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## **Futures\_Past brings Southern African archives to life through immersive storytelling**

*Six institutions, six powerful histories, and a call to artists to reimagine heritage with immersive arts*

**Johannesburg, South Africa** – The Embassy of France in South Africa, Lesotho, and Malawi, in partnership with the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS) and Electric South, has launched Futures\_Past: Amplifying Memory with Immersive Technologies — a two-year initiative designed to reimagine the role of archives through the power of immersive storytelling.

At a time when the heritage sector faces pressing challenges, from limited digitisation tools to shifting audience expectations, Futures\_Past provides a timely response by using emerging digital technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, spatial audio, and interactive installations. The goal is to create new pathways for audiences to engage with history, memory, and culture in meaningful and accessible ways.

The project is built around three interconnected components:

- A regional sector mapping and policy study on immersive arts in South Africa, Lesotho, and Malawi.
- A mobility and networking programme in France for up to 20 professionals, connecting Southern African stakeholders with immersive arts institutions, markets, and festivals.
- The creation and public exhibition of six immersive digital works, developed by artists and creative technologists in collaboration with selected archival institutions.

“Futures\_Past is not only about preserving heritage, but also about amplifying it for new generations. By merging archives with immersive technologies, we can honour memory while inspiring future innovation,” said Ingrid Kopp from Electric South.

### **Six institutions, six stories**

Following a comprehensive selection process, six archival and cultural institutions have been chosen to collaborate with creative teams. Each will serve as the foundation for an immersive work that reimagines heritage for contemporary audiences:



- [National Film, Video and Sound Archives \(Pretoria, South Africa\)](#): As the custodian of South Africa's audiovisual heritage, this archive preserves the nation's moving image memory. Its collaboration centres on the Moolman Opnames Collection, a set of 1960s films depicting everyday life under apartheid. The collection provides both an intimate look at domestic life and a disturbing record of state surveillance and propaganda. Immersive technologies will allow new generations to critically engage with these moving images in innovative ways.
- [GALA Queer Archive \(Johannesburg, South Africa\)](#): Based in Johannesburg, GALA is Africa's leading queer archive, housing invaluable material that documents LGBTQIA+ histories. The chosen focus is the Township AIDS Project (TAP), a grassroots initiative launched in the 1990s to address HIV in South Africa's townships. TAP's work highlights the courage and resourcefulness of queeractivists in times of crisis, and this project will explore how community-led responses continue to shape public health and human rights narratives today.
- [!Khwa ttu San Culture & Education Centre \(Yzerfontein, South Africa\)](#): Located on the West Coast near Cape Town, !Khwa ttu is dedicated to preserving San culture and knowledge. Their collaboration focuses on the Schmidtsdrift Linocut Collection, a remarkable series of artworks created by San soldiers forcibly relocated during apartheid. The collection captures displacement, resilience, and identity through bold visual storytelling, now poised to gain new life through digital innovation.
- [Iziko Museums of South Africa \(Cape Town, South Africa\)](#): One of the largest heritage institutions in the country, Iziko's archives span natural history, art, and culture. Futures\_Past will engage with Amanzi eAfrika, a forthcoming exhibition on water as a vital ecological, cultural, and spiritual resource. Through oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, and scientific insight, this project highlights water's role in shaping societies, reminding us of its fragility and centrality in the climate crisis.
- [Royal Archives, Museum and Information Centre \(Matsieng, Lesotho\)](#): These archives preserve the history of Lesotho's monarchy, political life, and colonial encounters. Materials range from rare manuscripts to artefacts reflecting the country's unique role as a mountain kingdom that retained independence while surrounded by apartheid South Africa. This project will reimagine narratives of chieftainship, resilience, and diplomacy in a digital space, offering audiences a deeper appreciation of Lesotho's cultural sovereignty.
- [Music Crossroads Malawi \(Lilongwe, Malawi\)](#): An innovative cultural organisation nurturing musical talent, Music Crossroads has built a living archive of traditional and contemporary sound. The Malawi Folksong Project is a collection of folk songs passed down through



generations, each carrying stories of community, ritual, and identity. This project will create an immersive soundscape that both preserves and reinvents Malawi's musical heritage for global audiences.

"Each of these archives tells a vital story about identity, resilience, and history in Southern Africa. Futures\_Past will bring these stories to life in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences," said His Excellency Mr David Martinon, Ambassador of France to South Africa, Lesotho and Malawi.

### **Call for immersive artists now open**

With the institutional partners in place, the project now launches an open call for immersive artist teams in South Africa, Malawi, and Lesotho. Creative teams are invited to submit proposals to work directly with one of the six archives to co-design an immersive project that reanimates archival material for public audiences.

Each selected team will receive funding of between R500 000 and R1.2 million, along with mentorship, technical support, and exhibition opportunities. Projects may use a wide range of immersive formats — including VR, AR, XR, spatial audio, volumetric capture, and responsive installations — but must demonstrate innovation, collaboration, and cultural sensitivity.

Teams must include at least four roles:

- A director/creative lead (from the country where the archive is based).
- A technologist lead
- A producer
- A trainee assistant producer (under the age of 30, as part of Futures\_Past's capacity development programme).

Applications will be judged on creativity, ethics, feasibility, and potential audience impact, with a strong emphasis on collaboration with archival staff and local communities.

### **The timeline for the call is as follows:**

- Call opens: 2 October 2025
- Open call webinar: 13 October 2025 (10:00–11:30 SAST) (Register [here](#))
- Deadline for applications: 9 November 2025 (23:59 SAST)
- Successful projects announced: End of November 2025
- Project delivery: By August 2026
- Public exhibitions: From September to November 2026



“This open call is an invitation to Africa’s most creative minds to collaborate with heritage institutions and push the boundaries of immersive storytelling. Together, we can transform archives into living, breathing spaces of dialogue, imagination, and memory,” said Sofia Saa, Regional Head of New Media, Film and Television at IFAS.

This project is initiated by the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS) in collaboration with Electric South, and made possible thanks to funding from the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

For full details related to the call for Immersive Artists, visit the IFAS [website](#).

For enquiries and application submissions, please email: [info@electricsouth.org](mailto:info@electricsouth.org).

- Ends -

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#### About the French Institute of South Africa:

The [French Institute of South Africa \(IFAS\)](#), the cultural arm of the French Embassy, has supported creative cooperation between South Africa, France, and the continent since 1995. With a growing portfolio in the heritage and archiving space, IFAS has played a key role in major regional initiatives aimed at safeguarding memory and advancing access to historical resources. Notable projects include the [digitisation of the Rivonia Trial tapes](#) in partnership with South African institutions and France's National Audiovisual Institute (INA), as well as cooperation with the [Morija Museum & Archives in Lesotho](#) to preserve shared histories and digitise valuable collections. Recently, IFAS co-hosted the regional seminar Advancing Audiovisual Heritage: Policy, Practice, and Cross-Border Partnerships in Cape Town with INA and the Agence française de développement (AFD). This seminar formed part of the broader *Unboxing Mayibuye* programme, which also included a regional mapping study and a professional training course on managing audiovisual archives.

#### About Electric South:

[Electric South](#) is a non-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. The organisation contributes to building a robust storytelling ecosystem in Africa, grounded in immersive and interactive technologies. Committed to industry development, Electric South creates opportunities and resources for African artists and creative technologists through mentorship, [workshops and labs including the flagship New Dimensions Lab](#), project funding, convenings, research, advocacy and field building. Electric South works with the ecosystem of African creators, industry, civil society, and governments, bridging these diverse sectors to create an enabling environment for artists and technologists and to reshape the trajectory of emerging technologies. Immersive projects produced with the support of Electric South have won numerous awards and been exhibited all over the world including at Sundance, Venice and IDFA DocLab.