

2019 UCT Book Award

***A History of the Iziko South African National Gallery:
Reflections on Art and National Identity***

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A History of the Iziko South African National Gallery: Reflections on Art and National Identity (UCT Press, 2017) is the first full history of the Iziko South African National Gallery. It traces the gallery's fortunes from its inception in the 1870s to the present day and considers the formative influence on the gallery of successive directors and trustees, as well as governments, showing how these have shaped its collection and exhibition policies.

A core aim of the book is to consider how national galleries understand their purpose – what is it to be *national*, what is it to be an *art* gallery? The question of the *national* is considered throughout the text, where it is shown that, historically and across the world, national galleries have often - paradoxically given their title - avidly collected art from outside their borders. In the book, South Africa's gallery is situated within this historical context. Against the backdrop of current decolonial debate, the question of whether a national gallery serves primarily to represent the nation's art or showcase that of an international art world becomes a pressing one.

The consideration of what it is to be an *art* gallery gives rise to a discussion of the debates concerning art's boundaries – be they with so-called 'popular' art, with craft objects, with objects of design. This study examines how the gallery has grappled with these issues over its history, and particularly in recent years as it has sought to expand its constituency. The conclusion to the book proposes a bold foundational analysis of the role of a national gallery in a rapidly-evolving nation such as South Africa. And, cognisant of the recent establishment of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, it considers how the two institutions might best complement each other into the future. Described by reviewers as "a quality study that ought to be read by anyone with more than a passing interest in galleries and museums" and a study of "impeccable archival research... and handling of contentious issues", this publication aims to uncover the often unspoken policies and politics of a public art institution.