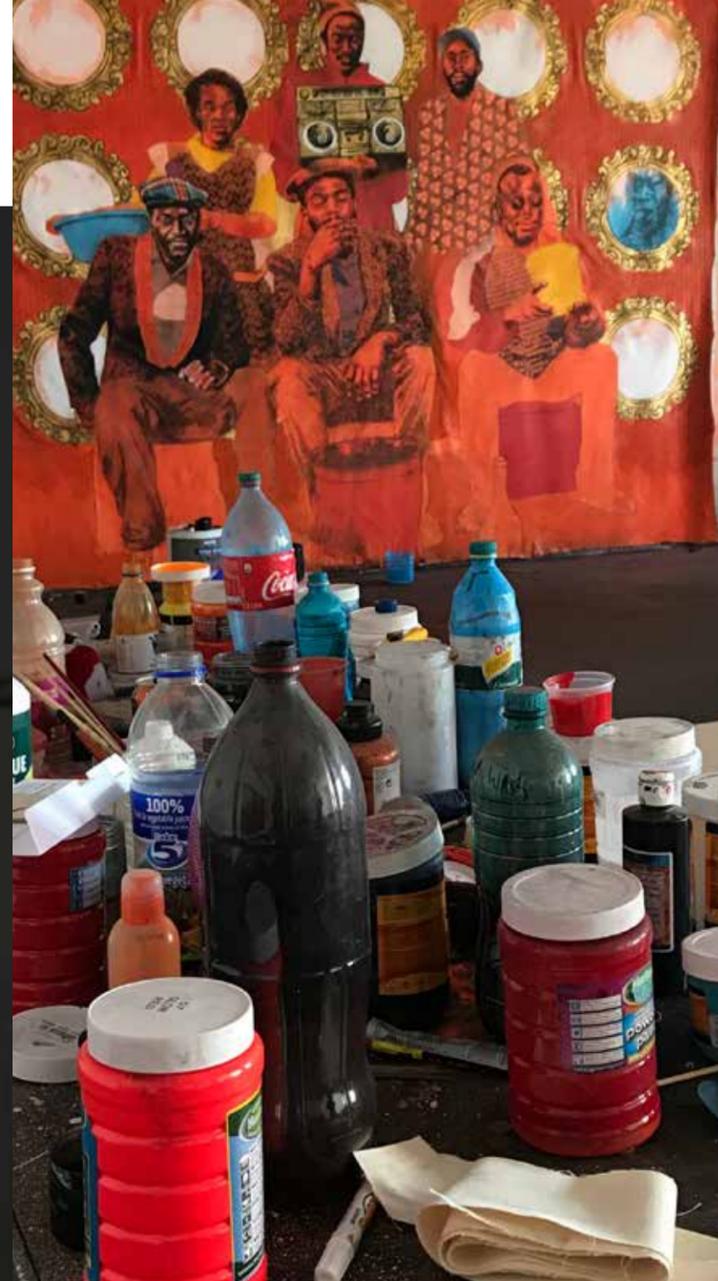


The Aftermath

From 22 August until 22 September 2018, FirstRand's Art@First Gallery will show the works of established and emerging artists from August House in an exciting new group exhibition titled *The Aftermath*.



The Art@First Gallery at FirstRand is situated between the entrance foyer to 4 Merchant Place and Fresh@First, the staff canteen. The pop-up exhibition space was initiated by Beth van Heerden, FirstRand's art executive, and opened its doors to staff about 18 months ago.

Van Heerden had originally been tasked with filling the wall spaces that had opened up when the canteen was extended and new boardrooms were established. According to Craig Higginson, at the time Van Heerden didn't have the budget to buy more work for the FirstRand collection – a role she has played now for over four years – so she and her colleagues went to the storeroom to look for existing works that could be displayed. There they found a great many ornithological and botanical artworks, some of which hadn't been displayed for several years; but in the end, in an effort to showcase more contemporary works by contemporary South African artists, they decided on a pop-up exhibition. As Van Heerden has stated, 'If you want people to be bitten by the art bug, they need to be exposed to what art can be. That's why in the last few shows we've approached a wide range of galleries so that our staff can be exposed to a much wider range of art than they might be used to... We are all so pressurised these days. To make time to go and see an art exhibition is difficult – even for those who would like to. So we thought we'd bring the art directly to our staff. On their way to the canteen, they can pass through an exhibition and perhaps stop, and look, and experience something unique.'

Justin Glickman, who helped conceive the Art@First initiative, designed a touch-screen kiosk that is situated inside the exhibition space and provides further information about the art and artists on display. Glickman says that 'art can be quite intimidating, especially to people who feel they know little about it. We wanted to provide a platform for existing art lovers as well as for people who may not have the confidence or inclination to go and look at art. We wanted them to engage with it in a way that was not intimidating, in a way that was relaxed, and so the middle space between the offices and the canteen is perfect for that. The great thing is: when a new exhibition goes up, you can immediately feel a shift in energy in the corridors. Suddenly, the whole place is alive.'

Teresa Lizamore, who is the curator of the Rand Merchant Bank art collection, has curated several exhibitions in the space since it opened, including an exhibition celebrating Women's Day in August last year. Lizamore was approached by August House for the idea of *The Aftermath* exhibition and it was decided that a call would be put out for a young new curator for the exhibition, and

they would be mentored by Lizamore. Independent curator, artist and entrepreneur, Olwethu de Vos made the grade.

De Vos obtained her B-Tech in Fine and Applied Arts at the Tshwane University of Technology in 2016, having majored in sculpture and glass. In her final year of study, De Vos volunteered as an educational assistant at the Pretoria Art Museum where she was introduced to curatorship and conducting children's workshops. The following year, she ventured fully into curatorship and by the end of that year she had curated eight exhibitions in Gauteng.

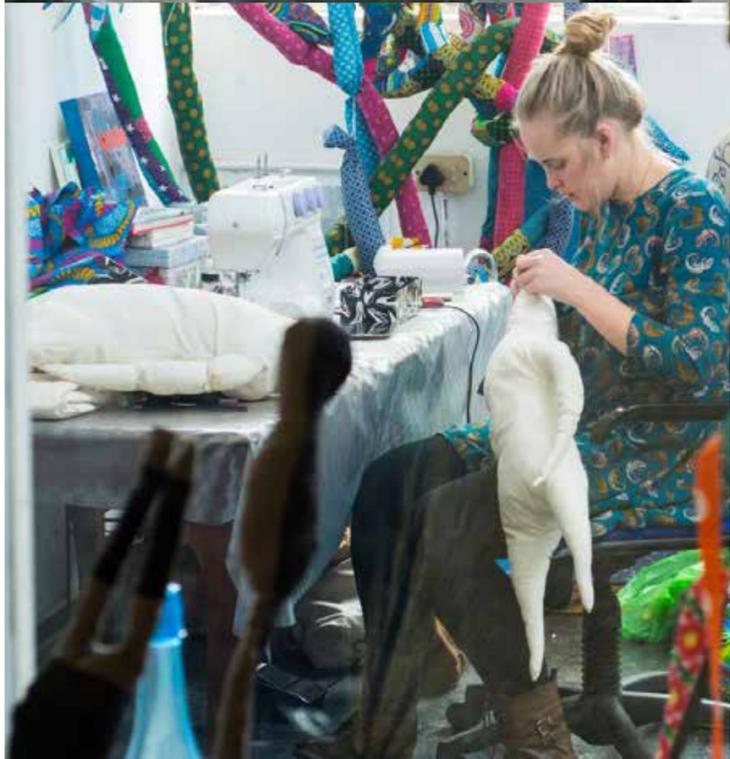
Known to locals as 'the artist's playground', August House has grown from a former light factory into an exclusive art building. A five-storey, 1940s urban building with high columns, authentic architecture and expansive open plan floors, it's a wonderful blend of inspiration and stillness.

Housing Pan-African artists in private studio spaces, August House is very possibly the largest community of African contemporary artists under one roof on the country, and most definitely the largest group of emerging professional artists in one space, incubating, collaborating and creating art together. August House offers artists a platform to be in a community while working independently on professional platforms with their own galleries and buyers. This well-respected art institution is enigmatically paving its own way in the local arts scene with its traditionally rebellious nature.

August House supports its leasing artists by initiating new projects like open days, where the public is invited to visit the individual studios, exhibitions such as *The Aftermath* or the one recently held at the Absa Gallery; providing vital opportunities for exposure for artists to launch their careers.

'August House houses about 60 tenant artists and after meeting all the artists at a briefing session, 40 of the artists accepted our invitation to be part of the exhibition at FirstRand,' says Lizamore. 'Olwethu and I have had meetings with all the interested artists to determine if their works are appropriate for the exhibition. As the exhibition is aimed at potential new staff buyers, it is important to exhibit works that will attract new buyers and show what the market has to offer. Also important is to ensure that the works exhibited are affordable.'

The plan is to exhibit about 60 artworks, says Lizamore. The artists have been given a theme, 'aftermath', which allows for artists to create works within the framework of the current situation in the country and the history of the country. This will include works by established artists such as Greatjoy Ndlovu, Sizwe Khoza, Toni-Ann Ballendan, Diane Victor and Benon Lutaaya, as well as works by emerging and lesser-known artists. The exhibition will consist of



mainly two-dimensional works, but will include a few three-dimensional works and an installation.

'The exhibition is a visual exploration of narratives of today depicted by various artists residing in August House,' says De Vos. 'These narratives vary in content and visual representation such as colour, technique, style and material. However, as much as these narratives vary, they all share a common thread which is an underlying social and cultural reflection of the times that they are living in now in the contemporary landscape of Southern Africa. While we are living in a democratic country, the exhibition simultaneously manifests into a discourse of the ramifications and benefits of de-colonisation such as land rights and ownership; economic structures; cultural and traditional objectification of the female and, currently, the man too.'

'The exhibition draws a parallel between the August House artists, portraiture and urban landscape art, while simultaneously exploring the long history of the August House building as a heritage site in Johannesburg. Artists are encouraged to explore various elements of the South Africa and its inhabitants and create work that reflects the melting-pot of cultures and spaces that resemble the beloved country.'

De Vos and Lizamore meet on a weekly basis and visit the artists' studios. 'Some of the main criteria with the

compiling of this exhibition is to get to know the artists, create bonds with the artists, ensure that they understand the concept and produce appropriate works, and that all works are produced and exhibition-ready by required dates,' says Lizamore.

'The framing, finishing off of an artwork, the placement and the hanging of this exhibition is an important part of the mentoring. Olwethu and I will discuss the best way to allow for an aesthetically pleasing and interesting exhibition,' says Lizamore. De Vos has also been charged with compiling a catalogue of the exhibition, which will also serve as a marketing tool.

Central to the philosophy of Art@First is to make art available and affordable. As with previous shows, the works are for sale for no more than R15 000, although there could be a few exceptions.

It is important with all Art@First pop-up exhibitions that those passing through know that the works are only there for a brief period. Otherwise the artworks risk becoming normalised, or naturalised, so that they are no longer fresh provocations that demand attention.

The Aftermath runs from 22 August to 22 September and is open to staff, but also to the public by invitation or appointment. **CF**