



It's been five weeks since I came home from my volunteer project in the township of Melkhoutfontein (Western Cape, South Africa) and my mind is still blown, still trying to integrate all the wonderful and magical things that happened while I was there. Sometimes it feels like it was just the wildest, most beautiful dream, then I realise I was really there and we really did it!

I am an artist, and my project was called 'PaintUp with Kamamma'. My mission during the four weeks I stayed there was to paint murals on the sides of houses expressing the forgotten cultures and histories of the townsfolk and the region they live by using Bushman rock art and Khoekhoen archaeology, all with the intention of trying to attract tourists with the promise of beautiful paintings, and to initiate a cultural awakening in the town. And oh my gosh, that's exactly what happened. Talk about the raw, magical power of art!

If it was magical for the people of Melkhoutfontein to see me creating artworks on their houses, it was magical for me too, to live and work in the community. I stayed with Gerty & Ivan in their homestay in the heart of the town, which was a wonderful experience, very comfortable and enjoyable to stay with a warm-hearted and good-humoured family. Everyone was incredibly welcoming – in Melkhoutfontein, people still call out hello on the street and stop to ask how you are, an increasingly rare human courtesy these days – and I was able to experience the community from the inside, not as a visitor but as a friend. This is a different view of South Africa, far off the tourist trails, and it's all the more truthful for it. It's a view that is down-to-earth, welcoming and full of heart.

What have I learned? On a practical level, a new artistic skill: mural painting. On a personal level, the sure knowledge that I have made a positive transformation in a lovely community which has long been left to fend for itself. That I have laid the groundwork for a three-year project which will help turn Melkhoutfontein's fortunes around and give them a greater sense of pride, self-worth and dignity. To know that I have made friends on the other side of the world and that I will be back there someday...

Bruce x

Postcard



From: **Bruce, ArtVisionSpace,
Bradford, UK**

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Volunteered in:

**Melkhoutfontein, Stilbaai,
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When

