ALMINE RECH

Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting Esther Mahlangu, A Retrospective

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A RETROSPECTIVE UNVEILING: A LIFE OF ARTISTIC BRILLIANCE

Cape Town hosts the start of the global tour of Dr. Esther Mahlangu's retrospective.

An international tour to celebrate the life and work of Dr. Esther Mahlangu has kicked off in Cape Town. The Iziko South African National Gallery has unveiled *Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting": Esther Mahlangu, A Retrospective* which opened its doors to the public on Sunday 18 February 2024.

Curated by Nontobeko Ntombela, the exhibition promises a profound exploration of Dr. Mahlangu's transformative artistry. It will be presented in Cape Town till 11 August 2024 before moving to Gauteng, and then on to the US and other continents for an extended period thereafter.

The retrospective opens its doors in the week that art lovers from around the nation descend on Cape Town for the annual Investec Cape Town Art Fair, hosted at the CTICC between 16 and 18 February 2024. Members of the media and a select group of VIPs were treated to a preview of the retrospective earlier this week.

"From her humble beginnings as a teenager in the 1940s, showcasing her talent amongst the IsiNdebele language-speaking community, to her meteoric rise to global acclaim in the late 1980s and 1990s, her journey is a testament to passion, innovation, and resilience.

"The retrospective pays homage to Dr. Mahlangu's unique approach to art, which intersects African culture with modernity and the contemporary, symbolising pride, self-determination, and innovation. It is not just an exhibition; it's a celebration of Dr. Mahlangu's voice, agency, and pioneering spirit," says Ntombela.

She adds that being part of a retrospective is a very significant achievement for any artist. "This is a landmark achievement for South African art. It recognises Dr. Mahlangu as one of the few South African artists who have had the opportunity to present a Retrospective Exhibition in world-renowned museums."

A drawcard for the retrospective is the iconic BMW Artcar, which has returned to South African shores for the first time since she crafted it in 1991. In a dramatic moment, the Art Car was craned over the roof of the National Gallery into the atrium and then pushed into the space that it will occupy for the next 6 months.

"Iziko Museums is honoured to celebrate the living legend, Dr Esther Mahlangu, and to host this colossal showcase where creativity, culture, and aesthetics are fused. Dr. Mahlangu is a living symbol of triumph against adversity. Her approach to art has inspired generations and is a re-affirmation of calls for Africa-centred innovations," says Dr Bongani Ndhlovu, Acting CEO, Iziko Museums of South Africa.

The exhibition will include a comprehensive 300-page catalogue published by Skira Paris, capturing her immense contribution to contemporary art, and illuminating her innovative approach that intersects African culture with modernity and the contemporary, symbolising South African pride, self-determination, and innovation. This will be released in July 2024.

The monumental retrospective will be open to the public at the Iziko South African National Gallery from February 18th until August 11th, 2024. From there it will then begin its global tour, stopping first at Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg before moving to the United States in early 2026.

The Melrose Gallery, Esther Mahlangu's global representative, was tasked with the implementation of the Retrospective Exhibition.

The public is invited to visit this celebration of Dr. Mahlangu's work as it travels the nation.

The event has been made possible thanks to the generous support of sponsors BMW and the National Arts Council.

"We hope everyone will immerse themselves in the world of Dr. Esther Mahlangu and witness the legacy of one of the most pivotal artists of our time," says Ntombela.