City of Johannesburg
Group Communication and Marketing Department

11th Floor A Block
Metropolitan Centre
158 Civic Boulevard
Braamfontein

PO Box 1049
Johannesburg
South Africa
2000

Tel +27(0) 11 407 7354

www.joburg.org.za

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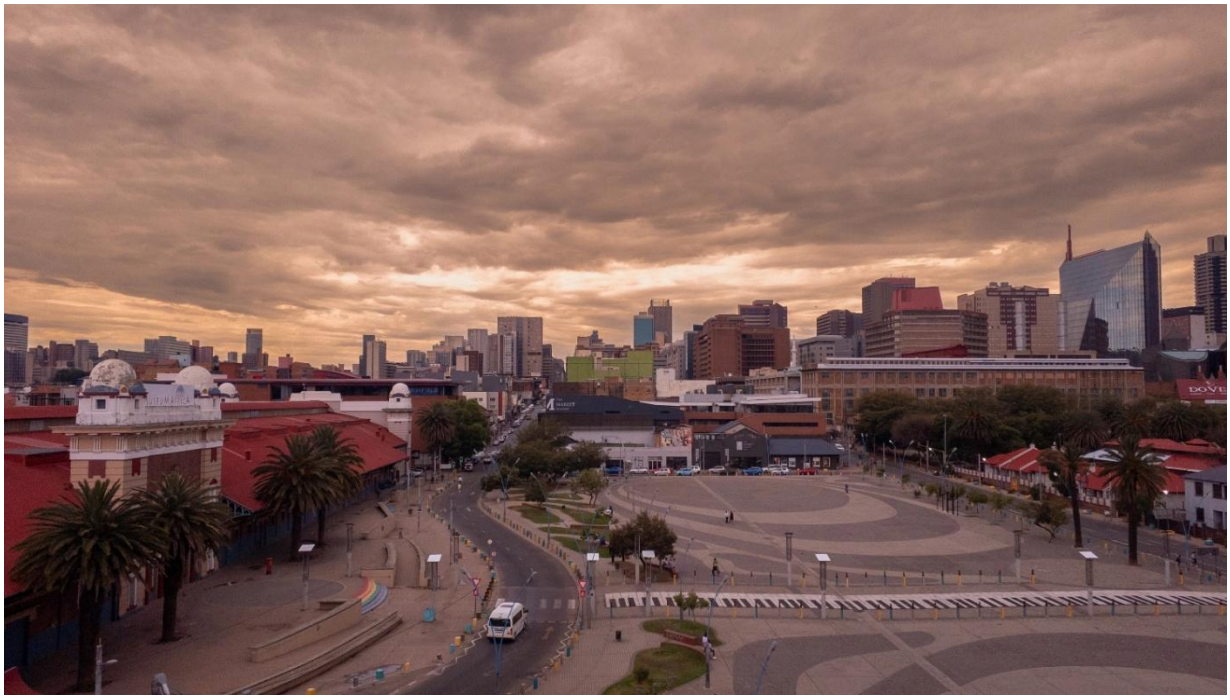
CITY ADVANCES MUSEUM-GRADE UPGRADES FOR JAG ARTWORK RELOCATION, STRENGTHENING ITS CULTURAL ARC



As the world commemorates International Museum Day on 18 May, the City of Johannesburg is reflecting on the important role museums play in preserving history, protecting heritage, and connecting communities to their collective identity.

This year's commemoration comes at a significant moment for Johannesburg, as major upgrades continue at Museum Afrika and the adjacent Pink Building in Newtown to prepare the facilities to international museum standards for the temporary relocation of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) collection

The upgrades form part of a broader initiative led by the City of Johannesburg to safeguard one of South Africa's most significant art collections while simultaneously reinvesting in the city's cultural infrastructure.

Johannesburg is a city shaped by movement — of people, ideas, and histories. At the centre of this dynamism lies the Johannesburg Cultural Arc, a symbolic and physical pathway connecting the city's major heritage, arts, and human rights institutions.

Stretching from Constitution Hill, across the iconic Nelson Mandela Bridge, and into the vibrant Newtown Cultural Precinct, the Cultural Arc reflects South Africa's journey from struggle to democracy and its enduring commitment to cultural expression.

The temporary relocation of the JAG collection into Newtown is more than a logistical intervention — it is a strategic cultural repositioning that strengthens the interconnectedness of Johannesburg's heritage institutions while reinforcing Newtown's role as a centre of creativity, memory, and urban regeneration.

Museum Afrika, housed in the historic 1913 fruit and vegetable market building on Lilian Ngoyi Street, serves as Johannesburg's premier history museum and remains one of the city's most important custodians of social and cultural memory. The museum houses extensive collections of books, artefacts, archives, and historical records chronicling Johannesburg's evolution.

The facility's established role as a centre for storytelling, historical preservation, and cultural exchange makes it a fitting temporary custodian for the JAG collection during the gallery's restoration process.

To support this transition, significant infrastructure interventions implemented by the Johannesburg Development Agency are currently underway at both Museum Afrika and the Pink Building.

Key upgrades include:

- Installation of modern HVAC systems with real-time monitoring to regulate temperature and humidity in line with museum preservation standards;
- Comprehensive roof rehabilitation and waterproofing to prevent water ingress and strengthen the building envelope;
- Installation of new polycarbonate roof sheeting to improve insulation and durability;
- Ongoing installation of a new 1MVA transformer to ensure stable and uninterrupted power supply;
- Upgraded security infrastructure including CCTV surveillance, biometric and fingerprint access controls, reinforced access points, and 24-hour security presence;
- Gas-based fire suppression systems designed to protect artworks without the risk of water damage
- These interventions are not only critical to safeguarding valuable artworks but also represent a long-term investment in Johannesburg's cultural infrastructure.

The relocation of the JAG collection into this environment creates renewed opportunities for cultural tourism, increased public activity, and deeper collaboration between Johannesburg's institutions of art, heritage, and memory.

The Newtown precinct is also home to major cultural landmarks including the Market Theatre, the iconic Newtown Heads public art installation, and nearby heritage destinations such as Chancellor House, commemorated by Marco Cianfanelli's Nelson Mandela: Shadow Boxer sculpture.

By positioning the JAG collection within this broader cultural ecosystem, the City is strengthening the Cultural Arc as a cohesive and accessible spine of arts and heritage while ensuring that Johannesburg's artistic legacy remains visible and protected.

While the relocation of the JAG collection is temporary, the impact of the investment will be long-lasting. The upgrades being implemented today will continue to strengthen Johannesburg's cultural infrastructure and contribute to the ongoing regeneration of the inner city for years to come.

As Johannesburg commemorates International Museum Day, the City reaffirms its commitment to preserving the stories, artworks, and heritage that define its identity — ensuring that future generations continue to learn from and engage with the city's rich cultural legacy.

ENDS

Joburg gets green light for JAG restoration as all approvals secured

Cultural and History Museums