

Phoebe Heunis

By Pierre Volschenk (M.A. Fine Art)

WHEN we look upon the history of art no longer as a mere history of artistic ability, but as a history of artistic will, it gains significance in the story of mankind past and present. Artistic ability would mean absolutely nothing if it were not for that very important decisive quality—artistic volition.

Phoebe Heunis is not only a gifted artist, she is also a person charged with a desire to work. It is this perseverance which has made Phoebe Heunis what she is and a significant name in art circles and with art lovers.

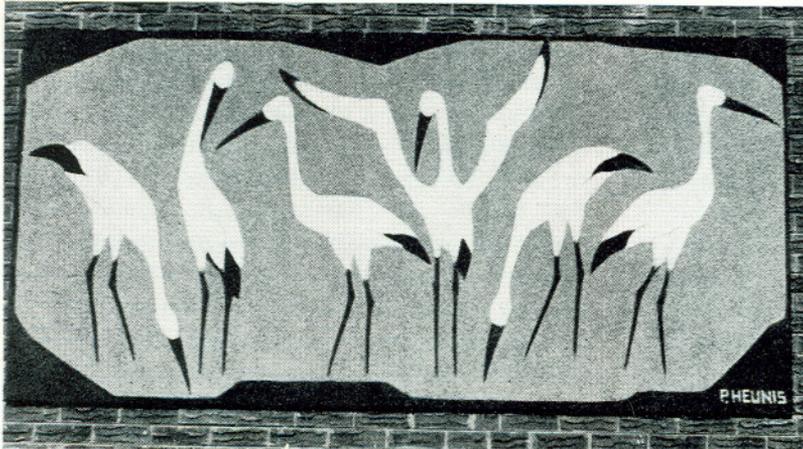
The artist spent most of her life in the Transvaal. At one time she was a student in physical education at the University of Stellenbosch. Here she met the man who was to become her husband. They have four children and are at present living in the picturesque town, Elgin, where her husband is the general manager of an apple company.

Professor Walter Battis was one of the first persons to advise Phoebe to devote more time to the study of art. This she did, first in Pretoria then by correspondence and later by visiting Europe, especially Spain, where she found the greatest stimulation. Why Spain? Because Phoebe loves a life that is dynamic and filled with rhythmic continuity and growth.

Phoebe Heunis has proved her unusual versatility. She was the first to realize the beauty of South African finely ground dolomite, using a technique which makes it ideal for out-door decorative work.



The artist with one of her sculptures called the Faun.



"Dolomite" panels 10 ft. by 5 ft. in the "Seuns Volksskool", Bethlehem.

She has been commissioned to do scores of panels of which some can be seen in some Bantu Administrative Buildings, the Volksseunskool in Bethlehem, and Dept. of Agriculture.

Dolomics, a word she has invented for her work, is only one facet of her output. Phoebe's paintings in oils vary from realistic portraits and still-life studies to highly abstract work. Alexis Preller defined her work as Expressionistic Impressionism, Expressionistic Realism and Symbolic Abstraction. Her work boils with rhythm not only created by motion but by inner movement.

Phoebe Heunis has exhibited in leading galleries, including Gallery 101. Some of her works are in the possession of Rembrandt, Mrs. H. F. Verwoerd, Prof. F. C. L. Bosman, Mr. Paul Sauer and many other art lovers. In 1964-65 some of her works were selected by the Transvaal Academy.

The versatility of this sensitive artist can also be traced in her modelling and sculpture. She depicts living form, always dynamic and full of rhythm. What is expressed in a dance is an idea; an idea of the way feelings, emotion and all other subjective experiences come and go, their intricate synthesis that gives our inner life unity and personal identity. Her work is charged with a feeling which belongs to the dance itself, and in essence is an expression of the artist's knowledge of many feelings.

Phoebe's sculpture arrests all available space around it—it is an outward image inspired by an inner life. That is why these works, always cast in bronze, manifest their greatest power when placed in an open park or garden.

The artist brings to aesthetics her own intimate knowledge of what she wants in life and what she attempts in her art. How true are the words of T. S. Elliot when he writes:

“No poet, when he writes his own *art poétique*, should hope to do much more than to explain, rationalize, defend or prepare the way for his own practice: that is, for writing his own kind of poetry. He may think that he is establishing laws for all poetry; but what he has to say that is worth saying has its immediate relation to the way in which he himself writes or wants to write”.

Whether it be her painting or sculpture one is always led away in the work of Phoebe Heunis for she is writing her own kind of poetry in her own style—always true to herself.



Above and below: Two more Phoebe Heunis sculptures illustrating her technique.

