

Kodwa, Jezile open SA pavilion at Biennale Architettura 2023 in Venice

Sports, arts and culture minister Zizi Kodwa and ambassador of South Africa to Italy Nosipho Nausca-Jean Jezile will officially open the South African pavilion at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia in Italy, on Friday, 19 May.



Installations at the SA pavilion

This year's Biennale Architettura, which runs from 20 May to 26 November, is themed 'The laboratory of the future'. Curator Lesley Lokko has centred Africa as a protagonist of the future - a springboard to talk about economic, climate and political criticalities.

The South African pavilion was conceptualised around the sub-theme of 'The structure of a people'. This integrates with the broader exhibition theme and seeks to evaluate the ways in which architecture has defined or impacted our social structures, including how South Africa's rich indigenous knowledge systems could hold solutions to global issues in this 'laboratory of the future'.



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Three South African curators have been appointed with conceptualising the SA pavilion, namely:

- Dr Sechaba Maape, an architect and the director of the design practice Afreetecture. He is also a senior lecturer at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) School of Architecture and Planning.
- Dr Emmanuel Nkambule, a senior lecturer in the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT).

- Stephen Steyn, a full-time lecturer and programme coordinator in the postgraduate programme in architecture at the Tshwane University of Technology's Department of Architecture and Industrial Design.

The curators have organised the pavilion space through three exhibition zones using about four tonnes of black rope that was made in South Africa. While there is an interplay of light and dark between the zones as visitors move between them, the zones all form part of a coherent, integrated exhibition.



[L-R] South African curators Dr Emmanuel Nkambule, Dr Sechaba Maape and Stephen Steyn

Three exhibition zones

The first zone is 'The past is the laboratory of the future' which looks to pre-colonial southern African societies, the Bokoni people in particular, to understand how they structured their societies as documented in a stone carving. This zone is curated by Nkambule.

The second zone, titled 'The council of (non-human) beings', presents Maape's contemporary drawings on the topic of animism in architectural practice, connecting to the mythology and indigenous knowledge systems of his heritage. Maape's work makes use of contemporary experiences and influences, including urban culture like hip hop and the South African musical genre of amapiano, which emerged in the mid-2010s, to create what he calls Kuru-mytho-futurism.

The third zone, 'Political animals', displays the results of national competition targeted at South African architecture schools and is curated by Steyn. The competition asked lecturers and students to consider the organisational and curricular structures of their schools and create architectural models depicting these structures.



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“The biennale will present us with a myriad of innovative solutions to contemporary issues that we are facing globally. That Professor Lesley Lokko has placed such an emphasis on African philosophies, schools of thought, and practitioners is a proud moment, and the hope is that we as a continent can use our moment in the spotlight to our fullest potential,” says Kodwa.

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