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UCT's Irma Stern Museum to showcase selected Grade 11 learners Art works

To commemorate their 50th anniversary, the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Irma Stern Museum partnered with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to invite Grade 11 learners doing Visual Art and Design to participate in a "Rethinking Irma Stern" project.

The exciting practical assessment task aimed to celebrate the connections between Visual Arts and Design and called for relevant participants throughout the province to re-think, re-imagine and re-interpret iconic works by Irma Stern, who is considered one of South Africa's most prolific and powerful artists, having played a leading role in introducing *avant-garde* art to the country.

The submissions were judged by an independent panel, which selected the artwork of 51 learners to be exhibited at the UCT Irma Stern Museum. An event was held on Saturday, 10 September.

The museum's director, Nadja Daehnke, thanked the WCED, adjudicators and funders involved in bringing this project to life. "A special congratulations to those here today whose work was chosen; it is a privilege to enjoy and celebrate the inspiration of a new generation of artists," she said.

Deputy chief education specialist at the WCED, Neil Simons, emphasised the opportunity that the collaborative project has opened up to nurture young people, and to introduce them to different environments. "Arts subjects are important to us as a department in terms of our focus on Steamac [science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics, agriculture and coding] fields, and help our pupils develop the kind of skills they will need to succeed in the current and future economy," he said. In adding his commendations to the learners for their achievement, he urged them to "continue developing your skills, and expose yourself to the world."

The project's adjudicators agreed that the high standard of work submitted from learners across the province made narrowing down a selection for the exhibition a difficult task. "There was such an immense amount of talent, which was amazing to see, and very inspiring. I love being surrounded by young artists and their work," said Sitaara Stodel, a technical officer at the Michaelis School of Fine Art's photography department, and a contemporary artist in her own right.

Rory Elliot, who is also a practising artist and currently completing his master's at the Michaelis School of Fine Art said that he was very impressed, not only by the learners' practical skills, but also how they were thinking conceptually about Irma Stern's work and how to re-imagine the themes and ideas. "In the brief the use of unconventional materials was encouraged, and some learners really embraced that and handled it very well," he said. "I was also excited to see the use of oil paints by high school pupils, as it is such a versatile medium."

Lifa Nogaga attends Sea Point High School and chose to rework an Irma Stern painting by adding some details to a rural countryside scene. "I was inspired by my love of nature and felt that the addition of trees and mountains brought a new element to the original work," he said. Nogaga plans on pursuing a career in art but added that "I will have to do some other work on the side initially to make some money."

The exhibition is open to the public until 30 September and teachers and learners enter for free during this time.



Some of the works of art by Grade 11 learners exhibited at the Irma Stern Museum.

Photo: Lerato Maduna/UCT

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