

World-renowned artist Dr Esther Mahlangu kicks off world tour at Iziko National Gallery

By [Aa-isha Hassiem](#)

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To commemorate her contributions to the world of art, Dr Esther Mahlangu's work will be embarking on a worldwide tour, and it feels appropriate that she receives her first round of praise on home soil. The Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town is the first stop, where an exhibition, curated by Nontobeko Ntombela, will be showcasing a portion of Dr Mahlangu's iconic pieces.



Image by Clint Strydom

Her rise to fame

Dr Mahlangu's work is now identifiable by its incorporation of bold colours and unique shapes, but she first gained genuine recognition in 1991 when she participated in the BMW Art Car Project alongside other industry giants such as Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Roy Lichtenstein, and Frank Stella. This success came after four decades of painting. Now, at 88 years old, Mahlangu is being honoured across the world as her pieces are set to be showcased on multiple continents.

Work with BMW

Following her first project with BMW, where she painted the exterior of a 525i, she was asked to collaborate again in 2016. This time, she was given the panels of a BMW 750Li Individual to paint. More recently, she was asked to design a commemorative logo for the company.



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The retrospective

Then I Knew I Was Good at Painting: Esther Mahlangu, A Retrospective intends to celebrate Mahlangu’s noteworthy style of combining traditional with contemporary. It features more than 100 contemporary artworks, historic photographs, and a short film that contains footage that has been carefully curated and gathered from around the globe.



Image by Aa-isha Hassiem

“The retrospective pays homage to Dr. Mahlangu’s unique approach to art, which intersects African culture with modernity and the contemporary, symbolising pride, self-determination, and innovation. It is not just an exhibition; it’s a celebration of Dr Mahlangu’s voice, agency, and pioneering spirit,” says Ntombela. She then emphasises the importance of this achievement, noting that few South African artists have been given the opportunity to display their work in world-renowned museums.



Image by Aa-isha Hassiem

A comprehensive 300-page catalogue, capturing her significant contribution to contemporary art and illustrating her innovative approach, will also be on display. This is set to be released in July 2024.





Images by Aa-isha Hassiem





The exhibit is now open to the public and will be available to view until 11 August 2024.

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