

revealed...

# *The Unknown Miner*

28<sup>th</sup> March 2012



## *Wits celebrates 90 years of excellence*

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg celebrates its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012. The history of the University is inextricably linked with mining, academic excellence, quality research and political, social and civic activism - associations built on strong foundations, which still hold today.

The University's roots are firmly embedded in mining, having developed from the South African School of Mines, founded in Kimberley in 1896. The University of the Witwatersrand was established formally in 1922 as the first University in the City of Johannesburg.

In recognition of its establishment as a result of, and contributor to, Johannesburg and the mining sector, Wits is unveiling the sculpture of *The Unknown Miner* in the Chamber of Mines Building on the Wits Braamfontein Campus.



## *History of The Unknown Miner*

In the late 1950s, Harry Oppenheimer commissioned Herman Wald (1906 – 1970), a sculptor, to create two memorial works to celebrate the life and achievement of his father, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, one in Kimberley and the other in Johannesburg.

The prototype of the miner was originally submitted in plaster to form a group of three miners holding up a sieve. Oppenheimer decided to use five smaller figures and the prototype was modified slightly and reduced in size. The five figures form the Diamond Diggers Fountain installed in Kimberley in 1959.

The second work by Wald, called *Stampede* (a group of 18 impala forming an arch over a fountain) was donated to the City of Johannesburg in about 1960 and now stands in Main Street, which serves as the base for several mining houses.





## About Herman Wald

Wald immigrated to South Africa from Hungary in 1937 and was a well established sculptor in Johannesburg between 1954 and 1970. He received corporate commissions and made portrait busts of VIPs. Unfortunately many of his smaller works, which were designed to become monuments, were not realised as such, due to his sudden death at the age of 64.

With the works *The Unknown Miner* and *Man and his Soul*, Wald encapsulates what he absorbed from his studies in Budapest, as well as Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London. He includes the detailed realism and vigorous surface modelling of Rodin and Jacob Epstein in *The Unknown Miner* and the smooth, fluid attenuated forms of Brancusi and Tortilla Albert in *Man and his Soul*.

The two very different works show the versatility of the artist who was equally at home creating detailed studies with surface texture as he was with smooth, fluid forms, which became almost completely abstract.



## Donation to Wits

*The Unknown Miner* was donated to Wits by Louis Wald, the son of Herman Wald and was accepted by Prof. Beatrys Lacquet, the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, on behalf of Wits University. Wits paid only for the casting and installation of the artwork. The bronze casting took several months to complete and 15 men were required to transport and erect the sculpture as crane access to the area was restricted.

One of the maquettes, *Man and his Soul*, was also donated to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management and accepted by the former Acting Dean of the Faculty, Professor Katherine Munro. It was enlarged to a diameter of three meters. This work will be launched mid-year as part of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.



## The Unknown Miner

*The Unknown Miner* is a casting of the original prototype of the five miners and stands at the east entrance of the newly renovated Chamber of Mines building that partially houses the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment. The portico entrance presents a striking view of the three-meter bronze sculpture to all who enter the building and is a fitting introduction to the new domed interior atrium.

The dark bronze provides a dramatic silhouette highlighted against the sun when one leaves the building. The outstretched arms and muscular rippling of the body provide a reminder of the important contribution of the mining industry and mining education to the economy of the country. The mining boots stand firm in the concrete and give ballast to the slight twist in the torso. Although *The Unknown Miner* has some characteristics of social realism, the work contains symbolic elements paying tribute to many unsung heroes. These men and women, from diverse backgrounds and cultures, laboured and sacrificed to create the mining industry and to establish Johannesburg as the 'City of Gold' from 1886.