

CAPE TOWN,
SOUTH AFRICA
FEB. 27, 2025

#2
JOURNAL

LA

TABLE

DE



METIS



METIS
ARTS & DÉVELOPPEMENT

What is 'La Table de Metis's' purpose?

Our aim is to reflect, debate and compare points of view and knowledge in order to better understand the place and role of the arts in our societies. The Metis Table is held all over the world, wherever our Metis takes us. It is always held in small groups. Each time, it brings together around ten committed, enlightened and experienced personalities. A line of thought is proposed, and an exciting, sincere and lively discussion ensues. We are not looking for the truth, but for a plurality of truths.

To keep track of these exchanges, we produce a brief summary each time.

**BRIDGET
FURY**
Founder and
Director of
Bridget Fury
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**BRUNO
BOSLE**
Director of
Mobilization and
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Partnerships, AFD

**CHERYL
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CEO of
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Curator at the
October Gallery

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TABLE DE METIS

#2

CAPE TOWN,
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Arts and Nature: how do they inspire each other and how do they drive innovation?

We face pressing environmental challenges, as well as the social and economic issues that are deeply intertwined with them.

These challenges fuel artistic creativity—they sometimes propel artists to success or, conversely, expose them to criticism.

At the same time, arts and artists may have a key role to play in driving directly or indirectly better environmental responsibility and management.

**What are your perspectives?
How does this resonate with you?**

ZANA
MASOMBUKA
Artist

TRISTAN
MOULINE
Chief of Staff
to the Director
General, AFD

TIPHAINE
DE MOMBYNES
Director of the
Metis Fund

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Chairman of
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Our personal connections to the arts are **multi-faceted**.

Exploring the personal connection each person has with the arts reveals the great diversity of roles and places the arts can hold in our societies. These personal accounts allow us to revisit, in a more intimate way, what the arts mean — without trying to pin down a fixed or universal definition.

◆ Art as a gift:

For some, arts are a gift that keeps on giving, a source of eternal wonderment. Once it is admired, it becomes a part of you, and the emotion you can feel knows no barriers or limits.

◆ Art as building an identity and a connection to your own culture:

For others, art is a lighthouse for survival and preservation of their identity. It is the reflection of the balance between tradition and modernity they are experiencing personally. Through expression and representation in the Arts, humankind lives on.

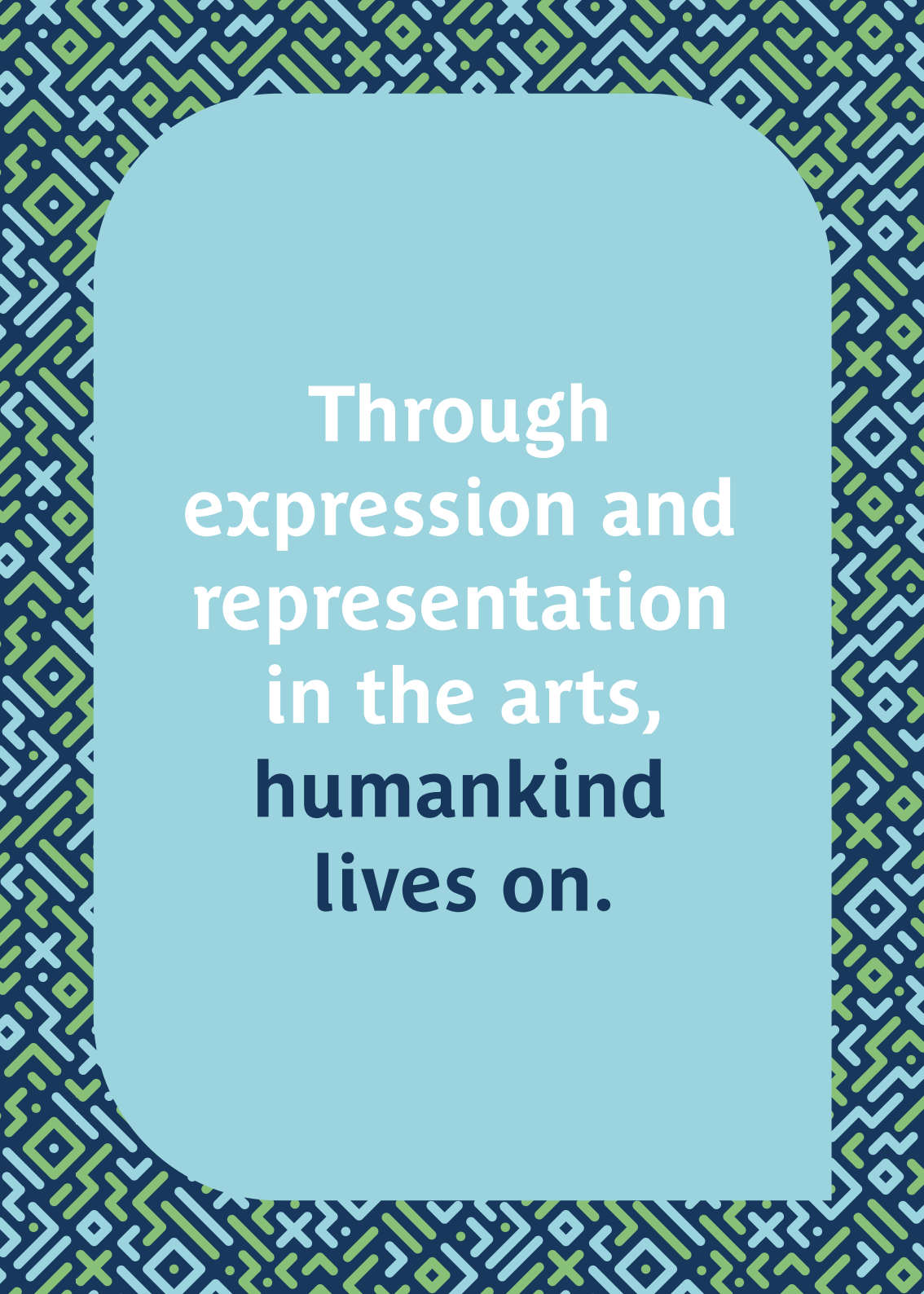
◆ Art as a bridge:

Art always connects two worlds, the artists and the public. It bridges imaginations and acts as an ever-open window that invites you to deeper experiences.


◆ Art to challenge:

Art involves deep contemplation, even when faced with commercial pressures, and it is sometimes there to challenge your perspectives.





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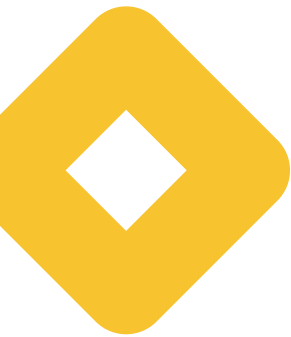
The link to art is not always
the same, as it lives in
constant flow between the
individual and the world.

For some, art is an external experience that
transforms into something deeply internal—
amazement, discovery, the elevation of the self.

For others, it is survival, a mirror of identity, a
lighthouse guiding them through times of trouble.

Sometimes the link is quiet, a soft presence in the
background. Other times, it is meant to disturb, to
challenge, to provoke thought. And sometimes, it
exists to empower, to give voice and strength.

Whatever form it takes,
art played a role
in everyone's life
at the table,
however near or far
they felt to it.



The ties between Arts and Nature are...

...NATURAL

- ◆ Sometimes the need for creation is instinctual, it happens without expecting it, the way the wind happens to the trees. When connected to nature, Arts are the natural next thing, an extension of Nature.

Nature inspires the energy
of art through its structure
and its essence.

- ◆ In Nature, there is an organic and evolutive balance that exists. Artists get inspired by it. There must also be a balance between rational and emotional aspects in art, much like the balance found in ecosystems.
- ◆ Just as nature has rhythms and cycles, artistic creation has moments of inspiration and flow. This energy is similar to working with nature—like gardening—where the act itself fosters a relationship with the environment.
- ◆ There are different practices of art in indigenous cultures. Arts are plural as nature: diversity and coexistence.
- ◆ Arts can connect people to nature through the physicality of creation. To create, the artist needs materials, and the access to these materials responds to the environment.



...POWERFUL,

- ◆ Practicing arts is what ignites the relationship to where you are. It holds power in the way it shapes emotionally, the relationship humankind have with nature.
- ◆ Consuming art opens your eyes to things that might be invisible. Arts have the power to tell you a lot without words, so for a consumer it reveals a space of nature that is hard to rationalize.
- ◆ Different indigenous groups use the same natural materials in unique ways. This creates a dialogue between cultures, showing how nature is both universal and deeply personal in artistic expression.

In the realm of art,
it is the people who live
within an environment
and create from it who
build the essential bridges
that help us understand it.

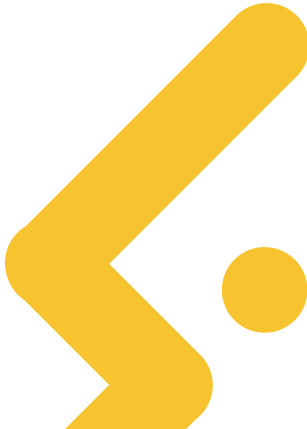
- ◆ Arts help with the intellectual curiosity, so when people understand it challenges the mind it's powerful. It can be disturbing for people business minded.




...AND YET, FRAGILE ALL THE SAME.

- ◆ Practicing arts comes quite naturally but still families or other forces can take you away from arts. Colonialisms for an example pushed colonized people away from arts.
- ◆ Artists respond to their environment out of necessity.

In societies there are human-made artificial boundaries. Wildlife, ecosystems don't care about border systems. The dichotomy also exists for Arts and Nature. Maybe it's time to drop those artificial boundaries.

- 
- ◆ Beyond the artists and the communities, economical barriers also play a crucial role in the way arts can engage with nature.



Stories we live-by: the interplay of world-building narratives and the Arts

Nature shapes the world, but narratives do too—and in that realm, the arts play a key role. Understanding the arts means understanding their dialogue with everything else: politics, society, and the environment. Like nature, the arts communicate profoundly, often without words.

IN A WORLD OF FLOWING NARRATIVES, THE ARTS HOLD THE POWER TO SHAPE, CREATE THEM AND LEAVE A LASTING MARK.

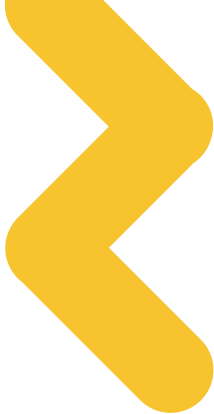
- ◆ **Art has the power of creating lasting resistance narratives. An example mentioned was that during the Boer War, Art was instrumental in that 30 years war. It allowed resistance to colonial power. To resist, people were painting inside the caves in Pretoria and because in 1880 people were sentenced to slavery, in 1902 they wouldn't paint with black anymore.**

- ◆ Some artists even changed the physical landscape itself, leaving a lasting mark on cities and environments. Architects like Gaudí in Barcelona or Niemeyer in Brasília transformed their surroundings in ways that shaped the identity of those places. Whether these artistic interventions are seen as positive or disruptive depends on perspective, as altering nature is always an act of interpretation.
- ◆ Another example mentioned was that the ancient artists that we can see today in the museums in Egypt were really good at the time and were also politicians, and what they showed back then is still relevant now. Hieroglyphics are a thousand years old but they told stories still relevant today.
- ◆ Art is an extension of society.



Art has the power of representation, it can reveal what is going on in nature, good or bad. Arts can shape the conversation humankind has with nature for the future generations.

- ◆ Some debates such as the need for strict definitions of preservation and conservation can be challenged by artists who differ.
- ◆ Art is also way to talk about politics.
- ◆ Some think the media is brainwashing us. This is where Arts can be the way to go beyond that or not.
- ◆ Art could be a communication tool. It is powerful and can be positive. But it depends on how it is used.



**YET WE MUST REMEMBER:
NARRATIVES WEAVE THROUGH THE THREADS
OF ETHICS, FUNDING, AND CIRCUMSTANCE.**

- ◆ There is an ongoing discussion about whether art should always carry a clear message or if that risks turning it into propaganda. Since artists are shaped by their environments, their work naturally reflects those influences, if the society is contained, the art could be contained too.
- ◆ It's hard to have nowadays freedom for artistic storytelling in Africa, because some of the stories artists want to share don't align with the concepts foreign funders expect of wilderness, pristineness, preservation.

Funders will only fund
the messages they want
to seek through.

- ◆ The paths of commercialization of art tend to be very constricting. Artists may not use their voices fully because they are caught in the commercialized space. Art fairs do not represent the true space and state artists are in, but they need to survive, and support families and themselves. Some artists might even chose not to follow an artistic career anymore because it is financially impossible for them.
- ◆ In the cultural centers the message is always the same, like propaganda. How do you advocate for something without propaganda?





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SO, HOW TO CRAFT NEW NARRATIVES FOR PUSHBACK?

- ◆ Arts shouldn't say the same thing as other languages. Shouldn't they say something different?
- ◆ But if artists exist and adjust to a certain environment, how do we expect them to do something different?
- ◆ There's another discussion about the youth's role in pushback. The younger generation, especially in Africa, is seen as a driving force for change. Yet, there's also recognition that they are not fully aware of the complexities of history and the layers of societal trauma, such as the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. In this context, pushback may be harder to sustain, especially when younger artists are not economically supported or protected.
- ◆ The digital age complicates pushback, as artists on social media may struggle with the fragmentation of their messages.

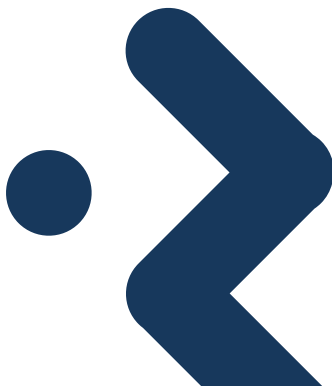


While technology allows communities to mobilize, it also creates fragmented, niche groups rather than a united front. The risk is that pushback becomes diluted or loses its collective power due to this fragmentation.

- ◆ The diaspora could play a huge role. In the current context, the retreat of western funds might be an opportunity for example for african investment coming from the diaspora to support the arts. Young african entrepreneurs are getting interested in these stories, in the communities and the way they interact with their environments. Will this free the narratives?

It is time for Africa to reset. It will be hard but imminent. And in this moment, it will be crucial to have stories to tell about africaness.

- ◆ But how do you create a different narrative? One that is not deeply rooted in western influence?
 - > We need to understand the differences but acknowledge the power of our similarities.
 - > If we do it with afro beats, we can do it with politics.
 - > Is it really important to have a Panafrikan approach? What's the benefit?
 - > Allowing our cultures to be malleable is necessary. Identities are not rigid.
 - > At UNESCO for example, there is a pattern of reinventing/resurging identities. You find the same pattern in nature.
- ◆ When talking about influence, it is also important to think of the global angle of Arts. What's in the galleries?



Freedom or duty : rethinking the artist's responsibility

When discussing how the arts shape narratives – especially in environmental and conservation dialogues – the question of responsibility inevitably arises. The arts undoubtedly have the power to convey impactful messages, but should artists take on that role?

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ARTIST...

- ◆ Some artists want to tell their stories, they deem this plurality of narratives crucial for youth.
- ◆ Artists who engage with their environments serve as bridges, helping communities understand their surroundings and themselves.

Artists have a responsibility
with the energy that comes
through them.

- ◆ As an actor for example, they float, feel energy, and feel a responsibility to honor this energy.






- ◆ Artists have plenty of material to work with, but many hesitate to use it because they're still figuring out who they are and aren't yet confident in using their own voices.
- ◆ Some don't see one moment coming through, they think artists are playing safe.
- ◆ It's also very privileged for us to judge the artists who are not as active when they cannot afford it. South African artists are not treated good.
- ◆ When artists see that big artists are not treated good, they see the results of going through the cave, and it is poverty. They don't want that.

But people want the revolution
and also the values, it puts
too much pressure on artists.

...AND THE COMMUNITY?

- ◆ Even if the link artist-nature is the most evident when it comes to artistic creation, we cannot foresee, nor expect, the communities to be separated from the shaping of this relationship.
- ◆ Communities, not just individuals, shape and sustain the possibility of creation. Sometimes, because the current functioning of African Societies works profit-centered, young Africans are pushed away from arts. Their community stops the possibility of artistic creation.
- ◆ Other times, communities survive through arts. Historically, art has been tied to power and resistance.
- ◆ Because we recognize the two-path way Artists and Nature interact, and we also acknowledge artists as part of societies and communities, we have to acknowledge that the community also holds a responsibility in facilitating the relationship, within their context, of Arts to Nature.
- ◆ There needs to be a space for arts to be encouraged, but once there is, the connection, the dialogue with nature is automatic.



**Communities,
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of creation.**



**The Metis Fund warmly thanks
all participants for their
contributions to this rich reflection,
which helps Metis nurture
its philosophy and actions.**

Thanks to Barbara Winkelried from
the Metis Fund for taking notes.

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