

NEWS RELEASE

Javett-UP partners with Blind SA to make art accessible for the visually impaired



Visually-impaired visitors to the Javett-UP engage with an interactive art piece.

PRETORIA – In a world where sight often dominates the art experience, the [Javett-UP](#) has taken a pioneering step towards inclusivity with its latest exhibition, [We, The Purple](#). On 11 October 2024, just a day after World Sight Day, Javett-UP welcomed ten visually impaired visitors to experience art and history through touch. This was made possible through the remarkable educational programme *Touching History: Exploring Apartheid through Sculpture*, organised in partnership with Blind SA, which offered participants a tactile exploration of apartheid-era South Africa through select sculptures from the [Bongi Dhlomo Collection](#). These artworks offered a unique, non-visual way to engage with the socio-political history of South Africa from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Curated by Javett-UP's Curator for Education and Mediation, Puleg Plessie, in consultation with art historian Jenni Lauwrens, the programme was thoughtfully structured into two sessions. Participants rotated among the sculptures every ten minutes, guided by Javett-UP staff and [Blind SA](#) mobility practitioners. This sensory-rich experience fostered deep connections with themes of apartheid, social justice, and linguistic diversity.

The Javett-UP takes pride in one of its key mandates to making the art of Africa accessible, relevant, and engaging.

Reflecting on the event, Plessie stated, “the programme successfully fostered an inclusive environment where visually impaired participants could engage with art and history through touch. Reflection and discussion sessions allowed for personal interpretations, encouraging dialogue around the historical themes presented. The collaboration with Blind SA ensured smooth facilitation, and the event met its goal of enhancing historical awareness while promoting meaningful conversations about social justice and the importance of accessible art experiences.”

In expressing gratitude to Javett-UP, Blind SA described the experience as both impactful and inspiring. “Thank you once again for your commitment to creating an accessible space for all. It is initiatives like yours that help break down barriers and promote inclusivity in the arts. The centre’s dedication to accessibility and inclusion shone through in every detail.” “The passion and professionalism of the Javett-UP team made a significant impact, ensuring that everyone felt welcomed and valued. The thoughtful programming and interactive elements allowed for meaningful connections with the artworks, fostering a sense of community, learning, exploring and understanding. Everybody had a great time and walked out refreshed with knowledge of South Africa’s art,” said Blind SA CEO Jace Nair.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

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