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JOHANNESBURG - South Africa has launched a major campaign to recover and protect lost township art chronicling the turbulent decades of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The drive to get the works back, many of which were bought by foreign diplomats and businessmen, is being hailed as crucial to securing some of the country's most influential art.

The effort is being led by the Ifa Lethu (Our Heritage) foundation, which said much of the art found its way to Britain, United States, Australia, Canada and Germany.

Township art depicts the harsh life in impoverished townships in the 1970s and 1980s - the two most violent decades of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Works already recovered were on display at the launch of the campaign, including paintings and sculptures.

The Ifa Lethu project began when former Australian High Commissioner to South Africa Diane Johnstone, gave it her collection.

Johnstone said she had assembled the collection with a view to giving it back to South Africa once the country ended racial segregation.

The Ifa Lethu collection will be housed at the Pretoria Art Museum from where it will tour galleries across South Africa.

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