

BRICS EXHIBITION CONCEPT DOCUMENT

EXHIBITION THEME: Uniqueness and convergence

South Africa has a long history of artistic expression dating back to the oldest known art in the world. This has served as a record of the past, providing memories, demonstrating spirituality, telling histories and stories of events and experiences spanning lifetimes. From humans painting and engraving objects and imbuing them with meaning thousands of years ago to modern artist expressing themselves through various mediums, the ideas of transferring deep rooted traditional, spiritual and cultural ideas has been constant. Many of these ideas have been expressed in the artworks using ancient techniques related to engraving, scratching, etching or marking a surface, an intentional and persistent activity through time and across populations in South Africa.

This exhibition highlights and juxtaposes the old vs. the new, exposing how the traditional, spiritual and cultural aspects of a diverse and sometimes ancient South African society are included in modern and contemporary works.

1. OSTRICH ENGRAVING AND ENGRAVED OSTRICH EGG: -- TO BE DISPLAYED TOGETHER IN THE SAME CASE



200X220



150X150

Ostrich engraved rock art from the Northern Cape, dated to approximately 2000 BP illustrates the importance of this animal to the Khoisan groups in the region at that time. Archaeological records show that ostrich eggshell also held a functional value to these populations, as depicted by water containers and beads. Here is an example of a modern engraved ostrich eggshell used as a water container from Khoisan communities in the Kalahari during the 19th century.

2. ISICHOLO, MARRIED ZULU WOMAN'S HAT and NOZI VESSEL

--- TO BE DISPLAYED TOGETHER IN THE SAME CASE. Stand for hat is available and can be brought with. The vessel must be displayed on a mirror to show its red underside.



205X135



380X135

The flared hat or *isicholo*, is traditionally worn by married Zulu women in South Africa during religious and **cultural** ceremonies. Today this hat style has been adopted in modern fashion, still representing deeply held cultural beliefs. The vessel alongside the hat, titled *Nozi*, was inspired by an isicholo worn by the artist's aunt, Nozibuko, demonstrating the crossover of tradition into artistic expression.

3. **BLOMBOS OCHRE AND LEAF THREAD VESSEL**
--- TO BE DISPLAYED TOGETHER IN THE SAME CASE



100X100



270X300

Dated to 77 000 years ago, this cast of the Blombos Ochre illustrates some of the oldest art in the world. The distinct cross-hatched design, in combination with parallel incised lines, represents the earliest forms of abstract art and conventional design in modern human history. The ochre colour of burnt red is also a consistent favourite through time. These ideas of aesthetics and symbolic behaviour are consistently used in South African art today, as exemplified by this Pit-fired, coiled terracotta vessel, titled, *Leaf Thread*.

4. ROCK ART REPRODUCTION BY GEORGE STOW



920x780

The tradition of rock art is iconic across South Africa and is a significant aspect of our heritage spanning thousands of years. Arriving in South Africa from London in the mid 19th century, George William Stow was fascinated by South Africa and its indigenous people, the Khoisan. He recorded many of the 'Bushman' rock paintings across South Africa in detailed watercolour copies. This rock painting reproduction, painted in 1865, illustrates a spiritual event. The imagery includes important animals such as antelope and felines, and the traditional elongated anthropomorphic (part human, part animal) figures representative of trance experiences.

5. FISHERMAN DRAWING NETS

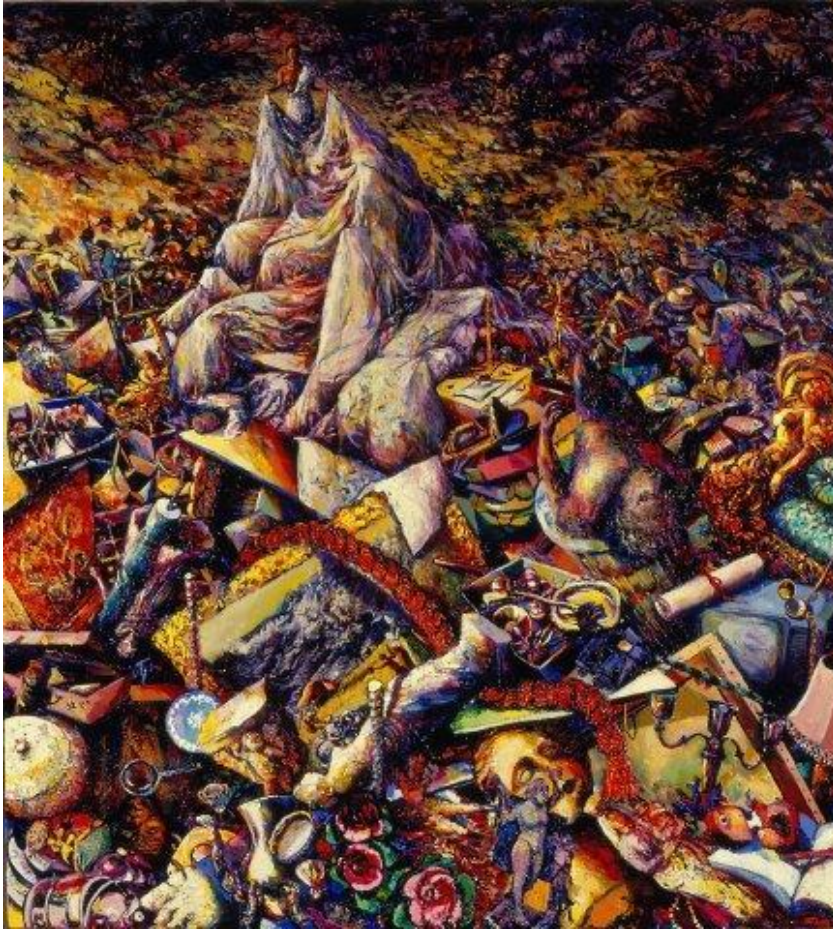
– TO BE PLACED ALONGSIDE ROCK ART



815X1020

Rock art imagery is often included in South African contemporary art works. This composition by Walter Battiss, *Fishermen Drawing Nets*, is based on the motifs from South African **rock painting** and uses the traditional human figure imagery to depict an everyday activity.

6. PILING WRECKAGE UPON WRECKAGE BY PENNY SIOPIS



1810X2000

Much of South Africa's contemporary art scene relates to the politics, social commentary and history of a vibrant country. Penny Siopis is a South African artist living in Cape Town. Between 1985 and 1995 she produced a body of work using oil paints and collage techniques, often referred to as her 'history paintings'. They combine symbols of European and African culture piling up as the debris of history.

7. THE MISSING ONES BY WILLIE BESTER



1500x250

Willie Bester is perhaps South Africa's best known example of Resistance Art. His art protested Apartheid and today, continues to speak up against violence, inequality and poverty in South Africa. His extraordinary work uses discarded objects and scraps of metal to illustrate social and political themes. Here, *The Missing Ones* depicts the many children that have been lost, reported missing and abused.

8. REVELATION OF ST JOHNS BY AZARIA MBATHA

Text before these two artworks:

Certain concepts are also readily portrayed in South Africa's art both in ancient times and today. Spiritual and religious depictions are common in various mediums including, for example, rock paintings, lithographs from Rorke's Drift and the famous painting by Irma Stern, titled *Two Arab Men*.



600X850

Known for his narrative treatment of biblical themes, Azaria Mbatha is acknowledged as one of the preeminent artists of his generation. "For me Biblical stories not only represented stories from the past; they became meaningful comments about the country in which I lived." (Azaria Mbatha, in *Theories that did not Succeed in Practice*, 1998).

9. TWO ARABS, DAKAR BY IRMA STERN

–TO BE DISPLAYED ALONGSIDE #8



950X760

Arguably one of South Africa's most recognized portrait artists, Irma Stern, was inspired by her extensive travels, particularly those in Africa. These journeys resulted in a wealth of artistic creativity in the 1930s and 40s.

10. MADIBA EMBROIDERED CLOTH BY SARAH MNISI



1150X1050

Modern depictions of iconic traditional foundations are evident. The embroidered cloth made by Sarah Mnisi of the Mapula Embroidery Project from the North West Province of South Africa depicts aspects of national pride, while honouring and memorialising Madiba.