

Ifa Lethu Foundation opens first arts incubator at Mamelodi and recognises Fossil Casting graduates

- Final phase of three year creative entrepreneur development programme
 - Incubator to be used to create market-ready products for local and tourist trade
 - Creates jobs in the Mamelodi area
 - Fossil casting graduates to receive completion certificates
 - **Prof Lee Berger** speaks on the importance of fossil casting to meet world skills shortage in the area of fossil casting.
 - Official opening by sponsor **Helen La Lima, Dep. Chief of Missions, US Embassy**
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In a joint event, the Ifa Lethu Foundation – South Africa’s leading heritage repatriation and creative development organization – officially launched their first arts incubator at a function on 16 March, 2011 at the University of Pretoria Mamelodi Campus. The event also showcased the economic benefits of the fossil training programme undertaken in collaboration with the Origins Centre.

Ifa Lethu CEO, Dr Narissa Ramdhani, says the Incubator is the culmination of a three-year development programme for creative entrepreneurs.

“We started our development work three years ago in Mamelodi by choosing 12 talented young people who showed real promise in the visual arts. We developed these talents by using some of our heritage artists to transfer their artistic skills to these youngsters in a series of workshops. The next phase was designed, together with the University of Pretoria, to teach the participants both entrepreneurial and business skills and how to make a sustainable living for themselves and their families from their artistic talents. The opening of the Art and Creativity Incubator will complete the project by giving these young people a place to work and to create market-ready products particularly for the tourist market.”

“We have since expanded the programme to Soweto and have built on our lessons from Mamelodi,” says Ramdhani. Soweto will shortly also have its own Art and Creativity Incubator.

In addition, the Foundation will be working together with tourist and other organizations to put the Incubator on the tourist map for the region.

“We envisage tourists visiting the Incubator and engaging with the artists as they create their pieces and ultimately buy professional-standard art works from these emerging artists. The students are already producing wonderful paintings, drawings, sculptures and other works – all way beyond what we consider to be ‘crafts’,” says Ramdhani, “and we

hope this puts Mamelodi firmly on the map as a destination for both local and international art lovers.”

The Incubator is sponsored by the US Embassy.

Fossil Casting

In 2009, prompted by the world shortage of skills in fossil casting, and together with the Origins Centre of the University of the Witwatersrand, Ifa Lethu invited youngsters to apply for a Fossil Casting workshop. Little did they know that on Thursday April 8, 2010, scientists would announce to the world that 9-year-old Matthew Berger, son of renowned paleoanthropologist Professor Lee Berger, had found the bones of a new hominin species that lived almost two million years ago. This thrust paleontology and South Africa into world focus.

Two of Ifa Lethu’s fossil casting students – Boy Louw and Bongani Nkosi – had been offered employment by the University and, indeed, were part of the team that worked on *Australopithecus sediba*. On 16 March, Prof Berger will present the Ifa Lethu Fossil Casting students with their certificates of completion. They will also stage a display of their work.

“With Fossil Casting listed by our government on the National Scarce Skills List, we realized we could offer young people an opportunity to learn a skill in great demand. We are thrilled to have Prof Berger as our speaker and to hand over their certificates,” Ramdhani commented.

The US Embassy has sponsored both these programmes in Mamelodi.

