
GOVERNMENT NOTICES GOEWERMENTSKENNISGEWINGS

DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE DEPARTEMENT VAN KUNS EN KULTUUR

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SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY

DECLARATION OF THE "BROSTER BEADWORK COLLECTION" AS A SPECIFICALLY DECLARED COLLECTION

By virtue of the powers vested in the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), in terms of Section 32(5) of the National Heritage Resources Act NHRA, no.25 of 1999, SAHRA hereby declares the Broster Beadwork Collection as a Specifically Declared Collection.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Joan Broster Beadwork Collection at the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) is a nationally significant Beadwork Collection which dates back to 1932 and was collected between 1952 and 1966. Most of the beadwork is associated with the abaThembu and was collected from Qebe in Engcobo, Eastern Cape. The Beadwork Collection forms part of the remaining collection depicting the cultural history and beadwork tradition of the Qebe community. The collection is made up of objects which were used for ritualistic and symbolic significance and personal adornment.

The Collection is significant in furthering the knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of Southern Nguni peoples in the Eastern Cape (EC). As much of the traditional material culture has left the EC, and there are few similar collections left, even in museums, it is important, wherever possible, to preserve what is held by other institutions, for future generations of South Africans to research and enjoy.

Early Xhosa-speaking people believed that glass beads washed up on shore, came from the ancestors. Later, and together with mother-of-pearl buttons, these materials were also seen as currency, and were very important for personal adornment, often at the expense of any wealth they might have had. Acquisition of beads & buttons for adornment purposes was another way of acknowledging the ancestors 'from whom abundance flowed'. Beads & buttons were second only to the currency value of iron and cattle in the early 1800s, when a woman's dress could cost twelve to twenty oxen.

Historical accounts also tell us that Xhosa-speaking peoples buried, or burned the clothes and belongings of their dead, and periods of mourning were marked by changes in appearance, practices that emphasise the spiritual significance of dress.

The value of beads in trade was well known, and in the mid-1700s one pound of beads, worth only a few pennies, was able to buy an ox. During the first half of the nineteenth century beads continued to be sought after and people went to great lengths to acquire beads & buttons for trade and adornment.

DESCRIPTION

The Broster Beadwork Collection is made up of items used traditionally in Xhosa rituals, symbolism and/or personal adornment. A complete inventory is available from SAHRA Head Office Registry.