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South Africa's longest-running public arts festival is back to (Un)Infect the City

Festival to focus on psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 pandemic

In partnership with the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Institute for the Creative Arts (ICA), Infecting the City (ITC) – South Africa's longest-running public arts festival – is back for its 12th edition. It started on 8 May and runs until 30 June 2021 throughout Cape Town's city centre, in locations across the Cape Flats, and online.

Now renamed for its thematic focus on the psychological and social impacts of living through this tumultuous period of history – and the strict mask and social distancing protocols in place – [\(Un\)Infecting the City](#) will present eight distinct programmes in public spaces and online over eight weeks this winter.

ITC began in 2008 as an offshoot of the Spier Performance Arts Festival, when the curators, UCT's Professor Jay Pather and Brett Bailey, had the vision to "broaden the audience base" of the festival and to bring "high-quality, enthralling performance to the city's theatres and galleries, and into the streets and other public spaces" to make performance accessible to people from all walks of life.

"South Africa has a tradition of innovative performance; though this very often happens in little theatres and small spaces, and the whole idea of going to performances is mystified," said Pather, director of the ICA.

Pather said the festival is a celebration of architecture, spaces and Cape Town, but it also allows people to cross a threshold and be exposed to ideas within various forums and spaces that they wouldn't have expected.

In previous years, the festival has focused on showcasing multidisciplinary art forms that engage with historical and contemporary narratives relevant to Cape Town and its people. This year – as South Africa grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the city and UCT with the recent fires that spread across Table Mountain – the festival has a thematic focus on the psychological and social impacts of this time.

"The pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge to mental health, food systems, employment and the arts. Still observing the festival's city-based concerns of urbanity and

spatial politics, some of the artists on the programme consider how these concerns have been further exacerbated by the pandemic. There are also many works that celebrate resilience, spirit and community,” said Pather.

The eight-part programme will feature work created by more than 50 artists, including installations, live performances, films and audio works. Reimagined as a crowd-free event that takes place across multiple outdoor venues, as well as via digital and virtual avenues, the new format allows for social distancing as well as adherence to all necessary health and safety protocols.

Programme 1 and 2 saw attendees observe live performances, in addition to watching a series of videos screened on the sides of buildings throughout the city centre. The programme led viewers to explore ideas such as loneliness, the abstraction of humaneness, and movement as a salve for afflictions of the mind – as well as the stifling effect the pandemic has had on the creative arts.

Those looking to attend the festival over the coming weeks can look forward to:

- Programme 3 (14 to 15 May) – video projections and live performances throughout the Company’s Garden and around its various statues, galleries and museums.
- Programme 4 (22 May) – live performances by Aphiwe Mphahleni at the Cape Town Station, and installations by Thania Petersen of WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery in taxis around the Cape Flats.
- Programme 5 (28 May to 30 June) – billboards and posters with specially designed artworks, spread across the city.
- Programme 6 (4 to 30 June) – audio works available via the ITC website.
- Programme 7 (11 to 30 June) – digital works released via social media and featured on the ITC website.
- Programme 8 (18 to 30 June) – excerpts of the full programme in the form of stills and video, available on social media and the ITC website.

ENDS

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