

EXHIBITIONS

Exploring iconic UP Museums art collections

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THE University of Pretoria Museums (UP Museums) recently hosted a group of visitors for a tour of the institution's most prestigious art exhibitions, as part of the University's celebration of 30 years of democracy. The group was accompanied by Professor Francis Petersen, who took the reins as UP's Vice-Chancellor and Principal from 1 October 2024.

"The UP Museums have curated a series of captivating art exhibitions in 2024, weaving together the rich tapestry of South Africa's 30-year democratic journey and highlighting the institution's enduring commitment to artistic excellence," said Dr Sian L. Tiley-Nel, Head of the UP Museums and Curator of the Mapungubwe Collection and Mapungubwe Archive.

To Not Forget: 30 Years of Democracy 1994-2024 opened its doors on 3 April 2024 at UP's iconic Old Arts Building, built in 1910 and declared a national monument in 1968. The exhibition runs through 29 November 2024, and features over 30 carefully selected South African artworks, each piece representing a significant moment in the University's transformative journey since the dawn of democracy. The exhibition's title drew inspiration from Durban-born artist Siso Ka-Mkame, and reflects the significance of remembrance in South Africa's democratic narrative.

The exhibition showcases UP's commitment to transformation through art, highlighting works acquired through purchases, donations and bequests since 1994. Many featured pieces were created by former staff members, postgraduate students and alumni, demonstrating the strong creative bonds between the institution and its community.

A complementary museum exhibition titled Homage to Pretoria: Narratives from the University of Pretoria Art Collection at the Javett-UP Art Centre presented signature works inspired by South Africa's administrative capital city. This exhibition primarily featured pieces from the University's institutional art collection, displayed in the Bridge Gallery. The UP Museums also hosted other exhibitions such as Plurality, coordinated and curated by the Visual Arts Department in the School of the Arts.

Dr Tiley-Nel also highlighted the institutional importance of preserving collections such as the University's world-renowned Mapungubwe Collection.

"The University of Pretoria has played a pivotal role in preserving and showcasing the Mapungubwe Collection, a testament to our nation's remarkable cultural heritage. These exhibitions provide a unique opportunity for visitors to engage with this priceless legacy and understand how the University continues to champion the preservation and dissemination of South Africa's artistic and historical treasures."

The historical Old Arts Building, which houses most of the UP Museums' collections, is itself a testament to South African heritage. "This sandstone masterpiece features distinctive architectural elements including a clock tower, Oregon pine floors and slate staircases, all set against the backdrop of the University's manicured lawns," Dr Tiley-Nel said.

"The diversity in the museum galleries embraces UP's safeguarding of collections on behalf of the nation, and the diverse collections on exhibition range from ceramics and art to sculpture."

The UP Museums emphasised that these exhibitions not only celebrate South Africa's democratic journey but also showcase UP's role in preserving and promoting the country's artistic and cultural heritage, while fostering an inclusive and diverse landscape for future generations.

Dr Tiley-Nel invited visitors and the University community to explore these remarkable UP Museums exhibitions, which offer unique insights into South Africa's democratic transformation and the country's timeless cultural treasures, "unique in not only higher education but also in the country".