

## PRESS RELEASE

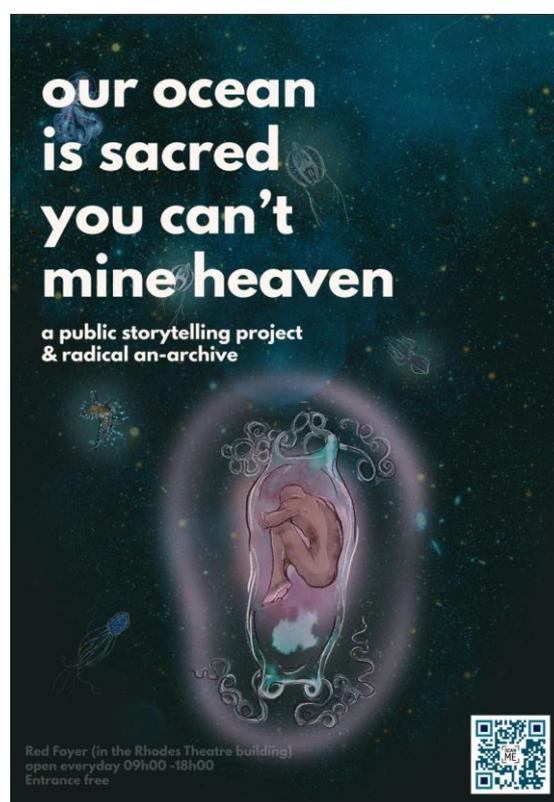
### *Our Ocean is Sacred, You Can't Mine Heaven*

*A public storytelling and radical 'an-archive' on intangible ocean heritage, exhibits at the Zero Gallery, Cape Town in collaboration with EITZ*

"Our ocean is sacred, you can't mine heaven" was a recent slogan seen on placards held by protestors against seismic surveys and ocean oil and gas exploration along the South African west and east coast. Recent High Court judgments weighing in favour of small-scale fishers and communities over massive Oil and Gas companies, have sparked greater traction and public interest (and advocacy) against the rush for minerals and oil and gas in the sea, and has, in its own way, created a new public conversation around ocean heritages, cultures, and livelihoods that are deeply entangled and related to the Ocean. This conversation will dive deeper at the "Our Ocean is Sacred, you can't mine heaven" Exhibition, Public Storytelling Project and radical an-archive at the Zero Gallery, on the corner of Church and Berg Street, in Cape Town from the 4<sup>th</sup> August to the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022, after which the Zero Gallery will transform into an even deeper collaboration and emergence of new work, public processes and events from the 1<sup>st</sup> October to the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

In this collaboratively curated exhibition funded by EITZ, the One Ocean Hub's Deep Fund and the National Arts Festival 2022. [One Ocean Hub's](#) South African Country Director Dr. Dylan McGarry and senior researcher at the Environmental Learning Research Centre ([ELRC](#)) at the University Currently Known at Rhodes, has lead a team of cultural practitioners alongside Dr. Boudina McConnachie at the International Library of African Music (ILAM) to develop a multi-genre audio-visual storytelling project, which shares some of the rich cultural artefacts resurfacing (and in some cases emerging) as reflections of South African ocean culture. McGarry explains: "Some of the artwork in the exhibition were used as evidence alongside the rich affidavits and testimonies of Small Scale Fishers and customary rights holders in the court interdicts, thereby expanding the arguments against oil and gas exploration to go beyond positivist scientific debate, into socio-cultural discourse – this lead to new legal precedents, where judges recognised the ocean as sacred to South Africans, with specific reference to the Ocean as the sacred realm of the ancestors"

Supporting McConnachie and McGarry, the exhibition was birthed alongside curatorial support of Michaela Howse from the Keiskamma Art Project and Luke Kaplan from Coastal Justice Network, and is a gathering of ethnomusicologists, traditional healers, visual and textile artists, photographers, marine sociologists, poets, marine scientists, heritage specialists, activists, lawyers, and other citizens who have been working in solidarity to reframe the narratives surrounding our oceans, and how we make decisions regarding our shared futures.



#### A DEEP COLLABORATION

Not only is the exhibition and public storytelling project an exciting collaboration of individuals, it is also an powerful solidarity movement across organisations and collectives, inspired first and foremost by Small Scale Fisher cooperatives and movements as well as traditional healer networks, it has become a collaboration and nexus of solidarity across arts organisations and collectives. Namely, the Keisikama Art Project, The EITZ collective, the One Ocean Hub's "Deep Emotional Engagement Project", The Woodstock Art Reef project, Empatheatre, The International Library of African Music, the Zero Gallery and the dynamic MCSA Central Methodist Mission and Coastal Justice Photographers. The Collaboration

also sees the Coastal Justice Network, led by Taryn Pereira and Buhle Francis, helping support the ‘political acupuncture’ and advocacy that links the artistic anarchist archive or ‘an-archive’ with current social movements like the court cases.

## ARTISTS CAN HELP MAKE THE INTANGIBLE A LITTLE MORE TANGIBLE

Cultural rights in South Africa, particularly customary and cultural beliefs of communities in relation to the ocean are not widely known and understood in decision making and policy.

McGarry encourages artists and storytellers to collaborate with customary rights holders, arguing that artists and cultural practitioners: “play a vital role in working in solidarity with customary rights holders to make tangible these sometimes-intangible heritages into artworks that can be used as evidence by ocean defenders in future court cases, thereby challenging the evidence hierarchies that currently exist in judicial process. The exhibition acts as a radical archive, or ‘an-archive’ of proxy artefacts of agency that hold meaning and evidence of intangible heritages of the ocean”.



Figure 1: The Keiskama Tapestry "Our Sacred Ocean" in the foreground, and the WARP coral reef in the background, at this years National Arts Festival

## THE ARTWORKS

### THE TAPESTRY: OUR SACRED OCEAN

One of the centre pieces of the exhibition was the OOH Deep Funded projects: Ulwandle lwethu olungwele (Our Sacred Ocean).

This large round tapestry (3.5m diameter) created by the Keiskamma Art project spans generations in its collection of stories and memories from elders and the young in the Eastern Cape Coastal communities of Hamburg and Bodium. The tapestry is displayed on a large rotating table, which mirrors and disrupts the map-tables used to carve up Africa during the Berlin Conference (1884-1885). Not unlike the rush for Africa of the 1880s, we see oil and gas prospecting of big businesses like Shell and Total, making similar maps of our oceans. Keiskamma, rather than mapping for control, have created a map of the ocean maps

connection, and relationships, turning the tables, quite literally, on ocean mapping. The tapestry was created in collaboration by Cebo Mvubu, Ndileka Mapuma, Thandazwa Mqali, Zukiswa Sikani and Nandipha Yona, Veronica Betani, Nombulelo Paliso, Fikiswa Madlingozi, Nomfundo Makhubalo, Nozolile Gedze. With advisory elders: Nozeti Makhubalo, Nompumelelo Nompunga, Vivian Solwandle and Nokhanyiso Nompunga.

Mixed media (incl. embroidery, felt, beadwork, appliquéd materials, shells and sea plastic, metal, repurposed materials) 3,8 m x 3,8 m

## THE CROCHET CORAL REEF



One of the stand out pieces was the “The crocheted coral reef” installation created by the Woodstock Art Reef Project. This crocheted coral reef 12 years to create, and is an ongoing and expanding installation that is lovingly made by hundreds of citizens across South Africa. It is one of many satellite crocheted coral reefs that adorn and warm up spaces around the world. The cosy reef coral holds powerful symbolism and figuration of solidarity in times of climate change. While coral bleaching due to ocean acidification and rising sea temperatures threatens the future of many ocean ecosystems, there are ecological citizens gathering around the world in solidarity.



## THE BLUE BLANKET

The Exhibition also showcased “[The Blue Blanket](#)”, an illustrated poem that resurfaces an often overlooked narrative around ocean justice in South Africa. In this short piece, the team explores the intangible and spiritual impact of Oil and Gas exploration into our oceans. Considering that the ocean is sacred to so many cultures in South Africa, this film asks, is mining our sacred ocean for more fossil fuels in this time of climate catastrophe worth it? This short film stood along with affidavits of Small Scale Fishers and Customary rights holders as evidence in recent court cases against big business and government. So far, interdicts in favour of communities have been granted by two judges, keeping the seismic surveys at bay. This recognition of the oceans as sacred in the law, with specific reference to and sensitivity towards the significance of the Ocean as a place where the ancestors dwell, marks an unprecedented shift in South African law. Both judges in two separate cases, recognised the customary rights and spiritual dimensions of many citizen’s relationships to the ocean.

Narrated by Mpume Mthombeni

Directed, Illustrated and Edited by Dylan McGarry

Music by Braam Du Toit

Sound editing by Tristan Horton



## SONGS OF THE SEA

The One Ocean Hub, also commissioned a project from the International Library for African Music, lead by Dr. Boudina McConnachie and Elijah Madiba from ILAM and the Music Department at Rhodes, who created two projects under the title: “songs of the sea”. The first was a sound installation entitled: “**Soundscapes**” which follows the team’s research journey of discovery and shares unedited and real sounds from the field, it is an audioverité of experiences and creative output. As McConnachie explains: “The ocean, we have found, is connected to all of us - but often not in the ways we expect it.” The Second piece, entitled “**Stories**” shares podcasts in English and Xhosa, of the relationship between the ocean and those who live off, with, and in it. Sitting in comfortable armchairs with headphones, visitors could sit and follow the story of the amaXhosa people and how their world is tied to the ocean. Hearing elders and children alike offering their insights and perspectives, folk-lore and myth associated with the ocean. Other collaborators on the project included Dumisa Mpupha, Bongani Diko, Nombasa Maqoko, Vuyelwa Moyo, Kuhle Ngqezana, Praise Mathebula, Kuhle Ngqezana, Thandeka Mfinyongo, Nombasa Maqoko, Dumisa Mpupha.



A soft Sculpture installation entitled “(Life)Jackets” by textile Artist **Cleo Droomer** created a radical archive in the form of floatation devices, aimed at floating painful ocean heritages to the surface. More than 12.5 Million enslaved people died in over 40 000 transit voyages across the Atlantic and Indian oceans during the 17th Century slave trade. The countless people who died during the passage rest in the Atlantic and possibly the Indian Ocean. This makes our Oceans significant for future memorial and heritage work.

### LIFE JACKETS

Cleo Droomer’s *(Life) Jackets* constructed from heirloom fabrics from his family's past, help surface a dialogue with his immediate grandparents and his enslaved ancestors. As a child Cleo had a recurring fear of drowning from a near death experience, and in researching this fear as an adult, uncovered a haunted legacy with water within his lineage. From the recent segregation and forced removals of his grandparents away from the ocean during Apartheid, to his distant ancestors who were enslaved and trafficked across the sea, the ocean couldn’t help but feel haunted. By deconstructing and reconstructing heirloom fabrics to create life jackets Droomer is keeping himself and his haunted histories afloat in our collective conversations around Ocean Heritages.



For him and many other South Africans, the ocean is sacred, as it is a resting place and cemetery. Despite contemporary music, art, poetry and literature now commemorating our oceans within necropolitical policy, neither the Atlantic or Indian oceans are recognized by the International Seabed Authority (ISA) or UNESCO as heritage sites for the descendents of enslaved peoples. The UN World Heritage Lists recognises places such as Auschwitz and the killing fields of Cambodia as “sites of inhumane, cruel and methodical effort to deny human dignity and right to life” - yet the drowning of enslaved peoples in our oceans has not been included. Droomer’s *(Life) Jackets* joins the call to recognise our ocean as a sacred world heritage site. If any activity, including exploration for Oil and Gas is to go ahead it requires sensitive and careful considerations and consultations with descendants of enslaved Africans and other diaspora from East Asia.



**A jacket for Ma**  
Soft Sculpture  
Patchworked Up-cycled  
heirloom fabrics & upholstery  
52 x 65 cm



**Clyde**  
Soft Sculpture  
Patchworked Up-cycled  
heirloom fabrics & upholstery  
52 x 65 cm



**De-assimilating**  
Soft Sculpture  
Patchworked Up-cycled  
heirloom fabrics & upholstery  
52 x 65 cm

## INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

“Intangible Heritage” a Photographic exhibition curated by Rhodes PhD candidate Luke Kaplan, brings together images made by activists and artists in South Africa, who are documenting and paying attention to other ways of knowing, being and doing in relation to the sea. Of particular interest for this exhibition is the sacred relationship with the ocean, from spiritual practices, rituals and ceremonies that rely on the ocean for cleansing of the soul, to heritage practices associated with fishing and marine harvesting, that stretch back across generations. The ocean, unlike other sacred sites, cannot be contained or easily placed on a map, it stretches beyond our realm of control or even comprehension, and so requires of us a different approach to making decisions around ocean health.



**Luke Kaplan**  
*Dwesa Sacred Site 1*  
90 x 60 cm  
Digital Colour Print  
Archival Paper



**Luke Kaplan**  
*Dwesa Sacred Site 2*  
90 x 60 cm  
Digital Colour Print  
Archival Paper



**Casey Pratt**  
Small Scale Fishers  
90 x 60 cm  
Digital Colour Print  
Archival Paper



**Kelly Daniels**  
Ubhaphathizo  
90 x 60 cm  
Digital Colour Print  
Archival Paper

## PURIFICATION



Finally, McGarry created an installation using antique chemistry beakers and sea-water entitled: "Purification". Which explored, how for many citizens in South Africa the ocean has deep mystical and spiritual quality. Most Nguni cultures revere the healing and purifying qualities of sea-water. It is used in many spiritual and ritualistic processes, from protecting homes from evil spirits and lightning, as well as used medicinally where it is used to induce purging and as enemas to heal a variety of illnesses. The water itself is considered sacred and cleansing (both spiritually and physically) as it is believed it is water that carries the soul, and all life emerges from water. Sea water is so valuable, that a small 500ml bottle can be traded for a goat, in land-locked countries such as Zimbabwe. Yet much of ocean literacy, and ocean decision making is dominated by western science, and has excluded spiritual and intangible heritage of the ocean in governance. Many laws and policies that govern our access and use of water is led by scientists informing policy makers and government agencies. With the legacies of Apartheid, many of these policies such as the Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 banned African mystical practice, along with other policies such as the Group Areas Act No. 36 of 1966, restricted ocean access for many black and brown South African citizens, further inhibiting spiritual and ritualistic processes with the ocean. The holding of sea water in these antique chemistry containers, invites dialogue between marine scientists and indigenous knowledge holders alike, to enter into new

conversations, literacies and policies that rethink the dominion of science alone over Ocean governance, and expand our ocean literacies to include other world views and thinking.

## THE HYDRO-RUG

Social Sculptor and Educational sociologist Aaniyah Martin, will debut her interactive public an-archival project entitled "The Hydorug" at the exhibition. Aaniyah a PhD candidate at the Environmental Learning Research Centre at the University Currently Known as Rhodes, is walking the entire False Bay coastline from Cape Point to Hangklip, engaging in citizen led public storytelling around the invisible histories and relationships with the ocean, with the explicit aim to surface new care practices related to the ocean, that emerge indigenous and local meaning-making, world-views, histories and memory. All the while, during her new-moon 'strand-looping' Aaniyah is surfacing Brown and Black histories of the ocean, and collaboratively stitching them into a rug. As Aaniyah explains: "I am swimming and walking close to the sea, and exploring how this opens up ghostly knowledges about the multiple histories that shape our presents and futures through our immersion and relationship with water... The hydro-rug grounds and creates a material and tangible outcome alongside the walking/swimming component of the inquiry into making new knowledge for pedagogies of care for our hydrocommons. The hydro-rug endeavours to create a common 'landing-strip' for participants, to share and make tangible their relationship to the ocean".



## LALELA ULWANDLE

Lalela uLwandle is a research-based theatre project created by [Empatheatre](#) that makes visible stories of living with the ocean that are seldom seen or heard in the public domain.

Lalela uLwandle means “Listen to the Sea” in isiZulu. At some point in our lives, many of us have picked up a large shell and placed it against our ears to hear the sound of the oceans within it. It is this image that we invoke in this project, of standing quietly on the beach and listening to the stories of the ocean, and the people who have an intimate relationship with it.



Weaving the stories, histories and contemporary concerns of diverse South African coastal communities into an Empatheatre production, Lalela uLwandle explores themes of intergenerational environmental injustices, tangible and intangible ocean heritage, marine science and the myriad threats to ocean health. Lalela uLwandle is an invitation to a participatory public conversation on ocean governance in South Africa. It is funded under the One Ocean Hub, a five-country hub of researchers exploring more democratic methods of engagement in ocean governance. It exists as a [theatre production](#), [radio play](#) and [short film](#). The short film and radio play will be exhibited at the Zero Gallery.

## DATES, TIMES, EVENTS

The “Our Ocean is Sacred, You Can’t Mine Heaven” will host events at every first Thursday between August and November. Where the public is encouraged to come and participate in a social processes, such as tribunals, social sculptures and other interactive collaborative practices.

### Exhibition Opening: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022

The exhibition opens at 6pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> August. One of the main activities that will occur, is a Collective Crochet Vigil, to add to the crochet coral reef. Citizens are encouraged to bring old wool and crochet needles and will be shown how to crochet corals to add to the coral reef. (although some some wool and needles will be available). The vigil will open up conversations around how to live and die well on a changing planet, and create space to stay with the ecological grief of our dying oceans, particularly the recent 90% dying of plankton recorded in the Atlantic ocean. While action is required, space to reflect, grieve and work with the losses we are facing are equally important. We also take this moment to celebrate Maria Van Gass and Leonie Hoffmeyer who started the Coral Reef 12 years ago. In this stunning collective citizen led social sculpture, we see just how powerful solidarity can be, in the rich diversity of voices, concerns, questions and memories that are stitched together in the coral reef. The opening will explore the work and share how the project is aiming to engage in further legal advocacy and encourage policy change.

### First Thursday events: (details to be announced)

1<sup>st</sup> September 2022

6<sup>th</sup> October 2022

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022

#### Notes:

The exhibition first ran from the 23 June to the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022 at the National Arts Festival, at the Red Foyer at the Rhodes University Theatre. This recent visit to Cape Town, is thanks to a grant from the OOH DEEP Fund and the EITZ collective. During its six month stay in Cape Town, artists and curators from the exhibition will be hosting tribunals, social processes and other actions in relation to the archive, with new artworks joining the exhibition, created by artists working in solidarity with customary rights holders and indigenous knowledge holders. One Ocean Hub Co-researchers from the Glasgow School of Art Stuart Jeffery and Lisa McDonald will be joining the exhibition, to document the archive using extend reality cameras, so people from around the world will be able to access and experience the exhibition close up.

#### Hashtags:

#OurSacredOcean  
#OurOceanisSacred  
#coastaljustice

#### Organisational Tags:

@coastal\_justice  
@oneocean\_hub  
@keiskammaartproject  
@keiskammatrustsa  
@lrcsouthafrica  
@nationalartsfestival  
@eitzero

#### Individual Tags

@dylan\_mcgarry. (Dylan McGarry)  
@mpumemthombeni (Mpume Mthombeni)  
@boudinac (Boudina McConnachie)  
@cleo\_droomer (Cleo Droomer)  
@contemporary\_strandlooper (Aaniyah Martin)  
@singingsand (Braam du toit)  
@helen\_walne (Helen Walne)  
@taryn\_pereira (Taryn Pereira)  
@luke\_kaplan (Luke Kaplan)  
@kellyrosedaniels (Kelly Daniels)  
@jackibruniquel (Jacki Bruniquel)  
@Caseyprattphoto (Casey Pratt)  
@mimsemimsen (Mia Strand)

#### CREDITS

Dylan McGarry  
Boudina McConnachie  
Michaela Howse  
Luke Kaplan  
Mpume Mthombeni  
Cebo Mvubu  
Kelly Daniels  
Cleo Droomer  
Ndileka Mapuma,  
Thandazwa Mqali,

Zukiswa Sikani  
Nandipha Yona  
Veronica Betani  
Nombulelo Paliso  
Fikiswa Madlingozi  
Nomfundo Makhubalo  
Nozolile Gedze  
Nozeti Makhubalo  
Nompumelelo Nompunga  
Vivian Solwandle  
Braam Du Toit  
Tristan Horton  
Maria Van Gass  
Leonie Hoffmeyer  
Aaniyah Martin  
Nokhanyiso Nompunga  
Elijah Madiba  
Dumisa Mpupha  
Bongani Diko  
Nombasa Maqoko  
Vuyelwa Moyo  
Kuhle Ngqezana  
Praise Mathebula  
Thandeka Mfinyongo  
Casey Pratt  
Jacki Bruniquel  
Lina Macanhe  
Helen Walne  
Raphela Linders

Woodstock Art Reef Project  
Keiskamma Art Project  
Coastal Justice Network  
Urban Future Centre  
Environmental Learning Research Centre  
International Library for African Music  
South Durban Community Environmental Alliance

Funded by  
One Ocean Hub Deep Fund  
National Arts Festival  
EITZ