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CREATIVE SUPPORT



**NURTURING
NEW
TALENT**

Over the past decade, Spier Arts Trust has changed many lives by creating an environment in which local artists have been able to build sustainable careers.

SPIER ARTS TRUST (SAT), a non-profit, purpose-driven cultural organisation, was established in 1996 by Dick Enthoven, a visionary, art lover and successful businessman who had purchased Spier Wine Farm three years earlier. His dream for the trust was to "enable the discovery and nurturing of new and exciting talent ... and to enrich the local community both culturally and economically", according to Gilly Hemphill in *Artslink* (2004).

As an intermediary, SAT contributes to building a market for South African arts by promoting, sharing and celebrating the artistic and cultural heritage of the country and its people.

Mirna Wessels has held the reins of SAT since 2015, when she became chief executive officer, and she works with Tamlin Blake as chief curator. With a team of specialists, they have shaped the programmes and grown the collections of original South African artworks on public display throughout Spier Wine Farm

in Stellenbosch and in Nando's restaurants around the world.

For more than 20 years, SAT has administered patron art collections that include the Spier Collection (comprising 7000 works, of which 1000 are Creative Blocks) and the Nando's Collection (32000 works, of which 21000 are Creative Blocks).

We talked to Mirna about two of SAT's initiatives: House Union Block and Spier Creative Block.

HOW DID HOUSE UNION BLOCK (HUB) COME ABOUT?

In 2020, Covid brought a pause to business as we know it. During this time, we decided to extend our programmes and client base to beyond our patron network. That's when House Union Block (HUB) was conceived. It is primarily giving fine artists who are in our network but not signed with galleries an opportunity to exhibit and sell their work.



■ SUPPLIED



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We aim to offer our extensive catalogue of South African contemporary art – diverse in content and price – to interior designers who manage design projects for hotel chains and corporates.

HUB's services to designers and architects include collaborations between fine artists and professionals working in the interior design and architecture sectors, including site-specific commissions.

HUB connects fine artists from our network with skilled artisans from various affiliate HUB studios, including Hammered Rocks Mosaic Studio, Keiskamma Arts Project and Qaqambile Bead Studio, some of which are also based at Union House. These collaborations result in renowned works that have been included in our collections.

WHAT MAKES SPIER CREATIVE BLOCK SPECIAL AND WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

Spier Creative Block is a wonderful way to support young artists early in their careers.

For collectors, Creative Block offers an approachable and affordable way to introduce original contemporary art – and their collections can grow over time.

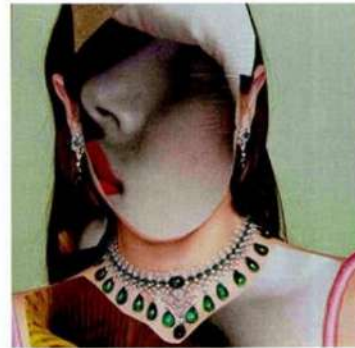
We have also seen some Creative Blocks sold on auction for 12 times the price we charge!

We have a rigorous application process and only consider professional artists who wish to make a career from practising art. Since starting in 2004, we have purchased 38000 artworks from 433 artists, many of whom are self-taught.

Some artists have participated since the beginning – which means we have bought more than 500 Creative Blocks from a number of artists, including:

- Boyce Magandela
- Ernest Fulani
- Fikile Mqhayi
- Khayaletu Sineyile
- Lindile Magunya
- Nkoali Nawa
- Sandile Ashabangane Mhlongo
- Selvin November
- Timothy Zantsi
- Velile Soha

We have monthly hand-in days in three main centres across South Africa (Cape Town, Johannesburg and Gqeberha), where invited artists bring in their artworks, having transformed blank 'blocks', which we supply (MDF board cut to a specific size).



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TOP: Nando's Somerset West interior, showcasing Nando's SA collection works by Ludumo Maqabula.

ABOVE: Interior of Spier Veld restaurant, with a beautiful salon-style installation from the Spier Collection.

On a busy hand-in day we see about 85 artists mingle and converse, which means that we're facilitating community engagement for people who often work in isolation.

Tamlin Blake, as chief curator, critiques the selection that each artist presents, providing constructive feedback on their technical skills, use of materials and their ideas and process. We never tell artists how or what to create, but rather help them to find their authentic voice in a safe environment.

Tamlin picks the best works from that hand-in day and all the artists are paid within 48 hours. This is another special feature of the programme, as it provides artists, especially emerging ones, with a means to continue practising their art at a very vulnerable stage of their careers.

Spier Creative Block is a Spier Wine farm Growing for Good initiative – the purchasing cycle provides regular income, while the reviews enable us to see artists' consistent output and commitment, so it becomes an entry into our other art-sourcing programmes for the collections.

We sell Creative Block online through HUB's website at houseunionblock.co.za/collections/creative-block. Collectors can also find us at the annual Latitudes Art Fair in Johannesburg and Solo Studios in Riebeeck Valley, and we sell through a number of partners (Spier Wine Farm, AVA Gallery, Sisonke Gallery, Saxon Hotel, and GFI Gallery).