

Showcasing his father's sculptures

One of Wald's most famous works is the Impala Fountain in Joburg

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"I'VE just arrived at our building... did you know they were going to put up a statue of a mineworker?", a surprised lecturer says in a cellphone conversation as she arrives at the Wits University's Chamber of Mines engineering faculty building on Friday afternoon.

Around the sculpture, called "Unknown Miner", streams of students stop to take pictures of the imposing structure depicting a mineworker whose imperiously outstretched arms belie his impassive facial features.

Who is that man? a surprised student asks as she walks past the statue situated on the Wits West Campus.

"My dad... Herman Wald made it. You know The Stampede... the Impala Fountain situated in Main Street (Joburg)? He made it," Louis Wald says.

The 7.5m bronze Impala Fountain he refers to was commissioned by De Beers' Harry Oppenheimer in memory of his father Ernest in 1960 and it is one of Herman Wald's most famous works. It was donated to the City of Johannesburg and was reinstated opposite the headquarters of Anglo American on Main Street in 2002 after Louis' brother Michael restored the work.

With many people knowing little about the man who made the bronze sculpture of impala leaping over a fountain, Wald has embarked on a process of showcasing his father's works "to give him the recognition he deserves".

The 53-year-old engineer has therefore kick-started his project by donating the sculpture of a miner and another one of co-joined bodies to Wits University - his alma mater.

With a twinkle in his eye, he watches with pride as workers at the university's faculty of engineering remove the scaffold from the miner's sculpture, a figurine "meant to

recognise people who mined this area (Johannesburg).

A few metres from the statue of a miner, an abstract bronze sculpture sits mounted on concrete.

Like the statue of the "Unknown Miner", "Man and His soul" draws attention with students stopping to take pictures and analyse and make their own interpretations of the structure depicting co-joined bodies.

"You can interpret it whichever way you want but it basically depicts a man in relation to his soul," says Wald of the work that was completed in 1965.

But his late father said in his own writings that the concept "tries to depict the vicious circle between life and death, running with such unaccountable centrifugal speed that could take man an eternity to catch up, thus the reason the half moon shapes chase each other with ethereal speed of light".

"I donated the sculptures and they (Wits) carried costs for setting them up. In return, I got a chance to relaunch my dad's work. A big book has just been done on South African artists and he's not there," Wald says.

He hopes a six-month exhibition planned to be held from February 12 at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town will draw as much attention as the two 3m bronze works set up at Wits.

The exhibition, which will showcase over 60 of Herman Wald's sculptures, writings and 100 drawings, is expected to run for six months. He has also donated two of his father's works, including the statue of a miner, to Wits University.

"I can hardly contain my enthusiasm about it. It's a way of reflecting and recognising the work of a very significant artist," Wald says.

The man who returned from London last week to oversee the installation of his father's



works says he started collecting information about his father's works before leaving South Africa for London 25 years ago, but it was only when his mother died in 2007 that he started concentrating fully on his father's works.

He has also set up a website which lists some of the people who bought his father's works over the years and where some of the sculptures were set up.

Among the works set up around Johannesburg is the 5.1m high monument set up at

West Park Cemetery - a monument set up in remembrance of the six million Jewish people who perished under Hitler's rule.

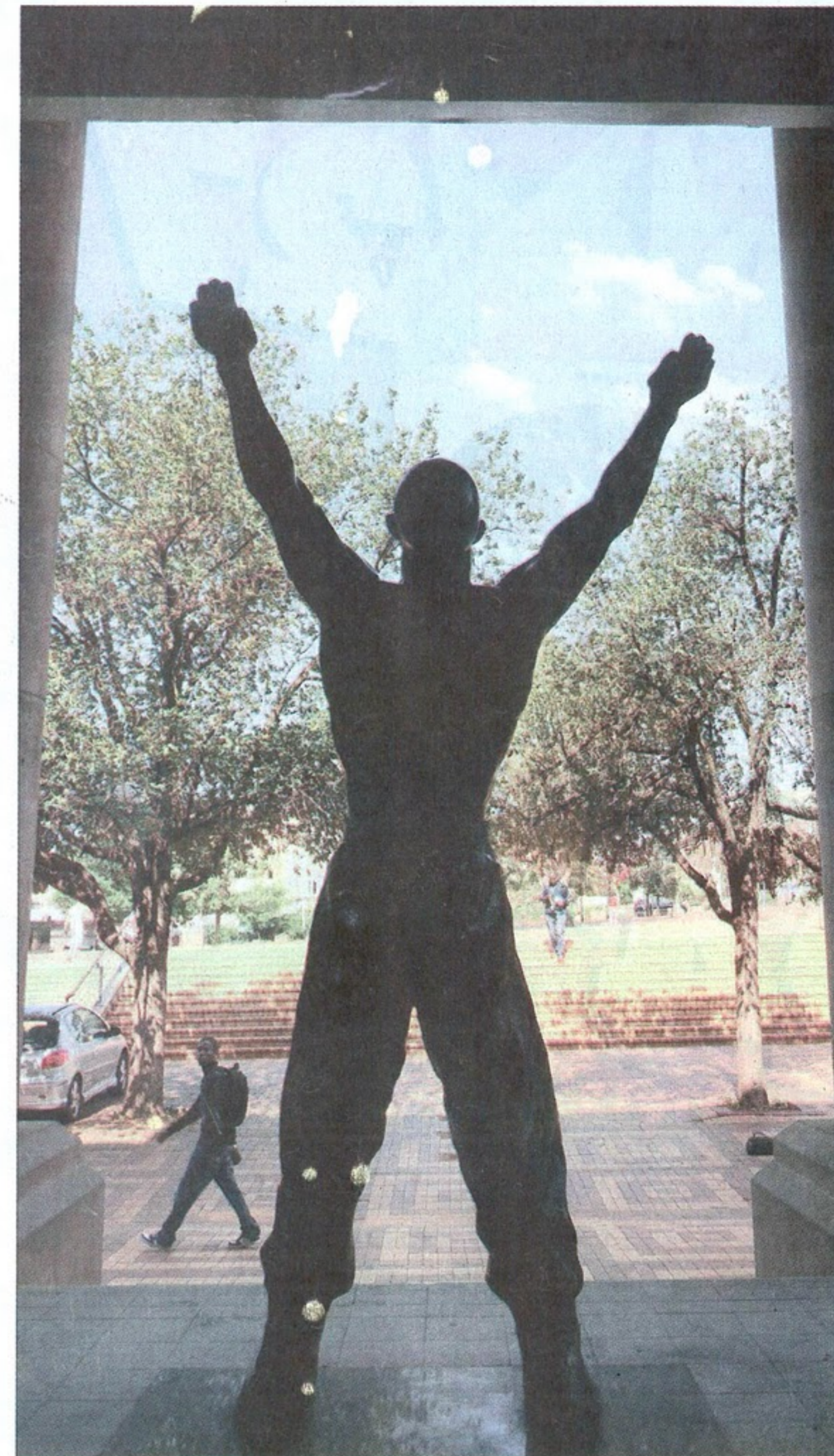
The West Park monument depicts six bronze fists, each 1.5m high, bursting out of the ground as a protest of the dead. Each fist is gripping a ram's horn, while the Jewish ritual trumpet stands 6m high at the end of the horns.

Other works around Joburg: ● Sandringham Gardens Johannesburg: "Kria", mean-

ing the rending of garments, is a symbol of Jewish mourning, originating from biblical days and still practised today. The figure represents the present day Jewish people in defiance of their enemies, with dignified hope and feet firmly planted on the ground saying 'I am here to stay on Earth', which is the birthright of any man, Jew or any other race.' (H Wald)

● 'Unity is Strength': Absa building on Main Street, Joburg.

ENDURING SYMBOL: The 'Man and his Soul' statue on the West Campus of Wits University.



UNsung HERO: The 'Unknown Miner' statue at the entrance to the Chamber of Mines building on Wits University West Campus.

PICTURES: DUMISANI SIBEKO