

## **Project description: *Crossing - Ho tšela – Travessia***

Two exhibitions will explore diverse two-dimensional and three-dimensional media, including painting, sculpture, drawing, ceramic, glass, and fibre work. The work of the six participating visual artists will also be publicly debated in a symposium and public presentations, to be documented and presented in a catalogue.

Our inquiry will be experimental with material dialogues and a common goal of critically considering the theme of *crossing - ho tšela – travessia*. The use of three languages in the title, signifies the diversity of cultural origins. The core concept of crossings originated from in February 2025, when Almeida took De Villiers and Miller for a walk over one of the many famous crossings in Porto: the Dom Luis 1 bridge. Miller (South African) and De Villiers (Belgian) were visiting the University of Porto to meet lecturing staff and students and viewed the university of Porto's galleries on a preliminary exploration and discussed the future collaboration informally.

Apart from the post-colonial ties between Portugal and South Africa, all the participating individuals have close personal experiences of the impact of transcultural bridges on their lives and we envision that our collaboration will be built on critical reflection of the constructive attributes of these 'crossing spaces'. The [prior collaboration histories between the artists are outlined](#) in a separate document. The serendipity of bridges and the reaching out across spaces triggered the concept for the current project. We will expand on the tensions and connections between points and places; conceptually crossing borders between cultures. Below the origin of artists are briefly mentioned.

- Miller grew up in a border town of Musina in South Africa, often commuting over Beit bridge which crossed the Limpopo River to Zimbabwe. She is currently a professor at Unisa, a distance university with students spread across the globe – working alongside Maja and Mosako.
- Maja grew up in Lesotho and as artist worked closely with the critical aspects around the Katse Dam (Africa's highest concrete dam). The project supplies water and generates hydro power but also impacts lives of people on multiple layers. Kabelo currently lives in Pretoria where he is a lecturer at Unisa.
- Mosako was born in Soweto, living through the traumatic impact of societies dislocated by apartheid politics and have since produced powerful works on the bridging of underlying tension and trauma in society. His current pigment and mixed media works expand on the performative contribution of the body in creative work.
- De Villiers, being born in Johannesburg, now lives as professional artist between Belgium and Portugal. She works with themes impacting community, women and ecology. Her earlier glass and resin sculptures brought sensual complexity to media, whilst her current fibre art explores ecological dilemmas.
- Almeida who was born in Guimaraes has studied both in Lisbon and Porto and is currently a faculty member in Porto – the city of bridges. Her glass work speaks of transformation through intense heat.
- Van Zyl lives in Pretoria, far from her family in the Eastern Cape, where her father still resides. For this project, she will explore both the physical and psychological distance between her childhood home and her current urban life. She will trace the Ferreira lineage of her paternal grandmother back to Portugal, seeking to bridge the spatial, and emotional divides between generations, and cultures.

We will consider structures and symbols of crossing borders that relate to the theme. These may be bridges, scaffolding, stairs, or ladders. The site-specificity of objects, plants or materials across distances carries ecological weight and anecdotes of histories. Our theme of crossing suggests trajectories of new life journeys, hope and spiritual passages. The gravity of politics around the Strait of Hormuz, which captured news and emotions of the world, bares grave reactions and a complex understanding of what a crossing might entail.

We envisage that as academic artists and cultural mirrors, the material and cultural exchange will add innovative reflection of our interwoven nature of existence. On the one hand all six artists have worked across a range of media and have extensive experience of installation, curation and mentoring younger artists. On the other hand, each has a favoured medium: [Almeida in cast glass](#), [Maja in cut glass and three-dimensional installation](#), [Miller in ink](#), [Van Zyl in oil paint](#), [Mosako in dry pigment layering](#) and [De Villiers in fibre art](#).

As collaborative work distinctly different from individual practice, we are interested to understand how the different members can **shift each other's approach regarding the systems of thinking that enabled grey areas as constructive tools**. Our collective work is also aimed at opening avenues for higher degrees students as we all have mentoring experience.

Finding meeting points between places and people are pivotal in the current acute fragility of world peace and cultural harmony. To work together we plan in-situ working month-long working periods before each exhibition.

**All African and European team members contributed creatively to the concept thus far and planned structured monthly activities allow different individuals to take the lead in activities.** We had several Teams meetings already took place and will be held on a regular basis as the project evolves. The curation process is artist-lead and will communicate the constructive dialogue between difference and its reciprocity.

**Our team consists of equitable composition with:**

- 4 women (66.7%) and two men (33.3%).
- 33.3 % are Caucasian South Africans,
- 33.3 % are Caucasian Europeans (from Belgium and Portugal) and
- 33.3 % are African people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Linguistic diversity: 2 Afrikaans, 1 English, 1 Portuguese, 1 Sesotho, 1 Tswana (all are fluent in English).
- Sectoral diversity: 4 academic artists and two fulltime artists.
- Career-stage: 4 established and 2 mid-career artists.

**Each team member has a role in the creative process and in the organisational demands of the project.** All participants will produce individual artworks as a result of a dialogic methodology. All artists will participate in the symposium and present talks of their works during walkabouts.

- Miller is the project leader, who brought the group together. She is responsible for submission of the project application to Goethe for funding. She has already applied to the Unisa Art gallery with a proposal, which was accepted.
- Maja will co-curate Unisa exhibition together with Miller as primary curator. He will organise radio interviews.
- Mosako will organise the symposium to be held at Unisa during the exhibition period in February 2027.
- Van Zyl has done extensive work on the budget and will continue to coordinate transport and logistics. She will also be the designer for exhibition invitations, social media posts and the catalogue.
- De Villiers will assist in all language editing of press releases and the catalogue in English and will host a workshop for artists at Ponto d'Arte residency.
- Almeida will be the head curator and organiser for the exhibition in Porto. She has established contact with the Porto university gallery for an exhibition date in April 2027. Almeida and De Villiers will organise and chair the symposium at Porto. Prof Almeida will also oversee the translation of catalogue and press statements in Portuguese.
- Mosako, Miller and Maja are each applying for financial support of their own travel and accommodation. Both Miller and Mosako has been successful in this process and are confident about the process. We will guide Maja in his application.

### **The project will unfold from 1 July 2026 to July 2027**

- Month 1 – 2 (July – August 2026): Concept exploration and planning, sketches or collages.
- Month 3 – 4 (September – October 2026): Concept refinement, exploratory pre-production and team meetings
- Month 5 – 6 (November – December 2026): Artmaking, advertising, social media campaign planning
- Month 7 (January 2027): In situ work in collaboration with another in Unisa studios. Exhibition preparation & finalisation, advertising
- Month 8 (February 2027): Exhibition at Unisa Art Gallery. Opening event, with catering supplied by Unisa. Dates confirmed by Me Tshegofatso Seoka. Audience engagement during the symposium and artist-led walkabouts. Documentation of artworks.
- Month 9 (March 2027): In situ work in collaboration with another in studios in Porto and Ponte da Mucela. Exhibition preparation, advertising, social media campaign
- Month 10 (April 2027): Exhibition at Museu e Gabinete de Exposições at Porto University, Portugal. Dates confirmed by Prof Isabel Gonçalves. Opening, symposium and artist-led walkabouts, documentation of installation.
- Month 11 (May 2027): Catalogue compilation and layout.

- Month 12 (June 2027): Launch catalogue. Archive finalisation. Exploration of further collaborative opportunities.

### **Dissemination:**

A broad public in Gauteng and in Porto will be invited to the public opening via gallery lists. In each case the educational journey involved with a tracing of steps and objects exchanged between local audiences will activate student and attending public conversations. Students and academics from both institutions will be targeted for the symposia. Unisa Art Gallery opening hours are Tuesdays – Saturdays 10:00 to 15:00. The opening and symposium will be live streamed at Unisa. Invitations will be disseminated via the Unisa Art gallery invitation list and the internal Unisa platform “UNISA INTCOM”. The catalogues and processes will be captured in web pages and on UNISA Institutional Repository, an open access source for research purposes.

Maja and Van Zyl are mid-career South African artists who have had little experience of exhibition and audience engagement beyond Southern Africa. Miller has been a mentor to both artists, and this project aims to extend the impact of their exposure. Even though Almeida, Miller, De Villiers and Mosako have more established exhibition experience, we have not shown in each other’s countries, and the planned project opens our conversations and academic understanding of the critical function of art.

The aim is to open networking across boundaries to enable the **career development of participating artists**. During the stay in each country, the local artists will arrange introductions to local curators to **open market access opportunities**. The open platform at the two universities will encourage future exhibition and curatorial projects for longer-term impact on students and colleagues.

**On the broader visual arts ecosystem Unisa and Porto University aim to archive the project for future research.** The project will be loaded onto the institutional repositories, and will explore further collaborative opportunities between institutions, including the residency space at Ponte d’Arte. In this manner the constructive trajectory of career paths of all artists will benefit from the collaboration.

The exhibition concept will also be presented at the Venice conference, ICOM Glass 2027, by [Teresa Almeida](#), to show the outcomes of the project to an interdisciplinary audience.

### **In conclusion:**

We endeavour to stimulate the interdisciplinary audience of the exhibitions, catalogues and future symposia in Africa and Europe to think critically with us and each other. This outcome of transcultural communication is an attempt to reduce perpetual stereotypes, to diminish prejudices, and to facilitate empathy. We hope to demonstrate that art can be a bridge to overcome problematic communication barriers and potentially construct the awareness of adaptability in our present turbulent times.