



Contra.Joburg weaves the city's creative spaces together. By **Ryan Enslin**

Joburg has always been a city of intersections – of stories, cultures, industries and dreams. But when it comes to art, the paths have often been neatly signposted: you go to a gallery, you stand in front of a painting, you move on.

Art waits for you in curated spaces, behind doors you must decide to open. But what if art interrupts you? What if, without warning, the city you thought you knew asked you to stop, to look, to feel?

That's the premise and the provocation behind Contra.Joburg, Joburg's most radical visual arts festival. Now in its fourth year, Contra is less about inviting you into the art world and more about bringing the art world to you. From August 30 to 31, the streets, rooftops, alleys and working studios of the inner city will become a living network of interventions. More than 170 artists, designers and makers will transform 12 venues across the CBD into a two-day maze of possibility, where the next encounter could be a whispered poem, a spontaneous dance or an installation that makes you stop mid-stride.

This isn't art as decoration. It's art woven

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Contra.Joburg's shuttles depart every 20 minutes, so you can traverse the city safely and comfortably, and the route itself becomes part of the adventure. Picture: SUPPLIED

into the city's very rhythms; unannounced, unscripted and entirely in the moment.

How Contra.Joburg works

The festival unfolds over a weekend, with each day offering a different route and a new array of studios to explore. Saturday August 30 focuses on venues including Bag Factory Artists' Studios, the Rand Club, Asisebenze Art Gallery, Play Braamfontein, the Creative Uprising at Transwerke and WLM. Sunday August 31 shifts the route to

spaces including August House, Ellis House, Living Artist Emporium, Asisebenze Art Atelier, Oovookoo and Victoria Yards.

Your ticket includes access to a hop-on hop-off shuttle service, running in two different loops, connecting the participating spaces. Shuttles depart every 20 minutes, making it simple to traverse the city safely and comfortably, and the route itself becomes part of the adventure. With kids' activities at various venues, Contra is also a family-friendly event.

The open studio format is central to Contra's ethos. Instead of pristine white cubes, visitors step into the living, breathing spaces where art is conceived and made. Here, artists are not distant figures but hosts, guides and co-conspirators in moments of shared discovery.

Layers of experience

Contra's 2025 programme weaves together visual art with live activations that pull you further into the moment. Dance

performances erupt in unexpected corners. Poets claim the air with verses shaped by the city's textures and tensions. Fashion turns the most unexpected of places into runways, blurring the boundaries between audience and participants. These interventions are not sideshows; they're central to the festival's energy. They anchor the idea that art is not a static object to be consumed, but a living exchange to be felt.

A city as co-author

By embedding itself in Joburg's urban fabric, Contra transforms the city from a backdrop into a collaborator. Each venue brings its own history, architecture and neighbourhood rhythm to the conversation.

With its layered heritage, the Rand Club plays differently against the raw creative pulse of August House. The industrial grit of Ellis House contrasts with the cultivated gardens of Victoria Yards. Play Braamfontein offers the thrum of street culture while the Creative Uprising at Transwerke channels the

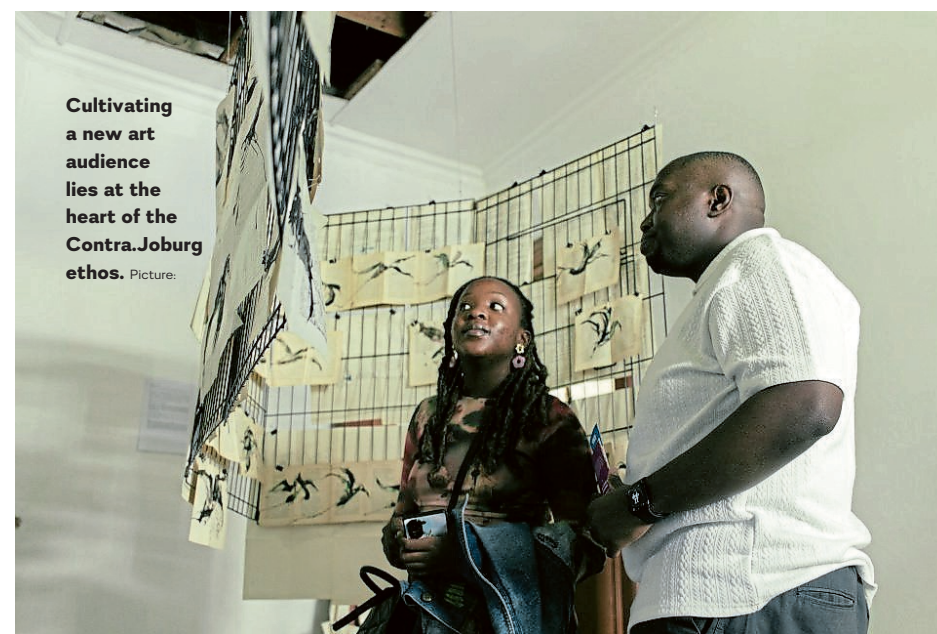
The emotional immediacy of the unexpected

At its heart, Contra.Joburg is about cultivating audiences who might not think of themselves as "art people" at all. By placing art directly in people's way, in moments they don't see coming, the festival taps into something deeper than planned appreciation – emotional immediacy.

A passer-by might not enter a gallery on a Saturday afternoon. But they might linger if a fragment of song catches in their chest, if a sculpture reframes the light in a familiar hallway, if a stranger offers them a verse of poetry as a gift.

These encounters don't just expand the audience for art; they expand what art can be. In doing so, Contra nurtures a culture where art is less about "special occasions" and more about a daily, lived presence.

This is the charge of the festival: to disrupt your autopilot, to replace your usual mental map of Joburg with a new one in which the city is alive with creative possibility.



energy of a new generation of makers.

These juxtapositions remind visitors that Joburg isn't a monolith but a patchwork, and that the arts thrive in the spaces between its seams.

Towards a creative economy

Beyond the experiences of any given weekend, Contra.Joburg is a long-term investment in the city's cultural life. Since its launch, the festival has facilitated nearly R3m in direct art sales, bolstering the city's creative economy and giving working artists the means to grow their practices.

Supported by civic advocacy group Jozi My Jozi, which recognises creativity's power to energise the city's future, Contra stands as both celebration and strategy – harnessing art to spark trust, open new spaces for connection and chart fresh pathways between the city's cultural life and its daily rhythms.

When art finds you

By the end of the weekend, the map of the city in your mind will have shifted. You'll know where Ellis House is, not just as a building, but as the place where you saw an artist at work with paint under their nails and in their hair. You'll remember the passageway in which a dancer wove magic in your imagination. You'll carry a print home, or maybe just the memory of a shared moment, as proof that Joburg's creative spirit isn't hidden, but here, waiting to meet you.

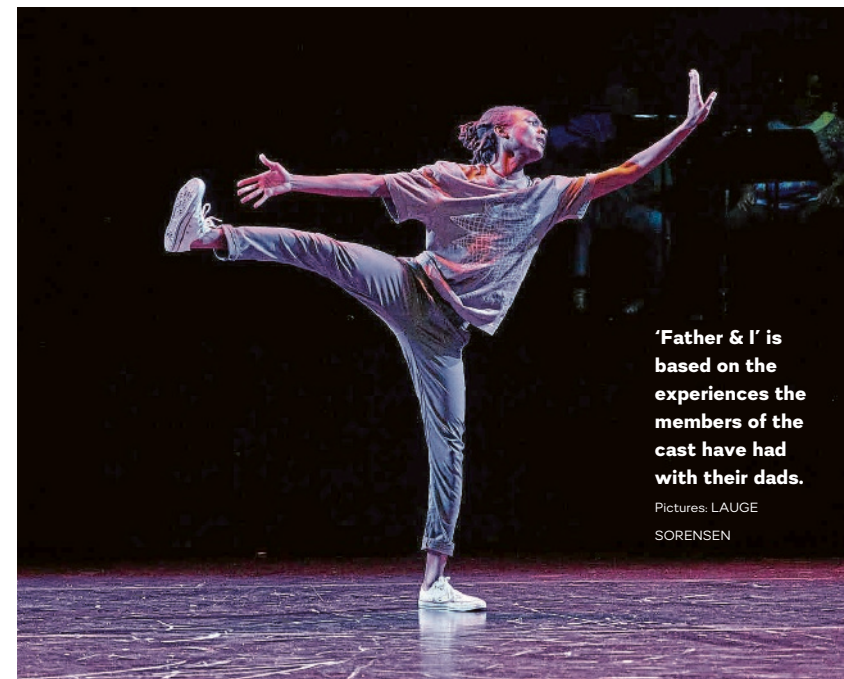
And that is the quiet, radical promise of Contra.Joburg. In a city where life moves fast, art can still catch you off guard. It doesn't wait to be discovered. It finds you.

Contra.Joburg 2025 takes place from August 30 to 31, 10am to 5pm daily.
Tickets: quicket.co.za
Information: contra.joburg
Instagram and Facebook: @contrajoburg



Artist Danisile Njoli in his studio at Living Artist Emporium, one of the participating venues in this years Contra.Joburg festival. Picture: RYAN ENSLIN

Dance



Father-child dynamics expressed in movement

Absence and presence captured by cast and dancers. By **Kgomotso Moncho-Maripane**

The latest production at The Market Theatre conjures up endearing names for fathers and father figures; tata, dad, papa, daddy, uncle and tyma (local slang for father) as these primary relationships are put in the spotlight in *Father & I* – a work that gently explores bonds between children and their fathers in contemporary South Africa.

The hum of the city from The Market Square's Sophiatown room during rehearsals helped fill in the background images for a number of fatherly portraits presented by the show.

Much of South Africa's society is built on the legacy of absent fathers, a product of the country's history of slavery, colonialism and apartheid's forced migration and migrant labour systems. The result is a vicious cycle of trauma, violence and generational disconnection that gives context to some of the personal stories in *Father & I*.

On the other side of absence is presence. Some stories capture the affection of the present father; the tenderness of father-daughter relationships; of manhood and dreams nurtured with care. But "distance and proximity can eat at the same table" as Rudy Francisco says in *Hide and Seek*, his poem about his ache for closeness with his father. It's one of a selection of Francisco's poetry that centres this topic. The dynamics of presence and absence, and the nuances of father-child relationships in South Africa find expression in the voices of *Father & I*'s young cast.

The Naledi-nominated show was conceptualised by 2024's Kwasha! Theatre Company. Kwasha! develops young theatre practitioners in partnership with the Windybrow Arts Centre and The Market Theatre Lab (The Market Theatre's educational and incubation wing). The programme picks five individual graduates from The Market Theatre Lab and other educational institutions from across the country for a year's transitional period of full-time employment in the company.

One half of the cast is made up of Kwasha! performers and the other of Moving into Dance (MID) dancers from different corners of the country. There are subtexts and lineages of migrancy woven



into the stories of these young people, who've come to find purpose and survival in the city.

The work is choreographed by MID artistic director, dancer-choreographer and teacher Sunnyboy Motau, with music by Bongile Lecoge-Zulu and Matthew MacFarlane, and direction by The Market Theatre's artistic director Greg Homann.

Speaking on the inception of the work, Homann said: "In meeting with the company last year with the aim of producing work I'd facilitate growing as a director, we explored various ideas that interested them. At one point we considered how many of these young people find love in Joburg. They also spoke about their relationships with their fathers. My father passed away relatively recently and we found common ground talking about fathers and fatherhood. I reached out to MID and the work grew organically from there."

Homann worked with the individual stories to generate the Kwasha! performers' monologues. "I conducted individual hour-long interviews about their relationships to their fathers. I did the same with the MID group, and got them to tell their stories through dance." Some movements are a plea for guidance and speak to notions of masculinity, inherited roles, vulnerability and socioeconomic considerations. Others paint a blank portrait of longing, the search of identity.

For Motau it was important that the honesty of the stories came through in the dance. "It became about taking a simple route, creating without imposing my style. The movement vocabulary came from the emotion and gestures developed by the dancers conveying their stories."

The strength of *Father & I* is the shared connection derived from the young cast's emotively raw, yet optimistic voices. It's the heart of the show's warmth. "I'm in love with the hope that things will be alright," one of them says.

Father & I is on at The Market Theatre until August 31. It then moves to the Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience in Durban from August 26 to September 7.