

Philippa van Straaten  
philppasarahvanstraaten@gmail.com  
076 115 1677

## Profile

History and heritage studies postgraduate and professional with extensive experience of working in a variety of museum and heritage environments. Currently working as the Curator: Traditional Southern African Art at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), as well as assisting with and/or managing various responsibilities within other roles at the JAG, during colleagues' absence. These include as Acting Chief Curator, and Registrar with associated responsibilities. Seeking to engage fully with the preservation, digitisation, collections management functions and facilitation of effective and efficient public access, including loans, within the Registrar position at the JAG.

## Abilities

- Hands on experience working with many of the JAG's collections apart from the Traditional SA Art collections, through working with and within the Registrar role, and therefore gaining in-depth knowledge of what is required of both positions
- Longstanding background in handling and working with various media and material
- Interest in and wide knowledge of archival practice generally, and thorough theoretical and practical competence in stocktaking, accessioning, cataloguing and maintaining records in various hard and soft formats (such as Excel and Vernon)
- Sound academic knowledge of the functioning of a museum and archive, and their aims and roles
- Awareness of the sensitivities and ethical concerns needed for exhibiting and re-presenting culture and social history to diverse audiences
- Experience of working in a museum as a first point of contact for museum visitors and researchers
- Experience using best practice methods when handling, cataloging, storing and conserving various museum collections
- Experience with the logistics of putting up exhibitions, and some experience of curating exhibitions
- Experience with managing loans, and acting as a courier with all that entails for such loans
- Extensive experience with Microsoft packages, Internet research, databases (such as Vernon) and social media
- Writing reports and creating material for archival purposes
- Events/seminar organisation and budget/financial management/ supply chain
- Team management, training and team-building
- Friendly, professional demeanour
- High personal integrity, reliable and approachable, tactful and pragmatic
- Creative and takes initiative

## Work history

**December 2014- present**

**Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG)**

**Curator: Traditional SA Art**

Responsible for the maintenance, care, documentation and curation of the world-renowned Traditional SA Art collection at the JAG

Main duties and work carried out so far include:

- Curated the *Pastoral Pieces* exhibition as part of the overall JAG Centenary in 2015, and the *Call and Response* exhibition as part of the multi-participant and ongoing Call and Response Project. Co-curated *Spellbinders* in 2018, and *Ngoma I* in 2019
- Yearly stocktakes of the entire JAG Traditional SA Art collection, and adding to and maintaining a database of the collection; facilitating bi-annual stocktakes of the Brenthurst Collection with the Brenthurst Library, on behalf of the owners
- Maintaining the storerooms, and keeping up to date locations registers of all works in the Collection, and providing information to the Registrar and Chief Curator
- Updating of archive files, catalogue cards and metadata, both in hard copy and online formats (Excel and on Vernon)
- Attending skills improvement courses online and in person to understand global museum and heritage issues
- Research and reading on relevant topics in the JAG library and online
- Assisting with the drafting of relevant policies and other policy-related material for JAG and the ACH directorate
- Liaising with colleagues regarding best practice methods for storage, conservation and record-keeping

- Effecting conservation or restoration requests where necessary, and ensuring that the collection is fumigated and conserved, and that ICOM standards for storage are effected as far as possible
- Liaising with researchers and other institutions regarding the use of the Traditional Collections for research, and knowledge dissemination.
- Providing tours and guided visits to the exhibitions and storerooms
- Facilitating workshops, walkabouts and discussions around the Traditional SA Art collections and for JAG generally
- Assisting with the role of Registrar, as/ when required:
  - managing various stages of the loans process for local, regional and international loans, both outgoing and incoming
  - international couriership of artworks from across the JAG collections, and ensuring works are properly transported, (un)packed and displayed. Liaising with shipping companies, lender and customs
  - drawing up of condition reports for all loaned works, as well as completing them, and checking against the works to note changes or damage, at all relevant stages of the loan
  - arranging for the collection and delivery of works from and to JAG for various reasons
  - assisting with and completing stocktaking across all other JAG collections, and maintaining storage spaces and problem-solving
  - records management, both physical and digital, and maintaining accessions lists and archival records
  - Assisting with facilitating research into JAG collections, and JAG generally
  - Assisting image researchers to access high-res digital images from JAG collections, and the financial administration thereof
  - considerations around conservation, and digitisation, as well as best practice methodology thereof
- Assisting with other aspects of JAG work- moving of artworks, offering help with and input into exhibitions, education tours, administrative work particularly if acting as Chief Curator on occasion, attending art fairs and events on behalf of the Gallery
- Assisting with the administration of the Art Gallery Committee meetings, and taking minutes thereof

**October 2011- December 2014**

**Museum Africa**

**Curatorial Assistant**

Working closely with the Manager: Collections to deal with inquiries, carry out research, assist with exhibitions and generally assist in the curation/administration of many of Museum Africa's collections

Main duties and work carried out so far include:

- assisting with Public Research inquiries into Museum Africa image collections
- setting up appointments for Public Research endeavours with clients, and assisting them while at Museum Africa
- the processing of digital orders for researchers and exhibitions from start to finish; invoicing and receipting
- assisting with disaster management during and after periodic flooding, and minimising consequent collection damage through using best practice methods of conservation and handling
- understanding and carrying out of proper handling, storage, care and stock-keeping/documentation techniques relating to a wide variety of materials, including photographs, documents and artworks
- general administration, accessioning and database file updating of items, in different collections
- managing the Public Research section in the absence of appointed staff
- some knowledge of loan and condition reports for loans to other museums or institutions, as well as obtaining insurance valuations for loan items
- researching aspects of other Museum Africa collections, such as History, Geology and Cultural History
- managing the Photographic Library, and maintaining the book and periodical collection, assisting with inquiries
- researching images and writing text for the monthly website feature, *Picture of the Week*, and liaising with colleagues and Information Services for this
- assisting with the mounting of exhibitions, as well as putting up two small, self-curated exhibitions
- assisting in giving short tours of Museum Africa exhibitions and storerooms after hours
- understanding of the City of Johannesburg and Museum Africa protocol, procedures, policies and resources
- acquiring familiarity with the collections database, and the ability to enter records and obtain specialised reports
- researched the Times Media collection in preparation for the mainly photographic 'The Rand Daily Mail- 1902-1985: A Retrospective' exhibition (did not take place due to funding)

**June 2011- September 2011**  
**volunteer**

**Parktown and Westcliff Heritage Trust**

**Research and education**

Researched and catalogued heritage buildings pertaining to the ambit of the Trust, and worked as an educator to school groups

**April 2009- end of May 2011**

**ICOMOS-UK, London**

**Office Manager**

Worked closely with the Secretary and Committee members in order to carry out the aims of the organisation, which operates in the World Heritage sector

Main duties included:

- managing the day-to-day administration and overall financial functioning of the charity
- organising and servicing committee meetings and Annual General Meetings
- conceptualising creative material for and organising money and profile-raising events, such as skills evenings
- promoting ICOMOS-UK to members and the public via newsletters and email communication
- marketing using Facebook, Twitter and the ICOMOS-UK website, redesigning of the website
- management of membership and its database, dealing with inquiries from members and the general public
- assisting in the management of the INTACH UK Trust and the scholarships it offers to research students

**November 2009- May 2011**  
**volunteer**

**London Canal Museum**

**Front Desk, Archives and Oral History**

Responsibilities included:

- high-quality visitor service, introductory talks and dealing with inquiries
- day-to-day running of the museum, often without supervision and assisting after hours with extra tasks
- training of new volunteers and updating of training manual and induction programmes
- the cataloguing of photographic material and its preservation
- transcriptions of oral history interviews, regarding life on narrowboats and around canals

**March 2008- February 2009** **ABC International, Johannesburg** **English Teacher**

**March 1998- February 2008** **Phase 2 CDs, Johannesburg** **Sales Assistant, and Assistant Manager**

**July 2007- December 2007** **Ribton-Turner Recruitment Johannesburg** **Part-time Research Assistant**

**May 2000- January 2001** **Clinton Cards, Farnham, UK** **Sales Assistant**

### **Qualifications and training**

*One- day training course: 'Understanding Ethnographic Exhibitions'*

November 2010

UCL (University College London)

Introduction to cultural history collections, exhibition and representation, examining cultural history exhibitions in the British Museum as a case study, practical issues around dealing with contentious material

*Master of Arts-Heritage Studies*

February 2007-February 2008

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Coursework and Research Report

Modules taken- Public Culture, Creating Media, Reconfiguring/Re- presenting the Archive

Internship undertaken at the (then) South African Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, and involved with cataloguing of correspondence related to one of the Museum's publications.

*Postgraduate Diploma (with Distinction)- African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies*

February 2005- December 2005

University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town, the Robben Island Museum, Cape Town

Modules taken- Issues in Museum and Heritage Studies, Public History and Tourism, Curatorship

Internship undertaken at the District Six Museum, Cape Town- and was involved in the cataloguing and conserving of photographic negatives which belonged to a well-known studio photographer in District Six.

*Bachelor of Arts- Joint Honours in History and Classical Civilisations*

February 2004- December 2004

Rhodes University, Grahamstown

Modules taken covered- historiography theory, oral history, public history, Greek tragedies, biography and Roman historiography

*Bachelor of Arts- History, Classical Civilisations, Journalism (triple major)*

February 2001- December 2003

Rhodes University, Grahamstown

Modules taken- various history modules, e.g. themes in Southern African history, Africa in Crisis, and South African identities and 'nationhood'; the 20<sup>th</sup> century in crisis; representations of the various Twentieth Century conflicts in photography, literature, music and film; the Cold War; print/ broadcast modules; media theory and issues related to representation, practical specialisation in television

Holiday work experience at the *Germiston City News* newspaper and *Engineering News*, 2001

University activities, achievements and voluntary work (SA and UK)

- Residence Committee and Rhodes Music Radio newsreader, and News Manager
- Tutor- various levels
- National Heritage Council Young Heritage Ambassador- Western Cape, 2005
- Member of the Golden Key International Honour Society
- Member of Richmond ACTSA (Action for Southern Africa, successor of the UK Anti- Apartheid Movement)- a fund-raising charity dedicated to raising money for and creating awareness of developmental and social issues in the Southern African region
- Volunteer at Children's Haven, Grahamstown and at Grahamstown SPCA

References

Diana Wall

Ex- Manager: Collections , Museum Africa

Tel: 072 221 8003

Email: dianarosewall@gmail.com

Ali Hlongwane

Ex-Deputy Director ACH, COJ : Museums and Galleries

Tel: 082 463 9869

Linda Chernis

Ex-Curator Images, Museum Africa

Tel: 082 468 1431

Email: chernisl@gmail.com