



From ancient fossils to Mandela's handwritten notes - rare specimens on display







Wits is the custodian of some of the world's priceless treasures and on the occasion of its 90th anniversary, Wits invites Joburgers to share these riches. An exhibition entitled *Wits90 Treasures* will run from 20 September – 14 October 2012 (Wed – Sun, 10:00 – 17:00) in the Wits Art Museum. The exhibition is diverse – ranging from the rare and peculiar to the uncanny and extraordinary.

Prof. Loyiso Nongxa, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Wits University says: "Great universities are one of the key pillars of our society - they survive for centuries and generations, they outlive governments and societies, making them ideal safehouses and curators of priceless treasures on behalf of civilisations."

Visitors can look forward to seeing the following on display, amongst other treasures: the Taung Skull; the Sediba Fossils; the world's oldest dinosaur eggs; rare African art; Dumile Feni scrolls; one of the world's oldest Bibles; Mandela's handwritten notes from the Rivonia Trial; Robert Sobukwe's original letters; Herbert Baker watercolours, photographs from the Barnett collection; excerpts from the Sol Plaatje collection; the Devil's Claw; old blueprints of the Union Buildings and the Johannesburg Art Gallery; rock art; a slave register and clay tablets (ca 3000 – 2000 BC).

Embryo models; animal skeletons; human death masks; iron lungs used in South Africa during the 1950s poliomyelitis epidemic; some 17th Century musical instruments and a medicine chest will also be on display. "This varied, multidisciplinary exhibition serves to bring together treasures that have never been put together in one space before. We hope that the people of Johannesburg and South Africa will take this opportunity to get to know a little bit more about our wondrous heritage," says Nongxa.

Some of the specimens and artefacts on display are published alongside.

Dates:	20 September – 14 October 2012
Time:	Wed – Sun, 10:00 – 17:00
Venue:	The Wits Art Museum, Corner Jorissen Street and Jan Smuts Avenue,
	Braamfontein
Contact:	(011) 717 9735
Info:	www.wits.ac.za/wits90



Several public lectures related to the Wits90 Treasures exhibition will take place throughout the month in the Wits Art Museum, some of which are highlighted below.

LUNCH TIME TALKS 12:30 to 13:30 @ WAM

26 Sep 27 Sep	Dr Geoffrey Blundell Rochelle Keene	The study of Rock Art in South Africa A brief glimpse into the Adler Museum of Medicine The Wits Art Museum - a new gem on the block Where do we come from - Karoo fossils unlock secrets of mammal origins Some fascinating items from the William Cullen Library Special Collection
28 Sep	Julia Charlton	
03 Oct	Prof. Bruce Rubidge	
04 Oct	Peter Duncan	
05 Oct	Prof. Francis Thackeray	The Taung skull and human evolution
10 Oct	James Harrison	Real beetles and biological wax models
11 Oct	Brendon Billings	Life and death masks - why were they made?
12 Oct	Prof. Lee Berger	The journey towards discovering Sediba

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on show at the **Wits Art Museum** 20 September -14 October 2012

The Wits90 Treasures exhibition samples some of the most significant objects from numerous collections held by Wits, from those which have an importance for our history and cultural identity, to those which define important moments in intellectual journeys of discovery. These objects, which we consider treasures, are part of a wider South African heritage, providing us with links across cultures and continents, across time and beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries.

People have different ways of assigning value to objects, and the exhibition places in the same space the fossilised remains of a variety of ancient beings who walked this part of the earth at different times in the past, works of art by famous African artists, rare books and items that have special significance in the unfolding of knowledge about the world. Many pieces have particular associations with very special people, from David Livingstone to Nelson Mandela, and carry traces of the aura of those persons with them. Rather like the "wunderkammern" of 18th Century Germany, the exhibition contains objects which are curious and wondrous, including animal and insect skeletons, books with early visions of knowledge, and beautiful forms of all kinds. Some objects are unique, others are representative of types, but all have value within our culture and history broadly conceived.

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Wits90 Treasures thus have no absolute intrinsic value. Their value is always constituted in relation to something, to a context, to an understanding that our views of the world are always open to question and debate. These treasures are also evidence, case studies, points of debate and at the very root of the kind of critical inquiry which happens within a University environment. Sometimes they are treasures because they represent views of the world through scientific conclusions which are incomplete or incorrect. At others they are treasures because someone has found them beautiful and preserved them for future generations.

All these treasures, and more like them, can be viewed, sometimes only by appointment, in the Wits museums, archives and collections in which they are housed. See the back page for details of Wits' Places and Spaces.





BOOK LAUNCH WITS: 90 YEARS OF MAKING HISTORY BY SUE KRIGE



This book is a series of snapshots of Wits' history over the past 90 years. Our focus has been on capturing beguiling, and often quirky, moments on Wits' timeline, rather than writing a comprehensive history of the University. Our aim is to highlight how Wits has been shaped by its social and political contexts throughout the past nine decades, and how the University, in turn, has influenced the world around it.

Each story in the book has been carefully researched and draws on primary sources and personal interviews in addition to the relevant literature. When writing a history of an institution, historians have to navigate between being either too apologetic or triumphalist. Such a history has to be framed by the deeply oppressive and racist policies and practices of segregation and apartheid, and their attendant social 'norms'. It cannot be otherwise.

There are a number of themes that thread through the stories in the book. One is mining, and, related to that, Wits' distinctive urban character.

www.wits.ac.za/wits90

The cover photo (pictured above), taken in 1939, powerfully illustrates Wits' physical relationship with the city – the emerging skyscrapers in the City, the cooling towers of the power station in Newtown and the ubiquitous mine dumps acting as backdrop. Wits began as a School of Mines, but, from 1917, its offerings included broader arts and science courses, in anticipation of the granting of university status. The Wits Mining Research Institute will be launched on 27 September 2012.

Wits has always thrived on the energy and innovation in the industrial heartland of South Africa and the City's fortunes are inextricably linked with those of the University. Since the 1980s, Wits' urban identity has been richly enhanced by the many students and staff from other provinces, the rest of Africa and the world, who have made Wits their university of choice.

Sue Krige is the editor of this book, which will be launched today, Thursday, 20 September 2012 at the opening of the Wits90 Treasures exhibition in the Wits Art Museum.



Wits is located in Gauteng, the commercial and industrial heartland of Africa. Although its major campuses are spread over 400 hectares in Parktown and Braamfontein, the University's physical reach extends from Sterkfontein in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site to the Wits Rural Facility in Mpumalanga.

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Wits is the curator of some of the world's most priceless treasures - be they palaeontological, historical, artistic or cultural as described in this supplement. The Wits campus has a wealth of sightseeing and educational opportunities which collectively depict the richness of our history, academic endeavours, diversity of disciplines and social interaction.

For a free copy of the Wits Places and Spaces booklet, email Shirona.Patel@wits.ac.za or read it online at www.wits.ac.za/places

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Wits' museums are free and open to the public on Heritage Day.

On Heritage Day, Wits will open the doors of its museums and galleries in Braamfontein and Parktown to the public at no cost. This is an opportunity for the people of Joburg to realise their heritage, but also to claim Wits as their own.

Members of the public are invited to explore Wits' Braamfontein campuses on Heritage Day. There is much to choose from, but visitors are encouraged to make a day of it. The following museums, and others will be open: the Origins Centre; the Wits Art Museum; the Planetarium; the Adler Museum of Medicine (Parktown); the Life Sciences Museum and Biodiversity Centre and the James Kitching Gallery.

A music concert and drumming session will take place on the Library Lawns at lunch time and eats and treats will be on sale. Tours of the campus will be conducted at 10:00, 12:00 and 14:00. Guests are required to meet in front of the Great Hall 15 minutes prior to the start of each tour.

Everyone has different experiences and memories of Wits. We invite you to share your Wits memories – good or bad – with us this year. We would like to archive all these memories digitally, with a view to possibly publishing a selection in a special publication, when Wits celebrates its centennial birthday in 2022.

Simply jot down your memory (up to 500 words) and email it to my.memory@wits.ac.za. You can also send letters to:

My Memory @ Wits c/o Shirona Patel, Head: Communications University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Private Bag x3, Wits, 2050

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