

## **Dr Janette Deacon**

Janette Deacon, the well-published and highly acclaimed archaeologist, graduated from UCT with a BA (1960), MA (1969) and PhD (1982). Throughout her career as an academic and later as archaeologist at the National Monuments Council she displayed exceptional scholarship and advocacy and it is in the intersection of these two that she has made a significant contribution.

Deacon's work contributed significantly to the Bleek and Lloyd archive at UCT, achieving the recognition by the United Nations as a site of the Memory of the World. Her scholarship in the human origins in South Africa, rock art research, and a whole host of other activities has largely been carried out at the intersection of scholarship and public life and has helped to facilitate new understandings of the indigenous past, shape legislation for the protection of the archaeological and visual heritage of the San, and profile South African archaeology and rock art research in a global context.

In the 1990s, she published, along with her husband, a volume titled *Human beginnings in South Africa*, drawing on their work of the past 30 years. It is described as “a masterful synthesis of the longest archaeological record and provides an effective introduction to modern scientific method and theory, the evolution of human behaviour and the current interpretations of the social, symbolic, and economic lifeways of ancient Khoisan peoples. It remains an indispensable text for Africanists and for any course on African archaeology”.

“Theory is part of the romance of archaeology and is vital if we want to breathe some life into the snippets of information drawn from stone and other artefacts,” said Deacon.

She is regularly invited all over the world to discuss South African rock art, its management and its relationship to both archival sources and archaeology. Her commitment to the preservation of the rock art of the San – a vulnerable pre-colonial archive – finds expression in a project which trains local people and amateur enthusiasts to record, document and clean rock art sites.

Deacon said: “The reason why much of Stone Age history has remained a secret for so long is not that it may not be told or that it has not been told in other books, but rather that it has to be individually discovered. Because we are remote from the past, we have to find it and immerse ourselves in it, if we wish to understand it and unlock its secrets. Pursuing the past is rewarding, and we hope it is a challenge more will follow.”

Deacon's work has won a number of awards, including the UNESCO and World Heritage Convention medal for her work on rock art internationally (2010). From 1979 to 1993 she edited the premier South African archaeological journal, *South African Archaeological Bulletin* and played a major role in shaping its character. Among her extensive publications are seven books.

In 1991 Deacon convened the first conference around the Bleek and Lloyd Collection with just a handful of scholars. By 2011, the third conference on Bleek and Lloyd Collection, held at UCT, brought together several hundred participants from around the world. This and the book that followed is a tribute to the richly interdisciplinary field that she has helped shape and is significant evidence of her contribution to her fellow scholars, to this university, to communities with whom her work has intersected, and to future scholarship.