

FRIENDS OF THE ART MUSEUM

Public Benefit Organization: PBO930029573

Email: friendsoftheartmuseum@gmail.com

Address: 1 Park Drive Central Port Elizabeth 6001

Contact: Mr Newman: 078 703 7003 / Mr Boulter: 083 232 0734



PRESS RELEASE

17 October 2025

PASSION, PATRONAGE & THE PUBLIC: 1975 - 2025 AN EXHIBITION CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF THE FRIENDS' SUPPORT OF ARTWORK ACQUISITION FOR THE ART MUSEUM COLLECTION

To celebrate 50 years of supporting the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, the Friends of the Art Museum are hosting a jubilee exhibition entitled 'Passion, Patronage and the Public: 1975–2025'.

The exhibition launches on Saturday 1 November at 10:30am for 11:00am at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum at 1 Park Drive, Central.

The exhibition reflects the important role that the Friends of the Art Museum have played in supporting the acquisition of artworks for the permanent collection of the Art Museum.

In 1975, the Friends of the Art Museum (formerly the King George VI Association) was founded by like-minded members of the art community who recognised that the Art Museum needed additional funding to ensure the growth of the permanent collection.

From its inception in 1956, the Art Museum was fully funded by the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, which meant that the city leadership had a budget available to buy artworks at their discretion. However, for most of its existence, the museum's acquisition budget has been relatively small, so the Friends' additional funding for this critical function has always been greatly appreciated.

Acquiring new works for the collection is governed by the Art Museum's Selection Committee. The committee is appointed through the Director of the Art Museum and ratified by the City Council. The selection committee includes members with a deep knowledge and love of art history and local and national art trends. They are guided by the collection policy which aims to promote the development of a dynamic regional collection which reflects the history and character of art, craft and design produced in the Eastern Cape and its relationship to national and international trends.

The Friend's budget for acquisitions, while modest, has meant that at critical moments where the selection committee has identified important artworks for the collection, and city funding was not available, the Friends could step in and facilitate the purchases.

PASSION, PATRONAGE & THE PUBLIC: 1975 - 2025 reflects these important moments and includes a variety of art works both local and international, made by well-known artists with internally recognised careers to emerging artists who now have a footprint in the Art Museum.

National highlights include William Kentridge and Tommy Motswai which will be hung alongside Eastern Cape legends Hylton Nel, Robert Brooks and Fred Page.

In 2016, the Art Museum was able to purchase selected works of Ethna Frankenfeld from her important solo exhibition awarded to her as the top prize winner in the 2011 Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Biennial Competition and Exhibition.

The Friends also funded the acquisition of works by three established Eastern Cape artists: Michael Barry, Ayanda Mji and Dolla Sapeta. All three of these artists are alumni of the Imvaba Arts Association, an art group formed in the 1980s to oppose the apartheid regime. They helped create posters and other visual material in support of the liberation movement in the Bay.

In 2021, the Red Location Gallery Chief Curator, Uthando Baduza ran their annual developmental project, the Sketchbook, which was designed to help develop the artistic practice of under-privileged artists in Nelson Mandela Bay. The selected participants were mentored by ceramic artist and Walter Sisulu University lecturer, Sonwabiso Ngcai. The participants were challenged to make new works on the theme, The body and space in the time of COVID. The work produced during this period was outstanding and the exhibition was put before the selection committee for consideration. In 2021 the city was still dealing with the crisis of the COVID pandemic during which the purchase of artwork was indefinitely put on hold. Through the assistance of the Friends' funding, the Art Museum was able to purchase, Production line by Mzwamadoda Yaya and Mbiz'ekhaya by Ayanda Nkomo for the collection.

With the Friends' support, the Art Museum also acquired a significant collection of traditional Xhosa beadwork and accessories. The inclusion of traditional attire and beadwork accessories into the Art Museum marked a significant shift in attitude to the value of these objects. In the Art Museum, these works are not only appreciated for the stories they share about our Xhosa community but importantly the pieces of beadwork and traditional attire are appreciated as significant pieces of art. The acquisition of these objects was not supported by the city in 1988, so the Friends stepped in with the necessary support and funding. The legacy of this acquisition is celebrated in the current exhibition, #Umbhaco, which is hung alongside the Friends 50th Celebration exhibition in recognition of its importance.

Due to funding restrictions within the city, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality has not been able to fund the purchase of artworks from 2010 to 2021. In 2018, the Friends of the Art Museum launched the Museum Gala to raise much needed funds. Art lovers around the city demonstrated their commitment to support local creative talent in the Eastern Cape by buying tickets to this glamorous fashion event. The event was bolstered by sponsorship from Adrian Gardiner's Mantis Collection.

This funding enabled the purchase of over ten new artworks by contemporary Eastern Cape artists for the collection and entrenched the importance of the Friends' fundraising efforts in the ongoing development of the permanent collection of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum.

The Friends of the Art Museum is a registered public benefit organisation that was established in 1975. As well as supporting the Art Museum in acquiring new pieces, the

Friends have also supported the Art Museum by organising art events creating a vibrant arts, culture and heritage community, and by funding disadvantaged community and youth access to the museum and art workshops.

The Friends of the Art Museum take pride in Nelson Mandela Bay's visual art collection, investing in audience development, art preservation, art education and art appreciation.

The Friends welcome new members, patrons and donors to join their efforts.

While many of the works in Passion, Patronage and the Public are objects located in a specific time and space, they are always available for re-interpretation by an inquisitive public.

This is a reminder that as generations pass, the Art Museum remains an invaluable cultural asset for everyone.

For further information, please contact:

The Art Museum:

Emma O'Brien on 041 506 2000 or 079 490 0690 or email:

artmuseum@mandelametro.gov.za

Friends of the Art Museum:

Mr H Newman: 078 703 7003, Mr G Boulter: 083 232 0734

or email: friendsoftheartmuseum@gmail.com

ENDS