



Creative wave from South Africa sweeps through Paris

From fashion and concerts to art exhibitions, SA artists have made 2025 an memorable year



By Vera
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South African artists in all media have a following in Paris.

The Franco-South African arts and culture association, Le Kraal, tries to follow and post on the incoming artists, to gather the Saffas living here around them and to celebrate the art emerging from Mzansi. Throughout the year we have had returning musicians such as Stogie T, BCUC, Bongeziwe Mabandla, and this time Reinhardt Buhr.

The year kicked off with the sublime Soweto Gospel Choir at the Folies Bergères and again at the Paris-New York Heritage Festival in July.

They were joined by DJ Nicky B of Kaya FM, and DJ Mo Laudi of Amapiano, also an artist-curator in his own right. In street dance, hip-hop pantsula star Jed Lawrence (Jed BBoy) of the Ubuntu BBoys made his presence felt at a peer gathering of stars in Massy, just south of Paris.

Singer Nicole Karmine brought truly South African vibes to the Latin Quarter, showcasing South African singers with her three evenings at Pomme d'Eve (the only SA pub in Paris): a session with the Duo Oud and singer-songwriter-dancer Vuyo; a live blues session with guitarists Vivian aka Gerry Tomcat Hattrick Horwitz and Mike Dickman; and an AfriFrans night where she performed with a French guitarist, singing in French, English and Afrikaans.

The live scene in 2025 was further enhanced by MaXhosa Africa's runway presence in both fashion weeks (autumn/fall, then spring/summer), each time accompanied by a talented live singer, Maglera Doe Boy or Zawadi Yamungu. South Africans can be proud of the variety of colours, styles and flowing textures, the designs acknowledging traditional inspiration.

But it's the visual and performance arts that have kept us the busiest. The Centre Pompidou this year used a self-portrait by Gerard Sekoto on the poster for its major Paris Noir show, a retrospective on 50 years of black artists in Paris.

At François Pinault's contemporary art Bourse de Commerce collection, four SA-born artists featured in the same show: Marlene Dumas, William Kentridge, Zanele Muholi and Robin Rhode.

In February, Kentridge was inaugurated as a French Academy member, while the SA-educated Dumas has just been announced as the first female contemporary artist to enter the collections of the Louvre. These are high honours.

Jozi-based Diane Victor's sophisticated smoke-made drawings were presented as a solo show by the 100-year-old Larock-Granoff gallery. Victor was also awarded the 2025 Mario Avati Engraving Prize by the Académie des Beaux Arts.

Two of South Africa's fine arts lecturers and artists-in-residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Elfrieda Dreyer (CAP Institute) and Gwenneth Miller (Unisa), with former resident Loeritha Saayman, exhibited for the second time at the Galerie Latuvu in the south of France over the summer.

Miller's work developed slowly and alchemically



A work by Gavin Goodman, courtesy of Filafriques.



A performance of *The Land We Carry* at the new Agora venue in the foyer of the Théâtre du Châtelet.

Photos: Supplied



Barbara Wildenboer's ceramic *She Who Wears Time as Adornment* was part of an African art fair in Paris.

during her residency. It exploded on to the SA scene in Johannesburg at 27 Boxes and in Potchefstroom's Aardklop 2025 on her return.

Paris welcomed the new school year with one of South Africa's most admired dancers, choreographer Gregory Maqoma. Invited to the freshly revamped Théâtre de la Ville-Sarah Bernhardt, his show *The Land We Carry* was performed in the Agora, a new open foyer space at street level, with the accomplished voice-master Xolisile Bongwana.

They were joined by Viwe Siyabonga Mkizwana on cello. The next day they performed outdoors. On Sunday morning, 7 September, under autumn leaves on the Place du Châtelet, Maqoma gave an Mzansi dance workshop to participants aged from eight to 80.

Xolisile Bongwana returns to Paris this month to perform *Cion*. The a cappella isicathamiya performance of *Cion* by Maqoma's Vuyani Dance Theatre has the incomparable Nhlanhla Mahlangu as its musical director with Mannie Manim on lighting. It is fully booked.

At the Théâtre de la Ville were Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company performing *Faustus in Africa*. Kentridge's on-stage blackboard projected the incomprehensible cruelty of the colonial history of Africa in rapidly executed charcoal sketches while the talented cast played double roles.

Brett Bailey's *Faust X* followed in October. It had launched in Weimar earlier in 2025, as this year marks the 250th anniversary of Goethe's arrival there. The devilish ambitions of Faust (an Elon Musk lookalike) and other contemporary leaders revealed futuristic irresponsibility, with masks adding a surrealistic and an African touch to the allegory.

Kentridge defied expectations in a second show, *Oh To Believe in Another World*, at the Paris Philharmonie. His documentary film lifted historical narrative to new heights. The Luzerner Sinfonieorchester under conductor Michael Sanderling performed Dmitri Shostakovich's 10th Symphony live during the projection; a cardboard cutout collage questioned the place of the individual in greater history while tracking Shostakovich through Soviet history.

The annual October AKAA (Also Known as Africa Art and Design Fair), under new director Sitor Senghor, welcomed at least six South African artists. Barbara Wildenboer formed part of the curated section of ceramic works, *Terre Mère*, her intriguing piece reflecting the give and take of the Earth; Cape Town photographer Gavin Goodman, represented by Filafriques, Geneva, exhibited his latest digital and AI experiments. He was interviewed by France 24.

Gallery BKhZ, Johannesburg, featured the contemporary stylised work of animation-trained painter Terence Maluleke, while Johannesburg's Isa Schwartz Gesseau of Locus Projects showcased the minimalist historical storytelling by Cape Town's Morné Visagie.

But it was the French Gallery Loo & Lou that really surprised us. A familiar artist was the 2021 Atelier Gerard Sekoto Absa Prize winner, Abongile Sidzumo, whose leather-made woven collages reveal surprising craft mastery. The second artist was Capetonian Anele Pama first-ever exhibition. His acrylic paintings were small but intimate, dense and impactful.

If there's anything in common to the work of South African artists seen in Paris, it is the uniqueness of the storytelling. There's nothing like a language of one's own. **DM**

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