do the plates. And David Krut had a whole outfit for etching and printing presses, but he couldn't do photographic etchings. I thought that was weird. It's not that difficult, but he couldn't do it. So, we must find another way. I thought one can do this thing on a slab of granite. There was a little guy, a short little guy, his wife, they lived here in Boksburg. Somebody said I must phone him. They engraved flowers on wine glasses and they printed things on glass. They could do the negatives. His name was Johan. So we talked and talked, and he said he can do it. So we designed a panel. We first tested three panels. And they were, I don't know, I think they were Zimbabwe black. I don't think we used Belfast black at first with him. They were two centimetres thick, they weren't 3 centimetres thick. They were thin, one person could carry one. And we printed three for the first exhibition at Michael Stevenson in Cape Town. And then we said to Dr. Michael that these are just the three prototypes, that if people wanted them, they could order and then we will print in edition, so with Michael I sat down and worked out that we will put the first three and he will show them and it was Mr. Mandela, Mr Sisulu and Mr. Kathadra. Those three. And the exhibition was on drywall and we battled because they're very heavy for the drywall and the show was supposed to open in about five days, and two of them fell off the wall and they broke. I can't remember which two fell off.

**FLC:** We also struggle with drywall the court.

**WB:** And then I phoned Johan and said, "Johan, you know all the measurements, you've done it, can you make this in the next three or four days? Can you make this and send us these two, they fell off the wall, Johan." He says, "No, no problem." He made them, he remade them. That Johan guy. He sent them down and we had a different system of hanging and then they were up. And then with Michael I discussed we would print, well you could call it print but it's really sandblasting, we would sandblast

an edition of five for the full set of eight different people. But we would change the format if we did eight, the format was... I think it's a metre by 120 cm. And we made a 150 cm. I can't remember the measurements. But you've got the proper format, yours is one metre by 130 cm or 150 cm. What is the one at Javett? That's the format that we settled on. Because the old ones were more rectangular. They were more square.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:13:16**

**FLC:** On the ones we have the days are noted at the side, and I saw at Javett it's at the bottom of the work.

**WB:** It depends on where we have to install it. So you install it so the dates are sensibly legible. Sometimes they're at the bottom, and sometimes they're on the side; it's something we would do in consultation with somebody who wants a set. The first full set went to Mr. Gordon Schachat, and with him also one set went to you, you have the second set. Or he has the second set, I can't remember. It was installed in his [Schachat's] garden. But then, Johan divorced his wife: his wife fell in love with a policeman. They did the first two sets, but his wife took over the business and messed it up a bit. It was difficult, she still knew how to do it but it wasn't so easy for her to do. They had a big fight and I stayed out of it. But they were the people responsible for your set and for Gordon Schachat's set. I can't remember his surname.

**FLC:** I'm sure there's only one Johan in Boksburg.

**HS:** Well there's only one that lost his wife to a policeman, I'll tell you that.

**WB:** He was a very down to earth, nice little guy and then he had this trouble with his wife and the policeman. Then the third set was still with Michael, but I can't really remember how it went. The third set went to Boston in the United States. I think Michael Stevenson was instrumental in managing the first three sets. Then when we made a fourth set, which was on show at Nirox, but with the fourth set I didn't have Johan anymore. I think the third set was still Johan, no it wasn't. No, I went to Frans, but who made the third set? Because now we had to find somebody else to make it because Johan's wife took all his equipment. She took everything, she threw him out. She was stupid. He was a good man to have, you know, he was nice but she wanted more stylishness and she had a policeman and Johan was more down to earth. I think she would be very sorry in time to come because he wasn't... he was just such a down to earth, nice person. Anyway, I'm trying to remember all these things. So I think the third set must have been still with Johan. After Michael Stevenson, I made a fourth set. Then we made one for Nirox. Benji wanted one. I said, "Benji, it costs a fortune, I don't have the people that used to make it." He said, "No, no, let's just make one. So we made a set with Frans Haarhoff and it was then Belfast black. No longer Zimbabwe. Frans Haarhoff..."

**HS:** Dis ook 'n lekker storie [this is also a nice story].

**WB:** It was a long story, because they had to learn how to do the stencil, Lena de Wet.

**HS:** I can give you the juicy bits but they're not for recording.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:18:23**

**FLC:** You should just say "stadig, dis van die rekord af" [slow down, it's off the record].

**HS:** No, you're going to have to phone me afterwards.

**WB:** They battled to get it square because Frans would also cut the granite, he would do everything, and it's very hand-made this stuff, made on the ground by people doing their very, very best. He got it as close to square as possible. You can't see that it is not square really, but it is just slightly off. I think your set was installed by Johan. He could do lots of things. He could drill holes in the granite at the back of yours and he had bolts set into the granite. The place where they put it, there was a lot of discussion about that. At first, it was the only work there and they needed a space, so they eventually appointed the space near the library. I don't know if the library is still where it used to be. It was supposed to be near the library. Other works, then, Wilma's work was put in the same space later on. It wasn't there at first. It was kind of a nice space, your space, because it was like a prison courtyard where you would have a smoke break, or you would come out or you would walk around there, or you could think, it's like a nice quiet space. Johan did the installation. The Boston one we posted overseas and somebody there installed it. Johan's wife and the policeman installed the one at Mr Schachat's place. Where is the Schachat one now? What happened to it?

**HS:** Would that be here around the corner at the Southern Collection? Was Schachat not involved in donating your copy?

**FLC:** That is one of my questions, yes.

**HS:** If he bought two, I'm sure he donated them.

**FLC:** So we have it on record that Gordon Schachat, Leon Kirkinis and Richard Enthoven, the three of them, donated our set together.

**WB:** Michael didn't tell me that.

**HS:** That was interesting to read in fact.

**WB:** But I do know that it was donated and Gordon was part of the donation, but they didn't tell me the details.

**HS:** Do you know who we can ask, Jeanine Dixon, she was Janine Howse, she is curator for Gordon here at the Southern Collection. If you want I can connect you by email or can find out for you. She was at JAG years ago. She's been working for Gordon Schachat's collection as a curator for a while.

**WB:** So I didn't know Mr. Enthoven. I knew Mr. Schachat.

**HS:** I should think you knew him.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:21:34**

**WB:** I knew him. But I didn't know the other people. I know that it was a donation. We were very, how do you put this? My wife at the time worked for Albie Sachs. Her name is Anel and her surname used to be Boshoff, but she's now remarried to Mr. Bitrovich who is Polish. She teaches in Wales. He's in Wales. He teaches at the University of Wales.

**FLC:** What is her maiden surname?

**HS:** It was Marias, from Eugène Marais, she is from that line. A very smart woman.

**WB:** So we had lots of lunches and suppers with Albie Sachs. And we went on holiday with Albie to Venda, we went on a lot of stuff with Albie. I fetched him many times from his house, just here in Yeoville, and helped him put on his shirt because he couldn't... his one arm was missing. And we became great friends, he wrote about me in one of his books. There was a problem that the court couldn't, somehow, receive work in this way, because it would compromise if they had to make decisions in court cases. They had to receive it in that way. And I think it might still be like that, but I can't remember how it was. I'm an artist, I'm not in the business of interpreting law and how things should be donated or bought or whatever. But I do know that they handled it like that, because there was a problem, that the court must not be seen to be partial to some people and not to other people, it must remain impartial as a court.

**FLC:** It's still like that today. In essence, we don't accept money from South Africans, but we do accept art.

**HS:** It's a very tricky thing.

**WB:** So there was a lot of talk and this work was done in this way, so that everybody would know that everything's above board, but I wasn't part of the negotiations. I made the work. They wanted the work, I made it, and that was the second one. The fourth one at Nirox was much later, after 2007, 2009 even. It was there for an exhibition. And the way they exhibited it was amongst trees in a veld outside, because you can show it outside. In the rain, in the sun, in the wind nothing happens to it. Then Nirox sent it to the Netherlands as part of an exhibition. It's all documented, don't you have the document?

**FLC:** Not the Nirox ones, but I'm sure I can find it easily.

**WB:** No no, there's like a little explanation where everything went.

**HS:** On Willem's website.

**FLC:** I know there is quite a lot on the website under *Prison Sentences*.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:25:49**

**WB:** Like the names of all the people in Boston. The Nirox ones went to Den Haag, and when the exhibition was over the South African works came back and it was back at Nirox under the trees. And then Benji [Liebmann] tried to sell it to Robben Island, if I remember correctly, but there was not enough money or something was wrong and he couldn't sell it. So eventually, I got the work back from Benji and then I sold it to the Smithsonian in Washington. That was number four. The Smithsonian built crates to send it to... What was that lady's name?

**HS:** Christine Kreamer? The Deputy Director of African Arts at the Smithsonian.

**WB:** Of course. They stayed with me here, and I had exhibitions at the Smithsonian of some of my work.

**HS:** In fact they adore him.

**WB:** So I went on letter tours at universities... So eventually they bought this work. They have number four and then a man from Paris by the name of Leridon commissioned the last one which is five. Frans Haarhoff made number four.

**FLC:** I wanted to check if number four is a full set, the one that was at Nirox?

**WB:** Ja, ja!

**HS:** There are wonderful images of it standing on the grass at Nirox on the website.

**WB:** One of the panels is cracked, but it is part of the granite. We didn't crack it by bumping it. It was in the granite. I wrote to them and they said "No, if the artist accepts the crack..." But you can't see it...

**HS:** It's amazingly fragile at the edges, granite like that. It's heavy and it cracks easily.

**WB:** Yeah, but this was a little crack in the middle. You have to almost use a magnifying glass if you want to see this.

**HS:** They all have little microchips that give us a heart attack every time.

**WB:** It is not a totally perfect material. Anyway, so that was fantastic, I have the works in the Smithsonian. And then, the last one... Frans Haarhoff's prices suddenly escalated and he asked a lot of money to make them, so I said to Martin my son we can make them ourselves. So we did. It was perfectly made. Better than any of the others I think. Well Danie who cuts it, he was out by less than a millimetre, the others were out by a little more. But the last lot's almost perfect. We now make them ourselves. My son and I and that's the one at Javett. The three pieces that were at Michael Stevenson

were an odd size. They're not the same size as yours. And Joburg Art Gallery bought the Mandela panel and we said that if anyone wants loose panels, they can have them but we'll set them on another edition of five.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:30:28**

**HS:** And they were all *Prison Hacks*, instead of *Prison Sentences*.

**WB:** You can buy a Mandela panel by itself, or another panel. The Mandela panel was two centimetres thick. The other two odd ones were Mr. Sisulu and Kathadra. They were sitting in my storeroom. When the parliament started shaking as a result of state capture with Zuma and some of the people being accused of stealing money, I was very unhappy. So Mr. Kathadra stood up against it. This was around 2014, 2015.

**HS:** He died shortly afterwards.

**WB:** He then spoke up against it and I respected that very much. Now one panel sells for a hundred thousand and something Rand. It's quite expensive to buy one. The Walter Sisulu one went on auction. You know what happened there? I tried to do something sensible with those three odd ones. I wanted to donate it to the Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden. Because I'm into botany. It's my stuff.

**FLC:** I grew up in the West Rand.

**WB:** And a lot of my work has to do with botany and studying plants. And I phoned and tried to talk to them. And they wouldn't even talk to me. I don't think they understood actually. I tried very hard. The Sisulu one on auction went for R400,000, they paid a fortune for it, and I thought "I'm trying to donate the bleddie thing!" And they won't accept it and Mark is furious. He knows them. And he's also a botanist, Mark Reid, at Everard Read Gallery. But it's too late now, Wilhelm came and saw the thing and I said just take the bleddie thing. He auctioned it and got a lot of money for it suddenly. I didn't want money, I wanted to donate it, and they didn't want to accept it. Now Mark is furious, but it's too late now. It's gone. Anyway, so there was one, the Mr Kathadra one. We phoned the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, the lady on the phone was very nice. And I said, I respect what he's done, and I want to make a donation of an artwork. So we went to them in Lenasia. And he was very taken. He gave us piles of books with signatures. Lots of photographs. He was like, this doesn't happen every day that somebody shows appreciation by giving such a weird thing. It was a bit of a surprise because we didn't know he was going to be there. And he spent a lot of time with us. We came home and not long after that, he died. Within a month or two. So that's your story for what happened to all of the panels. The Mandela panels, the five have been bought through galleries by different people all over the world, but the edition is finished. So that thing came to an end and David Krut probably is eating something, what do you eat your what out?

**FLC:** Eat your heart out.

**WB:** Is he doing that now? He should learn to, maybe by now they can do photographic etching.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:35:51**

**HS:** One of the Mandela panels is owned by Paul Harris and is at his gorgeous hotel there at the edge of Cape Town on the rocks. Ellerman House. Have you been to his gallery?

**FLC:** I haven't.

**HS:** So go there, because you will see a wonderful thing. The Mandela panel is there, and from behind you the rocks and the light reflects beautifully, and if you stand at a certain point then Robben Island is reflected in the granite.

**WB:** It's like a mirror, it is very shiny.

**HS:** It's quite phenomenal. Give yourself a treat next time by going to Ellerman House which is a treat anyways. It's sort of like a boutique hotel, but I think you can go and just have lunch. It's a beautiful thing to see and makes sense for your context.

**WB:** Calculating the number of days that everyone spent in prison... My *Bangboek* piece, I thought I might go to prison. Because I wouldn't wear a uniform and I wouldn't carry a rifle.

**HS:** He marched with a broom.

**WB:** I made some trouble. And in order to prepare for prison, I developed that *Bangboek* style of writing. I was gonna have my own spy writing and nobody would be able to read what I write. But it didn't happen. But the idea of prison, and of senseless prison, being put in prison for what you think and for what you stand for... I wanted to do this work from a sense of, I mean, I just had to do it. It was a thing that wanted to be done. It's not an artwork like "oh, it's pretty!" It's a conscious, conscience thing. Consciousness and conscience. But anyway, calculating these days was not easy. Because we had to verify the dates when they went in when they came out. It was made at the same time as another work which is now in the Reserve Bank. I must show it to you because they published a book...

**HS:** I'm sure you know it, it's a beautiful Reserve Bank publication from years ago. The fold-out is of Willem Boshoff.

**WB:** It was done by Rory Bester. We double checked every date. The date that was more difficult was Mr. Goldberg, because he came out earlier than the rest and he was angry about that. We had to make very sure, we phoned him up, we asked him and we got the dates right. To calculate 27 years of days is very difficult.

**FLC:** I saw on the website there's a document that shows the calculations.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:40:19**



**WB:** Yes, there is. For Mr. Mandela, we worked out the days, I can't remember how many, I get it wrong every time. 27 years, hey? It's madness. That's 27 years on a panel in days. Imagine somebody put you in jail just for one day, today.

**FLC:** Four neves, you haven't spoken about neves.

**HS:** Neves is extraordinary. That's what he wants to show you in that book.

**WB:** It was so infuriating to think of one day lost, and he lost 27 years and became president of a country. I thought, you know this doesn't sound real, it is a crazy story. But anyway, we got the dates right, but for Mr. Mandela, he was not allowed to receive correspondence. He was not allowed to receive news, he was kept unaware of what was happening – people sneaked stuff in to him. So, he did receive some letters but they were secret, nobody knew. So I made a work called *Secret letters*, showing every day as a crumpled up piece of paper, because they hid the letters as a crumpled up piece of paper in the crevices in the rocks on Robben Island, because they were carving rocks. We now work with the same sandstone that they worked with.

**HS:** Malmesbury Rock.

**WB:** I wanted to show what happened that he was unaware of. So Tickey the Clown died in that period, so one of the days is Tickey the Clown died. The Miss World, we had a Miss World in... He didn't know but it's, I must get the book. So sort of here and there, as he went into jail and as time goes on and on. All the things that he was kept from, some highlights. I opened up a three day period and stuck a piece of paper to show that in this slot of this whole time frame this happened. Some international thing happened, or somebody bombed something, let me get it for you. But they won't let us borrow that work, we would've had it at the Javett show.

**HS:** There were lots of things we weren't allowed to borrow.

**WB:** It's in the Reserve Bank and nobody can see this stuff.

**FLC:** Why don't they allow...?

**WB:** Because it's like money, it's like an investment and, it's in...

**FLC:** In a vault, in a bank, surrounded by *bokkies* [antelope].

**WB:** They must accumulate money.

**HS:** The other one not lent was *Tafelboek*, do you know it, an early work that folds in like a coffee table and folds out, and Mr. Schachat owns that and they said no. It is too fragile.

**FLC:** Too fragile, okay.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:44:01**

**HS:** They're saying it is too old, but so is the artist. It becomes tricky.

**WB:** You see it's this book by Rory Bester, who is the editor.

**HS:** And that's quite a while ago, hey? More than a decade.

**WB:** In 2007. It's this work [point to middle fold-out]. Now your Mandela panel will be these days. And if you look at the crumpled up pieces of paper. This is three days. And this is one day, there's a little hole into which the piece of paper is forced. All these bits of paper are forced into little holes. So they're secret. But every now and again, something shines through. On this day, more than 10,000 Soweto children joined in the Soweto uprising on the 16th of June. So there's three days for that. As the thing gets on, it gets a bit more violent. Barend Strydom on the 15th of November 1988, Barend Strydom massacred eight civilians and wounded 60. He's the white wolf. So that happened on those three days.

**HS:** I wonder if the Reserve Bank wouldn't lend it to you for a show?

**FLC:** Because we're at the Court?

**HS:** Ja, it's like government, you know?

**FLC:** It's a remarkable work.

**HS:** It is. And it really speaks to what you've got. Are you doing your recordings for your archive or for a publication?

**FLC:** First archives, then publications.

**HS:** Because I'm certainly going to let that speak to the *Prison Sentences* in our catalogue.

**WB:** So it's the same sort of thing that you have with one panel, which is the Mandela panel. The Mandela panel is the longest of all of them, because he stayed longer than anyone else. He stayed a few days longer than all the rest. In this panel [points to book] there are 10 of these things. And each panel has exactly 1000 holes drilled into this panel. If you add up the 10 panels there are 10,000 holes, and if you now work out Mr. Mandela's 9000 days that he was in prison, 9000 and something, then those days will take you to the last panel, but there will be an open space left over after the 9000 days that he spent in prison. Because there are 10,000 holes in this thing. To get information spread to exactly 10,000 to square it up, it is very difficult. You have to go back in time and look at what happened, but then you have to say we'll use these three, we'll use those three, and this will be this. It's like a nightmare of hard work this, to write down what happened. It's his timeline for what happened, while he was in prison and he was not aware of these things. Kept from him.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:49:21**

**FLC:** Did he ever see this work?

**WB:** I don't know. See the Reserve Bank is in charge of it. The work is imprisoned, as much as he was in prison. You can't read all the letters. I have it on my computer, the details of this thing. After a few days in jail such and such a thing happened. In the beginning, there were not so many bomb explosions in South Africa. There were more like "Jim Clark won the Formula One race at Kyalami," then we still had Kyalami as an international event. We don't have it anymore. But it happened somewhere in the beginning of his period. I've kept all the information that I used to create a timeline. So that you see "Oh, this is where Anneline Kriel became Miss World" and this is where this happened. Some rugby triumphs. Stupid things most of it, some of it is not so stupid. When it comes towards the end, there is lots of violence... uMkhonto we Sizwe and stuff like that. But he's also not allowed to know, his own organisation he's not allowed to see.

**FLC:** I also wanted to ask you about *Long Shadows*. You spoke quite extensively to *Prison Sentences*.

**WB:** The Long Shadow is a long story. A group of people who were part of the City Council's development programme got into the Constitutional Court and what happens there; the planning and the footprint of the awaiting trial prisoners and what happens to the old jail and other areas. So we had lots of meetings with them. They're not called the JDA, they're called some Blue, something.

**HS:** Something something Blue.

**WB:** Blue IQ.

**HS:** Yes, they were an independent company, but they worked with the JDA on a lot of museum-like and public projects, then they went bust, you know.

**WB:** With us, they launched something like five or six competitions. There were quite a few. There was a competition for the awaiting trial block. There was a competition for the, I don't think they've built it, for the gender commission. A whole lot of artists arrived on the site and sat down and we talked and listened to what they had in mind. This was the deadline, we had to make submissions. And you could make so many submissions, but not so many. I think it was two or three. And I think they kind of indicated that they would choose winning artists, and that works would be awarded. And nobody won.

**FLC:** They didn't like anything?

**WB:** At first, and then after some time, they only announced one winner. And it was me. And it was for the awaiting trial block. I submitted other artworks as well, but they didn't accept them. But a lot of people submitted, but nobody heard from them again. I think maybe their money dwindled. I don't know what happened. I went to their offices a few times and sometimes I went to offices opposite

public City Hall. There were ANC offices there. Artists Press was in the bus terminal shelter thing, they had a big place there. Then nothing happened. I won and nothing happened for a long time. We had made drawings on a piece of paper for the awaiting trial block. I was drawing little black and white drawings and they liked them. Andrew helped, Andrew Muller, we worked together. And eventually, I had to make the artwork. But the idea was my idea. And we thought to make something almost caricaturish, you could see figures in the dark. In the early morning or late in the afternoon, evening you could see figures. So if the sun comes up in the east, and it sets in the west, now in the geography of Joburg to the east, is the airport. Soweto is in the west. East, west orientation of the awaiting trial block. So we tried to position this on an east-west axis. Why are you asking me these things?! East-west axis, so that if the sun comes up in the east, there are these people, these poor sods, awaiting trial. They are shaking in their boots, they've done some stupid thing, they were caught with a piece of paper that has a song from the ANC or they've stolen something, God knows what. They were shaking because they were waiting for their court case to tell them what's going to happen to them. It is not a proper trialist waiting here. So they're standing there and the sun is to the east, casting their shadows into the block. If they're standing where the court is now. They're casting their shadows into the block and the shadows are long, because the sun is just coming up. And they wait the whole bloody day and towards the evening hardly any of them have vanished, but some of them are not there anymore because maybe they've been sent home. But their shadows are now long in the opposite direction. The sun is now in the west, and the sun is now setting, and they must come back or whatever. So the awaiting trial is where people are just sitting there, waiting and waiting and the sun comes up and your shadows are there, and the sun goes down and your shadows are there. It's really short and sweet this story of this caricaturish nightmare.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:58:17**

**FLC:** It's interesting: I noted the dates for *Long Shadows* which is 2007–2008, that's after the court was built. The court was built in 2004.

**WB:** Ja, that's right. That was what the Blue IQ people were trying to do. They hadn't made sense of the surroundings. The court was built, the front door went up while the squabble was going on. To make this thing somebody had to go and shake them up. I don't know if it was Albie Sachs that went to see himself what is happening to this thing, why is nothing happening, and have they allotted the prize money which they promised or what? Because I stay out of fights. I don't fight. But eventually they came up and the work happened. Frans Haarhoff used Belfast black. We gave him the profiles of these figures, these black shadows. And he helped us to cut them up and set them in the ground. And he...

**FLC:** There's nice pictures of that on your website.

**WB:** Ja, he was sitting there one day. They had lunch. He has people from the farm that work with him, but he won't allow anyone to... He wants to cut himself. He's very particular. He's a rugged and nuggety little guy. And some English visitor came and saw him having lunch there lying on his back. And he was saying to his friends, you see, this is white South Africa, they're doing nothing, and he's forcing these poor Black people to work here.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:00:21**

**HS:** O jirre!

**WB:** And Frans lost it.

**HS:** He would.

**WB:** He was very angry and he confronted the guy.

**HS:** And then?

**WB:** He called the Black guys and asked them "who cut this?"

**HS:** *Daai ou* [that guy].

**WB:** The guy had to apologise. He was furious. So there's lots of little things that happen along the way. But the work was more, I think, because, you know, if you get given a space where there's a rise in the landscape or the building has a special place, and you have to build something... They gave me the floor. And I've been given the floor a few times in my life.

**HS:** He's done very nice things on the floor like at Pretoria Girls High, if you're ever there you must walk into their theatre.

**WB:** So I often get given a space where I have to ask myself how do I do something with a space like that? So I thought, treat it in a philosophical way, I think it's very conceptual in a way the sun sets and rises. So eventually, it sort of turns into something which doesn't take up any space, because sculptures take up a lot of space. But it speaks. It has a message. And the same thing happened at Nedbank. Their new building. All the artists were given information and there were talks, and they started making proposals. And they called me right at the end. And they said there's one space left and it's the floor. Everybody else was given a wall, a nice space where you can build a sculpture.

**HS:** What is the title again of that work? So I can share it with Francois.

**WB:** It's called *Windfall*. You can find it on Google. So I got the floor, and I thought a bit about the floor, it is where the leaves fall. And so I made a work with the wind and with money, that fall from the sky. And I was the first one finished. The other guy was still working and I was done. It doesn't take up any space. And I'm very proud of it.

**FLC:** I'm very glad *Long Shadows* is there. It's a remarkable work. It's where we start all our tours. So the viewer can stand there and imagine that it's their own shadows and become one with them.

**WB:** Yes, the one stands like that and the other like that. We thought of that, the caricature that you feel for the person who's standing there. It's not funny, but it is finished, the past is the past and one must now deal with it. You'll get people standing there. We thought they would pose.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:04:03**

**FLC:** We've gotten through quite a lot of questions, so I'm skipping the ones that you've already spoken to.

**WB:** Anything else? I don't know, I can try.

**FLC:** You mentioned Wilma Cruise's *Right to Life* that was installed later on next to *Prison Sentences* and it also quotes Mandela's "I'm prepared to die" speech. So I was interested to hear your thoughts on the value you think that can be drawn from having the speech so closely placed to *Prison Sentences*. And I also thought about your *Neves* artwork, and that that speech is quite significant to you and I wanted to hear why it's so significant to you?

**WB:** I don't know. It was a long time ago.

**HS:** Good question.

**FLC:** I read, while doing research, that he delivered the ending of the speech twice.

**WB:** Well, I wasn't involved with Wilma's work or the placing of it. My work was already up. One day when I got there her work was up. It becomes more of an exhibition of different people. It's fine.

**FLC:** It's interesting that the courtyard has now kind of become a Rivonia Treason Trial space.

**WB:** It seems appropriate I guess, in retrospect. I don't think there are any negative thoughts about it, certainly not. I think when one reads the prepare to die thing... You see, the work I'm doing is mostly no words, you don't see words. It's silenced. There should be words, there should be a lot of words. But for 27 years, you've lost your voice. And here is the reason why you've said that, because you said that you're now going to pay. You will never say anything again.

**FLC:** That's a great reading of it. Because you said that, this happened. We haven't pointed out that in that way.

**WB:** If Mr. Mandela was given a second chance, would he say the same thing again? And if he knew that for 27 years, he would be silenced? He'll say it again. That's what makes it grey.

**FLC:** He did say it again, after he was released in Cape Town.

**WB:** Yeah, but I mean he wasn't going to be jailed a second time for it. He was jailed for it. That what he said caused all of this.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:07:27**

**HS:** There's an English literature professor Carol Clarkson, a South African, who is at the University of Amsterdam. She's a great fan of Willem's. And she wrote in a book that Mandela took the same words, he said them before he went to prison to a certain audience, and in that case sort of delegatised the courtroom and changed it to his audience.

**FLC:** Yes.

**HS:** And then after 27 years on the Cape Parade in Cape Town he used the same words, he quoted himself, but she admired the way that he spoke them to a new audience. So your point about the same words, and saying them and not saying them, if you have real leadership, I think you can take the same words and you can read your audience. So those words keep on speaking. That's real leadership.

**WB:** I mean, we grew up in the time that he was in prison. From '63, I was in primary school, a little boy.

**HS:** It was my first year of school.

**WB:** At that time I had no thoughts of my own, just running around and kicking a ball. I was taught what to believe. I wasn't allowed to believe what was right or wrong. I was taught to believe that he was evil and an evil man, and that he was the world's most evil man. A terrorist. We believed what we were taught as little kids and grew up with this being instilled in us. And I switched, turned around in 1972-ish. I switched and didn't believe it anymore. And then, even though I had changed my mind, my parents didn't change their mind. The people I went to school with didn't change their mind. In fact, some of them are still believing that he's the terrorist. We were thoroughly schooled as to what's right and wrong and this was a bad man. But I went through an experience of change and became a street preacher even then. '73 I was still preaching on the street as a student, and then I left, went back to finish my studies. And so as time went on, I became more resolute and even refused to then do military service and got into trouble. So it didn't come easy because if I were English speaking from the Methodist church, the Anglican church, the Catholic church there would be some refuge for me in England or in other countries. People there would carry me and look after my interests, but I was Dutch Reformed. I'm Afrikaans. So, if I said that I refused to do this because of my conscience and so on. People said, "Ja, maar's jy van die NG Kerk, jy praat kak!" [Yes, but you're from the Dutch Reformed (NG) Church, you're talking shit!]. "You just don't want to do military service because you're lazy or whatever." Nobody believed me. The Afrikaans people didn't think it was possible for an Afrikaans person to just switch, to turn. And the English people, they had their system, and I wasn't English, so I didn't belong to the End Conscription Campaign. I couldn't run off to another country and hide, and become an exile. I was stuck with this thing. That was the story of *Bangboek*, because I was afraid, the book that is afraid. That was at the end of the 1970s. And slowly 1987, the Berlin Wall fell. I think slowly the world politics shifted. And our politics didn't shift until fairly much towards the end of the 1980s. We had this Groot Krokodil [Big Crocodile] and his regime that wouldn't move. Mr De Klerk confronted and, a *staatsgreep* [coup] is actually what he did, he did a *coup d'etat*. He changed, he overthrew the government of PW Botha. And then they had a referendum. They asked all the white

people, sorry, they only asked the white people whether they think this is a good idea. Everybody had to vote whether they thought that we should change, a complete change. And the majority agreed that we should change.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:13:39**

**HS:** Willem, as a man of words, what is your relationship with South African law, especially the South African Constitution?

**WB:** Well, I was married to Albie Sachs' researcher. My wife did all the research for his input into the Constitution. And I saw the Constitution being written in the house here, because she brought home all these issues and they had to word difficult things. So I was there when it was written in that sense. I mean, I didn't go into the Constitutional Court or anything, but my wife actually had to proofread every word that he wrote or that he said, and a lot of that stuff was milled over at the breakfast table. I'm aware of exactly what's written in the Constitution.

**FLC:** It's quite remarkable seeing the Constitution being written over breakfast.

**WB:** There were nine judges, and they didn't agree on everything. And later on, after the Constitution was written, difficult things started happening, like the court case with dagga. I think they were wrong. They decided it was still a bad thing. But now, I think it's not such a bad thing anymore. So we were cross about that. We wanted dagga to be legalised. But they said no. So case after case is different, but that's testing the court, but the court seems to have come through a lot of different... One doesn't expect... And then you have to put on trial politicians, people who govern the country and tell them that they are wrong. And they must go back and rewrite their laws, the people in Parliament. And so I see a lot of that happening.

**HS:** So you saw in the [Javett-UP] exhibition lots of references to what democracy is: *Psephos* downstairs and *OSTRAKON* upstairs, going back to what Greek democracy is. I wish I could for very bright young people like you take you back to the 1990s just for a few days, it really was a time of change.

**FLC:** Back to our birth.

**HS:** It was a much more hopeful time for our generation than now. And it was an extraordinary time. That's where this work comes from.

**WB:** CONTRALESA. Next to the airport there's that place where they had all these meetings. And they had to iron out, before there was even a Constitutional Court, how this new country would look with Mr. Mandela there and the ANC that's sitting there, and the Nationalist Party was still there. The Nationalist Party that we grew up with, that taught us everything, after some time in the middle of the 90s they disbanded and vanished. And some of them walked over to the ANC.



**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:18:03**

**FLC:** Adding to Constitution, when I saw your exhibition at Javett-UP I saw *Tree of Knowledge* and all the wood that you use in your work. There's a strong reference to trees and use of wood and I also read that the word "druid" is like a knower of oak, of trees. The Constitution itself is depicted as a tree, in the court's logo and in the court building's architecture. The idea of justice under a tree is what the architecture is based on, the Constitution being a tree. So I wanted to ask you about if you have a particular view of seeing our Constitution as a tree under which we all live.

**WB:** Of course I do, but I don't know what to say. Trees. There are several of these archetypal trees. The Norse people have theirs. It's called Yggdrasil.

**HS:** If you've watched Lord of the Rings you would know.

**WB:** Seriously, there's a tree called Yggdrasil. And I read all this stuff. And the Jewish people have their three, the archetypal tree of life in the Jewish Kabbalah.

**FLC:** Buddha became enlightened under a Banyan tree.

**HS:** So you're talking to a druid who is a man of trees.

**FLC:** Yes. I recently read *The Overstory* which won the Pulitzer Prize, which is all about trees, so I'm quite fascinated.

**HS:** Well, trees are everything here.

**WB:** Well, we talked to Mark Reid the other day,

**HS:** He's into fungus!

**WB:** But the funny thing is, plants and animals, our DNA is very, very close to the DNA of any plant. Your DNA is very close to that of a cabbage.

**HS:** Congratulations.

**WB:** But not only a cabbage, but all the plants, there's not much of a difference. Which tells me that somehow we... our constituency, our historical constituency is to do with plants and animals, somehow we can't unlock yet how exactly we became more animal than plant. But it's very important that eventually this will be unlocked. And the thing of the three, a tree has branches, a tree has roots. Almost all trees, with very few exceptions, the branches start off by being grafted into the main stem, and then they are at first big and then smaller ones branch out of that. And then smaller ones branch out of that, and they become smaller and smaller, until eventually they terminate. That is called ramification. Ramify, trees ramify, it starts with a centre and it flares out. Now, your system of blood vessels that flow through your heart does not ramify. And sometimes trees have this in them as well.

But very seldom, your fig trees might, you'll understand what I mean. In Greek, there is a word for the mouth. It's the word "stoma". If you look at rivers, or arteries or streets, they don't necessarily get smaller and smaller like a tree. The one goes and mouths into the other one. And that one might mouth into another one, and at the T junction it might mouth out into two directions. And that process of intermouthing is called anastomosis, with the word "stoma" being in there. Now that networking of the tree is not a network of interbranching, but your body is a network of interbranching. The blood that goes out comes back, it flows back into your heart, nothing gets stuck somewhere in a remote corner. It's very interesting, these systems of construction. The tree architecture and arterial architecture of the body is interesting. So, I don't know, I write dictionaries, and anastomosis – I made a sculpture of things that flow into one another rather than end out somewhere. So *The Blind Alphabet* teaches me to interpret structures and configurations in a way that eventually becomes philosophical, because I have to write to the blind people that they might make some sense of it. The rivers of the world, for the most of it, they flow into the sea, and they start somewhere, so that's a kind of reverse tree almost. Reverse branching. With trees, if you take sensitive recording equipment, and you put it on the big stem of the tree you can hear the sap going up into the outer branch, but the sap goes one way, it doesn't return like your blood would that goes through your heart. It goes to the far reaches and it helps with photosynthesis and with growth of the tree. You can hear it coming from the roots, going to all the parts all the time. The tree is alive, very much, it's not blood it's sap within the sapwood, and it eventually becomes the growth of the tree.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:26:36**

**HS:** And in the forest trees give one another what they need.

**WB:** The hard core of the tree from which we make ships, from which we make doors and tables. This hard stuff is called xylem. It's a deposit. Every year the tree deposits seasonally a hard and soft bit of ring, an annual ring. It's called an annulation. The annular rings of a tree...

**HS:** 'n *Jaarring* [an annual ring].

**WB:** ... can tell you how old that tree is if you are careful in calculating, and the science of dendrochronology in taking bits of wood on a ship, an old ship or a house pillar, they have to be thick and you have to be able to drill. You have a cord drill. You drill into the tree and out comes a little sausage, a very straight little bit of wood. And in that you can see exactly which year there was a drought, which year there was a lot of rain and you can take those differences and match them to the record. The record they've got, they've got masses of records of trees that had been studied and proven that that was a year of drought, that was a year of fire, this and that. They can tell you exactly to a day how old a piece of wood is.

**HS:** Like archeology.

**FLC:** I think the word is "stratigraphy".

**HS:** Well the archaeologists use that word. If you go to Origins Centre you've got layers of sand, it's also a timeline.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:29:03**

**WB:** I read a lot and I write a lot about these things and I check them out a lot. I studied trees, I can tell you the name of all the trees in Kensington if we go walking around and every now and again if we find something that I don't know the name of I go crazy. Because then I must find out what it is. And then I go to the books and I go 'till I find out. I'm very the same with words. Some people when they read a book, they come to a funny word like "anastomosis"; "*ag nee God!* [oh no God!] *can't he use a nice word?*" Like what is a nice word for anastomosis? I don't know. But they will close the book and they get angry with these horrible words that people use. Me not.

**FLC:** You open another book. I'm gonna have to transcribe this so I'll have to properly get into your words.

**WB:** It's like finding a rare tree that I don't know the name of. I don't know the name of that thing and I must go and look. Then I go and search and I go mad, 'till I find out what it means. So unfortunately, I think I'm a little different. I don't close the book when I see a funny word, I'll buy all the books in the world and I want to know. Something happened to me somewhere. I'm curious and I'm hunting. With you sitting there, I am offloading a few strange words on you. I actually made sculptures of all the things I'm telling you. I've tried to interpret them in words or in some way, in systems. I try to make sense in a way... If you can find a graphic system. Like when it branches out or when it interbranches, networking, maybe you can make a graphic or construct a system that helps people to understand what they're doing. How the things they believe in or how the things other people believe in might help them, it's all to do with making visual what we think.

**FLC:** Thank you. That's nice to bring back to the Constitution. You mentioned *The Blind Alphabet* and I wanted to ask you about that. The Constitutional Court building incorporates some braille elements: the big wooden doors as you walk in, it was Andrew Verster and Andries Botha and they worked with a group of carvers. They incorporated some braille commemorating the opening of the court. And the typeface that was developed specifically for the court, designed by Garth Walker, was also based in part on the handwriting of Justice Zak Yacoob who went blind at a very young age. I wanted to refer that back to *The Blind Alphabet* and ask you, what steps do you think public art collections should take to ensure greater accessibility and inclusivity?

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:32:14**

**WB:** Well, the inequality of political standing, which we call disenfranchisement, disenfranchised Black people, to rob them of power. That's not unique to Black people only. There are many different disadvantage types. I'm not saying that Black people should not address the issue of disenfranchisement of Black people. It should be addressed, it should seriously be addressed, and something should be done. It is still standing, it hasn't been addressed enough. But for blind people, the same thing applies. They have a raw deal and they battle. It's the same with deaf people, there are

a lot of these categories of why one is at a loss. Poor people and rich people, poor people are battling because the rich people have all the money, they think. So these things are hard to understand sometimes. And *The Blind Alphabet*, I think, is some small way in which in an art gallery and exhibition, one can find a way to put blind people first and to put sighted people at a disadvantage, so that blind people will have to rescue them. That's the short of it. Because if you don't have blind people with *The Blind Alphabet*, then the explanations of the artworks are lost. And it's some clever little scheme. I thought of a scheme in which the disadvantaged languages of the country could be made superior and the advantaged English language, which is kind of the big thing, becomes dependent on people speaking the other languages, which are disadvantaged. So I wrote a dictionary. I need 10,000 words that are English words, but that the English people find difficult to understand. That even an English professor might not understand. And then I want to get people from other language groups to come to their rescue. How it works is like this: I would build a wall of a thousand bricks, I'm still gonna make this work before I'm dead one day. So it's got two sides and it's got two ends, this freestanding wall, you can walk around it, divided into parts. I will still have to think this thing through many times, but the one wall is a Xhosa wall, the one is a Zulu wall, the one is a Venda wall, and so on. I have to rethink, everything I do has always got a catch. But let's just take the short route. Pedi, Sotho, Sestwana, you have these walls, every wall is a language wall. It belongs to one of the language groups, and everything written on that is in that language. Now, it's an English dictionary where the explanations are in disenfranchised languages. So I've listed this dictionary of difficult English, which the English intelligentsia it must flummox, flaw them. For example, if you say to an Englishman, let me just think of a couple of examples. You use words like "onolatry", "are you onolatrous?" you might ask somebody in trying to make fun of somebody. This word was in use actually. It's like idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of idols. What is onolatry? It is the worship of donkeys. The word is in the Oxford English Dictionary. The Templars and the Crusaders used the words on the Arabs, because they wanted to belittle the Arab faith. And they said these are people who worship donkeys, they are onolatrous. So the word will be there, onolatry, and then the explanation will maybe be in Zulu. So the lady that sells tomatoes and potatoes, she can read, most of them can, and she can speak English. But she can also read Zulu if that is her language. So she would be able to... any English professor, any English person who walks past the wall and ask her what is onolatry, she can read the explanation in Zulu for them, and explain to them it's the worship of donkeys. She can get them to laugh at English, because English is the super language. So I want to put that which is first, last and that which is last, first. This is a very sort of strange principle. So there is a word...

**HS:** And that leads into your last question on that page.

**FLC:** Yes.

**WB:** Cataglottism. Somebody published a book with that.

**HS:** I know where you're heading. But you lead that into Afrikaans, which is a good question that you can ask.

**FLC:** Can I read my question to you Willem?

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:39:45**

**HS:** There is one very good question. I was just reading that one. Let him read it to you. It quotes an essay written on him. You're gonna like it.

**FLC:** In your work, you use language as an instrument of both cultural identity and cultural subversion. In your artistic activism you have also recognised the change in the status of languages and language groups in South Africa. You particularly used your *huistaal* [home language] Afrikaans to illustrate this. What do you think is the role, status...

**WB:** We'll here I'm using not Afrikaans, but Zulu and anything. I do anything to anyone for any reason. I'm not an Afrikaans...

**HS:** apologist.

**WB:** I'm not an Afrikaans apologist, that's a good word. I'm just having fun with languages. It's disenfranchisement, and Afrikaans is very often the *fokken* [fucking] bully. It doesn't have an innocent role in this.

**FLC:** I specifically wanted to ask what you think the role, status and future of indigenous languages in South Africa are.

**WB:** Is Afrikaans an indigenous language? I think they're going to suffer. They are going to dwindle, because the lingua franca which is English is going to influence the way they are spoken. And their constituency, the way they are put together as languages... You can already see it, when people are together they speak more fanagalo than pure Zulu. Or this Afrikaans people when they're together they speak more Afrikaans fanagalo. They say, "*Ag, jy weet, it's so so lekker*". Half the words are English already. People like to mix to just be acceptable. So it's gonna suffer. But suffering is not bad, *nè*. What is the role of languages while they're still around? You know that people must try to be understandable to each other. If you can shut up and create understanding then please shut up. Whatever makes people understand something is what goes. Whether it is in Russian, or whether it is in Zulu.

**FLC:** A lot of people in the country speak Afrikaans, I don't know whether it will die.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:42:24**

**WB:** No, but inside the group you get levels of sophistication. I mean, if you can see this level of sophistication. Chiasmus is the reverse order of constructing sentences. In Black languages there are far more sophisticated forms of this than in English or even Afrikaans. They use it more often and I've done some research on it, and used it in an artwork. What it means is this. Like I might say to you, "quitters never win and winners never quit". Now that's reverse order, it's the same sentence turned backwards. Quitters never win. Winners never quit. Two sentences, one reversed. Black languages have a lot of that where you reverse the thing you are saying. And we don't know it as white people.

But I have examples of the Black languages that use it from Lionel Posthumus who teaches Zulu at... I don't think he teaches anymore. But the level of sophistication of this thing, but in other things as well. So you can say: "you may allow a fool to kiss you. But you may not allow a kiss to fool you." They have a lot of this, doing this, and it comes natural. It's like singing. Their singing is more natural than ours which is by book and a piece of paper, their singing is a flow of things. So I'm not an expert, but I do know this. If left to themselves, within themselves, their own devices, they're a beautiful bunch of languages. We have wonderful languages, and the flow and the interaction within the group. You could never get close to it. It is wonderful. They understand each other perfectly, but bring a foreigner into the group where you have to prove some stuff especially, things start going a bit haywire. And then they try and speak English instead of their own language. And, I mean, if you're in court, in the Constitutional Court, there's a guy there. He's now caught. He's a Zulu man. There in town, there was this guy snatching bags. And he ran off with a bag and this big, strong Zulu man ran after him, he dived into him and put him down on the ground, and he grabbed the bag from him. And he held him for a second waiting for the police. And then the *skelm* [crook] jumped up and ran off. And before he could catch him, the police were there. And he's standing there with a bag in his hand, the culprit has run off, and they catch him and put him in jail, and he goes to the Constitutional Court or he goes to any court. And he has to stand up there, now he wants to impress everyone – he is innocent, he knows. But he speaks English, not Zulu. It looks guilty before he starts speaking. He looks as if he's guilty, because he's speaking a funny English, it falls flat. He doesn't have legal representation, and he's trying to represent himself. And he's trying to do so with a kind of... If he knows English very well, he'll be fine. But it's usually the case that he's fetching for words. And they're going to find him guilty, because there is no other evidence, they caught him red-handed. You must speak your language, if you can, but because the judge then has to get somebody to understand you. If they don't understand you, you've had it. But in your own group that's where everyone understands you perfectly. Love is there, that's where love is.

**HS:** I spoke to a storyteller once, a professional storyteller whose job was being a translator in court. My dad was a judge so I know how important the translator was. And he told the story of a man who was being accused. In his defence, he said something had happened to his wife. He said, "My wife shared the blanket." So the translator understood that was meant metaphorically, she shared the blanket with another man. But the translator told me in that court session, that truth didn't come across. So the truth gets lost. And if you try and link intellectual property laws with indigenous knowledge laws it's a complete disaster, you guys have a big problem. The court has a huge problem.

**WB:** The court has a nice diverse group of different people.

**HS:** And it embraces diversity.

**WB:** I think it's doing a lot to allow understanding. The key word is understanding. In the past, where there were any two languages, it was a disaster. The English people and the Afrikaans people.

**FLC:** Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng in 2015 declared that English is now the only language of record in courts. So you can still give your testimony in a different language, but it's not written down in any other language.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:48:49**

**WB:** It can't be right. One should fight that.

**HS:** It's going to get lost.

**WB:** But you know, it's very expensive.

**FLC:** It is.

**WB:** In the long run, languages are going to suffer, they're going to submit, they're going to change. And some of them are going to vanish.

**FLC:** And what effect will that have on the world, if we're mostly speaking Mandarin and English?

**WB:** It happens all over the world, ja. And we are only, you and I are only here for maybe less than a hundred years if we're lucky. If we're very lucky. We're talking about a few thousand years from now, what's going to be left. It's not for me to say like a prophet of the future to say what's going to happen to languages. People are going to do what they want. And Afrikaans children are beginning to speak. Afrikaans that's very different to the Afrikaans that we are taught in school. They mix, and they want to be accepted. They want to be accepted. Peer pressure. English people, they *gooi die taal* [direct translation: throw the language], hey.

**HS:** I think your question about the future of Afrikaans should be plural, it's not a singular Afrikaans but many different versions of it.

**FLC:** Yes.

**WB:** Luckily, I'm not in charge of anything.

**HS:** That's the thing, it's becoming a majority plurality. They say you can't gossip in isiNdebele about anybody because there's at least two Afrikaans words in that sentence. So it's a nice question, but it's an open question.

**FLC:** We say "askies" a lot in the office, and not necessarily even me. *Askies, nè* [sorry, hey].

**HS:** I think what's really interesting about Willem in terms of language in all your questions, he came from Vanderbijlpark and he grew up with one language, Afrikaans. And then he encountered English and he took it on, and he mastered it, and he is cleverer than most others. So you can say he comes from the vantage point of a minority language, if you set aside the politics for now, he took that on and look where he's got. He's an authority on language, in that sense.

**WB:** I can't read Zulu or Xhosa. But I can decipher German.



**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:52:48**

**HS:** No simple answer, but you probably chose the right guy to ask those questions to.

**FLC:** Just a big ball of grappling. Willem, we're getting to the end. There's a question that we ask all our artists in all our interviews.

**WB:** The answer is no [laughs].

**FLC:** Seeing as it really touches on our collection, which explores the intersection of art and justice. How do you see art as being connected to justice, or human rights in South Africa, or more universally? And I added a question "What does resistance art look like in the year 2021?" And I think they both speak to each other.

**HS:** That's a minefield.

**WB:** I think there are some difficult answers. The one is that some artists, especially academic artists, see injustices as a way to propel their career. It sounds funny. When they discover an injustice, "Thank God I have discovered this injustice! Now I can finish my doctorate. And it will look good in my doctorate." And I think that is a despicable way of thinking about an injustice, that you are glad to discover an injustice because it will further your career or what you're going to say in your doctorate and people are doing that. Shit, there's another injustice. Now I can make an artwork of it. And people are going to buy it, because justice sells. Not a good idea to think of it like that, but it's happening a lot. I sometimes feel am I guilty of that? Have I done all of these things for myself? But then I think I have gone through a process of being subjected to fairly similar sort of injustices even, I was an anomaly in the Afrikaans community and it's been tough for me. That's not necessarily the right reason or the wrong reason. But I feel I should do what I'm doing, or have done. I should have done it. If nobody else did it... I feel I did the right thing. In many cases, I think injustice is a reason for people to further their career. And that's for politicians. They see it as a platform from which they can launch their perceptions. I don't know if that's a good thing. All over the world there's such a thing as protest art as well. A lot of people, a lot of artists get punished for that, they get jailed for it. Maybe some artists think that police action, when you can spark it off, it's a bonus because then people believe you more easily. Now that you've created this. I'm not a sensationalist. You see the nature of the work is very quiet. It's not screaming abuse at anyone. I'm a pacifist, I'm not an activist or re-activist. I'm just quietly doing what I'm believing. It sometimes costs me, I don't want or I don't need money from it. I just do it. And it can sometimes hurt. And it can sometimes take a very, very long time to make. It requires patience.

**FLC:** The detail is incredible, of that *Blue* artwork. Wow.

**HS:** Do you like it? I've got film footage of it being made, coming up!

**FLC:** *Al daai kartonboksies wat jy so gaan knip het* [all those carton boxes that you snipped up].



**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:58:02**

**HS:** *Knip, knip, knip* [snip, snip, snip]. He speaks about it nicely. There'll be a film online, too.

**FLC:** I'm looking forward to it. I've got a few questions just about conservation, because it's a big part of what we do. So I've got a question here: "Are you mindful of conservation when making art to ensure its longevity for posterity?" And then it goes over into what do you suggest we do to take care of the artworks we have? Like the *Long Shadows*, they've been chipped, some of the pieces are missing, there's cracks. What should we do and know? If you're not here anymore, how can we take care of the work?

**WB:** I think it's part of the work in that case. I mean, not always. If people walk on something, there's going to be wear and tear. That's part of the work, I think one should just let it go. It's like a beautiful mosaic floor in a church. And after a few hundred years, it starts wearing away. There's not much you can do. In fact, if you replace the mosaic tiles with new tiles, it'll look terrible. So just let it go. It's part of life. But then, when you make a work, as much as you can, I think you've got to try and use the best materials that will last the longest and things go wrong. But if it is dependent on me, they won't, but they do. We are human, the best artists in the world have over a long period have things happen to their works, and the works fade. Paintings fade. The Sistine Chapel used to be brightly coloured, then it faded and faded to become very beautiful and soft. They cleaned it up and it's back to its garish bright and nobody likes it anymore. I do the best I can. I think very few artists are ever sued if their work fails the test of a short period of time. He made a sculpture and it fell off its base and it broke its head. Maybe they can ask you to remake it or give the money back. It hasn't happened to me yet. I think the things I make are relatively sturdy. There is a built-in obsolescent thing in everything in life. At some point in time, things will give. I don't know what, it might be the bolts, it might be the nails, things fall off the wall for me sometimes. I will try and fix those things that are broken. And one day when I'm dead it's somebody else's problem. A conservator: people paint with, I've used dung in my paintings. I mean, chicken shit and sheep manure and stuff. And people hang them in their lounges. Stinky stuff, but they're not really stinky, but not really nice smelling either. Chicken manure doesn't really smell. And they probably will develop worms. I don't know. I've painted with bubblegum, and they've lost colour. In 1974, or something, I made a bubblegum painting, a big one. Now, severely recently, there was some American at this revolutionary thing, he made a bubblegum painting. It's going to fade. I have used flower petals in paintings to paint as if they are paint. They faded, they become brown over time. They last for long, but they do fade. And if you understand that they will fade and you make them knowing that they will fade, because they get quite beautiful if they fade as well. They have a different sense of beauty. Maybe that can be part of your process. But if you are negligent, and it can be proven, you should give the money back. But nobody's trying to be negligent, artists usually try to be honest and fair. I'm very hard on myself, I spend a lot of time making stuff. And if I'm not happy that it doesn't meet certain criteria of longevity or some standards that I set, then I will probably make them again or destroy them. I'm hard on myself. I'm looking first at myself in my life. If it doesn't pass my test of whether it's good or bad, it's in trouble. I will not allow myself to make shit. And if it's deviating in any way from being the best I've ever done, or the best I can do, I'm in trouble. I will not allow it to go out. I make the work for myself in the first instance, and I have to like what I do. Before I will pass it on to some other other people

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 02:04:35**

**FLC:** It shows.

**HS:** It shows and I think also if people want to enforce some sort of agenda with Willem's work it doesn't work, because he's not doing it to enforce any agenda on anybody. So asking him what protest art is a very interesting question. He makes it because he has to.

**WB:** I think you must let it go, but test it from time to time. I trust Johan with the bolts and the drilling, but make sure it won't fall off within the next 40 years or so and you'll be fine. If it rains there and it brings up the dust, just clean it.

**HS:** And never polish, just wiping clean?

**WB:** If you use polish on sandblasted granite, if you take a wet cloth and you wipe it across, or if you just take a hosepipe and hose them down, you won't see the text. Because granite is a kind of liquid, and it's black. If you wet it, everything is black and it's liquid, the text will vanish. But as the sun comes out, and the text dries out, you will read it again. It's the nature of all gravestones. You can't read them in the wet, you can only read them in the dry. So don't use polish on them, if you do you can't read them.

**FLC:** How do you feel about having your works in the Constitutional Court Art Collection and what does the collection represent to you?

**WB:** The collection is a bit of a hodgepodge. I've seen what is there, there are things... Is it an honour to be there? I mean, I sort of sneaked into the collection. right at the beginning, when the building was still being finished. It was a great thing at the time. I mean, the Constitutional Court was a dream come true for me in my political aspirations. I don't have a political career, but I like to see certain things happen in the country. And that I think was a good thing. And I felt good being part of that. But there are some other things in there that just, people donated a lot of stuff. And you have a big problem, because I think eventually you have to edit, you have to leave things off. You can't put everything on. And not everything is, maybe you can take me off for a little while and give some other people a chance as well. But editing is going to save your collection. If you put everything you've got... This American person who comes there: have you seen all the shit at the Constitutional Court? You must edit. Take the shit and put it into the storeroom. You don't have to throw them away, people donate them. And they might still become worth something one day, but I would be ruthless in what I show where in which passage and how. It can backfire if you have a lot of stuff donated. The big galleries all have a committee and if you donate your work to a big gallery, just because you want to be part of the collection, it goes through screening and they might send it back and say sorry, we had a meeting and the committee feels that it's best to return your work.

**FLC:** Our committee is also quite considerate of what gets allowed in. And we do keep work in storage. But I think at some point, we're gonna have to look at capacity. And I think it's also important, because the art collection kind of gives a face to the Constitution and to our constitutional

dispensation. It must grow and it must stay relevant. It can't be that 1990s collection forever, but it also isn't.

**TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 02:09:31**

**HS:** So tell me, considering that all your works were donated, once your store rooms are full, what happens to them then? If you feel there are works that are not relevant anymore?

**FLC:** It's not full yet.

**WB:** They have a lot of space.

**HS:** There's a work there that I think is probably in your storeroom. A little glasswork by Shirley Cloete.

**FLC:** It broke. The one that was in the courtyard, *Hands of peace over Africa*. It started to go brittle and the glass started falling and they were worried that the whole thing was going to fall out, so they took it down.

**HS:** So she died about seven years ago. And her family wanted me to do a little book about her. So you can have that, if you ever wanted. But if the work is broken then I think that's probably one that's now on its way out?

**FLC:** It's in storage, and we haven't looked at fixing it, because I think it needs quite intensive restoration.

**HS:** It also comes from the 70s in a very different way to Willem's work from the 70s. If you ever want one, I've got lots of copies of that, our *Boereoorlog-geskiedenis en alles* [our Boer war/South African war history and everything]. Her father was the Cullinan of the Cullinan diamond, he was her grandfather. I'll give you one of those.

**FLC:** Thank you, it would be great for our library. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**WB:** Oh that was the last question! I can just say thanks for coming, maybe. And if I, if I said something funny, you can hold, something, against me.

**HS:** If I said you had a beautiful body you can hold it against me.

**WB:** No, man! Evidence against me, you can hold whatever I said in evidence against me. I don't care. A lot of people say a lot of things, all I care about, it's not what people say, but about making good stuff. If you make your work for public opinion, if what you make has to please a certain crowd, or a certain way of thinking, you've lost it. You've got to stick to what you believe in, I think. You've got to have some very definite parameters, and you've got to stick to your guns. If people go for you, let them. If they want to cut your throat, let them, that's fine. And never resent criticism. If people say

horrible things about you, let them. They must be free to say whatever the hell they like. You don't have to listen to it, but let them, and don't get cross with what they say about you, because they will say bad things. At some point, somebody's going to let loose – let them. That's what I think. And if they say good things about you, don't take them too seriously, either. Be very careful of the good things. Watch them with a very, some kind of a discerning eye. Take note and say thank you very much. And then go and drink some wine.

**FLC:** Thanks so much for your time. It's been lovely spending time with you on your lovely porch.

**END OF AUDIO RECORDING: 02:16:10**