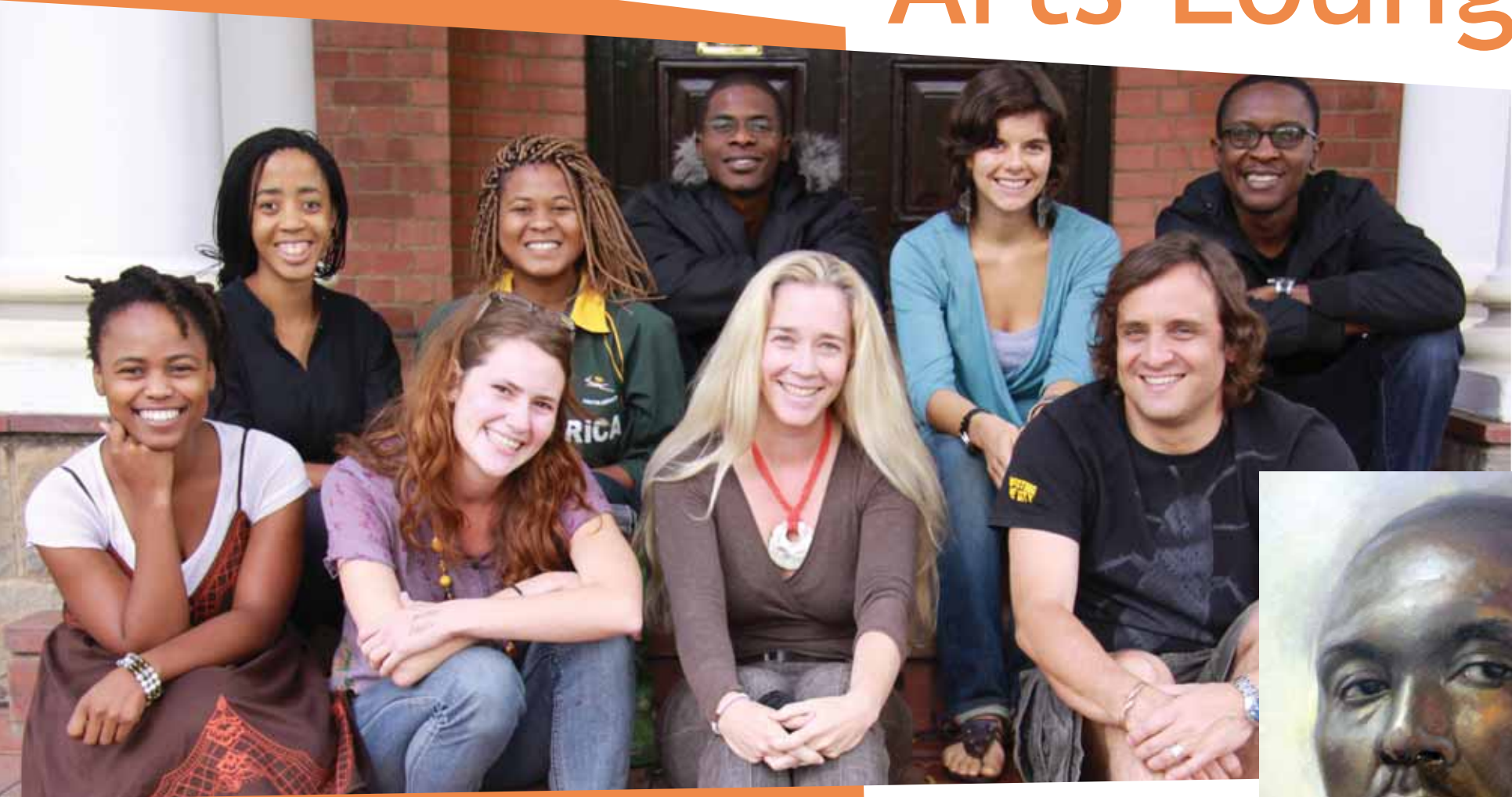


Neurons spark in the Arts Lounge



In an innovative collaboration between the Fine Art and Drama Departments, the new Arts Lounge at 17a Somerset Street is set to be an unmissable experience for those Festival-goers who truly appreciate the chance to both view and discuss art in all its myriad forms.

The Lounge is the brainchild of Ruth Simbao, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Culture at Rhodes University. Through her dedication to breaking down the boundaries between branches of the Humanities, Prof Simbao has created a venture that is set to shake up the experience of festinos and to initiate conversations that will carry on long after the last Festival posters are removed and Grahamstown has returned to its usual sedate pace.

The Arts Lounge is made possible by an infusion of funds from the Mellon Foundation and the National Arts Festival, and is hosted by the Rhodes University Fine Art Mellon Focus Area: *Visual and Performing Arts of Africa* (ViPAA).

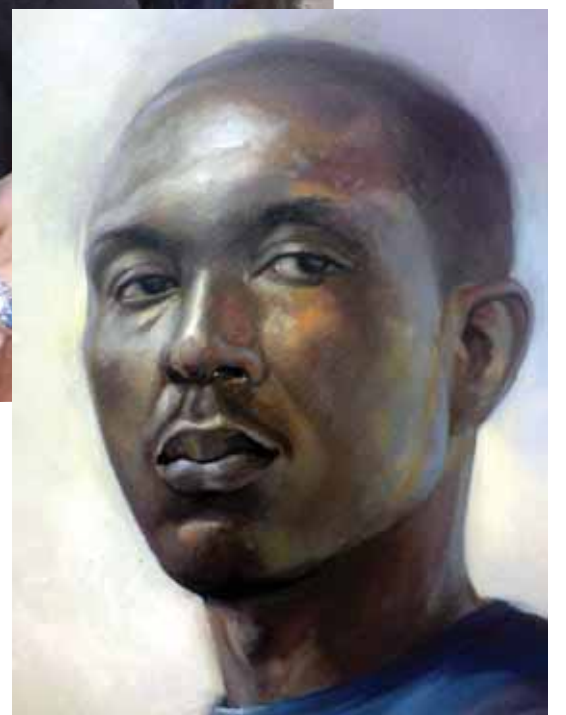
The research in which ViPAA is engaged is themed *The Audacity of Place - Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa*, and the team Prof Simbao has gathered together consists of both artists and art historians -- all with a keen interest in the complex relationship that exists between place and identity. The individual research carried out by ViPAA team members comes together in ways which subvert the traditional Euro-centric view of African art and, instead, look to develop a more nuanced and relevant discourse and vocabulary with which to approach it.

Prof Simbao is a widely acknowledged authority on the arts of Africa and has undertaken extensive research on performance in relation to cultural festivals in Zambia. Her current research interests incorporate site-specificity, diaspora and xenophobia. Other ViPAA members include Zimbabwean visual and performance artist Gerald Machona, known for the use of Zim dollars in his artworks, and Nomusa Makhubu, a Lecturer in Fine Art and PhD student focusing on Nollywood.

Dotun Makun, a current ViPAA MFA student from Nigeria, will take part in a panel discussion on negotiating 'strangeness' and xenophobia in contemporary spaces alongside ViPAA member Rachel Baasch, artist Maurice Mbikayi, Dr James Gambiza from Environmental Science, Dr Sam Naidu from the English Department, and PhD student in Fine Art, Biggie Samwanda.

*Front l to r: Nomusa Makhubu, Rachel Baasch, Ruth Simbao, Paul Cooper
Middle l to r: Lerato Bereng, Zama Nsele, Annemi Conradie, Dotun Makun
Back: Gerald Machona*

Dotun Makun, self portrait



Mbikayi trained in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on July 9 will treat Festival-goers to a contemporary performance on horseback in which he, swathed in bandages, aims to evoke the vulnerable situation in which incomers from other African countries find themselves in South Africa. Particularly pertinent in view of the recent renewal of xenophobic attacks in the Limpopo area, this piece of street theatre promises to be a Festival highlight.

Two particular events illustrate the collaborative and cross-disciplinary nature of this project. On June 30, a poetry and music performance will see Anton Krueger from the Drama Department reading a poem accompanied by Machona's hauntingly original music compositions. On July 8, *LesDem* draws together performers Gavin Krastin and Madele Vermaak from the Drama Department with Rat Western and Sonja Smit from Fine Art. Fine Arts lecturer Christine Dixie will also be presenting a screening of her installation *The Binding*, recently purchased by the Smithsonian Museum for African Arts in Washington DC. Other ViPAA members, Eben Lochner, Zama Nsele, Paul Cooper, Lerato Bereng and Annemi Conradie are involved in various performances and panel discussions. Distinguished guests include Mandie van der Spuy, Michelle Constant, Nandipha Mntambo, Serge Nitegeka and Jay Pather. Eastern Cape artists will also make their mark. Look out for discussions by Vusi Khumalo and Meshack Masuka, as well as a skin suspension in the ViPAA garden by tattoo artist John Wayne Stevens.

The Arts Lounge will open each afternoon with a performance vignette curated by Athina Vahla, lecturer in the Rhodes University Drama Department. Each item on the programme promises to spark the neurons and engage the senses of those ensconced on the Lounge's sofas. A variety of comestibles and tea, coffee and gluhwein will also be available to ensure festinos' physical appetites are not neglected.

For more info on the Arts Lounge schedule see www.research-africa-arts.com.