

Rupert
Museum

Kaloo

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*Arts
Quarterly*

THE ARTS NEWSLETTER OF THE RUPERT MUSEUM



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Want to find out more about them?

Download the SIAP '26 Application Pack here:

tinyurl.com/bdz634cf

Social Impact Arts: Creative Practice

by Renée Holleman

What might constitute a socially impactful creative practice?

The **Social Impact Arts Prize Fellowship** (SIAP), now in its 3rd iteration, is not prescriptive. Conceived as an investigative platform - this year presented as a series of research fellowship residencies in Graaff-Reinet - provides an opportunity for artists to question how they can extend the parameters of their studio practice, engage a chosen public, explore the locality from which their project originates, and examine a set of material possibilities that arise from within it, while producing new creative work and discourse. As an initiative supported by the Rupert Art Foundation, it takes the ethos of responsible social investment in the arts and opens it to the current moment, in all its messy complexity and deep tensions, within an expanded notion of the social.

The social can be taken here to refer to the communal, community, or community-based, a collective or group, the civil, civic, popular, public or society, as well as a gathering, occasion, event, or celebration. Extending this, we can think about sociability as friendliness, neighbourliness, companionability, conviviality, warmth, responsiveness or hospitality. Sociability may be interpreted as a relational counterbalance to an individualistic, reductive and mechanistic worldview.

Recent literature on social impact within the arts - widely defined as involving a balance between intrinsic and instrumental benefits - places **first-hand, individual experience at the centre of enquiry, recognising that reflectiveness, empathy and imagination** form the basis for benefits which extend outwards, such as civic agency and wellbeing.

More broadly however, we can consider social impact as inherently based on a beneficial change in relational dynamics, as the strengthening and enrichment of ties between people and across the more-than-human world.

The last five years since the first cycle has taken place have seen a global pandemic, the intensification of extreme weather events, escalating geopolitical pressures, and wars on multiple fronts in the Middle East, Sudan and Congo. We are living through a period of hastening change, but we can't say it is unprecedented.

The long arc of the earth's evolution is marked by major climatic shifts, civilisations have come and gone, and within the period of the last few centuries multiple communities (human and non-human) have experienced the world-ending devastation of imperial ruination, whose consequences we see lingering and compounded by inequitable systems of extraction and accumulation in the present day.

A notable distinction at this point is the increasing pressure on our shared resources and the resulting cascading crises at nested planetary scales. When we speak about the Anthropocene in this context, however, many will be quick to debate the narrative of common responsibilities, shared effects and collective conclusions. **The causes and impacts of inequality and ecological degradation are differential, requiring diverse perspectives and a willingness to examine the situated nature of complex interdependencies.**

Within its ongoing thematic framework, the SIAP positions these dynamics through the **lens of climate change**, recognising it as the defining issue of our time, but asks creative practitioners to consider a range of enfolded concerns related to environment, the social, and the production of knowledge.



... we can think about sociability as friendliness, neighbourliness, companionability, conviviality, warmth, responsiveness or hospitality.



Socially-engaged creative practice has a legacy of participatory, collaborative and co-creative methodologies for activating relationships between people, things, and sites ...



Additionally, it prompts practitioners to think about these concerns with an attentiveness to scale: via the inter-relationship between local specificity and the non-local or planetary.

In providing residency space in Graaff-Reinet the SIAP Fellowship invites research and investigation into the situated possibilities and conditions of small town life, with various factors of proximity and distance, isolation and interconnection in play. It also asks for an attentiveness to the distinct place character that defines the Karoo.

Socially-engaged creative practice has a legacy of participatory, collaborative and co-creative methodologies for activating relationships. These are between people, things, and sites, enabling a valuable exploration of how they are situated in relation to each other within a given set of parameters. It's also a modality that has been subject to reasoned criticism within institutional frameworks as well as individual endeavours for obfuscating power dynamics, or confusing ethical and aesthetic responsibilities. When viewers or audiences become participants or co-producers in a work of art, through social situations, there is a transition in aesthetic considerations. **These allow artists to develop process-based, community-oriented, politically engaged projects, but which sometimes only enable a modest dissolution of the boundaries between art and life.**

Alongside sustained intellectual engagement with the question of situatedness, socially-engaged creative practices have nonetheless brought into increasingly more detailed focus the importance of relationality. This focus attends to relationships themselves - connecting many different kinds of actors across a network - into a critical form of knowledge production within a creative practice's processes.

Taking this into consideration, the SIAP encourages the sensitive use of participatory methodologies but also recognises the transformative potential of building collaborative relationships across disciplinary fields of knowledge production, that may allow creative practitioners to engage a broad range of social forces, actors, discursive systems and physical conditions operating at a given site. To facilitate this process in 2026, the SIAP Fellowship residency provides an opportunity for practitioners to enter into **dialogue with local institutional partners and their collections and archives, alongside other materials and objects which animate the lives and lived ways of Graaff-Reinet's many diverse communities.**

By attending to these different aspects of situated engagement, practitioners may examine the deep, daily connection between human communities and their surroundings against extractive, industrial, or economic arrangements, and the ways in which social practices, cultural heritage, and environmental knowledge intersect, in what may be considered a complex ecological entanglement.

It is with this complexity in mind that the SIAP Fellowship has established a fellowship this year to allow for a period of research, as well opening up the prize to different art forms: 'in the landscape', 'between walls' and 'on the page, to encourage process work as well as the production of artworks, installations and texts.

The SIAP Fellowship calls on creative practitioners to consider how they take the process of experimentation and integration that occurs implicitly in the making an artwork, and open it up in such a way that it operates more explicitly as a catalyst, node, or point of connection between people, society and environment, and in so doing potentially redefine how an aesthetic experience can build bridges that produce meaningful change within the wider world.



Abri de Swardt: *Kammakamma*



Abri de Swardt is a transdisciplinary artist working primarily with performance, photography and the moving image. His exhibition, *Kammakamma* brings together a range of different media and methodologies, including historical research, site specific engagement, poetic and fictional texts, scriptwriting, videography, sound design and installation. Focussed on the Eerste River, from its many sources in the hills surrounding Stellenbosch to the sea at Macassar beach, De Swardt asks a critical question: *If the river's mouth could speak, what would it say?*

Kammakamma is the second of three films, and forms part of a larger body of work that positions the river as witness to and carrier of multiple submerged narratives. In imagining the river as capable of speech, De Swardt draws into being an understanding of the more-than-human world as neither passive or inert, but vibrant, animate and agential, and in this instance polyvocal.

Written in collaboration with poet and novelist Ronelda S. Kamfer, and historian Saarah Jappie, each episode of the *Kammakamma* filmic cycle is temporally and spatially distinct, situating its protagonists at a point of confluence within the flux and flow of personal, historical and environmental forces.

In *Kammakamma* we meet Hendrik Biebouw, a wayward teenager who, having attacked a VOC watermill on the Eerste River in 1707 along with three others, is recorded to have infamously protested his fate in the magistrate's court, proclaiming himself an 'Africaander' – a term previously used only for enslaved and indigenous peoples.

Performed by Ben Albertyn, Biebouw appears in De Swardt's film partially immersed, inebriated and adrift - a dubious configuration of one of Afrikanerdom's founding myths. He struggles to find his footing, grasping at sandbags on the river bank. His words are uncertain and in excess. They slip between Afrikaans, Dutch, German and Malagasy in a flood of tongues, drawing us into the title of the work which combines the Khoekhoe word for water ('//amma') and similitude ('khama') to embody the river as a voluble medium that doubles, destabilises and dilutes.

Through the form of a synchronised two-channel projection, De Swardt plays upon the idea of 'seeing double', of states of intoxication and parallel temporalities, troubling our perceptual stability so that we, like Hendrik Biebouw, may become saturated with river stories.

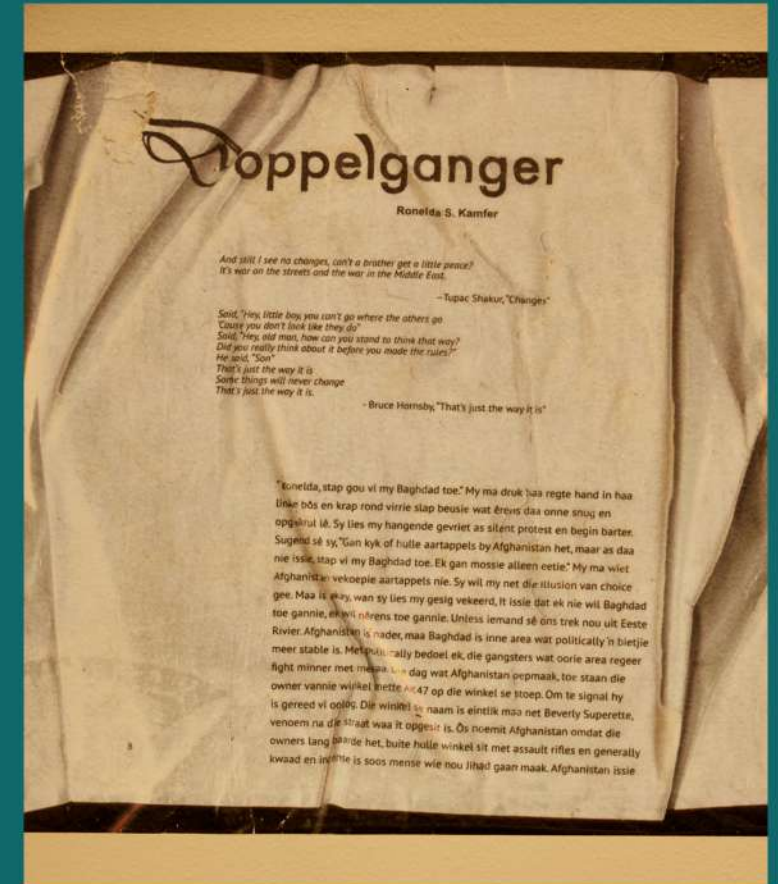
<https://www.instagram.com/abrideswardt/>

'Ik wil niet lopen, ik ben een Africaander, al slaat die landdrost mijn dood, of al setten hij mijn in den tronk, ik sal, nogwil niet swygen'.
(I shall not leave, I am an Afrikaner, even if the landdrost beats me to death or puts me in jail. I shall not, nor will be silent).

Giliomee, H. 2003. *The Afrikaners*.



Abri de Swardt
Kammakamma, 2022-2024
4K video, synchronised two-channel projection,
configurable screens, sandbags with sand from
Macassar Dunes, props and costumes.
Details from Rupert Museum exhibition view 2026



Abri de Swardt
 Kammakamma, 2022-2024
 Sandbags with sand from Macassar Dunes,
 props and costumes. E-publication with
 writing by Abri de Swardt, Ronelda S. Kamfer
 and Saarah Jappie.
 Details from Rupert Museum exhibition 2026.



Abri de Swardt
Kammakamma, 2022 - 2024
Film Still

Georgia Munnik: *Terroir*



Georgia Munnik's practice is poised on the delicate edge of the living/dying world, at the boundary between things holding form, and their gradual dissolution. In an expanded enquiry into archival methodology and meaning-making, Munnik delves into various forms of preservation and decay to present a body of work that shifts between small sculptural objects, image-making and scent.

***Terroir* takes the notion of transmutation as a core principle. The French word for soil or region, 'terroir' is both deeply material and simultaneously strangely intangible.** It is the essential qualities of earth and atmosphere, combined through mycelial exchange, photosynthesis, and energetic growth, and transformed through a cultural process of distillation or fermentation to produce something with a very particular sensibility.

In her work, Munnik extends the complexity of terroir to imagine the ways in which personal experiences are intertwined with the historical and environmental, asking how grief and trauma can be better understood, processed and expressed when grounded in the metabolic or more broadly biological.

After spending time during the SIAP residency in Graaff-Reinet, her initial archival research project underwent a significant shift.

By refocusing on an autobiographical enquiry into her ancestors' phenomenological experiences of their worlds.

Munnik entered into a much more personal and enriched engagement with a particular line of history.

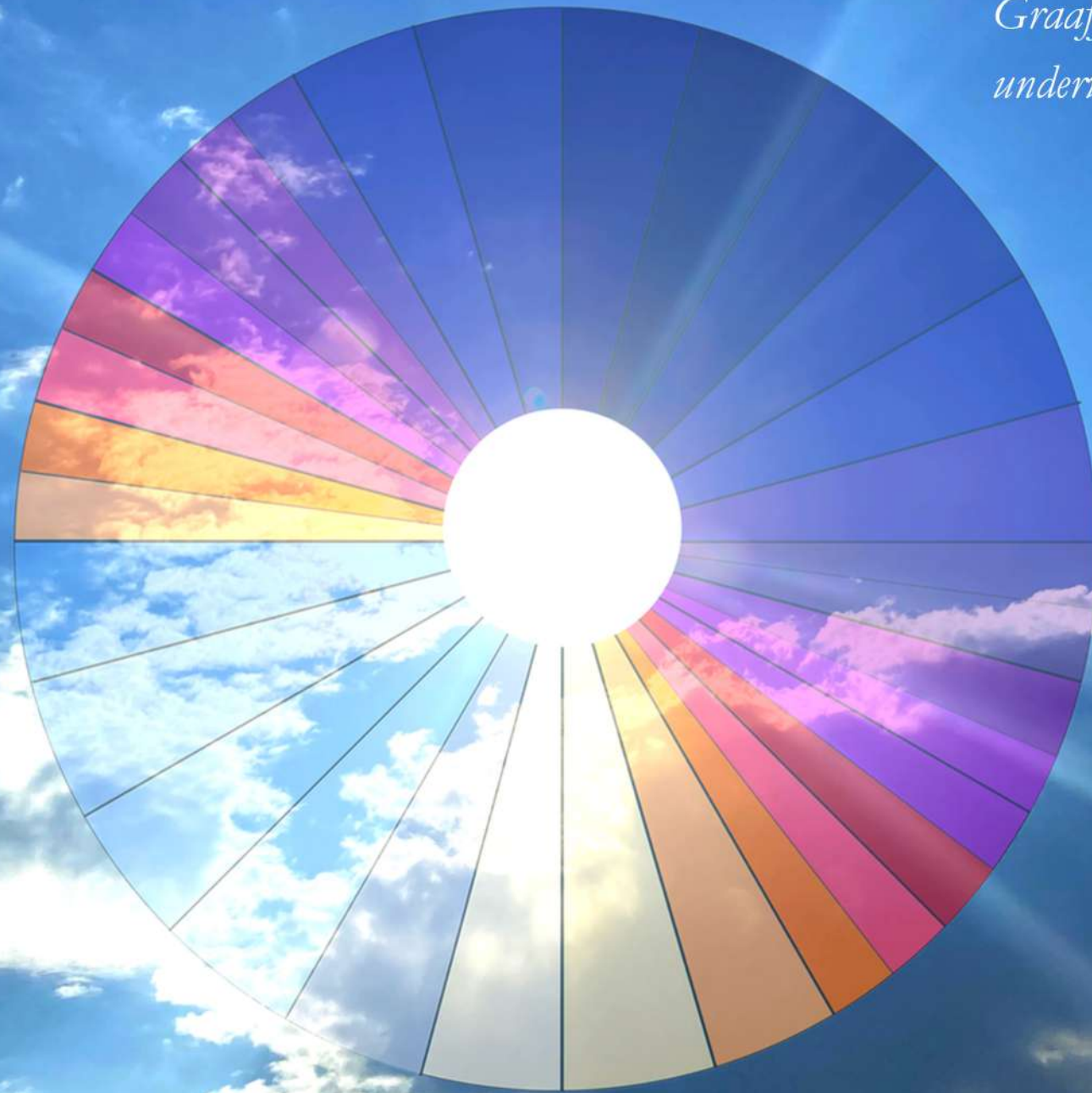
Identifying 'nodal points' - **such as the purple hue of the sky at dusk and dawn, the sound of a particular cricket in the mountain, and the scent of fynbos** - she was able to connect in the present to their lived experiences of the past directly through the senses, thereby arriving at outputs she may not otherwise have come to, in smell, bodily gesture, colour and sound.

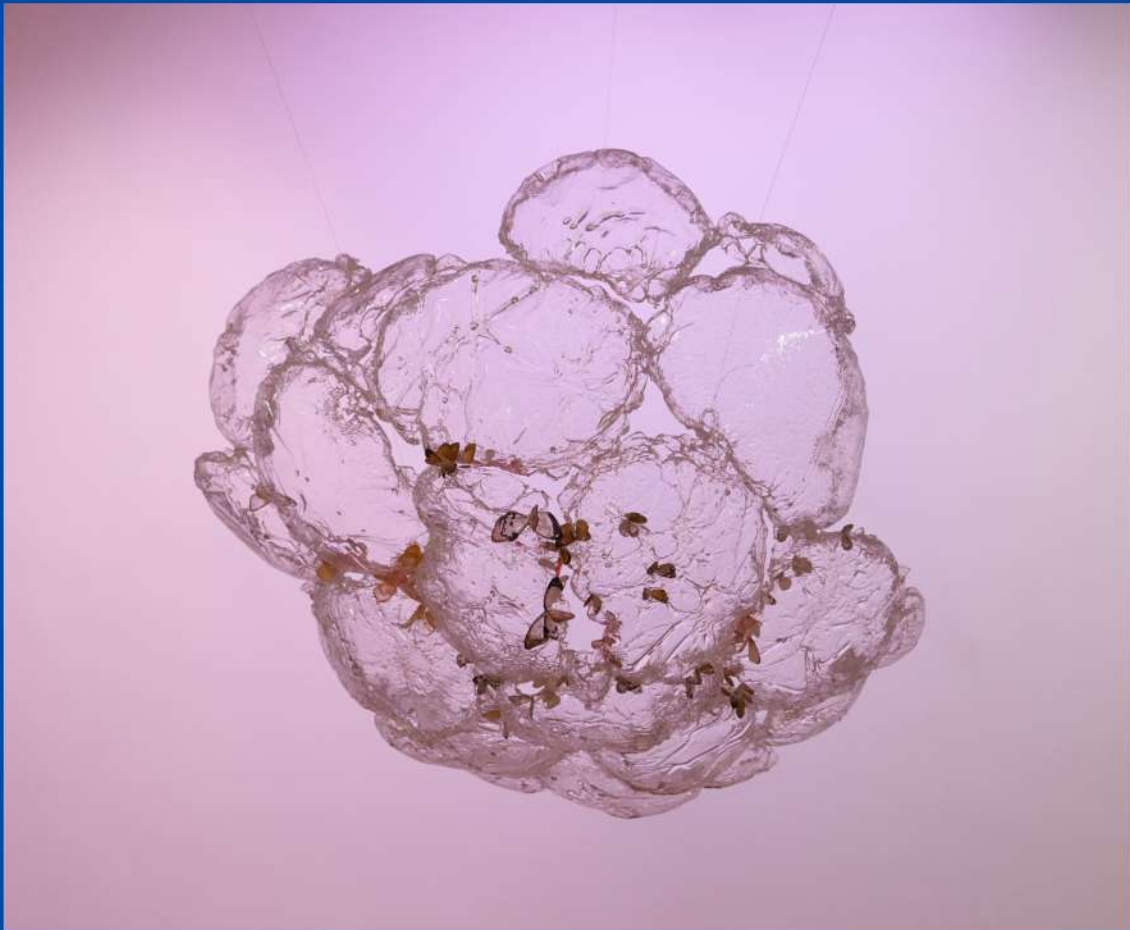
This change in modality is captured in a series of sculptural formations simulating organic mushroom-like clusters, butterfly cocoons and processes of chrysalisation, which bring together different kinds of biological matter that moulder and dissipate, with materials and processes that do the opposite. Notable works include laminated and resin-cast butterflies assembled in mud-puddling configurations on crystal bubble-like cocoons.

It is through Munnik's exploration of scent however, that we experience the most compelling of transformations. The launch of her perfume, **PHENOTYPE 13**, is the culmination of an olfactory practice that uses alchemical process and ingredient cultivation to capture dense personal, ecological and cultural histories in their evanescence.

https://www.instagram.com/georgia_munnik/

After spending time during the SLAP residency in Graaff-Reinet, her initial archival research project underwent a significant shift.





Georgia Munnik
Mud puddling, 2025
 Butterflies, resin and
 PHENOTYPE perfume

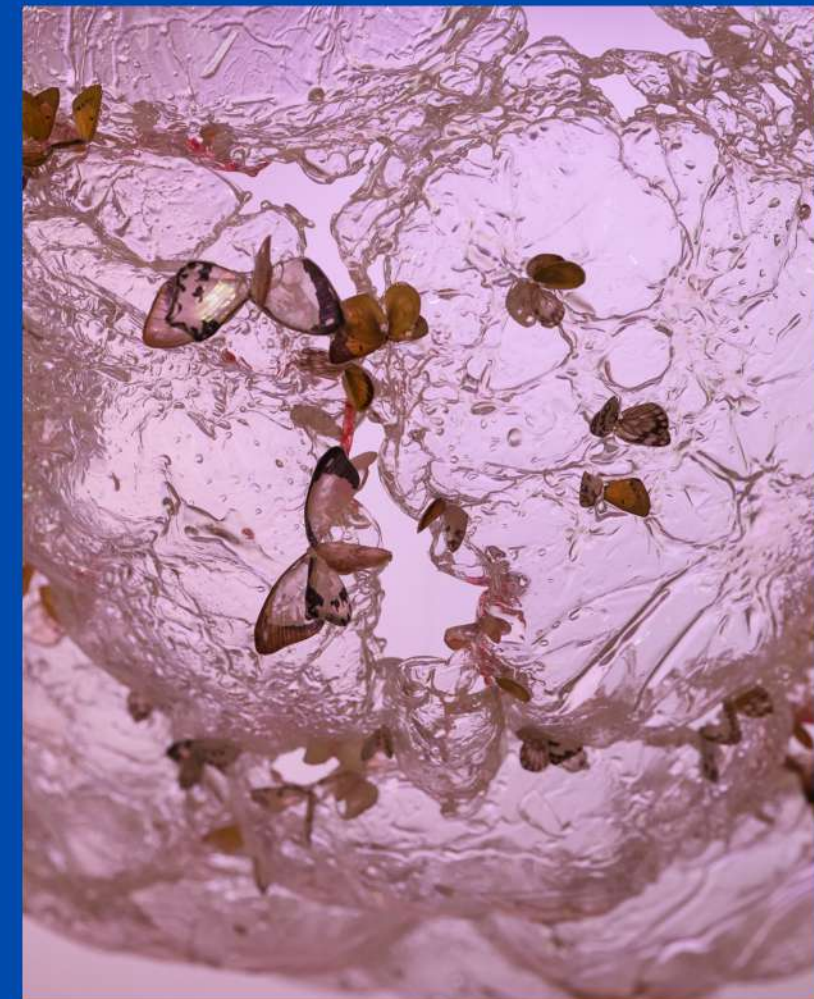
Georgia Munnik
Terror, 2026
 Rupert Museum exhibition view



... it's through Munnik's exploration of scent however, that we experience the most compelling of transformations ...



Georgia Munnik
Terror, 2026
 Rupert Museum exhibition detail



Georgia Munnik
 Detail of *Mud puddling*, 2025
 Butterflies, resin and PHENOTYPE perfume

Georgia Munnik
Reach, 2023
Photograph by Theodore Afrika



Georgia Munnik
Grip, 2023
Photograph by Theodore Afrika



Georgia Munnik
Glitch, 2023
Photograph by Theodore Afrika



Georgia Munnik
Drain, 2023
Photograph by Theodore Afrika

SIAP Fellow Focus: Io Makandal

... environmental embodiments of process, entropy, urban ecology, and hybrid environments during a time of climatic shift.

Io Makandal (b. 1987) was supported by the Social Impact Arts Prize in 2022 to develop a project called the *Listening Garden* located at the Victoria Yards in Lorentzville.

Makandal is an interdisciplinary artist based in Johannesburg, South Africa working with drawing, photography, organic matter and installation. Her practice is concerned with feminist and environmental embodiments of process, entropy, urban ecology, and hybrid environments during a time of climatic shift.

As a foundational influence, Makandal cites her childhood growing up on a plot on the **outskirts of Pretoria, and how her family values with regards to respecting the earth and growing food, allowed her to become more aware of energetic cycles of consumption and waste.**

Her formative years, spent largely in the veld or at her grandmother's 'wild house', also informed her understanding of the idea of 'the wild' and her relationship to the natural world. She has grown up being conscious of the politics of access to natural spaces, and with her current work on the Jukskei she has been able to explore how that translates into urban ecologies. She is motivated by what we learn from the earth as humble custodians, and how we can work towards a collective vital healing.

Working from public urban spaces

Makandal's creative practice has developed over the last ten years into a multi dimensional engagement with the urban environment in various states of material flux. **The idea of the 'creative city' is a well-established approach to urban transformation, but one that infrequently takes into consideration the cyclical or entropic energies at play in a city's becoming.**

Makandal's work is connected to the idea of the city itself as a kind of dispersed creative entity, that produces moments of poetic assemblage in collaboration with its inhabitants in various modes of repair and disrepair, growth and decay, aligned with political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett's thinking about the vibrancy of everyday matter. This has largely meant that her practice draws on, or operates within publicly accessible spaces, whether she is collecting objects and ephemera, drawing, taking photographs on city streets, working with the plants typically found growing spontaneously in unkempt or informal spaces, or making artwork involving soil and mud.

It is an emphasis on **shared or common ground**, what artist Martha Rosler referred to as 'bonus spaces', and landscape architect Gilles Clement the '*third landscape*' that frames her work within the social domain, and which informs and extends her creative investigation into urban infrastructures and ecologies.





The idea of the 'creative city' is a well-established approach to urban transformation, but one that infrequently takes into consideration the cyclical or entropic energies at play in a city's becoming.



Listening Garden

Supported by the SIAP 2022 grant, the *Listening Garden* is a 'living sculpture' planted on the banks of the Jukskei comprising a variety of endangered grasses and plants belonging to the Soweto highveld grassland biome endemic to the area. The project offers a space for contemplation and reflection for those who live and work alongside the river.

Ophidians Promise

In 2024, Makandal participated in a project developed by the Alserkal Advisory titled **A Feral Commons**, which draws from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's notion of the 'feral' — natural phenomena resisting human control — inviting artists of the Global Co-Commission to produce site-specific artworks that arise from local ecologies. Examining the often unrecognised non-human entanglements with humans and their built infrastructures, the artworks aimed to materially contribute to a higher awareness of our environments, unexpected inter-species collaborations, and sustainable public spaces for the future.

The idea for *Ophidians Promise*, arose out of Makandal's observation that the existing concrete pedestrian bridge in Victoria Yards was inhospitable to more-than-human mobility, and that a planted multi-species bridge across the culvert that the river runs through, would create a small opportunity for other creatures living in the vicinity to navigate the otherwise impassable channel of river canalization. Built using salvaged bricks and plants from the *Listening Garden*, the bridge (or ecoduct) is a reconfiguration of existing material found nearby, and an active attempt to recognize and promote the agency of others who might not ordinarily be recognized in urban mobility solutions.



Io Makandal
Ophidians Promise, 2024



Io Makandal
Listening Garden, 2023 - 2024
Installation



Io Makandal
Listening Garden, 2023 - 2024
Installation



Io Makandal
Ophidians Promise, 2024



SLAP Fellow Focus: Io Makandal

Working in public urban spaces

Public urban spaces, sometimes imagined as a kind of empty container for creative intervention, are often highly complex and contested, with multiple interwoven dynamics to take into consideration, despite appearances to the contrary. These include historical and cultural use, heritage value, environmental diversity, proximity to private property, commercial interests, pedestrian needs, traffic safety etc.

Collaborating with fellow artist Samantha McCulloch at the Nars Foundation in New York (2016), Makandal developed a series of artworks with the weedy species commonly found across the city. **Recognizing the value of these often-overlooked plants, the artists collected seeds, scraps of paper, and pages of reference text which they mulched together by hand and mouth to make paper, producing a set of small plant-identifying informational placards that encouraged the dispersal of seeds.** The placards were placed in public areas where they could be discovered by pedestrians and park goers, in an effort to raise awareness and shift public sentiment around the un-planned plant life of urban spaces.

The project is a useful example of a low stakes intervention in public space, embracing impermanence and engaging people in their course of their everyday lives while walking through the city.

Engaging site specificity

Since 2022 Makandal has had the opportunity to work together with the non-profit organisation **Water for the Future** on rehabilitating a section of the Jukskei River bank at **Victoria Yards** - a public/private partnership located in Lorentzville. A number of artworks have also been produced out of this collaborative arrangement.

When working within a particular space, Makandal notes the fundamental importance of generating certain kinds of processes that allow the development of a relationship with the site, its inhabitants and materials in ecologically sensitive manner. **In her own practice she has sought to expand the register of relational responsiveness into different kinds of sensing, such as sound, touch an smell, and to allow creative outcomes to unfold, rather than maintaining certain aesthetically-defined parameters in mind.**

Her experience has been that once you have chosen a site to work with, it is the deepening of that relationship over time out of which further creative projects, interventions and artworks evolve in a continuing process of research and experimentation.

<https://www.instagram.com/iomakandal/>



... a planted multi-species bridge across the culvert that the river runs through, would create a small opportunity for other creatures living in the vicinity to navigate the otherwise impassable channel of river canalization.



SIAP Fellow Focus: Nina Barnett

The Orange River Project

Nina Barnett in collaboration with Dee Marco, Amy Watson and Sinethemba Twalo were supported by the Social Impact Arts Prize in 2022 to undertake primary research on and alongside the Orange River. During the course of a 12 day field trip they traced the Orange River from the Gariep Dam to Alexander Bay.

Nina Barnett is a Johannesburg-based artist, writer and researcher. Her creative practice uses drawings, immersive installations, activations and experimental filmmaking to engage with geography, infrastructure, materiality and experiential knowledge. Barnett's practice-led research offers a situated, unique approach to the racial politics and geological effects of extraction and pollution, using material trajectories to consider environmental issues in relation to systems of oppression.

Throughout her career, much of Barnett's work has been about experiencing environments. She has early memories of visiting the Valley of Desolation, the Tswaing Crater, the Karoo and the ocean, and recalls feeling deeply thrilled at the fact of their being in the world. She has consistently made work to try and simulate, and learn from these kinds of encounters, such that first hand experiences with geographical sites and entities are what bring to her research a singular, subjective focus.

Theorists like Karen Barad and Sylvia Wynter have been strong influences in rethinking the agency of materialities stemming from their implicit quantum relationality, and reframing questions of humanness. At the moment she is developing an integrated practice of writing, researching and making, to position art and art-making as a prompt towards critical engagement with political and ecological questions.

The Orange River Project draws its title from the original name of the infrastructural development initiated by Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd in 1962/1963 - a massive apartheid-era civil engineering undertaking designed to harness the Orange River for irrigation, hydroelectric power, and water supply, and thereby boost agriculture and economic development. The Gariep Dam and the Orange-Fish Tunnel (east of Colesburg in South Africa's interior) form its centerpiece.

Thinking through the river, *The Orange River Project* aimed to explore the myths and history of the Orange River, and to document and critically reflect on the activities that take place within and alongside it. Its long geological past, its role in colonial expansion, the various historic water agreements concluded to manage its usage, the effects of infrastructural and mining projects in attempting to control and harness its flow, and the impacts on communities along its banks who have been historically subject to the kinds of violence, dispossession and alienated labour that are typically involved in the operations of colonial occupation (Gamedze, 2023).

In December 2022 *The Orange River Project* was presented as a sensory, multi-voiced installation at the Rupert Museum in Stellenbosch, which served as an introduction to the collective's in-process thinking, and invited visitors to consider environmental questions drawing on the river's past and future.

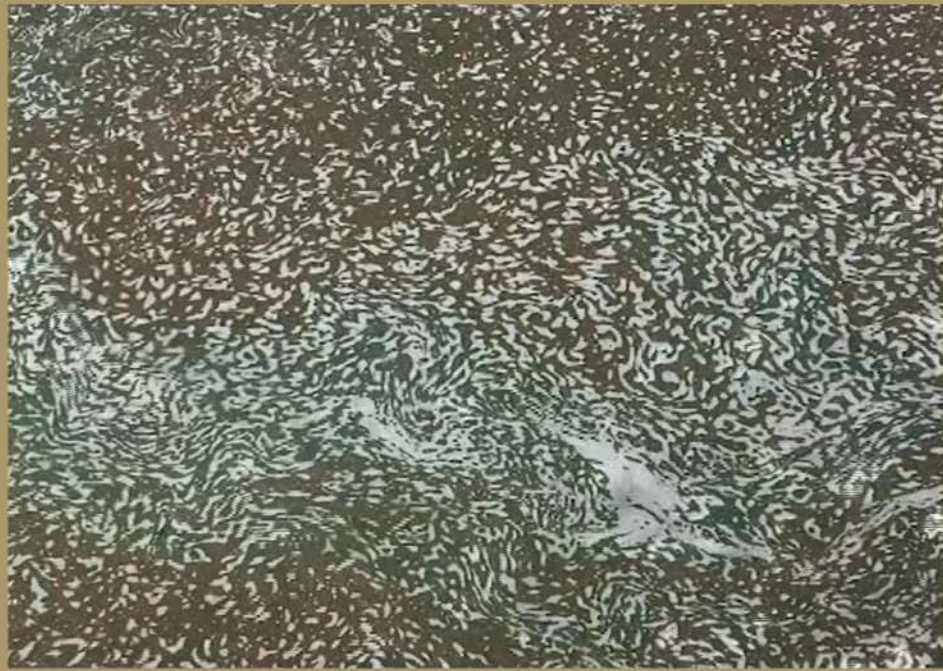
This installation included a sonic environment produced from field recordings from the research trip, with Orange River water suspended at the entrance to the exhibition space and lit up in glass vessels alongside hanging cyanotype markers of sun and air, with hand-made paper and canvas made with the water used as projection screens.



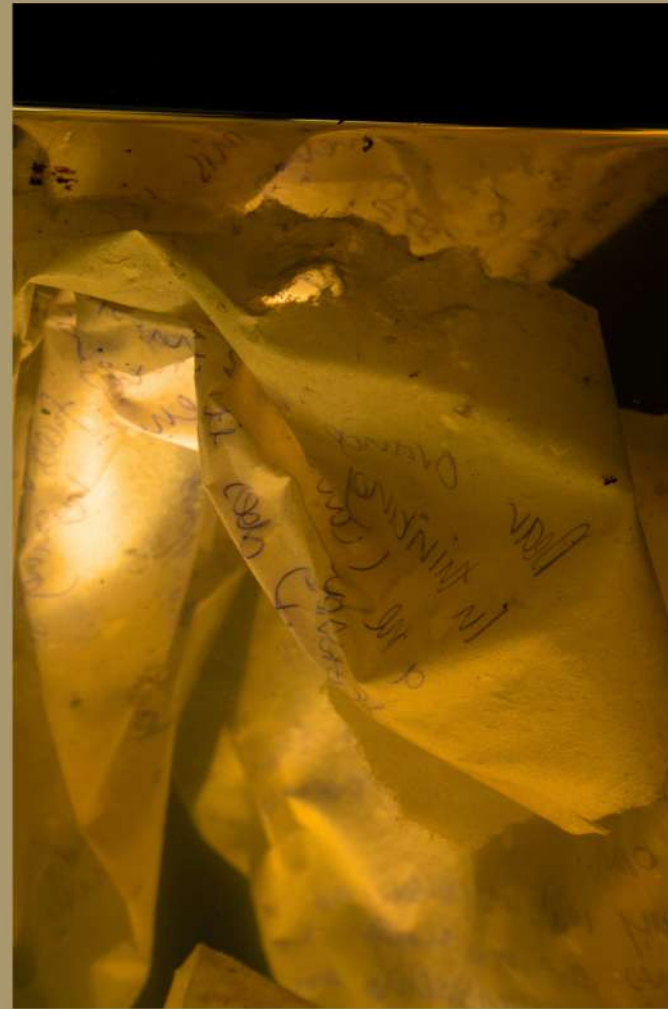
The Orange River Project 2023
Field Trip: Gariep Dam to Alexander Bay -
Gariep Dam display

Can we think about what the name of The Orange River Project means? Can we acknowledge this really painful history of the river being turned into a resource?





The Orange River Project 2023
Video



The Orange River Project 2023
Rupert Museum exhibition detail



The Orange River Project 2023
Rupert Museum exhibition view with
Nina Barnett and Amy Watson



The Orange River Project 2023
Rupert Museum exhibition view

SLAP Fellow Focus: Nina Barnett

The Orange River Project

Working as a collective

Collective practice in art-making involves artists working together to share ownership, knowledge, and resources, prioritizing collaboration, and offering mutual support. Collectives often adopt egalitarian, non-hierarchical structures, using regular meetings and shared decision-making to navigate diverse perspectives.

Barnett notes a number of aspects about working collectively that were really valuable to the way in which the project functioned relationally, and thus socially.

Reflecting on her own positionality as an individual artist, Barnett acknowledged that she met the idea of speaking for the river alone with some trepidation. Given the complexity and scope of the undertaking, and its multidimensional nature, she felt it almost essential to work in a collective way, drawing on the different insights, capacities and creative voice of each collaborator.

The relational dynamic was further enriched by their mutual decision to not separate out each artist from their familial and personal relational context, but to arrange the journey in such a way that partners and children would accompany them, and in such a way participate in and impact on the social dynamics that permeated the creative process, embracing the nuances and intimacy that familiarity brings.

Despite careful preparation, one collaborator was not able at the last minute to join, which produced some unplanned but surprisingly valuable changes in how the project unfolded. With the remaining collective deeply involved on a daily basis in a multimodal research process of documenting and gathering information, the action of reporting back to the physically absent collaborator allowed for some critical narrative processing and strategic reflection at a distance, which ultimately directed what the project was able to become.

Another important aspect of taking a collective approach was to explore different ways of knowing, both in the research methodologies used, and in the various skills and interests that each collaborator brought to the research journey, and project as a whole.

Beginning with an investigation into existing archival material, the collective employed a mixture of research methods on their field trip including direct observations, descriptive note-taking to capture the environment: its affect and ambience, participation in ongoing conversation, poetic reflection and the gathering of sounds, images, film and material from the river and its banks.

Further ways of knowing water as a social body

For Barnett, the collective approach to *The Orange River Project* formed an instructive point of departure for her continued work around water bodies and infrastructure in relation to the Vaal Dam - the focus of her PhD research. Stereotypically dams are considered to be spaces of utility. We know them in this formulation through data: water levels, rate of flow, amount of pressure, chemical composition, levels of pollution etc.

Over time, however, she found herself coming to an understanding that even though the dam was a fully human-made space, it could not be known in fully human terms. This is partly due to the fact that multiple species, chemicals and particulate matter inhabit and pass through the water, but it was also revealed in the stories that people themselves told about their experiences with the water, from the dam to its sources in Mpumelanga and the Lesotho highlands.

The water was a wellspring of myths, conspiracies and suspicion, and these stories would not be told without due caution for how they would be received, or a sense of trust in what would happen with the knowledge. Stories ranged from accounts of drowning and disappearance to tales of snakes, storms and spirits. In these retellings, Barnett recognized the water to be known as an animate force rather than a singular entity.

During her PhD research period, Barnett's creative practice involved visiting every body of water that flows into the Vaal Dam and making paper on site. With water as a collaborator in the making process, the pulp responded to the surface ripples and flow, other materials floating in the water became embedded, and the paper became a record of a moment in a very particular location.

What Barnett realised in these iterative actions however, was the knowing she began to develop was very much oriented through her body, and that a ritualised relationality was what she was looking for in formulating an understanding of the water as another body, as much as she was invested in the material qualities of the paper she produced.

<https://www.instagram.com/ninaruthbarnett/>





The Orange River Project 2023
Field Trip: Gariep Dam to
Alexander Bay - Gariep Dam



The Orange River Project 2023
Field Trip: Gariep Dam to
Alexander Bay - Mine dumps





Nina Barnett
A Turbid Body, Suspended, 2024
Installation at University of Johannesburg



The Orange River Project
2023
Field Trip: Gariep Dam to Alexander Bay - Riemvasmark



Nina Barnett
2023
Making paper - Deneysville, Vaal Dam

SIAP Fellow Focus: Sinethemba Twalo

The Orange River Project

Sinethemba Twalo's contribution to *The Orange River Project* was to produce a sonic archive that expanded the collective's close experiential reading of the river, paying homage to the environments and communities encountered along the way.

Interrogating processes of climate grief, Twalo is interested in the performative nature of language, the politics of noise, and that which has been marked by time and affect. Beginning from the suggestion, "we don't yet know what a sonic body can do," Twalo's ongoing process [over and over] ... and yet again is a series of sketches that think about the question of a liveable life despite ongoing and insurmountable crises.

The Orange River Project sonic archive is performed as a live mixing of samples on a set of DJ decks rather than played as a complete pre-recorded soundtrack. **It includes field recordings and synth interwoven with excerpts of poetry read aloud, alongside other texts, including the writing of poets Dionne Brand and Makhosazana Xaba, depending on the iteration of the work.**

The work builds through the slow repetitive susurrations of waves lapping on the shore, across other murmurs and vibrations, and the sound of birds, which appeared consistently throughout their journey along the Orange River.

While the field recordings are drawn from the research trip as a whole, Twalo explains that the thematics of the project resonated for him most powerfully in their visit to the community of Riemvasmaak, a few kilometers north of the Orange River near the Namibian border. Originally settled in the 1930's, the community was forcibly removed in the early 1970's to make way for an apartheid government military testing site and was only returned after the advent of democracy with the litigation of South Africa's first successful land claim.

The Riemvasmaak community's legacy of dispossession, displacement and reclamation, held within the quietude of an ancient landscape, was particularly affecting.

As Twalo and fellow artist Nina Barnett made their way through the dry river canyon nearby, haunted by the memory of a once flowing stream, they witnessed flocks of birds, swirling and flowing between the canyon walls like water, in a kind of animated registration of loss: the loss of land, the loss of livelihoods, the loss of connection. It is the cries of these birds echoing through the valley that can be heard in *The Orange River Project* soundwork.



Part of the grief one was also trying to make sense of was encountering communities that had dealt with historical forms of removal, and in this case the most affective moment of one of those processes was being at Riemvasmaak.

Grief and mourning: in private and in public.

A paradox of grief, writes A.J. Bermudez (2022), is that it's an occasion for both community and isolation. While the experience of loss is always innately personal, it can also catalyze the desire for connection. As humans, and perhaps not even exclusively as humans (various animal species have been observed to engage in versions of funerary rites), we are hardwired to mourn communally.

In the process of creating *The Orange River Project* soundwork, Twalo describes his own personal encounter with deep grief, and the mourning of a long term relationship that had come to an end. The poetry written out of this moment features in his performance repertoire for the work.

Thematics of grief, mourning and exhaustion are however part of his larger creative and theoretical project in the context of land relations, environmental damage and climate change, and his performances in public to date - with this in mind - speak to the question of ecological grief, otherwise known as solostalgia.

Many people report feelings of anxiety, hopelessness and despair as climate crises escalate around the globe, from urban youth protesting the betrayal of government and society at large to address systemic issues, to indigenous communities bereft at their loss of livelihood.

Grief comes in many forms: There is the bereavement-like grief and trauma in relation to natural disasters experienced personally or by those who are known, or close by. There is also transitional grief, which refers to the growing awareness of things changing, and feelings of grief and sadness because of the multiple losses involved. This includes the loss of human, animal and plant life, and the loss of environmental features, but also the loss of identities, beliefs, and lifestyles, which are integrally intertwined with the more-than-human. Climate grief in general is used to describe a wider sense of loss and anxiety related to the overall effects of climate change, because ecological catastrophe affects multiple intersecting social and political dynamics (Carly Dober, 2024).

While we can acknowledge our grief and anxiety in private, there are few significant opportunities to experience these sentiments in public. If we are able to process feelings in community, making connections between the personal/individual and the collective, we might find some degree of resilience and courage to continue (over and over) sustaining ourselves and each other through the contingencies of our becoming in states of environmental, and other forms of collapse.

https://www.instagram.com/blackuni_cornblessings/



*The Orange River Project:
Sonic Archive 2026
Latitudes performance*



In the Landscape: Site Specific Land Art

Strijdom van der Merwe

Strijdom van der Merwe is one of South Africa's most well known artists working in the land-art tradition. Since 1996 his practice has been firmly rooted in a commitment to site specificity. He describes this as an understanding that the conditions of the work are always inherently conditioned by an individual site, such that the particularities of place that present themselves on the day, at the time, in the season, determine what kind of work he is able to produce.

Van der Merwe has explored multiple different kinds of landscapes over the course of his career: the green and verdant, farmed and cultivated, arid and water-rich. The majority of his work exists only in the form of documentation.

Emerging in the 1960s - 70s, site specific practices challenged traditional art-making processes, with artists abandoning their studios and gallery spaces for distinctive places and unique settings. Site-specificity takes into consideration the physical, historical, or cultural context of the location, with the artwork's meaning, form, and content intrinsically tied to, and in dialogue with its environment.

Land art as a defined category of creative enquiry developed alongside this shift into alternative, public and outdoor spaces, in line with a growing awareness around ecological and environmental issues, and a desire to engage more directly with nature, exploring the landscape as a relational field, rather than as a representation.

Artists working directly with the land typically utilize local materials found nearby and onsite including soil, rocks, vegetation, earth pigments and water.

In the investigation into the complex connection between culture and nature, many land artists have made reference to much older ancestral and

indigenous traditions, such of the making of hill figures, mound art, geoglyphs and rock art. Van der Merwe has similarly drawn attention to the extraordinary rock engravings from Driekopseiland, Riet River in a number of his works, but most directly by working collaboratively with a group of students to reproduce the geometric motifs found on site in sand on the beach. The Driekopseiland site as a whole consists of over 3500 engraved images, on exposed glaciated andesite basement rock in the bed of the Riet River, which is submerged when the river rises. Echoing the deliberate placement of these engravings within the flow of the river, van der Merwe's collaborative intervention was washed away with the turning tide.

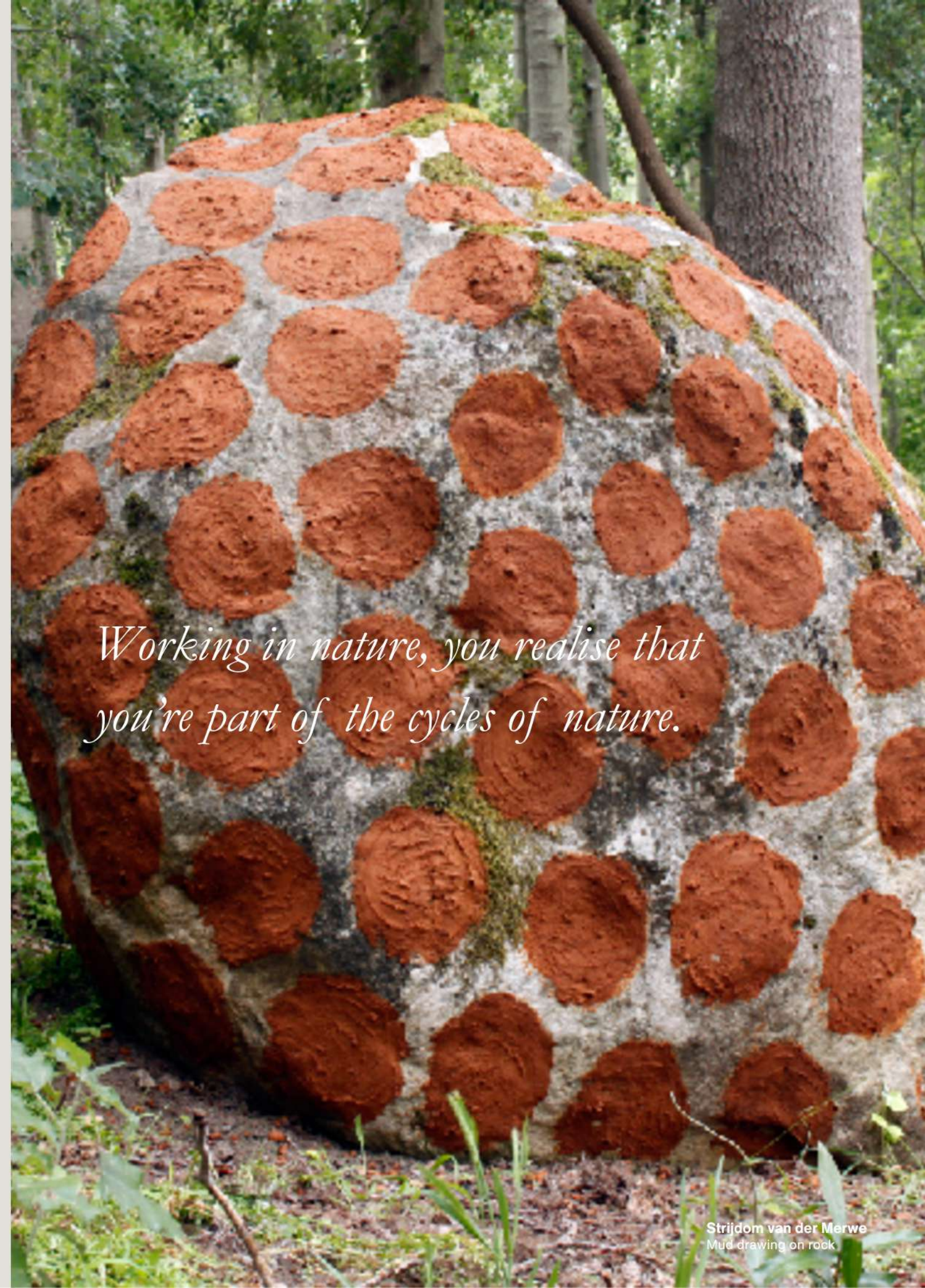
Although van der Merwe has produced some permanent sculptural structures, the vast majority of his practice embraces the temporary.

He writes:

"Working in nature, you realise that you're part of the cycles of nature. Whatever you do is a growing understanding and sharpening perception of these cycles, which eventually also are the cycles of life: growth-change, creation-destruction, life-death. To understand the site that you are working in and its surrounding areas, you have to get in conversation, in meditation with nature while you work. The beauty is in the fact that the work will be ephemeral, savouring that moment while creating it, because that moment will never exist again."

Van der Merwe has been instrumental in promoting land-based creative practices in partnership with a collective of South African artists, through the Site_Specific platform (launched in 2011), which encourages creative practitioners to produce non-destructive, non-invasive, impermanent artworks, temporary installations, performances, and interventions that dissipate in the environment over time

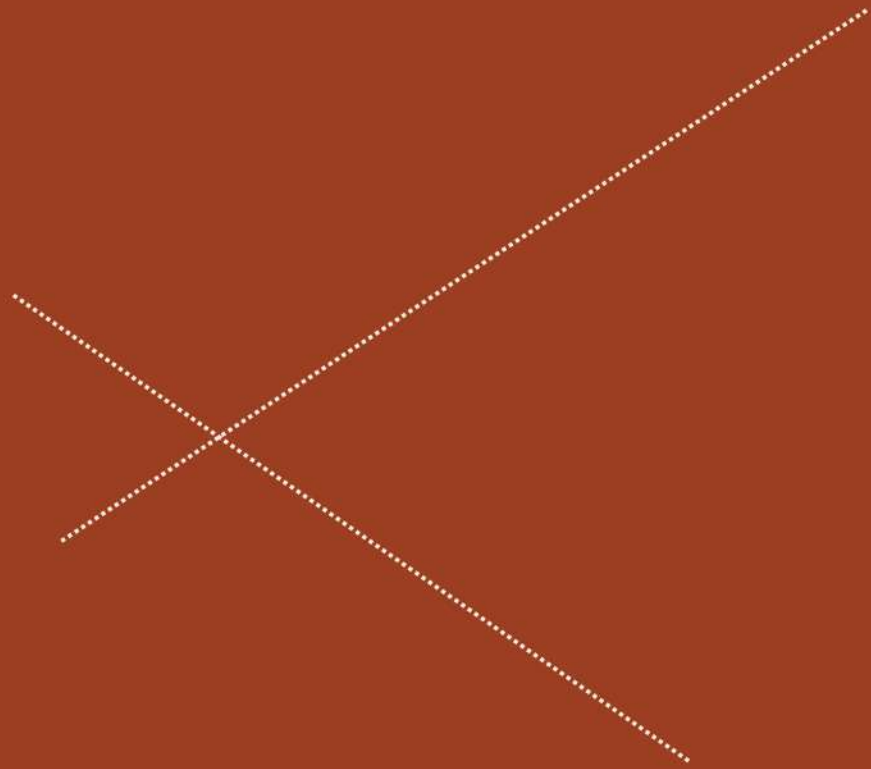
<https://www.instagram.com/strijdomvandermerwe/>



Working in nature, you realise that you're part of the cycles of nature.



Strijdom van der Merwe
Land rehabilitation project using discarded materials to reintroduce indigenous kannebos species in partnership with local farmers over a period of 4 years





Rock engravings from Driekopseiland
Riet River, South Africa



Strijdom van der Merwe
Reproduction of rock engravings from
Driekopseiland Riet River, South Africa



Strijdom van der Merwe
Desert drawing



Strijdom van der Merwe
Graphic design planted using canola in a wheat field, shown here in winter, and spring (below)

SIAP 2026: Partner Institutions

Karoo Origins Fossil Centre

The recently opened Karoo Origins Centre is a small flagship institution in the centre of Graaff Reinet. Home to the extensive Sidney Rubidge fossil collection, it charts the story of Southern Africa's deep geological past as part of the Gondwana supercontinent, the expansion of early life forms from the region's prehistoric seas, the mass extinction event resulting in the evolution of early reptilian life and eventually mammals, through to the current moment and its unfolding ecological crises.

Despite the soft shales and rugged dolerites that characterize the terrain, the Cambedoo region is named after the Khoikhoi words "IXam" - meaning green and "debo(o)" meaning pool, or hollow, due to the area's ability to retain water and remain verdant at times. The landscape is rich with ancient rock art by San peoples depicting their history and belief systems which enlivened the animal and plant life, rocks, winds and rain of the environment in which they were in constant dialogue. It's perhaps through this reminder of relationality, that we're invited to register the scale of our global biodiversity decline, or the need for a sensibility of shared responsiveness.

The rocky aridity of the Karoo landscape is also considered formative to South Africa's aesthetic and literary tradition (JM Coetzee, 1988). Coetzee argued for the necessity of a geological rather than botanical gaze, speaking against aesthetic expectations shaped by the lush landscapes of Europe, plaasroman pastoral ideologies, and racialised mythologies in which themes of emptiness, domestication and land ownership loomed large. With this imperative in mind, the narrative scope of the Karoo's lithic history and multiple geo-temporalities can be read as both prescient and of our time; an opportunity for science and fiction in the making.

The Karoo Origins Fossil Centre may be a point of connection for creative practitioners interested in developing a project focusing on geological and paleontological records, or environmental preservation, restoration and land stewardship, alongside a concern for indigenous practices and cosmologies. The centre has space in its upstairs learning hub for workshops and other facilitated activities, as well as for small events.

<https://fossilcentre.co.za/>
<https://www.instagram.com/karoooriginstfc/>

Enquiries:
 marina@fossilcentre.co.za
 Tel: 087 093 6135



Nuweveld escarpment showing exposures of the Beaufort Group
 Image courtesy Karoo Origins Fossil Centre

Dinogorgon-rubidgei
 Image courtesy Karoo Origins Fossil Centre



SLAP 2026: Partner Institutions

Graaff-Reinet Museums

The Graaff-Reinet Museum complex, comprising four heritage buildings and a military museum, positions itself as an institution synonymous with not only conservation and restoration, but also with exhibiting the history and heritage of all the people in the Camdeboo region.

It holds a diverse permanent collection of civic, domestic and agricultural artefacts, a repository of significant documents, and several special exhibits and collections. Over the course of the year, the museum runs an educational programme for local schools as well as several events aligned to South Africa's heritage calendar and other local activities.

For creative practitioners interested in developing a project more aligned with the social and cultural heritage of the Graaff-Reinet region, the museum provides a range of research opportunities and points of access across Graaff-Reinet Central, Kroonvale, Masezakhe and beyond the town's borders into the Karoo.

Practitioners are invited to investigate the possibility of surfacing lesser-known stories, minor histories or counter-narratives from within local communities, recognising the importance of the personal, anecdotal and living archive, as well as the generation of social connections and new publics.

The Reinet House and Urquart House buildings together provide an outdoor space for sculptural work or event activities, as well as an indoor space for exhibitions and smaller gatherings.

<https://graaffreinetmuseums.co.za/>

Enquiries:

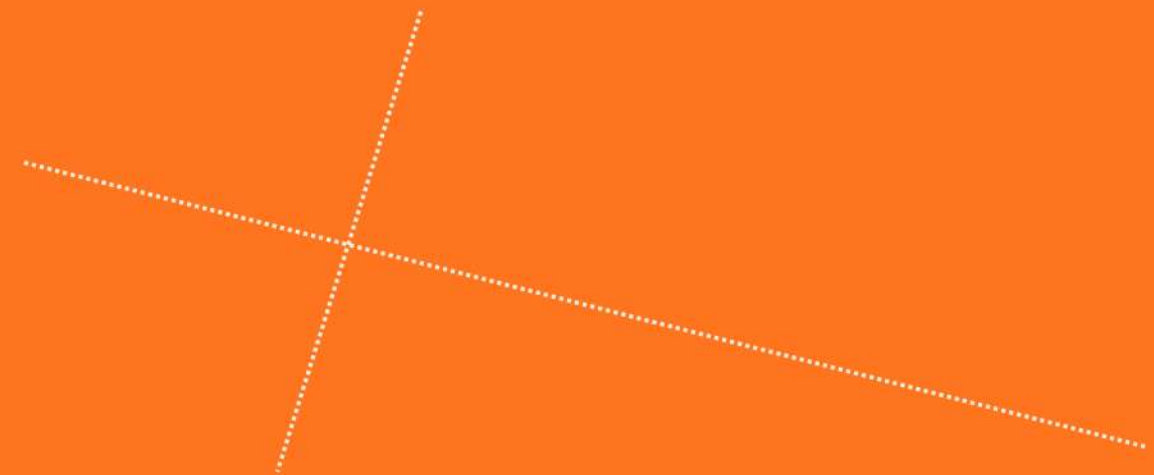
1. Reinet House: 049 892 3801
2. Urquhart House and the Military Museum: 049 892 5650
3. The Old Residency: 049 891 0664
4. The Old Library: 049 892 4248



Graaff Reinet Museum: Reinet House



Graaff Reinet Museum: Reinet House collection and water wheel.



SIAP 2026: Partner Institutions

Jan Rupert Art Centre, Studios and Workshop

Graaff-Reinet has two dedicated spaces for the visual arts.

The first is the Jan Rupert Art Centre, which is programmed with artwork from the Rupert Museum Collections in Stellenbosch.

It also hosts the Social Impact Arts Hub, with artist studios, including a double-room multi-purpose space that can also be used for writing or co-working, and a larger workshop that can accommodate larger forms of production or maker-based processes (e.g., weaving, dyeing, carpentry, ceramics, and metalwork), as well as collaborative production.

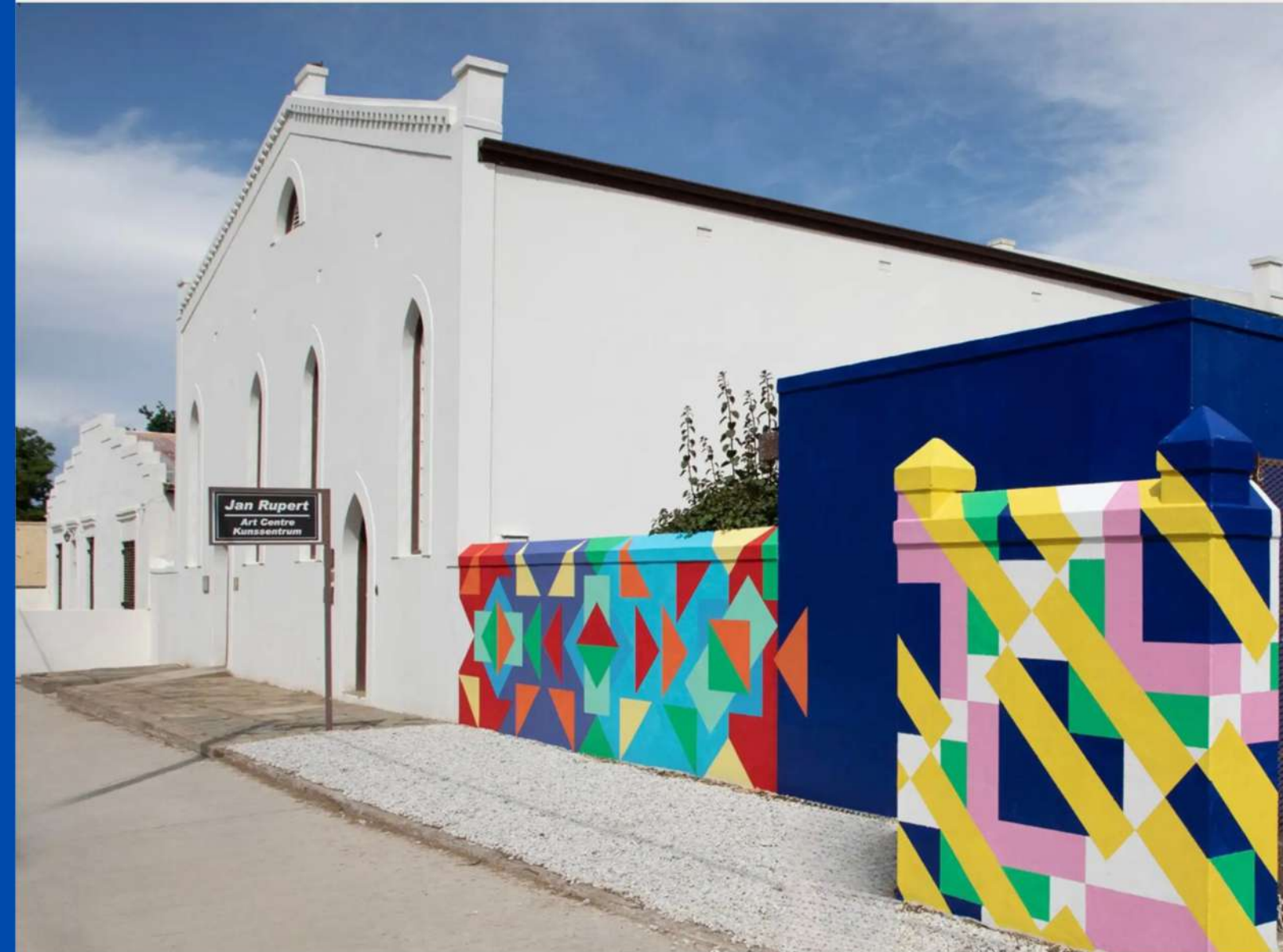
The second space is the Hester Rupert Museum, which exhibits a collection of 126 paintings and sculptures from the last century, donated by 106 artists, located in an old church in the centre of the town, with numerous works by renowned South African artists.

Those with an interest in South African art history may seek to engage critically with specific artists, artworks or genres as a catalyst for their project.

Furthermore, the John Rupert Theatre, conveniently located opposite the Karoo Origins Fossil Centre, is a 50-seater auditorium with a stage, sound and projection facilities, and two tuned pianos, providing an additional space for performance-oriented projects.

Enquiries: +27 (0) 49 892 6107 |
Email: janrupertcentre@telkomsa.net

hesterrupertartmuseum.co.za
<https://hesterrupertartmuseum.co.za/exhibitions-jan-rupert-art-centre-graaff-reinet/#>



Jan Rupert Art Centre, Graaff-Reinet



John Rupert Theatre, Graaff-Reinet

Download the SIAP '26 Application Pack here:

tinyurl.com/bdz634cf