UCT Irma Stern Museum exhibition: Athi-Patra Ruga and Irma Stern

The relationship between the contemporary artworks of Athi-Patra Ruga and that of the late, celebrated canonical painter Irma Stern is one that speaks to both admiration and disruption.

Image supplied: Athi-Patra Ruga

To further this dialogue between the two artists' works, the UCT Irma Stern Museum (ISM) will host an exhibition where the works of both artists, Stern and Ruga, will be installed alongside each other.

The exhibition will include new site-responsive works that Ruga produced during a three-month residency at the ISM, combined with select and iconic loan works. The exhibition opened for public viewing on 31 March and runs until 18 June 2022. The show is accompanied by a series of walkabouts, talks and workshops.

The retrospective will feature select examples of Ruga's iconic tapestries from the period 2009 - 2018 which reference paintings done by Stern during her 1943 and 1946 expeditions to central Africa.

Gladys Kalichini wins Henrike Grohs Art Award 2022
31 Mar 2022

Since 2008, Ruga's work has been in conversation with the art of Stern, drawing on and reworking such iconic paintings as Stern's *Watussi Queen*, *Swazi Youth* and *Zulu Woman*. Now, Ruga is engaging with the famed painter at the intimate level of her former home. This project is part of an ongoing interest in the Stern oeuvre.

Famous during the later years of her career, and to this day, Stern's work is now well entrenched in the annals of South African art history.

Largely in response to witnessing first-hand the horrors of the South African War, First World War and losing loved ones to the Holocaust, Stern sought an alternative to western urbanised civilisation in a fantasy of noble exotic cultures. As such, many of her paintings portray an idealised and romantic version of 'native' culture.

For Ruga, such pieces deserve a closer critical look. Over the years, he has taken her famous images and destabilised them, Queering them as a response to the status quo.

Southern Guild presents *Spring Awakening* exhibition
25 Mar 2022

In his own rejoinders to Stern's paintings, Ruga reassesses from a post-colonial stance. For instance, he gives Stern's nameless and passive sitters - the paintings have unspecific titles like *Malay girl* or *Zulu Woman* - actual names and agency, disrupting the notion that these sitters' primary function was as a tableau for European contemplation and consumption.

According to art consultant Mary Corrigall, Ruga's approach is "in some way an attempt to view the traumas of the last 200 years of colonial history from a place of detachment … where wounds can be contemplated outside of personalized grief and subjective defensiveness."

Despite their broadly differing viewpoints, there are astonishing similarities – perhaps a contributing factor to the magnetic pull that exists between them.

Ruga's oil stick and pastel work on canvas will be hung among Stern pieces in the museum, deepening the invitation to the viewer to compare and consider. As part of the exhibition, Ruga will present a number of learner engagements and walkabouts that highlight the conversation with Stern and her art he has had for over a decade.

Javett Art Centre exhibition articulates Apartheid through art
23 Mar 2022

For more information and dates for walkabouts and events, please see below and visit the UCT Irma Stern Museum website. Booking is essential for the walkabouts and discussion with Ruga as well as the workshop with the ISM curator and educator. To book, contact irmastern@uct.ac.za.

Here is the programme:

Walkabouts with Athi Patra Ruga (essential booking):

9 April from 10.30am – 12.30pm

12 May from 2pm – 4pm

Discussion with Athi Patra Ruga and guests (essential booking):

14 May from 10.30am – 12pm (R160pp)

Walkabouts with ISM Director:

13 April from 10.30am – 12.30pm
3 May from 2pm – 4pm

Practical art-making workshops with ISM Curator and Educator (essential booking):

24 May from 11.30am – 1pm (R250pp)
4 June from 11.30am – 1pm (R250pp)

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com