



THE
MELROSE
GALLERY

PROFILE

Dr Esther Mahlangu
Born 1935

"I would continue to paint on the house when they left for a break, when they came back they would say: what have you done child? Never do that again! After that I started drawing on the back of the house, and slowly my drawings got better and better until they finally asked me to come back to the front of the house. Then I knew I was good at painting."

Dr Esther Mahlangu was born in 1935 in Middelburg in Mpumalanga. She was taught the art of Ndebele design and house painting from her mother and grandmother as is tradition in Ndebele culture.

She was a disruptor and visionary from an early age, incurring the wrath of her elders by painting over their wall paintings. She was told to practice on the back of houses but her innate skill was soon clear to see and Dr Mahlangu is a source of great pride to the Ndebele nation as their most globally acclaimed artist and ambassador.

Dr Mahlangu was the first person to reimagine Ndebele design on more contemporary mediums and this has led to her painting anything from planes, cars, motorbikes and bicycles to pots, canvas, walls, mannequins and even war helmets.

Although she had already built a strong reputation in South Africa, her international break through was in 1989 when she was invited to participate in 'Les Magiciens de la Terre, an exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, France. For this exhibition she painted a model of her house in Mpumalanga which was viewed by massive audiences.

In 1991 she became the first lady and first African to be invited to participate in the BMW Art Car Collection amongst other notables of the likes of Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Roy Lichtenstein and Frank Stella.

Whilst firmly grounded in and immensely proud of her Ndebele culture and choosing to live in her homestead in rural Mpumalanga and wear traditional Ndebele dress, Dr Mahlangu is a woman of the world. She has and continues to spend extensive time in many of the world's largest and most modern cities collaborating with leading museums, curators, art fairs, celebrities and global brands.

Dr Mahlangu has collaborated on many high profile projects including John Legend and Belvedere Vodka to raise money for the fight against HIV in Africa, BMW, Rolls-Royce, Fiat, BMW, British Airways, South African Airways, Eytys Sneakers for Paris Fashion Week and Freshpak Rooibos amongst numerous others.

During her illustrious career, spanning 3 decades, she has developed an almost pop icon status of her own. Her works grace the collections of the likes of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys for the Dean Collection, Usher, John Legend, Trevor Noah, Oprah Winfrey, Will Smith and Black Coffee amongst numerous other pop stars who recognize her unflinching dedication to her artform and practice.

Many leading museums, private collectors and corporates have also acquired her works including the Smithsonian Institute, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, National Museum of Woman in the Arts, Centre Georges Pompidou, Museum Bochum, Musee des Beaux Arts, Iziko South African National Gallery, Pretoria Art Museum, Jean Pigozzi, the Sovereign Art Foundation and the World Bank amongst numerous others who understand her invaluable contribution to contemporary art.

Dr Mahlangu richly deserves her many accolades and awards which date as far back as 1988. These include the receipt of two honorary doctorates in 2018 and an appointment as ‘Office of Arts and Letters’ the highest recognition for contribution to the arts from France and an award from the United Nations in 2019. In 2007 she received ‘The Order of Ikhamanga’ from the President of South Africa.

Throughout her life she has steadfastly advocated for the promotion and preservation of Ndebele culture. This has led to her commitment to educating and passing her skills to the younger generation via her self-funded art school at her homestead.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

- 2020** Unveiling of the ‘Mahlangu’ Rolls-Royce Phantom, Cape Town, SA
- 2020** Investec Cape Town Art Fair – Past/ Modern Section, Cape Town, SA
- 2020** ‘Dr Esther Mahlangu – Disrupting Patterns’, The Melrose Gallery, Cape Town, SA
- 2019** ‘Timeless’ Oliewenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein, SA
- 2019** ‘Timeless’ Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, SA
- 2017** A Tribute to Nelson Mandela, The Melrose Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 2016** BMW Lounge, FRIEZE ART FAIR, London, UK
- 2015** Esther Mahlangu 80, UCT Irma Stern Museum, Cape Town, SA
- 2014** Esther Mahlangu: An Artistic Residency, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Virginia, USA
- 2012** Overlay, 34FineArt, Cape Town, SA
- 2010** Centro Espositivo St. Art, Calenzano, Italy
- 2008** Esther Mahlangu: Reacquiring, The Kyle Kauffman Gallery, New York, USA
- 2007** Esther Mahlangu 2007, 34LONG, Cape Town, SA

- 2007** Why Africa?, Fiat 500, Turin, Italy
 - 2005** Esther Mahlangu, 34LONG, Cape Town, SA
 - 2003** Esther Mahlangu 2003, UCT Irma Stern Museum, Cape Town, SA
 - 1998** Museum of Oceanian and African Art, Paris, France
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Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 2019** Conflict Resolution Art, Athens, Greece
- 2019** ‘Timeless’, The Melrose Gallery Cape Town
- 2019** Limited edition Freshpak Rooibos tin
- 2018** Public Commission – 3 murals: The Market Theatre Foyer, Esther Mahlangu Boardroom at Windybrow Theatre, The Contemporary Market Square Complex, Johannesburg, SA
- 2018** Group Exhibition, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA
- 2018** Not A Single Story, Nirox Foundation Sculpture Park, Cradle of Humankind, SA
- 2016** South Africa The Art of a Nation, The British Museum, UK, 27 October 2016
- 2016** New design – Belvedere (RED), NY, USA
- 2015** Amref Health Africa Artball: Celebrating Contemporary Art, New York, USA
- 2015** Imibala Gallery, Somerset West, SA
- 2015** Sneaker design with Swedish Company Eytys, Paris Fashion Week, France
- 2015** 40 years of BMW Art Cars, BMW Museum, Munchen, Germany
- 2014** Traditional African Murals, Museum of African Art, Belgrade, Serbia
- 2014** Look Mickey!, 34FineArt, Cape Town, SA 2014 Les Magiciens de la Terre, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- 2014** Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
- 2014** Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town, SA
- 2013** 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London, UK
- 2013** Urban Interpretation, Graffik Gallery, London, UK

- 2013** FourWalls, 34FineArt, Cape Town, SA
- 2012** Art Drive! Exhibition, Great Eastern Street Car Park in Shoreditch, London, UK
- 2012** Urban Interpretation, 34FineArt, Cape Town, SA
- 2012** Blend, 34FineArt, Cape Town, SA
- 2011** Durban Tourism Indaba, Durban, SA
- 2011** Ensemble, 34FineArt, Cape Town, SA
- 2011** ArtMonaco'11, Monaco
- 2011** Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA
- 2010** Africa. Objetos y Sujetos, Teatro Fernan Gomez, Centro de Arte, Madrid, Spain
- 2010** ATASA Trust Southern Africa Handcraft & Ndebele Art Exhibition, Newtown, SA
- 2010** La mostra sulla Regina d'Africa Esther Mahlangu, Napoli, Italy
- 2010** Museum of Arts and Design, New York City, USA
- 2010** 2010 Fine Art Collection, FIFA, South Africa
- 2009** Sortileges, Fondation pour L'art Contemporain, Claudine et Jean-Marc Salomon, Alex, France
- 2009** 3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
- 2009** 2010 Africa? Una nuova storia, Complesso del Vittoriano, Rome, Italy
- 2008** The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, USA
- 2008** Denver Museum of Art, Denver, Colorado, USA
- 2008** Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA
- 2007** Why Africa?, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin, Italy
- 2007** Painted the New Fiat 500 - "Why Africa?", The Pigozzi Collection, Italy
- 2007** SA Art -- Signs, Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava, Slovakia
- 2007** Berlin and Beyond Art in Public Places, Florida, USA
- 2007** Berlin and Beyond Art in Public Places, Florida, USA
- 2007** Durban Art Gallery, Durban, SA
- 2007** Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, USA
- 2007** The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- 2007** Tacoma Museum of Art, Tacoma, Washington, USA

- 2006** 100% African; The Jean Pigozzi Contemporary African Art Collection, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
- 2006** Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA 2006
- 2006** Memory Innovation Tradition, 34 LONG, Cape Town, SA 2006
- 2006** Roppongi Hills Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2006** Beyond Lilith: The Sacred Feminine, Scuderie Aldobrandini Frascati, Roma, Italy
- 2005** Arts of Africa, Grimaldi Forum, Monaco
- 2005** Yokohama Triennial, Japan
- 2005** New Identities Contemporary Art from South Africa, Pretoria Art Museum & Johannesburg Art Gallery, SA
- 2005** Galleria Spacia, Italy
- 2005** South Africa-USA Native American Exchange Project, Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, USA
- 2005** Project Row Houses, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA
- 2005** African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA
- 2005** National Museum of African Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., USA
- 2004** New Identities Contemporary Art from South Africa, Museum Bochum, Germany
- 2004** New Orleans Jazz Festival, South African Stage, New Orleans, USA
- 2003** Dentro e Fuori le Mura, Fabbrica Eos, Milano, Italy
- 2002** Passport to South Africa, Centro Culturale Trevi, Bolzano, Italy
- 2002** The Art of Colour, Knysna Fine Art Gallery, Knysna, SA
- 2001** Arte Africana Contemporanea, Galleria d'arte Spazia, Bologna, Italy
- 2001** Galleria Cavellini, Brescia, Italy
- 2001** South Africa Today, The Helsinki Fair Centre, Finland
- 2000** 5th Biennale of Contemporary Art, Lyons, France
- 2000** Dialogue of Cultures, EXPO 2000, Hannover, Germany
- 1999** The Three Rivers Art Festival, Pittsburgh, USA
- 1999** <<REWIND>>FASTFORWARD.ZA, VanReekum Museum, Apeldoorn, Netherlands

- 1998** Solo Exhibition, Musee des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris, France
- 1998** Africa Africa: Vibrant New Art from a Dynamic Continent, Tobu Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
- 1997** British Airways tail wing design, UK
- 1997** Exhibit Gallery, Philadelphia, USA
- 1997** York College, Los Angeles, California, USA
- 1997** Mural for National Museum of Woman in the Arts, Washington D.C., USA
- 1997** Ndebele Images - Then and Now, National Arts Club, New York, USA
- 1997** Oog op Zuidelijke Afrika, Het Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, Netherlands
- 1997** Portal to America, Installation, Spoleto Festival, Charleston, South Carolina, USA
- 1997** African Immigrant Folklife Festival, Washington D.C., USA
- 1996** Parish Gallery, Georgetown, USA
- 1996** Exhibition for the Congressional Black Caucus, Washington D.C., USA
- 1996** Armour J. Blackburn Centre, Howard University, Washington D.C., USA
- 1996** World Bank, Washington D.C., USA
- 1996** Mural - Ministry of Finance Building, Pretoria, SA
- 1996** Mural - Alexandra Township Stadium, Johannesburg, SA
- 1995** BMW Art Cars and Paintings Exhibition, Sydney, Australia
- 1995** Group Exhibition, Market Theatre, Johannesburg, SA
- 1994** BMW Art Cars Collection, National Museum of Woman in the Arts, Washington D.C., USA
- 1994** Mural - National Museum of Woman in the Arts, Washington D.C., USA
- 1994** Mural - Ndebele College of Education, KwaNdebele, SA
- 1994** Mural - African Festival, Lisbon, Portugal
- 1994** Mural - European Inventive Business Travel Meetings Exhibition, Geneva, Switzerland
- 1994** Out of Africa, Musee des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, France
- 1993** La Grande Verite, Les Astres Africains, Nantes Fine Arts Museum, Nantes, France
- 1993** European Inventive Business Travel Meetings Exhibition, Lisbon, Portugal

- 1993** Geneva International Exhibition, Geneva, Switzerland
- 1992** Comme des Garçons, Tokyo, Japan; New York, USA; and Paris, France
- 1992** Comme des Garçons, Tokyo, Japan; New York, USA; and Paris, France
- 1992** Out of Africa, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- 1992** Fire Screen, Civic Theatre, Johannesburg, SA
- 1992** BMW Art Cars, Documenta 9, Kassel, Germany
- 1992** Africa Hoy, Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
- 1992** Africa Hoy, Cultural Centre of Contemporary Art, Mexico City, Mexico
- 1991** BMW Art Cars, Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, SA
- 1991** BMW Art Cars Commission, Germany
- 1991** Painting columns in Building, Tokyo, Japan
- 1991** Fashion Collection, Tokyo, Japan
- 1991** Ny Afrikansk Billedkunst, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1991** Africa Hoy, Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas, de Gran Canaria, Spain
- 1990** Caravan Auto Show, Lavante, France
- 1990** Bordeaux Festival, Bordeaux, France
- 1990** Mural Painting, Rosebank Shopping Centre, SA
- 1990** Mural Painting, Johannesburg School, SA
- 1989** Centre de la Villette, Paris, France
- 1989** Fine Arts Museum, Angouleme, France
- 1989** Mural Painting, Musee des Beaux Arts, France
- 1989** Les Magiciens de la Terre, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Collections:

National Museum of Woman in the Arts, Washington D.C., USA

Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., USA

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Virginia, USA

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava, Slovakia

Museum Bochum, Bochum, Germany

Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, SA

Musee des Beaux Arts, France

Musee des Arts d’Afrique et d’Oceanie, Paris, France

Botshabelo Museum, Botshabelo,

BMW Art Cars Collection, Germany

Museum of Modern Art, Equatorial Guinea BHP

SA Roppongi Hills Art Museum, Japan

Museum Bochum, Germany

Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, SA

University of Cape Town, SA

The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva, Switzerland

Larry Warsh Collection

Ben Milstein Collection

Rupert Art Collection, Stellenbosch, SA

The Dean Collection (Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys)

Usher

Trevor Noah

Oprah Winfrey

John Legend

Will Smith

Black Coffee

The Sovereign Art Foundation

World Bank Collection, USA

BROKER Art Collection, Belgium

BOE Bank, Cape Town, SA

Johnnic Communications Management Services Collection, Johannesburg, SA

Billiton Collection, Johannesburg

RE:CM Collection, Cape Town, SA

Recognitions:

- 2019** UNHRC Southern Africa NGO and Multi-Stakeholder Award in Recognition of Inclusivity and Empowerment
- 2019** The Department of Arts and Culture publish a book on Dr Esther Mahlangu for “25 Years of Democracy – Growing South Africa Together for Women’s Emancipation”
- 2018** Awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Johannesburg (UJ)
- 2018** Awarded an honorary doctorate from the Durban University of Technology (DUT)
- 2016** The Lilizela Awards, Minister’s Award, SA
- 2016** CAAMMPPS, South African Women Identity & Heritage Life Lessons, Discourse Honorary Award, SA
- 2015** Lilizela Tourism Awards, Best Roots and Culture Exhibition, SA
- 2015** The Lilizela Tourism Award, Roots and culture, SA
- 2015** South African Traditional Music Achievement Awards, Life Time Achievement Award, SA
- 2013** 1st Mbokodo Award, SA
- 2012** 1st Mbokodo Award, South African Women in the Arts, SA
- 2010** Increasing Access to the Arts Award - 13th annual BASA Awards, SA
- 2007** The Heritage Award for Preservation and Promotion of South African Heritage and Culture, The Premier of KZN, SA
- 2006** The Order of Ikhamanga (Silver) , Government of South Africa, SA
- 2006** National Arts and Culture Trust, Lifetime Achievement Award, SA
- 2001** Arts and Culture Award, Art Promotion, SA
- 2001** Pan African Broadcasting, Heritage and Achievement Award (PABHA) , SA
- 2001** Radio Ndebele Award, SA

- 1999** Mpumalanga Arts and Culture Award, SA
- 1997** Nassau County Commendation, New York, USA
- 1997** Incorporated Village of Hempstead Citation, Hempstead, New York, USA
- 1997** Ministry of Culture and Communication, Centre de la Villette, France
- 1996** Mpumalanga Sport Premier's Culture Award, SA
- 1988** Radio Ndebele Award, SA

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