

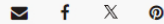
ART & DESIGN

# TAKE A TOUR OF THE SHAPING OF JUSTICE AT SA'S HIGHEST COURT

THE ARCHITECTURE AND ART COLLECTIONS INDICATE AN ETHOS THAT ACCESSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC WAS SACROSANCT, JUST AS THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT ITSELF IS DEDICATED TO "DEMOCRATIC VALUES, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS"

19 March 2024

Words: Diane de Beer



The Constitutional Court public art gallery

Image: Supplied

*The Constitutional Court Art Collection (CCAC) is more than an aesthetic addition to the Constitutional Court building. It is a unique collection of South African and international artworks that stimulates and enriches education, critical debate and research on the roles of the Constitutional Court of SA.*

This is the intent stated by the Constitutional Court Trust, custodian of the CCAC, in one of its many booklets promoting and embracing the thought that both the building and the art collection, which was the brainchild of Albie Sachs and Yvonne Mokgoro (the two judges who were appointed to the court's décor committee in 1995), are for the people and by the people.

Twice a month (more or less), Art & Justice tours of specifically the art collection and architecture are presented by members of the curatorial team, normally on the second and last Saturday of every month from 9.30am to 11.15am. Special tours are sometimes presented on public holidays.



### Human displacement in frame through art of David Goldblatt and Kiluanji Kia Henda

The exhibition includes works from Goldblatt's long-term photographic essay and publication, *The Structures of Things Then*, with colour works from ...

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Tours focus on the artworks in the public gallery, where works are rotated twice a year, as well as integrated works in and around the court. The tours often have a specific theme, connected to the exhibition at the time. The last special tour I attended in December 2023 (on the occasion of World Aids Day weekend) focussed with reason on Aids, with the newly restored and framed Long Life Body Maps as the focus (artworks that were made in response to the HIV/Aids epidemic).

The CCAC Artworks Committee had purchased a digitally printed set of body maps in 2004 and for the occasion of them being shown again, they invited the art instructor and facilitator of the project, Jane Solomon, and one of the participants, Nondumiso Hlwele, to talk about the project of the Bambanani Women's Group.

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Furthermore, retired justice Edwin Cameron gave an introductory talk on the difficult history of Aids and the fight for treatment in this country. We are reminded not only of the ongoing crisis of people living with Aids but also of the heroism of those who were prepared to fight for their lives. "I want to speak briefly about what Aids means to our country because it beset our country just as we were hoping to become a free, just, equal human-centred democracy," he began.

Cameron explained that, at that time, we thought in our arrogance and stupidity that we would escape it, we thought that we had better methods and systems.

"What in fact happened is that we became the country and are still the country in the world with the most people living with HIV: some 12% are the new figures released recently by the Human Science and Research Council. That means 7-million of us are living with Aids today and that makes us the biggest group of people living with Aids in any country."



Constitutional Court's Body Maps exhibition

Image: Supplied

Reminding us of past mistakes, he noted that the important thing was to remember the terrible missteps one could take when disregarding science. "We also had people who wanted to disregard science around Covid with the same catastrophic results."

What makes his testimony so valuable is that he started taking antiretrovirals 26 years ago and owes his life to the treatment.

Cameron also praises courageous people such as Nondumiso Hlwele, who took action. "At that time, if you were diagnosed with HIV, there was no treatment and you were expected to go home and wait to die," she said.

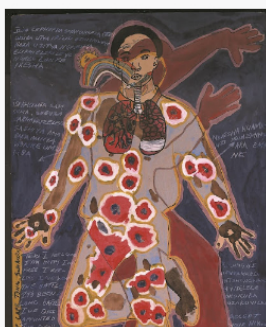
Until she found her way to what is now called the Bambanani group which started under the guidance of Jonathan Morgan and Kylie Thomas (both working for the Aids and Society Research Unit at the University of Cape Town at the time), and art instructor Jane Solomon to do body mapping. Twelve women and one man who had found access to treatment came together to tell their stories publicly for an advocacy book.

They wanted to teach people living with HIV how to live with the virus and those who were not living with it, how to survive.

It was to illustrate this book that Solomon introduced body mapping: a drawing/therapy technique popular in the '70s that employed one's body image. She had been exploring it as a tool for self-growth.

She explained that she used art-making as a way to access an inner world of memory, feelings and emotions. "Body mapping uses symbols and symbolism of colour, talking, listening and sometimes dancing and singing as a way to explore, record and reinvent how we interpret our lives."

Participants were assisted to trace a life-size outline of their bodies and then personalised their HIV stories using their



...document that the artist brings their  
body maps and artistic vision.



Nondumiso Hwele's body map

Image: Supplied

The particular morning's excursion proved once again that these CCAC tours (on both my visits presented by curator Francois Lion-Cachet who is steeped in both law and art) didn't only remind and inform those attending, but also reinforced something justice Pius Langa said when serving as chief justice of the Constitutional Court. "Every day as we try to answer difficult questions concerning fundamental human rights, the moving works of art and uplifting design of our building constantly remind us what should not be forgotten: that justice is for people and all people are united in their inherent human dignity."

**Booking are open for these 2024 dates:**

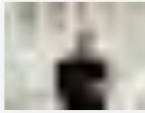
March 21 (Human Rights Day special tour featuring spoken word poets' responses to the CCAC); April 13; April 27 (Freedom Day); May 11; May 25 (Africa Day); June 8 ; June 22 ; July 13; July 27; August 9 (Women's Day); August 24; September 14; September 28; October 12; October 26; November 9; November 23; December 14.

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