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Arts project appreciates Macassar and its people

A project aimed at changing the tarnished image of the community of Macassar township near Somerset West, as being home only to crime, poverty and other social ills is reaping fruits after a collaboration between the University of Cape Town's (UCT) School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics and the community. The arts project presents another side of the story of this community through an exhibition called: "Who We Are".

The response to the exhibition has been overwhelming, and now there is talk on ways to keep its photographs on permanent display.

Studio Light, a non-profit youth development organisation in this township conceptualised the idea in 2016. Clint Abrahams, lecturer and architect, and John Coetzee, a principal technical officer in the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics curated the exhibition as part of a community outreach initiative and a design-build experiment.

Several workshops and discussions took place every Friday evenings in Macassar living rooms, evolving into a photographic project in June 2017 for which the participating youngsters shot street scenes that countered the negative perceptions of the area.

Abrahams paints the scenario: "They reconnected with their neighbours, developing trust as they captured people going about their everyday business, and after two years the group produced a series of images that told a story of hope and promise." He says young people created displays of objects found in the backyards of their parents' homes, transforming ordinary spaces into extraordinary places.

The group attended a frame-making workshop at UCT presented by Coetzee and Shafiek Matthews. They created frames from reclaimed timber, which they used to better show off their images. The weekly meetings culminated in an idea for an exhibition in July this year, with visual installations spread across three sites – two private homes, and the Macassar Public Library.

The house of Thomas and Enith Adonis, known locally as Bong's Place, was home to the display detailing the journey of Studio Light. This served as an introduction to the exhibition. "Here was a shack, previously used as a shebeen, converted into a temporary

gallery, paying homage to the generosity of the ad-hoc structures used by the youths to produce the work," says Abrahams.

The house of Paul Swartz was also opened to the public for viewing the many creative works made by this inspiring television repairman and sculptor. Says Abrahams: "Here, visitors were confronted with the potential which citizens have to better their environment through the repurposing of found objects."

The structure, which is currently being proposed as a permanent addition after the library's gate reading recorded an increase of 1 200 visitors during the exhibition, displays the photographic images captured over the past two years.

The project has sparked other plans that will be a collaborative effort involving local schools and other community organisations.

[See more photos of the project here.](#)



Some of Studio Light's artworks on display.

PIC: Studio Light

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