



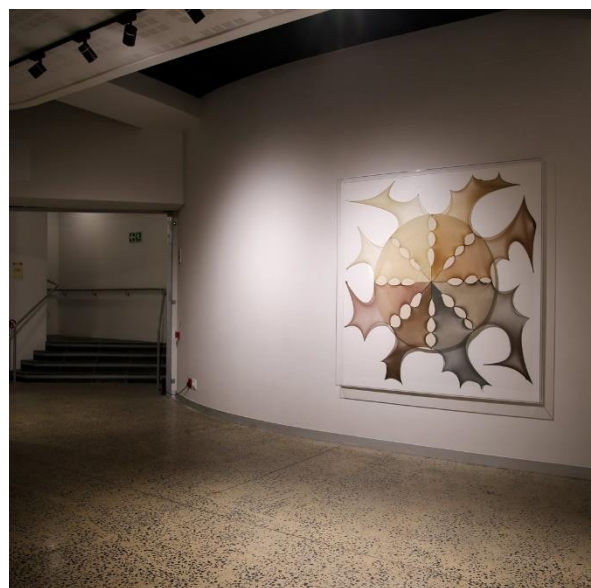
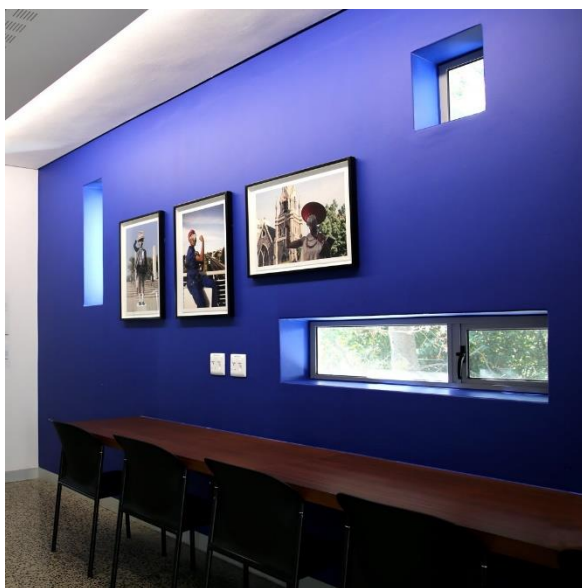
UCT Works of Art Collection (WOAC) Senate Report 2024

Introduction

Art collection formally began at UCT in the 1920s with the Kolbe Bequest. The UCT Works of Art Collection and the role of the oversight committee were formalised in 1978. Since then, UCT has been investing in art as a critical resource and asset for the university community. Until recently, the collection did not have a full-time curator and/or collections manager. The management and oversight of the collection relied on the passion and input of already full-time employed and otherwise committed members of UCT staff.

2024 was a significant year for WOAC as it was able to employ a full-time Curator and Collections Manager (in a two-year post) to ensure that the University's investment in the Collection is safeguarded, enhanced and used to benefit students, staff and the wider university community.

The focus areas for 2024 were: auditing the collection, formalising collections management; contributing towards and supporting the transformation of space and place at the university; and establishing a better network within UCT to champion the use of the UCT Works of Art Collection as a teaching and learning resource.



Installation views: New Neville Alexander Building

New Curator and Collections Manager Post

The contributions that the WOA Collection and its oversight committee could make to the university have been historically constrained by the lack of human resources – leading to inadequate displays, lack-lustre publicity, and a restriction in the number of events hosted. However, in 2024 employment of a full-time Curator and Collections Manager to oversee, manage, curate and make accessible the collection helped to better realise its potential for supporting transformation, research and teaching and learning at the University. Collections management and display processes were formalised and streamlined. And, strong inroads were made into addressing the most problematic areas of collection storage and the collections database. However, much remains to be done to have a well-managed, thriving and widely appreciated collection which contributes meaningfully to UCT's Vision and Mission. The Curator and Collections Manager is crucial for the same. As noted above, the position is a two-year contract post which expires in 2025. WOAC will be seeking to extend the position or make it permanent so that the university's investment in art is secured and the collection is adequately used in the future.

Auditing the Collection

The last audit of the UCT Works of Art Collection was done in 2011. Since then, lack of staffing, inadequate signage and guidelines, and ad hoc installation of artworks have meant that the collection has become dispersed without an adequate inventory and location register. The ramifications are the loss of cultural heritage, inadequate return of investment for the university, and financial losses.

The 2024 audit of the collection allowed for a clearer picture of what state the collection is in, its gaps, and its potential.

Given that the just over 1600 artworks in the collection are distributed over 6 campuses and in approximately 70 buildings, and given that an audit requires on-site and in-person inspection of each artwork, an audit of the collection is a considerable task. This task is made all the more difficult as often locations are inadequately, or not at all recorded, and at times artworks are housed in not easily accessible places such as offices. 21 artworks, which were previously considered lost, were found during the 2024 audit. These works, some of which were considered missing since 2011, were found this year. However, another 132 artworks were found to be missing. These missing works remind us that adequate human resources are needed to maintain and sustain the collection.

The largest focus in 2024 was on establishing which artworks were where, making note of missing or damaged work, and updating the database to accurately reflect the status of collection items. Whilst this is an ongoing task, WOAC is proud to have realised an audit of the vast majority of the collection in this year, with just over 70% of the work audited.

Formalising Collections Management: Curatorial Policy

For more than three decades, the University has recognised the need for a formal Curatorial Policy (see: Works of Art Committee Minutes, 22 August 1990). While steps were taken in the past to produce a curatorial policy, these could not be brought to their logical conclusion. A curatorial policy should anticipate change, provide a guide for continuity, and offer a structured way to envision and move toward the future. A lack of policy has, to quote Eva Franzidis (*Hidden treasures in Ivory Towers: the potential of university art collections in South Africa, with a case study of UCT*, p.69), instead led to “contradictory practices [from] the committee” and a “lack of a clear understanding of what exactly the purpose or role the WOAC (or the artworks for that matter) might have in the context of UCT.”

Given the long-standing negative ramifications of such a lack of policy, WOAC in 2024 focused on drafting a comprehensive curatorial policy, which was tabled for ratification at the Feb 28 2025 Senate meeting. This document is an important backbone to formalising, streamlining and safeguarding the Collection, and its use and management.

Signage and brochures

Additionally, WOAC concentrated on improving communications about the collection, especially through brochures and signage in public space, to ensure that the purpose and value of the Collection is broadly understood and respected. This is an ongoing task and will continue to be a focus area in 2025.

Storage

Until August 2024, the UCT Works of Art Collection was housed in costly, inconvenient and inadequate off-site commercial storage. With support from UCT Libraries, under whose ambit WOAC falls since January 2024, the collection is now housed in an UCT-managed, climate-controlled, safe and convenient storage space. This represents a considerable saving to UCT and will ensure that UCT’s art assets are kept safe when they are in storage.



Left: Johannes Maswanganyi, Rismati is running | Right: Mikhailia Petersen, Into the Sun

Acquisitions and Deaccessioning

The status of the UCT Works of Art Collection as a ‘living’ source of knowledge which constantly evolves and aims to reflect the contemporary moment, rather than as an art-historical record of art production, has now been formalised in the WOAC Curatorial Policy. As part of this, the WOAC committee continues to acquire artworks that: fill gaps in the current Collection; speak directly to the concerns and values of UCT; support art and culture in this country and the African continent; and that represent a sound financial investment.

To fulfil this aim, eight artworks were purchased in 2024, and one artwork was commissioned. WOAC is particularly pleased that these acquisitions include works by Mary Sibande, Dineo Sheshee Bopape, and Johannes Maswanganyi, all widely considered as highly important contributors to the South African art canon. WOAC is additionally pleased that the acquisitions include artwork by “new rising stars” in the African art world – with DuduBloom More in particular enjoying a meteoric rise in success. Other works were acquired in response to requests from stakeholders – with the acquisition of work by Mikhailia Petersen in direct response to concerns raised during WOAC-led workshops, where participants spoke about the invisibility of disability in the work currently held in the WOA Collection.

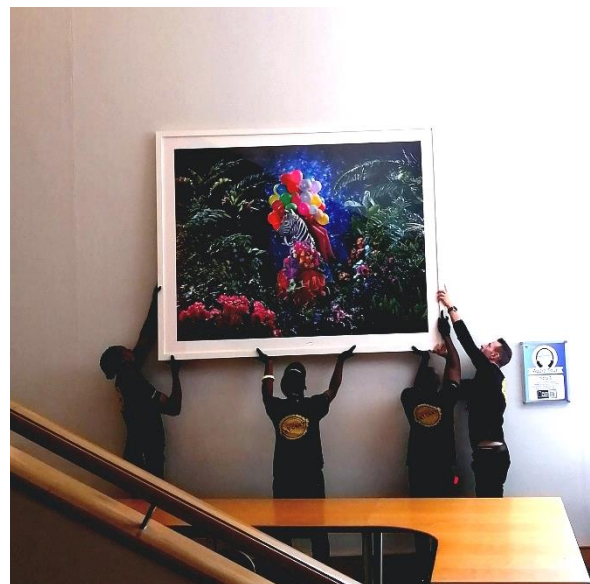
The need to create a relevant and balanced collection, which reflects adequately the demographics of the university and the region it is situated in, means that WOAC in 2024 continued to deaccession artwork by artists or portrait subjects who are massively over-represented in the Collection. WOAC additionally deaccessioned artwork that was damaged or missing. In total, 7 artworks were deaccessioned.

Conservation

The risks of inadequate collections management due to lack of human resources were laid bare in this year. Close inspection during the collection audit revealed a number of damaged and severely damaged works. A full-time, dedicated individual or team in charge of collections management would have been able to avoid the said damage caused due to neglect.

The cost for conservation in 2024 were considerable, and there remains a backlog of works to attend to in coming years.

Additionally, it was found that the day-to-day care of cleaning work was not adequate, so that valuable artworks, which represent the future heritage of our university and country, look lack-lustre under layers of dust. The presence of the newly-employed collections manager mean that the committee was able to start addressing such issues through regular hands-on maintenance and cleaning.



Feedback boards and installation image, UCT Libraries installation

Curation and Programming

Curated spaces and public programming are the most visible faces of WOAC, and thus are always a priority. The decision in 2024 was to focus on two major spaces, and to enter conversations with a number of other departmental teams and transformation committees around future re-curations.

The re-curation of the Main Library on UCT's Upper Campus saw a considerable and much appreciated shift in the tone and visual and intellectual appeal, of this site. The project, which was realised in collaboration with the UCT's Libraries Transformation Committee, was accompanied by a series of workshops and discussions, as well as poster and

feedback board campaigns. Especially noteworthy was the strong voice that emerged from a cohort of students who work as Library Buddies within the university, and whose input helped shape the installation.

The second priority space was the re-curation of the New Neville Alexander building, where one of the highlights was a well-attended staff walkabout of the exhibition.

Additional to the above, WOAC installed and refreshed numerous smaller sites, including The Office of the Ombud, Glenara, and ICTS.



WOAC presented engagements with Transformation Committees and workshops

Move to Libraries

Until 2023, the Works of Art Committee was housed under Property and Services (P&S). In 2024 for the first time WOAC became part of the UCT Libraries portfolio. This siting of WOAC within UCT Libraries was hugely beneficial in 2024, with ongoing discussions around the possibilities that art can bring to this space, and vice versa. The move to Libraries has huge potential for future growth, especially in support of establishing a university GLAM ecosystem (bringing greater coordination between university galleries, libraries, archives and museums).

The move to Libraries, allowed WOAC to reposition itself more effectively as a teaching and learning resource, and a repository of knowledge for research.

Use of the UCT Works of Art Collection as a Teaching and Learning Resource

With the possibilities offered by being part of UCT Libraries, WOAC in 2024 placed focus on establishing cross-disciplinary links and networks with other UCT departments and

units. Here the focus was on highlighting the WOA Collection as an important teaching and learning resource.

Existing links with the UCT Centre for Curating the Archive were expanded to include not only the established programme of internships, but to also include input in and supervision of the Honours in Curatorship course. WOAC participated in the Digital Curation course offered by the Department of Knowledge and Information Stewardship (DKIS) and has established strong ties with DKIS and UCT Art History, which allow for more collaborative projects in 2025.

These conversations are ongoing and ever-expanding, but have led to the establishment of collaborations, co-teaching and workshops which WOAC will co-present in 2025, or where departments and units will draw on the collection in their teaching.

Website and Database

The WOAC database is at the core of collections management, and regular updates are crucial to maintaining the Collection. As part of the extensive audit of the Collection in this year, the quality of information available on the database has been radically improved and expanded upon.

The WOAC website and social media are the primary ways in which WOAC communicates with broader audiences and hence they are regularly updated and kept relevant.

Meetings

The Works of Art Committee met quarterly, with several additional meetings by the sub-committees.

Leadership

In 2024 Professor Nomusa Makhubu Chaired the Works of Art Committee, with administrative, strategic and governance input from the Executive Director of Libraries, Ujala Satgoor.

2024 was the first year in which WOAC fell into the ambit of the UCT Libraries and this has been a great support to WOAC in its pursuit of more formalised, efficient and effective ways of working.

Conclusion

The Works of Art Collection committee wants to express its appreciation especially to the UCT Libraries and UCT Transformation Committees for their support and assistance.

The committee also acknowledges and thanks those members of UCT – whether staff, students or stakeholders – who engaged with the Collection and the committee in 2024, contributing to the important work of transformation at UCT through re-imagining space and place, and through engaging in critical conversations around visual symbols.

Dr Ruchi Chaturvedi

Chair, WOAC
February 2025