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27 June 2018
To All Editors
For Immediate Release

NEWTOWN'S ICONIC PUBLIC ARTWORKS GET A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

On Saturday July 14 at 13:00 the newly restored Newtown Heads and a colourful new art installation by the Imbali Visual Literacy Project will be revealed to the public at a festive launch on Mary Fitzgerald Square as part of the inaugural Newtown Now festival.

The Newtown Heads, a public art installation of 560 carved wooden heads that sit on plinths across the Newtown Precinct, have become one of Newtown's most iconic features over the last 17 years.

In 2018 the City of Johannesburg's Community Development Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage Directorate announced it would restore and repair these much-loved public artworks, many of which have become severely damaged or destroyed over the years.

Spearheading the refurbishment of the Newtown Heads is sculptor Americo Guambe who led the original team of artists who first created them in 2001. Made from old railway sleepers, each hand-carved head is unique, representing a sea of faces from across the African continent.

Americo Guambe says of his Newtown Heads sculptures; "I wanted to show the people of Johannesburg that it is a city of many diverse cultures. And so the heads do that – people of all races, genders, ages and cultures adorn the plinths around Newtown and the city."

The first stage of the refurbishment has seen the restoration and replacement of 196 heads around Mary Fitzgerald Square and along the pedestrianised walkway that connects the square to Helen Joseph Street. These heads will be joined by a new public art installation led by Imbali Visual Literacy Project that includes coloured flags which will be hung from the square's lampposts and large screen-printed banners emblazoned with images of Newtown's iconic buildings.

Newtown Now festival and the launch of the Newtown public art installation

On Saturday July 14 at 13:00 the restored Newtown Heads and the new public art installation by Imbali will be officially unveiled on Mary Fitzgerald Square with a festive celebration as part of the inaugural **Newtown Now festival**.

Newtown Now is a free festival that celebrates Newtown's unique culture and heritage, at the heart of which is Newtown's iconic public art installations. The one day festival on Saturday July 14 includes free walking tours, arts and heritage exhibitions, creative workshops, family events and a flea market. Participating venues and tour guides include: Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, the

Building a better city

Directors

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Registration Number: 2001/005101/07

Worker's Museum, The Market Theatre, Museum Africa, Market Photo Workshop, Stop Sign Art Gallery, 56 Pim Studio, Past Experiences, and the Newtown Junction Precinct.

Please find a selection of press images of the Newtown Heads here: bit.ly/2Khk8hd

For all interview requests and press enquiries about Newtown Now please contact Melusi Hlatshwayo at melusi.hlatshwayo@inyourpocket.com

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Americo Guambe

Mozambican-born Americo Guambe has been creating wooden sculptures since the age of 13 when he was trained in the Maputo workshop of master craftsman Armando Maxava. After leaving Maputo during Mozambique's devastating civil war, the Guambe family settled in the Zambezi region before again being forced to flee to Malawi as refugees after their village was destroyed by armed rebels. In late 1980s Guambe returned to Maputo to begin working with his old mentor again. In 1993 aged 24 Guambe moved to Johannesburg aged 24 to begin his career as an artist. In 2001 Guambe was awarded an order to create several hundred wooden sculpted heads to be installed in the Newtown Precinct, the famous Newtown Heads. Over the years Guambe estimates that over 600 of his works have become public art in the Joburg inner city. Some of his most famous works include the Governor's House Trees in Hillbrow and the statue of a young boy and girl opposite the Constitutional Court.

Imbali Visual Literacy Project

The Imbali Visual Literacy Project was created as a project of Women For Peace in 1988 to develop strategies for training teachers with no arts background in poorly resourced schools to enable them to provide an enriching art and creative education for school pupils. Based at The Bus Factory in Newtown Imbali has since expanded its focus to include creative skills-development and training for South Africa's unemployed youth in specific income-generating craft and design activities such as embroidery, sewing, textile screen printing, ceramics, beading and jewellery making. Imbali Visual Literacy Project sells its designs, which include everything from cushions and tablecloths to blankets, clothing, jewellery and homeware, at their official shop in the Museum Africa foyer.

**Press release issued by Johannesburg In Your Pocket Media on behalf of:
Johannesburg Development Agency and the City of Johannesburg Community
Development Department, Arts, Culture and Heritage Directorate**

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