

# It's fierce, feisty and funny at this year's National Arts Festival

South Africa's visionaries, mavericks and disruptors headline this year's National Arts Festival, which runs from 30 June to 10 July, 2016, in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape. The programme taps into the national mood with fierce, feisty and funny productions that both celebrate South Africa's vibrant contemporary culture as well as tackle the wounds of the country's traumatic and violent past.

Visitors to Grahamstown can look forward to world-class performances from local and international theatre companies, including some reinvented and reinvigorated classics, as well as to contemporary dance from the Cape Dance Company, performances by Aka, the African prince of hip hop, family fare from the Chinese Guangzhou Song and Dance Ensemble, and some heart-and brain-busting work from returning Standard Bank Ovation Award winners on the Arena programme.

Ismail Mahomed, the artistic director of the National Arts Festival, said he had relied on history to provide the context for building this year's programme, which creates space not for nostalgia, but for critical reflection, analysis and reinvention.



## A challenging time for SA

"While this is a challenging time for South Africa, and the arts sector in particular, we are proud to present a programme that is artistically strong, textured in its expression, and effectively representative of the diversity of the South African arts sector," Mahomed said.

Now in its 42nd year, the National Arts Festival is the largest and longest-running celebration of the arts on the African continent. For 11 days, an eclectic mix of drama, dance, music, performance and visual art, street performances and family fare is presented in the transformed Eastern Cape town.

This year, almost 80% of the Main programme is either written, directed, curated or headlined by women, with playwright, director and producer Lara Foot leading the charge as 2016's featured artist.

Foot, the chief executive and artistic director of the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, will premiere *The Inconvenience of Wings*. Set in a landscape of memory and dreams, it features theatre bluebloods Andrew Buckland, Mncedisi Shabangu and Jennifer Steyn. Foot will also re-stage two of her previous works: the award-winning *Karoo Moose*, starring the original cast; and *Tshepang*, the extraordinarily poetic and redemptive telling of one of South Africa's most brutal stories.



## Solo theatre festival

This year's solo theatre festival comprises eight inspired one-handers about women, performed by women. "The stories celebrate the compassion, tenacity and integrity with which women engage in their political landscapes," Mahomed said.

The productions include: *Ruth First: 117 Days* (performed by Jackie Rens); *Amsterdam* (Chanje Kunda); *Immortal* (Jenna Dunster); *Unveiled* (Gushan Mia); *Penny* (Zethu Dlomo); *In Bocca Al Lupo* (Jemma Kahn); *Blonde Poison* (Fiona Ramsay); and *Watching* (Ester Natzijl, a production that comes to the festival from the 2015 Amsterdam Fringe).

## Related productions:

- \* *OoMaSisulu*: based on the life of Albertina Sisulu and performed by Thembi Mtshali, will premiere in Grahamstown;
- \* *Noka Ya Bokamoso*: is artist Lerato Shadi's exploration of the representation of the black female body; and
- \* *Looking/Seeing/Being/Disappearing*: choreographed and performed by Nadine Joseph, explores the representation of the 'disappearing woman' in contemporary South Africa.

Booking for the 2016 National Arts Festival opens on 9 May.

[www.nationalartsfestival.co.za](http://www.nationalartsfestival.co.za)