

A 'Church' for art to open in Cape Town CBD

Cape Town has seen a number of new art foundations open since the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (Zeitz Mocaa) ushered this city's art scene into a new era. Church, a new project space for art, which will open this October in that titular street in Cape Town's CBD, looks set to create big waves too.



The work of Cape Town artist Thania Petersen who will present the inaugural exhibition at Church. | Source: Supplied

The Church, located in a heritage building in the Cape Town CBD near the AVA, Eclectica, Nel and Worldart galleries, is black-owned and is intended to offer artists, curators, writers and other cultural agitators a platform to experiment.

New works, works-in-progress, ideas or statements that might not be viable in a commercial space can find a home at Church. Founders Hoosein Mahomed and Shelleen Maharaj say they are more interested in establishing a fluid platform that is responsive to the needs of the art community.

“Artists are freeing themselves from the gallery model, questioning the status quo, interrupting racial structures and this moment prompted me to consider creating a project space that would advance or support these changes.

“Nothing about what we intend doing is in relation to others, there is no benchmark or standard to aspire to. We have freed ourselves from these kinds of expectations,” says Mahomed.



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A space to present new ideas, spark conversations

In line with its title, Church exhibitions will open on Sundays and instead of a ‘sermon’, there will be discussions, public addresses or performances. Mahomed adds that the Sunday Sessions will provide a space to present new ideas and conversations in an attempt to draw the art community closer.

The Church is designed to accommodate multimedia works and boasts a room designed for filmic works to be screened. The façade of the building can also accommodate a live performance or installation aimed to tease the attention of passers-by.

One of Cape Town’s most outspoken artists, Thania Petersen, will stage the inaugural exhibition titled “*Garden of passion gaps*” - artificial foliage dotted with models of mouths parading missing front teeth (the passion gap).



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The installation is inspired by an embroidery work bearing the same motif titled *Onse Ou Kaap*. Petersen is drawing from iconography associated with the Cape community, disentangling the layers of oppression, complicity and liberation.

“I am exploring the absurdity of constructing and imposing an identity on people and creating a ‘type of people’ and telling them this is how you are as a creole community in South Africa.

“There has been an orientalised of the Muslim community in South Africa, we were made Asian in the African landscape. If we return to Indonesia we are not like anyone there, we are not who you say we are. Who are we? We are now at a point where we are taking things apart,” Petersen says.

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