

National Arts Festival commemorates 50 years

As the National Arts Festival commemorates 50 years, the curated programme reflects on universal themes that rang true at the founding of the festival and all subsequent editions, and interrogates the urgency of distinct challenges particular to the here and now.



Siphiso 'Hotstix' Mabuse returns to the National Arts Festival. Image supplied

What started as a showcase of some 60 works in an attempt to preserve English culture and 1820 Settler heritage during the depths of apartheid, has transformed into South Africa's longest-running and most diverse arts festival, featuring works across language and genre that attract an increasingly diverse South African and international audience.

Selected through a process of application, and lengthy curatorial panel review, the National Arts Festival's curated programme is a creative litmus test of society and a reflection of the artists' lens on South Africa and the world. The 2024 curated programme is a dialogue of ideas in a restless era as world orders shift, violence escalates and uncertainty prevails on the cusp of a post-truth world.

Says artistic director Rucera Seethal, "To encompass all that the Festival could and has ever been in a landmark year such as this is an overwhelming task and belies the Festival's role in breaking out new work and reimagining older ones. So in creating this programme, we have played with the juxtaposition of old and new and the emergence of ambitious ideas that bring the festival into a new era of cross-border and international collaboration."

Some of the highlights from the curated programme include the world premiere of Third World Bunfight's *The Stranger*, the cutting-edge new work *1789* by Sibikwa Arts Centre, a tribute to artists passed by Mandla Mbothwe and the innovative new works of the Standard Bank Young Artists.

Through several visual art exhibitions, the history of the festival is brought into the conversation, and exciting new projects that connect artists and creators from Africa take the Festival into a new direction for the future.

The National Arts Festival will take place in Makhanda from 20-30 June 2024.

For more, go to <https://nationalartsfestival.co.za>

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