

profile

LEONARD SHAPIRO

With a formal background in both Social Science and Fine Art, Leonard Shapiro found the perfect application of his unique skills and knowledge in his position as director of CraftSouthAfrica.

CraftSouthAfrica develops craft enterprises by identifying the hand skills and materials used by crafters and then designing new products that will be competitive nationally and internationally. As CraftSouthAfrica's head, Leonard Shapiro also mentors crafters in the business skills they need to engage with the retail market.

"My Social Science studies gave me insight into the relationship between economics, politics and social structures," he says. "This has helped me understand the dynamics in the rural areas where I assist craftspeople."

His training at the Michaelis School of Fine Art taught him about the nature and use of materials, and today he uses this knowledge in his own creative

projects and developing new products with craftspeople.

Leonard views craft as a potential major contributor to South Africa's economy and as a tool to improve the quality of life in rural areas. "Craft is often seen as 'cute things people sell by the side of the road'. But in many parts of the world, craft generates huge amounts of income for entrepreneurs," he explains.

Leonard provided South African designers with an international platform at the 2008 Milan Furniture Fair, where he curated the South African component for a show by Misael, an Italian design group for which he sources designs, art and crafts. The five artists were Lyall Sprong, Heath Nash, Rebecca Townsend, Andile Dyalvane and Leora Lewis.

"I selected work that blurred the boundaries between art, craft and design," says Leonard, who will curate the Misael stand at the 2009 Design Indaba. Eight designers and artists will be exhibiting, including Walter Oltmann, famous for his aluminium wire work, bead artist Mickaël Kra, Bronze Age, and Leonard himself, whose work will explore alternative materials for the traditional art of mat weaving. The stand, designed by museum and gallery curator Roger van Wyk and Tsai Design Studio, can be found at 7C.

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- Design Indaba Expo, 27 February to 1 March 2009, www.designindaba.com

PHOTOGRAPH MICHAËLE GRANGE WORDS ALMA VIVIERS

