

**John Ellerman  
Foundation**



***Protea* – International Curatorial Exchange Programme Between  
South Africa and the UK**

**Programme Review – One Year On**

**Report Authors:**

**Ciorsdan Brown, Head of Research and Impact, with input and  
support from Sufina Ahmad, Director**

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## Introduction

John Ellerman Foundation is an endowed grantmaker set up in 1971 that seeks to use 100% of our assets in pursuit of our organisational aim to advance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world. We do this in two ways mainly:

1. Funding charities for work that has national significance in the fields of the arts, environment and social action (our funding categories). We believe these can make an important contribution to wellbeing.
2. Investing and managing our funds in such a way that balances the desire to maintain grantmaking capacity, operating in the long term, and addressing the risk that our investments are poorly aligned to our aim and values.

In December 2021, as part of John Ellerman Foundation's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, we launched *Protea* - an international curatorial exchange programme that involved eight curators working in the UK and South Africa undertaking field research in the form of 10-day bilateral visits taking place between April and August 2022. *Protea* had two points of origin:

1. A focus on curatorial development, which underscores our existing commitment to supporting curatorial skills through our Museums and Galleries Fund (MGF).
2. The longstanding connections between our founder, John Reeves Ellerman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, and the two countries in which he spent most of his life – the UK and South Africa.

*Protea* cost a total of £84,650. We received 44 Expressions of Interest from individual curators. 15 of which were invited to submit Request for Proposals. This resulted in the selection of eight curators to participate in *Protea* – five were based in South Africa, and three were based in the UK. Of these eight, three formed UK and South Africa based pairings, and there were two individuals based in South Africa who undertook exploratory trips to UK institutions on their own. This resulted in five curatorial projects being supported, as summarised below:

1. *Annelize Kotze (Social History Curator at the Iziko Museums of South Africa) and Dr Andrew Mills (Curator for Archaeology & World Cultures, The Hunterian, University of Glasgow):*

Understanding the shared histories of ancestral human remains collections and developing curatorial strategy supporting repatriation efforts, between the Archaeology and Ethnography sections of The Hunterian and Iziko Museums.

Picture: Annelize to the left and Andrew to the right.



2. *Dr Motsane Getrude Seabela (Curator of the Anthropology Collection, Ditsong Museums of South Africa's Cultural History Museum & Dr Njabulo Chipangura (Curator of Living Cultures, The University of Manchester, Manchester Museum):* Interpreting social biographies of cultural objects at Manchester Museum, UK and Ditsong Museum, South Africa. Picture: Motsane to the left and Njabulo to the right.



3. *Dr Erica de Greef (Co-Director African Research Institute AFRI, Curator at Large in Fashion at Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCAA), Cape Town) & Alison Moloney (Independent fashion curator, lecturer and PhD candidate on the Advanced Practices Programme within the Visual Cultures department at Goldsmiths, University of London):* Addressing the ongoing absences of Black South African fashion histories in the Bernberg Costumes & Textiles Collection held at Museum Africa. Picture: Erica to the left and Alison to the right.



4. *Dr Melissa Boonzaaier-Davids (Abalone Scientist, formerly Assistant Curator - Marine Invertebrates, Iziko South African Museum, Cape Town):* An evaluation and complete inventory of the selected South African material stored within the natural history collections in both the UK and South African institutions, focusing on extant and fossil bryozoan collections.



5. *Francois Lion-Cachet (Curator - Public Engagement, Constitutional Court Art Collection, Constitutional Court Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa):* A comparative study determining how the law is visualised through art, architecture and judicial symbols at the Supreme Court of the UK (UKSC), in comparison to the Constitutional Court of South Africa (CCSA), examining the significance of such portrayals for our understanding of the law.



In November 2022, we published [a final project report about Protea](#), which was written and compiled by Mark Irving, Executive Curator of *Protea*, with input from Dr Nobulali Dangazele, UK project Manager for *Protea*, Mariapaola McGurk, South Africa Project Manager for *Protea*, and Sufina Ahmad MBE, Director of John Ellerman Foundation. The report found that *Protea* extended our organisational understanding of what curating is, the forms it can take and where and how it can have impact. *Protea* also provided valuable opportunities for individual curators to undertake field research within a curatorial framework that supported their own development, as well as their organisations, particularly in terms of acquiring new knowledge, international contacts and wider networks. The Framework was shaped around the three thematic areas of the Arts, Social Action and Environment – chosen due to these being the three funding categories through which the majority of grants are made by the Foundation. The expressions of interest and requests for proposals did, in some cases, demonstrate some overlap between thematic areas, but there was always a main or leading thematic area. The framework also offered three different phases of inform, interpret or implement through which enquiries could be framed – some curators took a linear route through all three phases, and others opted for ‘deep dives’ into one specific phase. The curators were supported to use the framework by the Executive Curator for *Protea*, Mark Irving.

Ultimately, *Protea* was intended to be a project that demonstrated the value of curating as a means for driving change by unlocking creativity, building alliances, fuelling support for different areas of work, and influencing power. This was well evidenced in the November 2022 report. However, we were keen to learn more of the impact of *Protea* for each of our curators one year on. This report shares the findings from these interviews. We hope that the findings from *Protea* will inform and influence the work of other funders that support curatorial practice in the UK and internationally.

## Methodology

In August 2023, Ciorsdan Brown, Head of Research and Impact at John Ellerman Foundation, met for up to 60 minutes on Zoom (digital conferencing software) with each of the curators involved in *Protea*. The curators were asked 12 questions, beginning with an exploration on why they had decided to participate in *Protea*, and what they had found most surprising, rewarding and challenging about the exchange, and whether they would participate in an exchange like *Protea* again or recommend it to others. There were also questions about their work one year on from the exchange, including the perceived benefits of the international curatorial exchange, if any, whether the partnership had continued and whether the exchange continues to inform their current work.

The final part of the interviews considered curatorial practice more generally, as well as exploring sectoral challenges and trends now and in the future, such as how the curatorial profession is evolving and the kinds of challenges and opportunities that curators must consider in their work, and their views on these, including those they believe should be prioritised. They were also asked about their views on the role of communities and audiences in collections management. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for the curators to offer their reflections flexibly. This review also considered the November 2022 final project [report](#) for *Protea*, alongside internal documentation on *Protea*, to produce the key findings shared in the next section.



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## Key findings

These findings are based on the inputs outlined in section two, namely the interviews with the eight curators selected to participate in *Protea*. Though the five projects and research areas differ, there are common threads linking them and below we consider these within three sections: impact on the individual; their practice and progress one year on; and wider reflections on context and the future of curation.

### *Impact on the individual*

The *Protea* programme was considered by the curators as a highly positive, unique and timely opportunity for all involved. Curators felt a synergy with the Foundation's aim to advance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world.

### *Flexible funding and timely opportunity*

All eight curators emphatically endorsed *Protea*, saying they would recommend it to others (with several mentioning that if there was the chance to take part again, they would love to do so). They particularly praised the flexibility embedded within the *Protea* programme, which enabled them to develop project scopes without always knowing what the outcomes or end goal would be. This allowed ideas and creativity to thrive. *Protea* funding also gave the curators freedom to take a break from their everyday practice or roles, with many citing that the exchanges offered their work renewed vigour and new insights and ideas – with five curators sharing that their work would have stalled or not happened at all if the opportunity had not arisen, and one curator outlining how they had gone round in circles and been unable to progress their ideas tangibly, despite lots of conversations, due to the lack of available and aligned funding opportunities. Several curators commented on the timing of *Protea*, describing it as “*absolutely perfect timing*”, or “*miraculously serendipitous*” for their work.

### *Knowledge building and exchange*

The acquisition and sharing of knowledge were central to the curators' experiences, with all eight using *Protea* to build on their existing expertise, but doing so in ways that were exploratory and inquiring. The participants came to *Protea* with a mixture of professional and personal experiences. They all had at least five years' professional curatorial experience, three were undertaking PhDs, and four already had PhDs. At the time of the exchanges, six were employed by museums or universities, two were independent and most were educators or had teaching as part of their roles. There was a common thread of reciprocal learning, not only in terms of the direct exchange of knowledge between curators as well as institutions and their counterparts, but also in learning being passed on and shared beyond the pairings. The curators reflected that they had benefitted from a broadening of their expertise, new international contacts and wider networks. Three curators that have organisational affiliations referenced that this had also elicited the same benefits for their organisations with further connections being brokered even after the exchanges had come to an end.

### *Challenges*

The curators felt very well supported by the project team, with each also expressing appreciation for the ample budget given to them, which allayed any worries or stress around paying for travel, subsidies and accommodation. However, one issue that was noted related to the communication around the exchange aspect of the programme, which meant that two participants made trips themselves without an exchange partner. One curator reflected in their interview that an exchange partner would have been really beneficial. One pairing formed a completely new project from scratch using their combined skills, experience and respective access to objects with common roots, which was noted as challenging initially because of the breadth of possibility and scope in deciding what to focus on, but ultimately thoroughly fulfilling for all involved.

There was some discussion from the perspective of participants based in South Africa, around the "*politics of access*" and the (seemingly inevitable) stress involved in getting visas on time to participate in the project. It is worth noting that these were challenges which were not equally felt or experienced by participants with UK passports.

Much of the work undertaken by some *Protea* curators and their associates required significant emotional labour, often accompanied by a deep sense of responsibility to communities to ensure their voices are heard and their wishes actioned, and to shifting the focus of curatorial practice in both the UK and South Africa. As discussion evolved it was evident that the slow pace of change and the power (or more often, lack thereof) to shift these systems is a heavy and at times frustrating burden to bear, and the *Protea* curators involved in such work should be recognised for their resilience and determination in the face of this.

### **One year on**

Curators felt that *Protea* supported them to continue developing their curatorial expertise and practice well after the exchanges came to an end. Some, but not all, have managed to continue building on their exchange findings, but there is extensive evidence of *Protea* having an impact on individuals, institutions and wider networks. Those that completed their exchanges in pairs seem to have elicited various benefits, including continuing to research and develop their work further.

*Protea as a contribution to a life's work and passion*

*Protea* offered most curators the chance to build on existing areas of curatorial expertise, whether by trying something new or exploring an adjacent subject in more depth. For others, it was more separate to their day-to-day roles, and they mentioned being keen to come back to it in order to progress the work. Much of the work is finding its place and audience, and in a couple of cases the work's progress lies in the hands of others, which means there is a feeling of helplessness in moving it forward. This is a heavy weight to bear and something that curators recognised as being not just a job but a life's work, inextricably linked to personal experiences and stories.

*Knowledge sharing with wider audiences*

Advancing knowledge and changing practice and language within curatorial spaces has been a key feature of six of the *Protea* participants' work, particularly those working in pairs, and it is evident that this has and continues to be built upon and shared. Each of the three pairs have continued to communicate and work with each other. All eight curators have been sharing their learning in various different ways, including through public speaking opportunities at conferences, lectures both to students and academics, articles for international publications, and one pairing has received funding to hold an exhibition which will be the main outlet for their research on the collection they have been investigating. In the case of PhD candidates, one has dedicated a chapter of their research to the learning from *Protea*. Another had a student take up an area of study that would not have been possible had the groundwork not been conducted as a result of their exchange. *Protea* has had an impact beyond the individual, similar to the expected outcomes of the Museum and Galleries Fund, which focuses on curatorial support for work that goes beyond the individual and institution and out into wider networks.



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### *Strengthened bonds and networks*

All eight curators were extremely positive about the benefits of international curatorial exchange, with some reflecting on the Foundation's bravery to go ahead with the in-person exchanges despite the Covid-19 related uncertainties. Those that were part of a pairing expressed that the opportunity to visit each other in their own contexts enhanced their working relationships and ability to collaborate, well beyond what would have been possible if they had used digital conferencing software only. Some of the curators knew (of) each other already, but had not worked directly together, and so *Protea* allowed them to build stronger ties between individuals and institutions. All eight also appreciated being able to meet the other curators as a way of broadening their networks, and sharing learning and expertise.



© Njabulo Chipangura



### *Access - seeing and feeling collections, context, people and buildings*

Having funding for up to 10 days in which curators had the time to discuss and interact with collections and communities were key benefits of the in-person exchange reported by *Protea* curators. Several curators described it as a “*profound*” experience and a deep personal journey of learning that in no way could be replicated through digital means. One example of this was the curatorial partnership between Annelize Kotze and Dr Andrew Mills, which provided Andrew with the rare opportunity to meet directly with communities who have suffered the loss of ancestral remains that are unburied. Both Annelize and Andrew described how their exchange allowed Andrew to consider the remains held in Glasgow in the context of South African communities in a tangible way, unlike anything that he has been able to achieve through pictures or email or even the remains themselves. Annelize shared that whilst in Glasgow and in the presence of these ancestral human remains, she had felt a deepened spiritual connection and responsibility to ensure their rightful repatriation.

Both Annelize and Andrew reflected in their interviews that the often violent ways in which specimens, sacred deities, ancestral remains and indigenous objects were “*acquired*” and, in

many cases, stolen has resulted in thousands of objects now existing under European museum “ownership”. The interviews with curators did often highlight the inextricable colonial links between the UK and South Africa, and that the significant physical distance between these two countries and continents impedes access such as that achieved via *Protea*. There were several examples given of the impact this lack of access to objects on “home soil” has in stalling the advancement of learning. In parallel, advances in technology have been made in Europe (for example with imaging software and technology), but due to their cost these are not easily accessible to curators in South Africa. There is a sense that until this changes, it will be more difficult to have parity with work that is being conducted in UK institutions, especially as those in South Africa are at the behest of UK and European colleagues who could help them with access, but who are also busy with their own work and priorities.

There was also discussion in four of the interviews around the remnants of colonial history which are still present and visible in South Africa, whether in the form of buildings, collections or objects which are hidden due to the shame associated with them (in reference to the Bernberg Costume & Textiles Collection, which is made up of predominantly white-owned European fashion objects – see image to the right), or in the form of the systems and symbols which are used today. The discussions also highlighted that whilst transformation is underway both in the UK and South Africa, there is still some way to go to shake off practices, taxonomies and policies that were embedded during the colonial period in which these museums were established. *Protea* provides robust examples of the synergy and learning that could be gleaned from those operating in both the UK and South Africa on participatory and decolonial approaches to their practice.



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### *Power and the pace of change*

Six curators expressed frustration at the slow pace of change in a few different areas, including the literal lack of access to collections, the need for funding to purchase innovative technologies which would enhance learning, or that progress on topics like the repatriation of human remains relies on legislative and institutional changes and there are limits to the role of individual curators.

Although the conversation on repatriation more widely, has moved forward, it was reported that there are also powerful voices within these institutions in the UK and elsewhere that do not wish to see change or believe it is necessary, therefore strong buy-in and sponsorship from senior leadership is vital. Perhaps an important reflection would be to consider why this buy-in has not happened in some cases, especially in terms of where decision-making power lies and with whom. It came through in multiple interviews that whilst the work of curators is at the forefront of academic thought and curatorial practice, ultimately they are operating in a

system where the views of influential and powerful people and institutions can dictate the pace of change.

One of the curators spoke of their admiration for the work of artists they have worked with recently, who use art as activism, and the pace at which they can mobilise, campaign, create and use their voices. They felt that this is less visible in the museums sector, but that potential collaboration and links between artists and museums could accelerate this. This and other interviews highlighted the potential for art to bridge the existing divide between the static physical museum and living and breathing communities, and whether museums are seen as too inaccessible, thereby perpetuating existing inequities in access.

### ***Reflections on wider curatorial practice***

Curators are still seen as the experts and have deep care for and understanding of their areas of research, but there is increasing recognition of the valuable knowledge which exists within communities and the importance of this knowledge being exchanged. Curators felt they had an important role to play in facilitating this exchange as well as “*rehumanising collections*” and changing perceptions of museums as colonial, unwelcoming and faceless institutions. There was reflection that the funding environment is challenging in both the UK and South Africa, with a need to fund the research which enables strong curatorial practice and positive community engagement. It is hoped that by raising awareness,

### ***The role of the curator***

The word curate comes from the Latin *curatus*, which means “*to take care of*”. *Protea* curators expressed that this core principle of care remains at the heart of curation and there continues to be deep importance placed on continuous learning, increasing knowledge and understanding, and caring for collections. There was mention of a shift from curators being seen or seeing themselves as God in the past, and this model was felt to be redundant and no longer desirable or acceptable by those interviewed. Furthermore, traditionally curators were sometimes perceived as knowledge hoarders, the ones who knew the most and therefore they had ownership over the collection in quite a hierarchical manner. Instead, the *Protea* curators believe a more accurate representation, especially in their own work, is that curators are custodians, who should be reflective, proactive and possess humility and empathy, and always place context at the forefront of discussions. As one curator put it, curators have a role to play in “*rehumanising collections*”, or “*putting the soul behind the science*”, as another said. One curator noted that communities possess just as much knowledge, if not more in some cases, than the curators they work with, e.g. in terms of provenance and care of objects that may not be noted in books or indeed in museum records, and this knowledge should also be revered and stewarded. Most of the curators interviewed, agreed with the idea that curators today have a duty to ensure that the knowledge they build is distributed, not locked away in one person’s mind. Two noted the importance that everyone, from the security guard, to the Director, to the receptionist, should have some understanding of the collection and its aims.

To conclude, curators have dual or multiple responsibilities – not only for collections and their care, but in connecting with audiences through the telling of stories which have been hidden, ignored or erased. They are seen as agents of change in the way they programme, interrogate and investigate provenance, with several striving for reparative justice, critiquing dominant institutions and holding them to account. This is an important part of the wider distribution and sharing of knowledge which is a theme of both *Protea* and the Foundation’s Museum and Galleries Fund. The role of the curator is evolving, but the root of curation remains intact.

### *Community, audiences and co-production*

There was discussion of what role communities have in understanding and honouring collections. The need to determine who we mean by community was expressed by some, as communities are not homogeneous. For example, there is an important discussion around the practice of involving affected communities i.e. indigenous communities with direct links and connection to certain objects within museum collections, but community is not limited to them – so the curator has a role in appealing to a broader spectrum of community whether that is a school pupil in Johannesburg or the Khoe-Sān peoples. What also came across from the interviews was the deep and time intensive work that goes into engagement methods that come from a place of integrity and understanding in order to build trust, particularly as museums can be viewed negatively given their histories.

This theme links with the earlier points noted on access and is particularly poignant in South Africa, because, as noted by four of the curators, it was only after apartheid that Black people were permitted to enter museums, therefore there is pain and trauma associated with these institutions which were exclusionary to Black people. Museums were places that were set up and run as if they were “*old boys clubs*”, as one curator said. A consensus from the discussions was that there is much more work to be done to repair the damage of colonialism and create spaces where everyone feels they belong. As one curator put it, “*without communities – what are museums?*”

These shifts mirror some of what is happening in the grantmaking and charity sector more widely both in the UK and in South Africa (the [#ShiftThePower](#) movement being one example which had its genesis in South Africa), with the move towards a more trust-based approach to funding. The central premise is to listen more intently, shifting decision-making power to a more participatory model and taking action to make changes based on deep and raw feedback. These shifts require determination and effort to see them through, and the same can be said for decolonising both practice and theory in the museums sector.

### *Funding*

The funding landscape for museums and galleries in South Africa and the UK is under significant pressure, and competition for funding is high, with the majority of funding for museums and galleries coming from government, provinces and local authorities. This has only become more difficult during and following the Covid-19 pandemic, with funds being diverted to fighting the disease. The competitive funding environment means that curators are noting a related lack of acknowledgement and investment into collections research and curatorial practice. One curator spoke of an increasing requirement for funding to be directed towards engaging communities, when in reality to build and progress their fields, funding for research is just as necessary, if not in some ways more important. If collections and research is not advanced, especially regarding decolonisation of collections and programming, then it will be difficult to have a compelling offer for schools or communities to engage with in the first place. The benefits of advancing research are not always visible or recognised as being important, and they are at risk of being disregarded or lost in translation. These reflections from *Protea* curators have parallels with the Museum and Galleries Fund and what we have heard from our grant-holders in the UK, that the important and necessary work of good collections management, furthering knowledge and research is often passed over in favour of community engagement.

However, it could be said that you cannot have good community engagement if the former is not done well or with integrity, as the two go hand in hand.

### *Reimagining museums and their stakeholders*

A theme which came up in discussion on four occasions was the physical manifestation of colonialism in the museum building. They are most often *"massive white buildings"*, as described by one curator, which are intimidating, patriarchal and not viewed as welcoming places. This is an issue common to both the UK and South Africa given the roots of the architecture are the same. Another point noted by the curators was that in addition to the inaccessibility of the museum building itself, the location of most museums (in the business district in large cities) is physically inaccessible to those living on the city outskirts. One of the museums mentioned by a curator was a former Fruitmarket, built with steel shipped from Britain and described as a kind of *"monument to colonialism and British Empire"*. In stark contrast to this intimidating, authoritarian and stern architecture, and part of the focus of Francois Lion-Cachet's research and *Protea* project, the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg possesses architecture and an art collection that symbolises justice as *in service* to the people of South Africa. Symbols of nature and biodiversity and their interdependence with humanity and justice are brought in too, differing greatly to the UK Courts and museums of the colonial past. In this example, South Africa's architects have intentionally framed legal proceedings as something that happens in harmony with nature *"thereby challenging Anthropocentric subordination, separation from, and the abuse of the natural world"*.

This discussion is mirrored in the UK sector in places, with a report commissioned by UKRI and created by The Liminal Space in 2021 on [Museums of the Future](#) advocating for, amongst many other things, new museums to consider the flow of their architecture in breaking down the image of the imposing institution, helping to make people feel more welcome and for museums to be places which are used day-to-day for work or meeting friends. Museums of the Future also comments that those *"who built and ran the museums of the past are not the same people who will create the museums of the future"*, suggesting that these shifts not only in museum practice but in the make-up of the people who work and govern them, are happening already, with more on the horizon.

### *The future of curation – where next?*

Curators reflected on the fact that curatorial work and practices are moving in the right direction in terms of community participation and co-curation, alongside a desire for the pace to pick up. There were reflections from six of the curators on the need for much more accountability and honest conversations around practices and approaches which were not only unethical but violent and traumatic for those involved. They felt that we should own up to these issues and *"face the music head on"*, as one curator put it, which is the only way to move forward with integrity.

There were also practical hopes expressed by the curators around being able to take the work forward in the form of bigger and more extensive exhibitions and events, research opportunities and seeing projects to fruition. One poignant example was a hope to one day see the burial of ancestral remains because, as told to the curator by an indigenous community member, *"the bones of those that came before us, they are talking and they are shouting at the museum and saying that they need to return to the soil"*.

## 5. Conclusion

*Protea* was intended to be a project that demonstrated the value of curating as a means for driving change by unlocking creativity, building alliances, fuelling support for different areas of work, and influencing power. Furthermore, by connecting curators in the UK and South Africa, the project sought to demonstrate what curators have in common but also to reveal what they have to offer each other and the contexts in which their fieldwork takes place. Through interviews with participants a year after *Protea* took place, we heard how a relatively small amount of flexible funding can have the most catalytic of impacts – enabling the curators to deepen their knowledge, explore new and untested areas of focus and to build deeper connections with others in their international curatorial community. Overall, *Protea* has been very positive, with particular highlights including its timing, how it was run, and that it offered curators space for reflection away from their day to day work.

Beyond this, one of the key findings from the programme which peppered the hugely insightful discussions with curators was the deep impact colonialism has had and continues to have on museum practice both in the UK and South Africa. In particular the interviews highlighted this in terms of: museum architecture and symbolism; indigenous objects which are hidden in European museums and should be shown and their stories heard; objects in South African museums which are hidden and gathering dust due to their apartheid past; the heartache of communities whose ancestral spirits have not been laid to rest; to the seabed, sand dunes and soil which are missing crucial fossils and specimens which were taken to advance European knowledge and scientific research.

Conversations around decolonisation, colonial legacies and restitution are happening in both countries, but progress remains slow. The increasing acknowledgement of the importance of involving communities, in a way that embodies decolonial practice as well as theory, is a common and very timely theme across continents. With many of the curators funded through *Protea*, there is not only a deep passion for community involvement but a strong impetus due to a feeling of responsibility that museums are nothing without the people whose stories they tell or who they share them with.

The *Protea* curators are pioneers and educators in the work they are doing and the connections and networks formed and strengthened with others internationally is vitally important. The curators involved in *Protea* are clear that the exchanges were worthwhile and enriching, and they are unequivocal in their support for in person exchanges. There is a sense from the discussions that both in the UK and in South Africa, there are individuals within curatorial spaces brimming with energy and ideas about the possibilities they are on the cusp of, but we are in a slightly ‘messy’ phase with stops and starts, not least because of a lack of flexible funding to take this important work forward. By bringing together these bright curatorial sparks and giving them the space, time and funding they need to explore and scratch the surface, *Protea* has unlocked a plethora of knock-on impacts, from stronger networks between institutions, basis for further academic research, knowledge being shared with global peer networks, uncomfortable but vital conversations around colonialism, as well as exhibition proposals, guest lectures, and strengthened bonds and community.

The *Protea* programme was instigated as a one-off celebratory initiative which formed part of the Foundation’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2021. Through our initial programme [report](#) from November 2022 as well as this ‘one year on’ review, which provides a deeper dive into the curators’ experiences and thoughts on curatorial practice in the UK and South Africa, we have uncovered key benefits of *Protea* for the individuals and the institutions involved as well as learning which is now being shared amongst the museum and galleries community on a

local, national and international scale. We believe that this valuable experience could and should be replicated by others with the funding to take it forward, and we hope that *Protea* and its findings provide something of a proforma to enable this to happen. Just as the 'how' of curatorial practice becomes more important, so too does the way in which we provide this kind of funding. The key features were a funding programme based on flexibility, trust, respect for participants' knowledge and expertise, wrap-around support in the form of project managers, an executive curator and a flexible curatorial framework. We hope that any funder or institution keen to build on this work would do so in the same vein, as we predict the results will be profound.

Thank you to all of the curators who gave of their time so generously in preparing for and answering our questions, and for providing such rich insights into their areas of focus, their experiences and wider reflections.