



37th Conference of the South African Visual Art Historians Association (SAVAH)

UNSETTLED: re-Collective Memories and Histories of South Africa

1st CALL FOR PAPERS

The 37th Annual SAVAH Conference will be hosted by the
Department of Visual Arts in the School of Visual and
Performing Arts,
Faculty of Humanities,
Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha

5-7 September
2024

Nelson Mandela University
Gqeberha

1st Call for Papers

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37th Conference of the South African Visual Art Historians Association (SAVAH)

Theme: **UNSETTLED: re-Collective Memories and Histories of South Africa**

Dates: 5-7 September, 2024

Venue: Department of Visual Arts, School of Visual And Performing Arts, Nelson Mandela University

Website: <https://sawah.org.za/conferences>

The South African Visual Art Historians Association (SAVAH) is pleased to announce the 37th annual conference, centred around the thought-provoking theme of "UNSETTLED: re-Collective Memories and Histories of South Africa." The conference aims to explore the multifaceted aspects of South Africa's past, present, and future, as seen through the lens of art history, visual culture, visual and performing arts and its pivotal role in shaping societal narratives.

Theme Overview: As South Africa continues its journey of self-discovery, the concept of "settling" takes on renewed significance. One may think of settler-colonialism, and the associations between settlement and belonging, along with expressions that relate to place and trauma, such as letting the dust settle. On the other hand, looking back over recent history from the end of the apartheid era, or even further back, some complacencies in contemporary South African society might still need to be "unsettled". This raises questions about how much we have actually changed. The visual and performing arts offer opportunities for critical interrogation of the "settled" and "unsettling" dynamics of our society and how we express ourselves.

This will be the first time the SAVAH conference is held at Nelson Mandela University and only the third time it is held in the culturally rich province of the Eastern Cape, itself laden with the incongruencies of socio-economic and historical legacies which affect the social cohesion of the region. The conference will allow researchers to question and engage with the ways in which art might challenge these legacies, and also to consider how they are embedded in particular geographical contexts, places and landscapes.

This conference seeks to unravel the dynamic interplay between art, unsettled histories, and the processes of settling, unsettling and being in the spaces in between. We invite scholars, artists, researchers, curators, and performers from diverse disciplines to contribute their insights and engage in constructive dialogues around this profound theme. Conference Topics include (but are not limited to):

1. The intersection of activism and social justice in visual and performing arts in unsettling our current context
2. Visual and performative representations of unsettled histories and memories in South African art.
3. The role of the visual and performing arts in documenting and contesting historical narratives.

4. Post-colonial and Decolonial reflections on the idea of "settling" and "unsettling" and its artistic expressions.
5. Exploring the complexities of national identity through visual culture, art and performance.
6. Art as a tool for healing and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.
7. Challenges and opportunities in curating exhibitions that engage with unsettled or unsettling histories.
8. Decolonizing art history and the representation of settler histories.
9. Artistic responses to forced migrations, displacements, and land dispossession
10. Art education and the transmission of collective memories in South Africa.

Submission Guidelines: We welcome both individual paper proposals and panel proposals related to the conference theme. Individual paper proposals should include an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with a brief biography of the presenter(s). Panel proposals should consist of a 500-word abstract outlining the panel's theme and objectives, along with a brief biography of the convenor(s), with individual abstracts and biographies submitted separately for each paper within the panel. Please submit your panel proposals and paper abstracts via the relevant online submission forms on the SAVAH website. Accepted presenters will be notified by March 1st 2024.

Conference Highlights: Apart from paper presentations, the conference will feature keynote addresses by prominent artists and scholars, and panel discussions under the theme "UNSETTLED." Attendees will have the opportunity to network with fellow participants, fostering a vibrant community of visual art historians, artists and performers in South Africa.
Important Dates:

- Submission Deadline: January 31st 2024
- Notification of Acceptance: March 1st 2024
- Conference Dates: 5-7 September, 2024

Join us for this intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant conference, as we collectively explore the notions of "unsettled" histories and the idea of "settling" through the prism of South African visual art. We look forward to your contributions and to creating a memorable event that advances the field of art history and enriches our understanding of South Africa's past and present. While online video conferencing platforms are valuable and enable wider participation in the event, we are planning for the conference to take place in person only.

For further information and updates, please visit the conference website or contact us at conference@savah.org.za

Sincerely, Prof Vulindlela Nyoni Conference Chair,
37th Conference South African Visual Art Historians Association (SAVAH)

Head of Department
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