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UCT and Iziko partner in reimagining the story of human evolution

The Human Evolution Research Institute (HERI) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in collaboration with the Iziko Museums of South Africa, will host a new exhibition entitled, HUMANITY.

The exhibition reimagines the story of human evolution as centred on the diversity of humans today and how we came to be that way. Housed at the Iziko Museum, the exhibition will be opened to the public on Thursday, 28 September 2023.

“Africa has shown itself to be the cradle of humanity with the oldest fossil remains of our distant relatives all found there, and nearly everything we know about early human evolution coming from the African continent,” says Professor Rebecca Ackermann of the Department of Archaeology and HERI co-director.

HUMANITY deliberately de-centres the “lone white explorer narrative” associated with human evolution, and instead focuses on the rich record of people found in South Africa and Africa. In doing so, it reimagines our origins as a story of intelligence, creativity, and endurance through time.

“We are hoping to take visitors on a new kind of journey, one that explores our diversity and how we became who we are today. We are bringing together our future and our past for all of us to share in the present,” says the exhibition’s curator Dr Wendy Black.

Entering the exhibition is an immersive experience, where walls are shrouded in handcrafted reeds that tower to a star-filled sky. The effect transports visitors from the typical museum space to a place where ancient storytelling – or lessons – seems natural.

Visitors then meet a snapshot of modern humanity through photographs by renowned artist Pieter Hugo and interviews with several South Africans, including prominent figures like Cape Town comedian, Marc Lottering.

By sharing their story of what it means to be human, the stage is set to move back in time to our deep past.

This is captured with awe-inspiring fossils and artefacts from across the continent, including a wall covered in ancient hand axes that paint a picture of how biology, technology, and culture have played a part in the emergence of us. Capturing this interconnectedness of the past with the present is a one-of-a-kind mural from Cape Town street art pioneer and artist Mak1One.

“In HUMANITY, human evolution is told as an inclusive story of resilience and adaptability of people against the backdrop of change and challenge through time,” observes Dr Wayne Florence, Research and Exhibitions Director at Iziko Museums.

HUMANITY is the product of a diverse team of co-creators, which included South African and African researchers, academics, community leaders, living human treasures and representatives from different interest groups. The result is a genuine effort to decolonise the exhibit, where ownership of the narrative is truly African.

“Through HUMANITY, Iziko Museums aims to further encourage critical reflections and ownership of humanity’s rich history and heritage and to inspire a new generation of storytellers. The exhibition forms part of a series of projects that Iziko Museums has in preparation for its bicentenary in 2025. We invite members of the public to engage with it and to give the museum their feedback,” says Dr Bongani Ndhlovu, the acting CEO of Iziko Museums of South Africa.

Exhibition details:

HUMANITY:

Opening event by invitation: Wednesday, 27 September 2023

Open to the public: From Thursday, 28 September 2023

Address: Iziko South African Museum, 25 Queen Victoria Road, Cape Town. Open Monday to Sunday from 09:00 until 17:00

Email: info@Iziko.org.za or call 021 481 3800

For school group enquiries and bookings, contact bookings@Iziko.org.za or 021 481 3832

Ends

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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