

S45 29/11/71

WHEN A SIGNATURE IS NOT NECESSARY

THE design is of flying birds; stylised birds, with sharp beaks and wings, bird's-eye views of birds stacked in flight the way aircraft are stacked above an airport.

And it will be quite a mural, when it goes up in the main concourse of the new international terminal at Jan Smuts Airport; 6,4m high, 48m long, in plain language 3 000sqft of it. The bird's flight plan was designed by Esias Bosch, the master potter, who is now working on the ceramic mural at his house near White River in the Eastern Transvaal.

Mr Bosch was working on it when we visited him. And what a way to work — kneeling on a wooden platform mounted on

TEXT:
Jean Le May

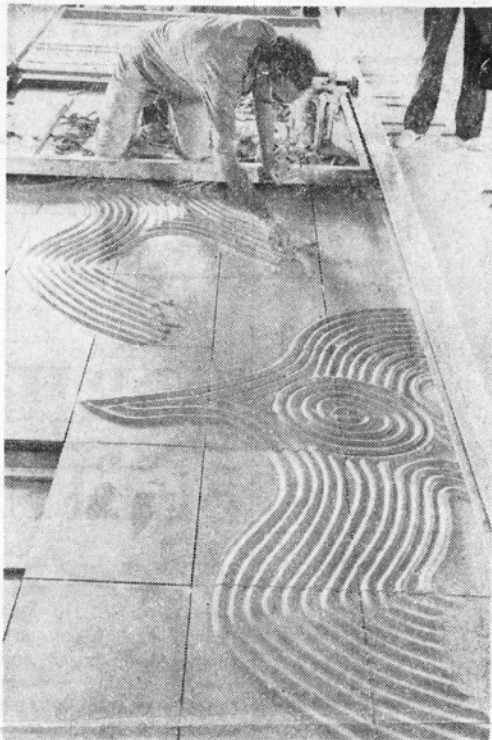
tramlines above the tiles which form the base of the mural, bending over almost double to reach the mural.

On the platform next to him were the cylindrical lengths of clay which he uses to model the birds, placing them deftly and with confidence on the bare tiles below. As we watched, a bird took shape under his hands. He does not work from a drawing; a rough design is blocked out, then he completes it as he works at it.

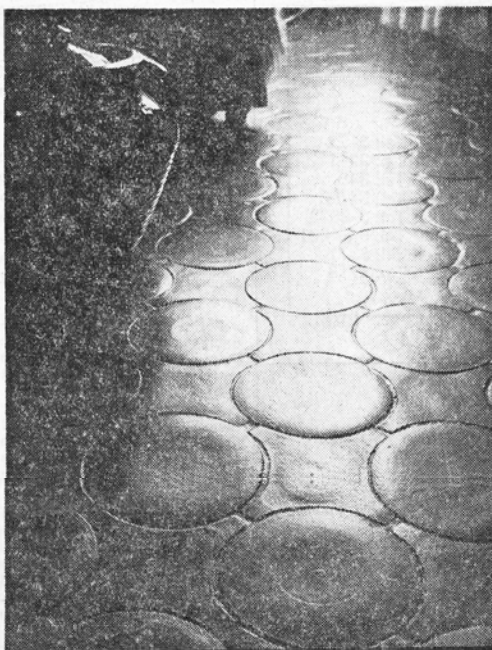
Because of its size, he is making the mural in sections. Mr Bosch showed us some of the completed tiles. The glaze (which is fired in an oil-burning kiln at 1350deg C) is made of crushed dolomite rock, mixed with feldspar as a binding agent and diluted with water.

"It's really the agricultural lime the local farmers use on their citrus trees," said Mr Bosch.

The fired glaze is creamy, the colour of nougat, with small discoloured flecks in it. Its texture, combining with the fall of light and shadow on the relief design, gives a feeling of movement. It is hard to believe that the birds are not actually in flight.



Esias Bosch working on the stylised birds for the jumbo mural for the new international terminal at Jan Smuts Airport.



The art of the master potter put to practical use; interlocking circular tiles form the floor of the sitting room.

Mr Bosch showed us some of the other glazes he used, which are stored in big pottery urns in his studio.

"Some of the local rocks give beautiful glazes," he said. "We grind them ourselves. . . . The local granite, for instance, gives a wonderful sage green glaze when it's fired at very high temperatures. I nearly always work with impure materials, I find they give more interesting textures, wood ash makes an unusual glaze."

Mr Bosch never signs his work, believing that a work of art should stand by itself without a name attached to it. He believes, too, that all craftsmen — builders, plumbers, carpenters — are artists.

"I feel there's a lot of snobbery about what is art and what is not. Why, for

PICTURES:
Andre de Wet

instance, do you never see the name of the engineer who designs a bridge? A beautiful bridge is just as much a work of art as a painting — better, in many cases."

Mr Bosch practises what he preaches, for he designed and built his own house, using local materials. The beamed ceilings are of local timber, the roof of wood ash and clinker, and most of the floors of ceramic tiles made by himself. Furnishings are mostly Cape Dutch yellowwood and stinkwood, combined with the rough textures of mohair, a fine Afghan wall hanging, and Mr Bosch's own pottery.

The house and its natural garden, which is looked after by Mrs Bosch, form a harmonious whole entirely in keeping with the country in which it is set.

"We moved down here so that I could work away from the distractions of a city," said Mr Bosch. "I use plant and bird forms a great deal in my designing, and here I'm surrounded by them. Particularly the birds. . . ."

As we drove away, he walked back into his studio. It was obvious that he was already mentally involved with the next flight plan.