

FACULTY FOCUS

A MONDAY MONTHLY SUPPLEMENT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES



BEING HUMAN

What the humanities teach us about the human condition

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RECLAIMING THE PAST

How do we live with history?

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LIFE LESSONS

Can study in the humanities help you live a more meaningful life?

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TSOTSITAAL

Unique South African words and phrases

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DRAWING THE LINE

Carrol Clarkson on the role of art in the creation of a just society

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A WORD FROM THE DEAN

Professor Sakhela Buhlungu
Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to the Faculty of Humanities at UCT. Ours is the largest of the six faculties, with approximately 6 000 students, 25% of whom are postgraduates. The demographic profile of the students has been changing rapidly in recent years, such that in 2014, the majority of our undergraduate students are black, coloured and Indian (53%), while the remainder are white (32%) and other groups (15%, made up of international, 'race undeclared' and Chinese students). Our faculty is also the most complex; not only because of the large number of disciplines that constitute it, but also because of the variety of study programmes and research activities.

Our academics equip students with skills that are crucial for engaging with the material and non-material aspects of being human. I am proud to say that we produce graduates equipped with fundamentally important skills – analytical and communication skills, research and writing skills, argumentation and decision-making. UCT humanities graduates are highly sought after in the labour market, locally and globally. Although our graduates are able to secure jobs on the strength of their first humanities degrees, we have also noted a trend by many students to advance to postgraduate study, which further enhances their skills and employment prospects in high-level positions.

A humanities qualification prepares students for a multitude of career paths in the public sector, the private sector, the media, the NGO sector, consultancy services, and careers in research and academia. Analytical and problem-solving skills as well as the ability to think laterally are valued and developed across all fields in the modern world. These abilities provide an essential foundation for engaged citizenship and for entry into the world of work for graduates. The growing awareness of the value of skills gained in humanities courses has seen an increasing number of students from other faculties registering for our courses.

In 2011 the Academy of Science of South Africa produced a research report titled *Consensus*

Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies. One of the findings of the study was that "the evidence on humanities graduates shows clearly that virtually all humanities graduates are employed, that the vast majority (more than 80%) work for an employer while the rest are self-employed, and that there is a fair spread of graduate employment across the public and private sectors" (ASSAf, 2011, p127).

Space does not allow me to take you through the vast array of exciting courses, degrees, diplomas and certificate programmes on offer in our faculty. Suffice it to say that students who love exploring ideas about how to make the world a better, more humane and just place will find our faculty extremely exciting and attractive. After all, the study of the humanities has been at the centre of the evolution of the university and the pursuit of scholarship, from the time of the great philosophers in Athens and other parts of the world, all the way to the present.

It is my hope that this *Monday Monthly* supplement will give you a taste of what we are about.

Further information about the faculty, its departments, research units and centres can be obtained from the website, www.humanities.uct.ac.za.



“Study of the humanities has been at the centre of the evolution of the university and the pursuit of scholarship, from the time of the great philosophers in Athens and other parts of the world, all the way to the present.”

Sakhela Buhlungu

HUMANITIES BY NUMBERS

6000 students

43 countries represented in the student body

75% undergraduates

25% postgraduates

6 SCHOOLS

- School of Languages & Literatures
- Michaelis School of Fine Art
- School of Education
- School for African & Gender Studies, Anthropology & Linguistics (AXL)
- School of Dance
- South African College of Music

10 ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS:

- Drama
- English Language & Literature
- Historical Studies
- Philosophy
- Political Studies
- Psychology
- Religious Studies
- Social Development
- Sociology
- Centre for Film & Media Studies

15 RESEARCH CENTRES AND INSTITUTES:

- African Gender Institute
- Centre for African Studies
- Children's Institute
- Research Institute for Christianity & Society in Africa
- Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa
- Centre for Contemporary Islam
- Centre for Creative Writing
- Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA)
- Institute for Intercultural & Diversity Studies
- Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies & Research
- Centre for Curating the Archive (formerly known as the Lucy Lloyd Archive & Resource Exhibition Centre)
- Centre for Rhetoric Studies
- Centre for Social Science Research
- Library and Information Science Centre

72 NRF-RATED RESEARCHERS

- 5 As
- 26 Bs
- 34 Cs
- 6 Ys
- 1 L

4 SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH CHAIRS (SARCHI)

- Prof Carolyn Hamilton
- Prof Rajend Mesthrie
- Prof Abdulkader Tayob
- Prof Lungisile Ntsebeza

2 AW MELLON RESEARCH CHAIRS

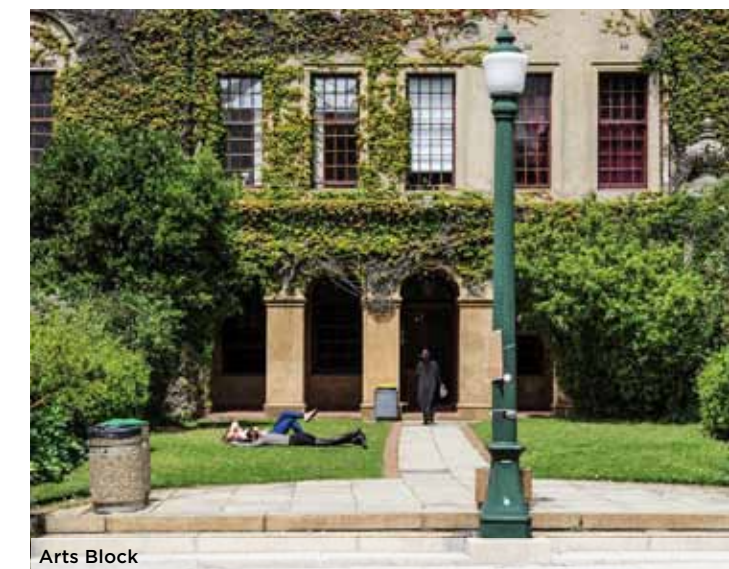
- Dr Matthias Brenzinger
- Prof Fiona Ross

27 winners of the prestigious Distinguished Teacher Award since the award's inception in 1981 have come from humanities

HALLS OF HISTORY

Curated by Lwando Nteya & Thaheer Mullins

A brief tour of the humanities of bygone times, told through UCT buildings.



Arts Block



PD Hahn



Beattie Building



Harry Oppenheimer



Leslie Social Science



Kaplan Centre



Humanities Building



School of Dance



Baxter Theatre



Hiddingh Campus



South African College of Music



The Little Theatre



Egyptian Building

Upper Campus

The **Arts Block** is one of the original UCT structures, designed by architect JM Solomon, who sadly committed suicide before he was able to see his work completed. Arts 100 is one of the few lecture theatres on campus featuring its original design.

The **Beattie Building** houses the humanities faculty's offices, and was named (in 1964) after Sir John Caruthers (Jock) Beattie, the principal and first vice-chancellor of UCT (1918-1937). He's also the only person to be buried on upper campus, with his grave situated just above UCT's tennis clubhouse.

The **Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre** for Jewish Studies and Research is based at Rachel Bloch House. Established in 1980, under the terms of a gift to the University of Cape Town by the Kaplan Kushlick Foundation and named after the parents of Mendel and Robert Kaplan, the Kaplan Centre seeks to stimulate and promote the field of Jewish studies and research. It also houses the Jewish Studies library, a collection that includes twentieth-century Yiddish literature as well as texts looted by the Nazis during World War II and rescued by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Committee.

The **Harry Oppenheimer Institute** houses the Centre for Africa Studies as well as the African

Gender Institute and is named after the diamond magnate, previous chancellor of the university (presiding from 1967 to 1999), and one of the world's richest men.

The Leslie complex (**Leslie Social Science** and **Leslie Commerce**), originally a series of huts, was named after the first professor of economics at UCT, Robert Leslie, and was completed in 1979.

UCT's Department of Psychology (based in the humanities) is located with the sciences in **PD Hahn**, named after the Jamieson Professor of Experimental Physics and Practical Chemistry, Paul Daniel Hahn (at whose request women were admitted to study chemistry). A great deal of the art you'll see in the building is by Associate Professor Fritha Langerman, director of the Michaelis School of Fine Art.

The **Humanities Building** has lived many lives – first as the home of the Faculty of Education, then as the Wilfred and Jules Kramer Law Building (until the law department built its own structure on middle campus), then as the Humanities Graduate Building. It's currently undergoing a renaming process, but in the meantime, it's home to the Institute for Humanities in Africa, the Department of Philosophy and the School of Education.

Middle & Lower Campus

The **Baxter Theatre** came under UCT's jurisdiction so that state control didn't hamper the theatre's ability to stage multiracial productions. The theatre turns 37 this year.

The **South African College of Music** was founded in 1910 by Mine Niy-Darroll and a group of musicians, and opened in Strand Street. It had six students. In 1925 the school moved to its current location, Strubenholm – the private residence of Henry Struben. The college boasts several string, wind, jazz and percussion ensembles, as well as choirs, a symphony orchestra, a jazz big band and an opera school. The WH Bell Music Library, just next to the college, was the first completely

self-contained, functionally designed music library in Africa, and opened in August 1943. It now comprises 10 000+ books, 33 000+ pieces of music, 5 000+ gramophone records and 2 500 CDs.

Initially established in 1934 as the UCT Ballet School, the **School of Dance** has been the training ground of many generations of South African ballet dancers, some of whom went on to achieve significant success, both in local ballet companies and abroad. Over the decades the school has broadened its base to incorporate other dance forms. Since 1998, both African dance and contemporary dance have been offered as full streams. 2014 marks its 80th anniversary.

Hiddingh Campus

Many of the buildings on **Hiddingh Campus** were designed in the office of Herbert Baker (the original plans can be found in the Baker Collection, in Manuscripts & Archives) and named after a kindly benefactor: WM Hiddingh, who bequeathed £15 514 to the South African College. English composer and conductor

Professor William Henry Bell, the first Professor of Music (1923-1935), single-handedly created the **Little Theatre** out of an old chemistry laboratory in 1931.

The Orange Street location of the **Egyptian Building** on Hiddingh Campus was a zoo in the late 18th century, complete with lion's dens and a small lake that supposedly housed a hippo. The structure itself was UCT's first (it predates the Groote Schuur campus) and was the first built for the express purpose of higher education in South Africa. Built in the Egyptian revival style, which includes motifs and imagery of Ancient Egypt, it was completed and opened in 1841. It is now part of the Michaelis School of Fine Art.

WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

Story by Judith Browne
Photos by Michael Hammond

What can the human and social sciences and the arts teach us about what it means to be human? Can close self-study help us live better lives?

In earth's ecosystem, human beings are one species among many millions – a species on which the humanities focus almost exclusively. How can the close study of how humans think, communicate and express themselves; organise themselves into groups and structures, with governing systems; and engage with the surrounding environment and other species who inhabit it help us advance and evolve our understanding of the world (and our place in it)?

What sets us apart as a species?

To help unpack what the humanities can teach us, it's worth questioning what sets us apart as a species.

Some have suggested it's our larger brains (relative to our body size) – crudely, that a larger 'computer' makes for better computing. Others point out that we're one of a few species not just to have a mutually beneficial relationship with other species, but to befriend them: taking animals into our homes and treating them as one of our family. Agriculture and animal husbandry have played a significant role in our advancement. Using tools we've fashioned with our own hands, we till the land and tame wild animals; we also prepare our food, and have

developed a fairly elaborate (if not always healthy) relationship with what we subsist on, whether plant or animal.

Still others suggest it's language that sets us apart: that our ability to think, to think about that thinking and to convey that thought to another human, allows us to imagine the future, to evaluate and learn from the past, and to try get to grips with our place in the world.

The seat of the soul

Where before, our life force was believed to be based in the soul (of which psychology was originally the study), much of what defines us as human is now believed to reside in the brain.

"From the neuropsychological point of view, what makes us human is the relative size of the part of the brain that distinguishes us from other primates – and indeed from other mammals – namely, the prefrontal lobes," explains neuropsychologist (and head of the Department of Psychology) Professor Mark Solms. "The prefrontal lobes have two major functions. Firstly, they inhibit outputs from the instinctual-emotional parts of the brain, which would otherwise compel us to respond in

fixed, stereotypical ways to events. This inhibitory function creates the possibility of thinking, which is the second major function of the frontal lobes.

"Thinking in this sense boils down to an experimental or virtual type of action carried out in the safety of our own minds before committing ourselves in the real world. Action derived from thought is vastly superior to instinctual action, in that it creates flexibility and adaptability based on learning from experience. We should, however, never forget that these higher cognitive functions of the human brain are still ultimately driven from below; thinking does not replace instinctual drives – rather, it only elaborates and refines them."

The storytelling animal

For primatologist Jane Goodall, the first of the Vice-Chancellor's Open Lecture speakers in 2014, what sets us apart from primates like chimpanzees is our complex linguistic ability: "There isn't a sharp line dividing humans from the rest of the animal kingdom," Goodall argues in a 2002 TED talk. "It's a very wuzzy line. It's getting wuzzier all the time as we find animals doing things that we, in our arrogance, used to think were just

human ... The one thing we have, which makes us so different from chimpanzees or other living creatures, is this sophisticated spoken language – a language with which we can tell children about things that aren't here. We can talk about the distant past, plan for the distant future, discuss ideas with each other, so that the ideas can grow from the accumulated wisdom of the group."

Oral historian Sean Field, former director of the Centre for Popular Memory, would argue that storytelling – as a way of recognising patterns, drawing connections between them, and making meaning of the world around us – is central to being human: "Telling or performing stories across the private and public worlds we experience is central to the human condition. But the paradox

of life stories is the conscious and unconscious ways in which they are framed through memory-work and cultures. The stories not told or expressed unintentionally are as meaningful as those consciously told, in different ways and times, to various audiences."

Witnessing humanity

Language and the stories we tell ourselves don't just shape identity. Questions of who or what is human (and how language enforces the divide) have also significantly shaped history: systems of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, patriarchy and other forms of discrimination are predicated on how 'human', how 'civilised', people are believed to be. Systems of violence depend on dehumanisation.

“Eruptions in our society in the mining industries and evident in the service delivery strikes may on one level be about material things such as money or facilities. Underneath this, though, is a much deeper call to witness the human, to be made visible in a tide of negation, degradation and invisibility.”

Jay Pather

LIFE LESSONS

Photos by Michael Hammond

What can a degree in the humanities teach you about life? Can it help you become a better person?



Claire James
English, Afrikaans, history and social anthropology

“It's taught me that so many things are socially constructed. Being [in the humanities] has taught me to be a lot more open; it still taught me to be critical, to evaluate things from the space that they come from – but it's made me a lot more respectful.”

Zoe Fraser
Sociology, social anthropology, philosophy and critical thinking (1st year)

“Sociology and social anthropology are very personal ... You delve into a lot of other people's lives – and not necessarily people that you've been exposed to. It opens you up ... and in that way, you understand people more.”



Alexxa Leon
History (3rd year)

“I'm more aware of this global system of inequality that I'm a part of and I've become aware of the experiences of other people, not just my own. Just knowing more helps. It informs my decisions of the day, what I perpetuate and what I actively try not to. It matters what stories are told. Because it comes down to who has power to tell those stories. That has a huge effect on how people are represented, how we see people, and how we treat people.”



Reagan Kutlo Tsimakoko
Politics, Mandarin, African and Chinese history

“Mandarin opened up a whole new world. It's allowed me to learn from people and a culture that has been around for thousands of years. Just learning this language, you're able to communicate with 1.2 billion people that you haven't been able to communicate with. It's taught me that there's more than one history. There's more than one story.”

Andrei Damane
Politics, political science and international relations (2nd year)

“I chose to do political science after two gap years. And it was in that time that I worked in a restaurant and I had to experience a lot of different kinds of cultures. That really piqued my interest in politics and diplomacy – you don't understand the necessity or the need to speak to people properly until you're in a situation where you need to be kind to people all the time.”



Gloria Chikaoanda
French, law and international relations (3rd year)

“The thing about humanities is ... it makes you question everything that you think you know. It opens up your mind to different possibilities. It makes you more tolerant.”

human condition, but there is a great deal of variety that rests in that.”

She spoke of current work in the sciences – specifically new biologies and genetics – and how these seem to be returning to “the idea of a human condition, to ... what we all share as humans”. What she sees there is not a frightening vision of human biology, but the assurance of ‘soft wiring’ in our genetic script, “malleable, plastic relationships between what we're born with and how the environment shapes us”.

It is this very plasticity that suggests the answer to ‘what makes us human’ is not only undefined, but also open to radical redefinition.

The humanities project

Associate Professor Lesley Green, who is behind efforts to launch a cross-disciplinary degree in the environmental humanities in 2015, believes that radical redefinition is key to the humanities project: “I think the central challenge of our times is to rethink what makes us human – to rethink it is to be part of a planet that has been brought into crisis by our assumptions about humanity. The work of the humanities in the years ahead is enormous: if we are to survive, we need to be reimagining what makes

us human. Sciences can point to the problems in disturbed earth systems, but working out how to alter the current course requires every field of the humanities.”

For Green, the dimensions of problems we face – such as our inability to act decisively and collectively on climate change, an issue that threatens our very survival – are distinctly human. More hopefully, though, potential solutions are too.

“The world's problems are never tidily confined to the laboratory or ‘spreadsheet,’” argued Deborah Fitzgerald, dean of humanities, arts and social sciences at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT) recently in *The Boston Globe*. “From climate change to poverty to disease, the challenges of our age are unwaveringly human in nature and scale, and engineering and science issues are always embedded in broader human realities, from deeply felt cultural traditions to building codes to political tensions ... Our students also need an in-depth understanding of human complexities – the political, cultural, and economic realities that shape our existence – as well as fluency in the powerful forms of thinking and creativity cultivated by the humanities, arts, and social sciences.”

“The work of the humanities in the years ahead is enormous: if we are to survive we need to be reimagining what makes us human. Sciences can point to the problems in disturbed earth systems, but working out how to alter the current course requires every field of the humanities.”

Lesley Green





Zootsuit-inspired fashion in Gauteng in the 1950s (the word *tsotsi* is said to have come from the zootsuit craze). Photograph by Ronald Ngilima, sourced from *The Other Camera* project, University of Cape Town Libraries.

THERE'S A LARNEY ON MY STOEP!

Curated by Abigail Calata

English might be only one of 11 official national languages, but the diversity of the country's history and people is coded into its words and expressions. Professor Rajend Mesthrie studies English in its multicultural and multilingual South African context, and has co-authored a book with journalist Jeanne Hromnik: *Eish, but is it English?*

Bunny chow

From the Chinese word for spicy, 'chow' has come to mean food in South Africa. 'Bunny' probably comes from 'banya', the Gujarati word for a merchant or trader.

Busy

As in 'busy sleeping, dying, relaxing'. The use of this word in South African English is possibly related to the Afrikaans infinitive '*besig om te*' ('busy to'). However, there are parallels in international English, especially in ironic or poetic usage.

Dagha

Mud or mortar used in building. It comes from the isiZulu and isiXhosa word '*udaka*', which has the same meaning.

Gogga

Slang for any flying insect. It derives from one or more of the Khoisan languages and is widely used in the Cape. It is also the nickname of a well-known former cricketer, Paul Adams, for his unorthodox spin action.

"He threw me with a stone"

Commonly used in Cape Town, more generally by bilingual people for whom Afrikaans is their dominant language. The sentence construction comes directly from the Afrikaans expression, "*Hy gooi my met 'n klip*".

Larney

Meaning 'posh', 'classy' or 'dressed up', this word is short for 'Hollander', which in the early twentieth century signified an upper-class person dressed in fashionable European styles and distinct from the local 'yokel' or Afrikaner. The words seem to be connected via the intermediate form 'landie', which is still used in parts of Cape Town and Mozambique.

Peri peri

The East African word for pepper, signifying food that is hot and spicy.

Quagga

This originally onomatopoeic word most probably comes from a Khoi word, based on the braying of the now-extinct subspecies of the plains zebra.

Robot

The use of this word for a traffic light has long been discontinued in England, but survives in South African English, from whence it has spread through much of Southern Africa.

Tsotsi

A seSotho word believed to have come from zoot suit, an outfit with narrow stove-pipe trousers worn by American gangsters in the forties and fifties. A *tsotsi* is a gangster or a wannabe gangster.

REVIVING AN ANCIENT TONGUE

Story by Abigail Calata
Photos by Yazeed Kamaldien

The sounds of Khoekhoegowab, not heard for centuries in Cape Town, are reverberating in the Mother City again.

The language known as Khoekhoegowab (but also Nama or Nama-Damara) is spoken mainly in Namibia, some parts of South Africa and Botswana. It is related to the Khoek (or Khoi) language that was spoken for many centuries by the inhabitants of the area known today as the South-Western Cape – and lost as a result of many of its speakers being killed in warfare with European settlers or through diseases such as smallpox. The remaining Cape Khoek speakers were, by and large, gradually assimilated into colonial society, becoming part of a much larger and diverse group that in time came to be called coloured.

Linguistically, these Khoek speakers and their descendants shifted to speak mainly a version of Dutch that would eventually become Afrikaans.

Justin Brown, a doctoral fellow at the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA) and a PhD candidate in linguistics, is following a group of coloured people in Cape Town who are embracing Khoekhoegowab as their language.

"They view it as the closest thing to the original Khoek language of their ancestors, and are striving to retrieve and reclaim something which they believe is part of them and deeply significant," he explains.

Brown is interacting with members of the Khoi and San Action Awareness Group (KSAAG), a non-profit organisation that, among other things, runs weekly Khoekhoegowab classes at the Cape Town Castle.

"The revitalisation endeavour takes different forms and varies from person to person, but a large part of it involves celebrating, promoting and also learning the Khoekhoegowab language. To this end, Khoekhoegowab language workshops and/or lessons have been taking place sporadically in Cape Town since 2008," clarifies Brown, who attends these classes for research purposes.

"Progress has been hampered by many factors such as lack of funding, lack of teaching materials, and the difficulty of securing suitable venues; but nevertheless, the lessons are continuing, and there is growing interest and participation," says Brown.

He observes: "There is a strong celebratory dimension to these activities and a great deal revolves around affirming and celebrating the beauty of the Khoekhoegowab language, its sounds, its rhythms, the feel and texture of the language and its musical nature."

"The lessons and other instances of Khoekhoegowab usage are highly performative and take the form of utterances meant to be shared in a group."

Justin Brown



(From left) Khoisan Chief Hennie van Wyk says it's vital to revive Khoek. Activist Jill Williams works to promote both the Khoek language and culture. Bradley van Sitters runs Khoek language classes at the Castle to a range of ages, including teens like Grayton Bernadus, Tammy-Lee Chambers, Monolita van Ster and Caleb Piekaan.

MORE THAN WORDS

Language helps us give expression to a multitude of thoughts, experiences and emotions. Yet as versatile as any one language is, all have their limits. For those times when we literally cannot find the words, art offers us an alternative means of expression. Abigail Calata asked a number of leading UCT minds for their take on how the arts help us express what words cannot.



"Dance is a communicative tool from and of the body; and as such, emanates from a wellspring of our collective (hi)stories ... Dance helps us as humans make more sense of our world and each other. It elevates the notion of what shared humanity could look like in the social space, allowing the dialogue between private/interior worlds and public/exterior worlds to begin."

Gerard Samuel
Director of the School of Dance



"Verbal language can be seen as the broad strokes of one's consciousness, and art helps us to get between those broad strokes into the subtleties of highly subjective experience. This can be overwhelmingly energising when one's inexplicable mysteries find themselves expressed in an art work. Art opens up a vitality that one never imagined possible, and gives one a sense of the depths and heights of which one is capable."

Jay Pather
Director of the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts

Drama graduates Luc-Given Mkhondo (right) and Yanga Jikela appear in a scene from the play *Woza Albert!* Their performance formed part of last year's final-year auditions at the Little Theatre on Hiddingh campus. • Dr Ivan Toms, a former SHAWCO director, in a clinic in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, shortly before being sent to prison for refusing to report for military service in 1987. Photograph by Graeme Williams, courtesy of the *Then and Now* project, UCT Libraries Special Collections. • Senior students of African dance perform in Maxwell Rani's *Amajuba*. This choreographic work was loosely based on Xhosa mythology, and performed at the Baxter Concert Hall in 2012. • A performance from artist Athi-Patra Ruga's *The Future White Women of Azania: The manifesto* at the 2012 Live Art Festival, presented by the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts. The artist describes his work as "bursting with eclectic multicultural references, carnal sensuality and a dislocated undercurrent of humour". • A trumpeter performing in the 2014 Africa Day Alumni Concert.

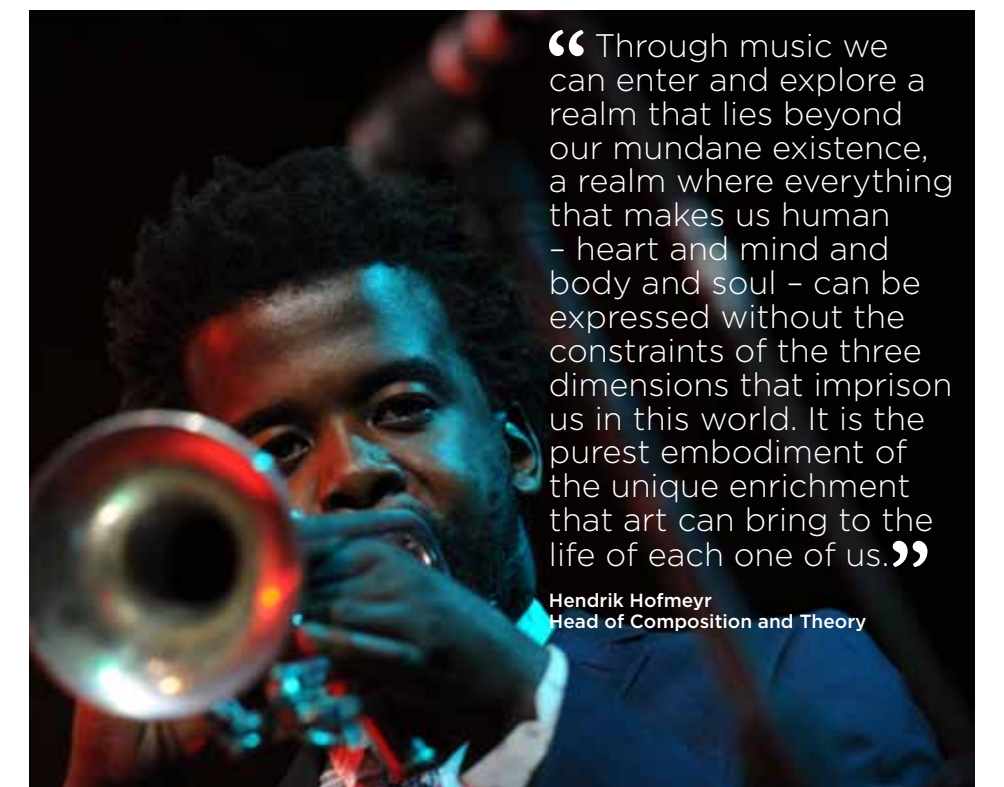
"Essentially the language of art is the metaphor. The way of the actor/artist has been, and always will be, a path of insight to personal knowledge; and through this insightful personal knowledge, to reflect and interpret for the world an understanding. We need more than ever the presence of the actor/artist to help us touch that which is too often beyond our rational comprehension."

Geoffrey Hyland
Head of Drama



"I continue to be inspired by the power of photographs to be suggestive, interpretive and to travel way beyond the material plane sometimes, as if they were magical. For one who works in the archive I am struck by the extraordinary role photography plays in relation to memory work as we face our traumatic past, deal with the challenges of the present, and imagine a place we call South Africa."

Paul Weinberg
Photographer and Senior Curator of the Visual Archive



"Through music we can enter and explore a realm that lies beyond our mundane existence, a realm where everything that makes us human – heart and mind and body and soul – can be expressed without the constraints of the three dimensions that imprison us in this world. It is the purest embodiment of the unique enrichment that art can bring to the life of each one of us."

Hendrik Hofmeyr
Head of Composition and Theory

A GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE?

Story by Yusuf Omar

A life without happiness is not much of a life at all, and the best political systems ensure that their citizens can live a happy life.

So argued the Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Much of the book mulls over what 'happiness' actually means – is it pleasure, honour, health, justice? What combination of these is the ideal state for citizens of the state?

The very notion of 'citizen' at the time of the early Greek philosophers was far more exclusive than South Africa's Constitution holds: all were required to actively participate in one of the earliest forms of popular democracy known to humanity, but only a few were deemed capable of participating.

Scholars such as UCT's Professor Robert Mattes, of the Department of Political Studies and the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR), study modern democratic systems and political culture as part of the continuing quest to develop a political system that serves everyone's needs.

Knowledge of how these systems work is crucial to making them work and to protecting people's rights, argues Mattes: "By developing

greater cognitive awareness of its processes, through direct experience with the fruits of political performance and through national experiences with political competition, people learn both about the content of democracy as well as its consequences," he wrote in 2007.

South Africa's own post-apartheid dispensation might be democratic by definition, but many citizens still live in poverty, and inequality is as great as it is nearly anywhere else in the world.

Tackling socio-economic injustices

Universities' role in developing society was explicated by Emeritus Professor David Cooper, in his 2011 book *The University in Development*. The former head of sociology at UCT argues that, in addition to the neo-liberal imperative to produce graduates ready-made for the industrialised labour market, universities are obliged to develop new visions, concepts and policies of research so that they can unleash their capacity for social development

and social justice for both industry and civil society.

To this end, Professors Nicoli Natrass and Jeremy Seekings, both of CSSR, have put much effort into unpacking the causes and effects of poverty and inequality (see the main body of *Monday Monthly* for a recent debate on that issue). As they argued in 2010, many of the institutional and structural features that shaped South Africa's apartheid-era growth path continue to do so in post-apartheid South Africa. These and other factors perpetuate poverty and inequality, they contend, despite the transition to democracy.

Performing identity

Social science students are exposed to a range of arguments about livelihoods, and the factors informing which people have what – and why.

The salient issues of racial, gender and class inequalities in South Africa are grappled with in the 'Race, Class and Gender' course available

to undergraduate students in the faculty. The course work deconstructs these concepts in ways that question students' fundamental understanding and opens new possibilities for thinking about and 'performing' identity.

This performance – as academics such as former UCT sociologist Melissa Steyn argued in her book, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be* – is often subconscious, but is informed by a range of external factors, and permeates every facet of life in the post-colonial and post-apartheid state.

While this is an appetiser to the work of the Faculty of Humanities, the common themes of the common good and social justice resonate throughout.

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

Professor David Benatar, head of UCT's Department of Philosophy, considers what philosophy might contribute to how people can live a 'good' life.

Philosophy is a discipline with wide-ranging subject matter, and only some fields of philosophical inquiry – most obviously moral philosophy, but also related areas such as social and political philosophy – are directly concerned with questions about the good life. Philosophers hold a wide range of views, and thus philosophy does not offer a single answer.

Instead, philosophy, or at least analytic philosophy, offers a methodology for grappling with questions about the good life. This

involves analysing – getting clear on what we mean by key terms and claims; drawing on empirical evidence; testing evaluative claims in various ways, including for consistency; and constructing logical arguments.

The evidence and arguments should – although unfortunately, they often do not – precede the conclusion. In other words, one should see where the evidence and arguments lead, rather than pick and choose evidence and arguments to fit some preconceived conclusion.

The sort of methodology described here is also used by those working on questions in other areas of philosophy, including metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language. At least some people believe that honing the relevant skills and gaining understanding can be one component of a good life.

It should be said that not all philosophical views about the good life are uplifting. Some philosophers think that while some lives can be better than others, no life can be really good.

That view is obviously contested, but it cannot be rejected merely because it is unpalatable. This is because one unfortunate fact about the world is that what is true is not

always nice, and what is nice is not always true.

Even when it is not nice, however, the truth is at least sometimes worth having.

“One unfortunate fact about the world is that what is true is not always nice, and what is nice is not always true. Even when it is not nice, however, the truth is at least sometimes worth having.”

David Benatar

In an article published in the *New South African Outlook* in January 1999, former student of religious studies at UCT and current Chair of Council Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane writes of a government's responsibility to its citizens, and the responsibility that comes with freedom and the 'good life': "Government exists for the co-ordination of human life so that the general well-being of humanity may be promoted and a full human life made possible, through guaranteeing to everyone peace, security, freedom, justice and all that enables the 'good life'. Equally, the freedom to enjoy 'the good life' carries obligations." Quoting the InterAction Council's Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, he argues that freedom and responsibility are interdependent. "In any society, freedom can never be exercised without limits. The more freedom we enjoy, the greater the responsibility we bear – towards others as well as ourselves. The more talents we possess, the bigger the responsibility we have to develop them to their fullest capacity. We must move away from the freedom of indifference towards the freedom of involvement."



Photo by Henk Kruger



By representing himself and using the Rivonia Trial as a "showcase for the ANC's moral opposition to racism" Nelson Mandela used an apartheid court of law as a channel for a political protest, fundamentally changing the relationship between law and politics in South Africa, says Carrol Clarkson. This image of Mandela is from the days of the Treason Trial in 1956. ©Photograph by Jürgen Schadeberg. Sourced from the University of Cape Town Libraries Special Collections

Aesthetics has to do with knowledge acquired through the senses, and careful attention to what is available within a field of sensory perception gives us an indication of how a society perceives itself. So: what can be seen and heard? Who has a voice? What makes headline news? What is censored?

Answers to questions like these help us to better understand how a society delineates itself. Changing the field of perception may be one way of encouraging a different appreciation of what counts and of what matters – and hence, of opening up the possibility of imagining a more just society.

Speaking at her inaugural lecture on 21 May, titled *Drawing the Line*, literature and theory expert Professor Carrol Clarkson argued that aesthetic discourses are just as important as legal and 'rational' discourses – especially when it comes to matters of social justice. She also subtly demonstrated her argument that the way we speak and think about ourselves has profound implications for how we behave, and for the decisions we make.

Weaving together strands from ancient Greek philosophy and contemporary political theory, as well as referencing post-apartheid South Africa's struggle with identity, Clarkson literally drew the line. Using the chalkboard behind the lectern, she created a 'timeline' of her defence of critical theory's role in addressing questions of transitional justice – sketching visual hooks of both theories and people, which guided the audience through the motivation for her argument.

Of art and morality

"Art, like morality, consists of drawing the line somewhere," began Clarkson, quoting writer and philosopher GK Chesterton. "The act of drawing this line is an art as much as it is a question of morality."

The drawn line reconfigures space; "it divides, yet juxtaposes two entities; it connects two distant points; it includes some and excludes others; it marks a boundary between standing for, and standing against."

"What I want to suggest is that legal and political discourses on their own may not be enough to make sense of these lines," said Clarkson. "That is to say, I'll be making a case for the value of an aesthetic discourse – not least when it comes to thinking through questions of social justice."

Art's place in the 'ideal state'

In Plato's imaginings of an 'ideal' state, the Republic, the artists and the poets were not welcome, Clarkson explained. "It has yet to be proved that the arts have a place in a well-run society", was one justification. Law and rational principles were deemed the only lenses through which to see the world.

But it is the arts that provide a lens through which to interpret society and its habitus and thus provide a way to question norms and break a path to new and seemingly strange ideas, argued Clarkson. It is in the recognition of the "new in the utterance of 'the other' that the process of transitional justice can begin ... [And] if this is so, then the constitution of a new legal order has primarily to do with speaking a newly readable language" – a new form of expression.

Perception and the aesthetic act

Clarkson takes an "aesthetic act" (to borrow Jacques Rancière's phrase) to be "any event, or an encounter with a work, a text, a painting, that brings about a different perception of one's standing in relation to others." Ideologies, values and ideals are bound up in what can be seen and heard, said Clarkson, and this field

of sensory perception influences how we think.

"In her seminal paper on ubuntu, former Constitutional Judge Yvonne Mokgoro foregrounds the integral role of perception in political thought: ubuntu is a 'world view', a determining factor in the formation of perceptions which influence social conduct", Mokgoro tells us.

"What interests me is the context in which certain works, acts, or encounters, by creating a new field of perception, have the potential to bring about shifts in the way a community delineates itself in terms of what it perceives to be significant, or even noticeable at all."

Clarkson used Nelson Mandela's statement from the dock at the Rivonia Trial in 1964 as her primary example.

By representing himself and using the trial as a "showcase for the ANC's moral opposition to racism", the late freedom fighter was using an apartheid court of law as a channel for a political protest, said Clarkson. "As a result, the relation between law and politics in South Africa became irrevocably troubled: a political appeal to humanity's conscience suddenly had a spectacular and legitimate place within the overall social configuration of apartheid South Africa.

"Mandela's words radically altered the social system determining what could legitimately be seen and heard, and hence brought out starkly the oppressive delimitations that had prevented people from perceiving what they actually shared in common."

Social justice

An aesthetic understanding brings us back to our senses, said Clarkson; it allows us to think, question and recalibrate our perceptions of what is "salient, legitimate and meaningful" by drawing attention to the political

DRAWING THE LINE

Story by Yusuf Omar

The arts have a vital role in the construction of a just society, by creating the space for new ways of thinking, speaking and therefore understanding the world. Professor Carrol Clarkson explains how.

implications of different modes of representation.

"It's at the level of the materialisation of values and ideals – in writing, speech, and other forms of cultural production – that we are able to recalibrate the settings which have traction on the way we think.

"A shift in our modes of representation within given contexts has the potential to affect social perceptions of what can be seen and heard, of what counts and of what matters."

These perceptions delineate the ambit of personal, political and cultural commitments, and our margins of exposure of one to another, said Clarkson.

“Art, like morality, consists of drawing the line somewhere. The act of drawing this line is an art as much as it is a question of morality.”

Carrol Clarkson



Photo by Michael Hammond

THE TRAVELLING POET

Story by Helen Swingler

Afrikaans poetry is thriving at UCT, with new poets and titles emerging from the Master's in Creative Writing course offered by the School of Languages. But to reach broader audiences at a time when poetry sales are dwindling worldwide, the Afrikaans poet must travel in translation, says Professor Joan Hambidge.

The names of a new crop of young Afrikaans poets mentored by Joan Hambidge roll off the tongue: Carina Stander, Fourie Botha, Aniel Botha, Martina Klopper; and Hennie Nortjé, winner of the Ingrid Jonker Prize 2013 and the Eugene Marais Prize 2013 for his debut anthology, *In Die Skadu Van Soreel Bone*.

"He writes smashing poems," Hambidge says of Nortjé.

But audiences, even for prize-winning poets, are dwindling; selling 800 copies of a poetry volume puts it in the 'bestseller' category. How much more difficult, then, for the Afrikaans poet?

Part of a global tradition, translation is making poetic works in vernacular languages increasingly accessible to international audiences. And more and more Afrikaans poets are spreading the word in this way.

"Poems travel in translation, particularly via the internet," Hambidge confirms. "We can't survive without translations. Anthologies are something else; we also know that poetry travels through anthologies."

In her journal while on sabbatical in 2012, Hambidge quotes Ruth Padel: "Poets travel the dark roads." In Padel's *The Poem and the Journey: 60 poems for the journey of life*, based on columns she wrote for *The Guardian*, she analyses poetry for the ordinary reader – maintaining that it should travel to people, and open their minds.

Hambidge agrees. "Good poetry is an international language; it is less about theme than about good language and the ability to write something that will change something inside you, or open your vision of the world."



Slam poetry is alive and well on UCT campus, where it has an appreciative audience. UCT student Siyabonga Njica recites one of his works at UCT's 2013 march against violence. Below is an excerpt from another of his poems – this time about education – which he delivered at a 2012 Humanities event.

“My head is constantly looking down
Timid to even make a sound
But I know maths is not the end
Yes, figures and I are distant friends
It's not hate but rather shame
How numbers conclude the expressions on my face

Time stands still during her gruelling lessons
The blackboard's moving, bullying my innermost conceptions
Annoyed, I would table my confession:
Mathematics is for the white man

If not, then why do I not understand?
At school we are judged by how well we can solve for x
As if x reflects the individuals we are to become next
I am perplexed by the system
Which sets demands and does not listen
To our yearning voices just because we are children
Children of wisdom, challenging the system”

A NATION REIMAGINED

As a poet, Professor Kelwyn Sole has a “double vision”: part teacher and part writer, with a keen eye on post-liberation South Africa, with its new social and cultural energy and possibilities: fresh lenses for poets to ‘re-imagine’ the country. He recently spoke with Helen Swingler about the new generation of up-and-coming South African poets.

On poetic re-imagining

“Post-1990, poetry is gaining momentum. People are trying to imagine the future and the past through poetry ... On a general level, what you see post-1990 has been a discussion and acting out of the various roles that poetry can play. There's a strong belief among some poets, like Mazisi Kunene and Wally Serote, that poetry can be used as a tool of nation-building.

“After 1990, however, there have also been many poets critical of the new dispensation, often the black poets of a younger generation. In an interview, Serote says that in South Africa after liberation there will be a gap between the ideal and the real world for a long time. So there's this noticeable utopian – almost apocalyptic – tendency in some poetry after liberation. Poets like Seifhamo Motsapi, Lesego Rampolokeng and Vonani Bila, and white poets like Karen Press, came into the 1990s and started

measuring what was happening against what they hoped would happen, and this has given rise to a lot of critical perspectives. There's a lot of criticism of politicians, a lot of punning; they're called 'politshams', who are involved in 'politricks'. This is what interests me; there's an oddly sharp edge to a lot of liberation poetry.”

On identity

“Quite strong among the younger poets is an urge towards identity; they are looking for ways to find self-expression and their identity through poetry. I'm noticing this particularly among slam poets and spoken-word poets. There are others who talk of poetry as having a healing function. Poet and publisher Rob Berold once remarked that poetry can act as a means to bring the fragmented portions of ourselves, and the fragmented portions of South Africa, together.”

On poetic innovation

“There's a new spirit afoot; many of the new poets are playing with language, particularly second-language speakers who start punning and playing ... Mbongeni Khumalo's remark to his audience that 'Your minds are full of fool-stops' is a typical example. These poets are also more formally experimental than in the apartheid years. Increasingly, in post-liberation South Africa, it's useful to see individual poets' consciousness as a kind of matrix where various influences are absorbed. There are poets who have knowledge of local culture and poetic traditions, but who at the same time are looking at the influences of other countries and other forms; and these come together in new ways in their poetry.”

On society and empathy

“I'm increasingly convinced that being human implies being aware of other beings as well. And it's not only human; in the past 10 years I've become a birdwatcher. You are also human by being more aware of your environment, more sensitive to what's going on around you, on micro and macro levels. In my work I've got a strong sense of trying to make readers more critical, more aware, more self-aware. I suppose that's my utopian goal. I want readers to have to work. I like strong reactions, even if they're negative ones. The point is, poetry is a place to start imagining; you don't have to write a whole novel to do this. You can start at a smaller [scale]. Writing poetry is, I think, about struggling to become more human; more fully human, more tolerant, more interested in being alive; that's what I hope it can do.”



RECLAIMING THE PAST

Story by Helen Swingler
Photos by Michael Hammond

What do we stand to learn from history? For UCT curator-cum-archivist Renate Meyer, the Sankofa bird, a West African symbol, illustrates what she means when she talks about historical archive collections “talking back”.

The Sankofa bird flies forwards while looking backwards. The egg in its mouth symbolises the future. “The idea is that you can't look forward unless you look back to see – and in a sense, reclaim – the past,” says Renate Meyer, manager of the UCT Libraries' Special Collections and archives, which houses one of the largest ensembles of Africana on the continent.

The past tells us who we are today, and the extensive collections of monographs, periodicals, ephemera, pamphlets, film, sound recordings, maps, conference papers, newspapers and collectables housed in Special Collections “talk back to our past and present”.

“They tell us a whole lot about what was happening in our social history,” adds Meyer.

Although Special Collections house some rare Africana (there's a Dutch Bible from Antwerp dated 1535), they're also home to some quirky articles.

There's the chip of wood from the tree under which David Livingstone proposed to Mary Moffatt in 1824; a moonstone bracelet that was said to belong to author Olive Schreiner; a collection of activist and trade unionist Ray Alexander's hairbrushes; a microscope which belonged to FG Pearcey and which he used when he accompanied Darwin on the voyage of the *Beagle*; and a black fountain pen with a gold top used by Queen Elizabeth (the late Queen Mum) to sign the visitors' book in Jagger Library in 1947.

Here are stories yearning to be told. If the bracelet was Schreiner's, who gave it to her? Is there a hint of romance? And hairbrushes as memorabilia of the no-nonsense Alexander? Alexander's papers, at least, provide an answer, and an unexpectedly tender picture emerges. Her husband, Jack Simon, loved to brush her long hair.

The leitmotifs of colonialism and apartheid linger. In the substantial historical maps section, history is shown imprinted on the land.

“Many show the social and racial divisions created through the roads system. NY1, for example, was Native Yard 1, and it's still etched on the city's maps today,” said Meyer. “You can call it Steve Biko Drive, but how do we live with the past in ways that are constructive?”

On the day we meet there's an exhibition of art by Charles Davidson Bell (1813-1882), surveyor-general in the Cape, artist and heraldist.

The works are beautifully rendered, but reflect the colonialist's perspective: “The document is historical, but racist in its view,” says Meyer. Therein lies a dilemma. “How do we show these objects without perpetuating ways of looking? How do we re-imagine in constructive ways?”

“We create frames every day, and these are layered on historical perspectives,” Meyer notes.

Housed in the refurbished JW Jagger Building, the collections are made available to users in a magnificent reading room.

The Kipling Collection commemorates the life and work of Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), and is one of the most important, if not the finest, of the libraries' non-Africana special collections.

“The collection includes not only works Kipling wrote, but those that influenced him and how he worked ... it gives a sense of how his breath and hands moved in the world.”

Meyer is integrating all this material so that researchers will be able to search these repositories for connected digital, audio and visual material.

“We want to get this material into the public space where it can start to make a difference in people's lives.”

“Many [maps] show the social and racial divisions created through the roads system. NY1, for example, was Native Yard 1, and it's still etched on the city's maps today. You can call it Steve Biko Drive, but how do we live with the past in ways that are constructive?”

Renate Meyer



A moonstone bracelet thought to have belonged to author Olive Schreiner.

Trade unionist and activist Ray Alexander's hairbrushes.

A sliver of wood from the tree under which David Livingstone proposed to Mary Moffatt in 1824.

The microscope that belonged to FG Pearcey, and which he used when he accompanied Charles Darwin on the voyage of the *Beagle*.



THE ART OF HONEST CONVERSATION

Story by Helen Swingler
Photos courtesy of Fabian Saptouw

A group of third-year Michaelis School of Fine Art students have been experimenting with everyday objects, using them in public art interventions to open up spaces for what can sometimes be difficult conversations: around gender, sexual identity, and the choices we make.

When sculpture student Liesl Brenzel dressed the UCT first rugby team in practice jerseys made of lace and felt, she was making a statement about perceptions of masculinity. After the practice session, the team signed a jersey and Brenzel had it box framed, to replicate the traditional aesthetic of rugby memorabilia.

This 'public intervention', titled *Die Manne*, was for a third-year new media elective, 'Public Practice and Socially Responsive Art: Exploring masculinities and HIV/AIDS.' According to the elective outline, there's a dearth of knowledge focused on the relationship between HIV, retroviral treatment and masculinity. Through this work, Brenzel wanted to investigate how these men would be perceived if there was any change to the status quo.

To try to address this knowledge gap and encourage critical discussion and reflection, Michaelis School of Fine Art elective lecturer Fabian Saptouw and his students have been working in partnership with UCT's HIV/AIDS, Inclusivity and Change Unit (HAICU) since 2012, exploring the connection between contemporary constructions of masculinity and HIV through art production and intervention.

"Art is being used in public spaces in an informal and interactive way, making it widely accessible, to engage people about HIV/AIDS,"

says Saptouw. "Our students are not standing back from tackling social issues and messages. And this is where art and education intersect."

Many of the artworks use everyday objects to convey their messages and create space for discussion.

"In that process of doing, and in discussion, is where the shift happens in the students' understanding of these social issues and the artwork," says Saptouw.

Thinking and process are vital to the ways we look at the world; and as much as the art is about meaning, it's also about the process of making, acting and creating art, he explains.

"The process gets the students thinking critically about how we understand the role of art. On a small scale these projects are shifting people's relationship to art as well. Creating an artwork in response to these social issues gives students agency, and they become active participants in the discussion instead of passively absorbing information. They feel they are doing something."

As the students' public artworks open up issues around HIV/AIDS, students begin to talk to other students.

"And in speaking to their peers, the students become HAICU ambassadors," notes Saptouw.



The UCT first rugby team donned lace and felt practice jerseys for Liesl Brenzel's project which challenged perceptions of masculinity. Her work was part of a third-year elective for new media students – a result of a partnership between the Michaelis School of Fine Art and HAICU. • By placing rainbow cushions against more impervious structures in and around the campus and city, third-year Michaelis student Julia Kabat invites passers-by to consider the vulnerability and fragility of those who experience prejudice. • Made from hollow-cast wax, Julian Gasson and Raees Saaiet's third-year installation *One Hundred Hollow Men* refers to both the literal hollowness of the figures, and rigid masculine qualities sometimes favoured in society rather than inner strength. • HIV stigma was the focus of this first-year Michaelis student's installation in the Molly Blackburn Hall. With the aim of making people confront their own prejudices around HIV/AIDS-related issues, students lounge against pillows made from condoms, taking the 'private' – in this case a bedroom – into a public space.

EXPANDING THE HUMANITIES

Study in the humanities doesn't just expand understanding of society and culture – it can also bring new insight to other fields of study. Two good examples of this are the medical and environmental humanities.

As part of a new master's level course offered by the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics (AXL), titled 'Medicine and the Arts', students in humanities and the health sciences can explore the intersections of their disciplines. Medical anthropologist Dr Susan Levine – who, alongside Health Sciences Professor Steve Reid, is driving the medical humanities movement – explains: "Each seminar is presented by an artist, a social scientist and a medical practitioner, in discussion with one another in what have been called 'radical trios'. For example, the session titled 'The Heart of the Matter: A Matter of the Heart', had Johan Brink (heart surgeon), Peter Anderson (poet)

and a heart recipient in conversation at UCT's heart transplant museum at Groote Schuur Hospital, the site of the historic first heart transplant in 1967."

UCT will play host to a conference on the medical humanities in August 2014, with discussions of an MPhil in the medical humanities currently under way.

Subject to Senate approval, UCT is also set to launch an MPhil specialising in the environmental humanities in 2015 – a collaboration that currently includes academics in science, engineering and the built environment, law, and the humanities (with 'budding conversations' in commerce and health sciences as well.)

Environmental humanities course convenor Lesley Green explains why such a degree is important: "At a time when crucial debates about the management of the biosphere and ecological resources are often trapped in a polemic between 'development' and 'the environment', an initiative in the environmental humanities at the University of Cape Town will offer a space in which to reimagine and reconfigure the terms of the conversation." As part of this degree, studies encompassing comparative literatures and creative arts, decolonial thought, debates on development and land, and studies of science and democracy will be drawn on in a larger dialogue on the making of an environmental

public in the Southern African region. "Students will be able to bring issues of collective life and wellbeing into dialogue with contending versions of 'nature' and 'environment'. It's particularly exciting to see a new graduate course taking shape titled 'Environmental Conflicts', which Lance van Sittert is convening, and which will have a different theme every year, starting with fisheries in 2015. The aim will be to bring current debates onto campus at a depth that enables us to hear from many different sectors and disciplines," says Green.