



Left A set of twins will indirectly benefit from the income generated by the Project. Above The Hamburg altarpiece. Below The tapestry that came second in the 2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards. Bottom, from left More than 120 women are involved in the Keiskamma Project; the Project has helped combat high levels of unemployment. Opposite, clockwise from left The beaded frame of the altarpiece; the Hamburg altarpiece; new life has been breathed into the village of Hamburg.

the art of UPLIFTMENT

These women made the 120-metre tapestry that came second in the 2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards. It's a measure of what happens when great heart and great art collide

Words and photographs Pippa Hetherington

The Hamburg of this story is an old fishing village in the Eastern Cape on the dunes above the mouth of the Keiskamma River. Part of the former Ciskei, its history is tainted by the conflict of the frontier wars and forced Bantustan segregation. And, being one of the areas hardest hit by the AIDS pandemic and acute poverty, its future seemed bound to the suffering of its past.

To travellers or passers-by, it is nevertheless a place of breathtaking beauty and abundant

marine life. This peaceful spirit is what attracted Carol Hofmeyr, a Jo'burg doctor with a diploma in child health, honours in psychology and English literature, and a fine-art master's degree, who was looking for somewhere quiet to concentrate on her arts. She got to understand and love the people of Hamburg and in November 2001, she founded the Keiskamma Art Project, an embroidery and textile project aimed at combating the high level of unemployment

in the area. The project now employs more than 120 women, each of whose lives it has changed significantly.

Each year, one major tapestry is produced. This year's masterpiece was unveiled at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival – a three-metre high altarpiece, based on the Isenheim Altarpiece in France, which is often described as art's most horrifying depiction of the crucifixion. The Hamburg tapestry depicts its own version of the crucifixion and resurrection; the outer panels show HIV and AIDS imagery – mourning, dying and disease – in mute colours; when the panels are opened, Hamburg in all its glory is revealed: fat Nguni cattle, colourful birds and fish, prosperous and healthy people.

'The work is a wish and prayer that the whole village will overcome the past,' says Carol. 'The real pain of the world is always there, but you have to find a way to use suffering to restore life itself.' Future plans for the project? To establish a tertiary art school,



build a gallery in Hamburg and to continue to make one monumental piece each year, which will ensure the sustainability of the project – and employment for 120 women. ■

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- ### TIMELINE
- * **November 2001** Keiskamma Art Project started
 - * **August 2002** National Craft Awards, Newtown, Jo'burg
 - * **November 2002** Exhibition, Oxford, United Kingdom
 - * **September 2003** Finalist Brett Kebble Art Awards (Wall hanging was bought for Brett Kebble's private collection)
 - * **October 2003** Gold award in the FNB Vita Craft exhibition
 - * **August 2004** Exhibition of the Keiskamma Tapestry at Constitution Hill, Jo'burg
 - * **September 2004** Finalist for FNB Craft Now awards
 - * **October 2004** Keiskamma Tapestry placed second in Brett Kebble Art Awards
 - * **July 2005** Launch of altarpiece at Grahamstown National Arts Festival

