

The value of art

By [Shakirah Dramat](#), issued by [Cornerstone Institute](#)

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Have you ever tried to imagine a world without art? The first thought that comes to the minds of many when posed with this question is often geared towards imagining a world without galleries, music concerts or dance studios. But what about the chair you're sitting on? The design of the phone you use every day, the logo of the company you work for or your favourite quote that was taken from a world-famous poem? Even though art is all around us, every moment of every day, it's one of the most undervalued sectors of our society - with many choosing to see it as a hobby or extracurricular activity.

When Covid-19 hit and global lockdowns were enforced the world went into a toilet-paper-buying frenzy. Many were unsure of how we would live without being able to move around as we please, without seeing our loved ones and, for some, without being able to go to work. I think it was less about not being able to partake in the outside world but more about not being able to socially connect. Cue the online creativity boom.

In an attempt to flatten the curve, our world was reduced to what society deemed to be 'essential' yet, essential did not include theatres, clubs, comedy houses or galleries. This is strange to me because as Kathleen Ebersohn, put it: "Art offers solace, hope and inspiration, even more so during periods of complexity." Society uses music, photography, poetry and painting to navigate, understand and explore the realities of past and present and to come to terms with what the future may bring. It helps us to develop perspective and provides a dependable source of catharsis and comfort.

We saw this boldly and clearly when online streaming became a way for us to stay connected and to retain our humanity. While millions of people in the world, and in South Africa, were stuck at home with just four walls and an internet connection we were once again forced to recognise and appreciate the resilience and importance of creative practitioners. Livestreamed poetry festivals, DJ sets and even theatre productions made people feel seen and understood – giving them the hope and courage to persevere.

Not only does art help us in the present, but it also plays the even more crucial role of preserving and capturing the human-experience of today, for the generations of next century. In the same way that ancient Khoi rock art or Egyptian carvings has helped us understand our origins, the photographers who captured the empty streets of Cape Town during our first 21 days, and the authors who wrote *The Lockdown Chronicles* have made sure that future civilisations are informed of our uniquely African experience during these unprecedented times.

Art doesn't only provide joy and escape, but it contributes to the global knowledge pool, in a world where Eurocentric ideologies and stories are at the forefront of almost every inch of modern-day society, it's increasingly important that we value and encourage the creation and celebration of African art. Over and above supporting governments by using art to combat the information-deficit in our country, and keeping people entertained and connected through virtual experiences; creative expression and artistic work has also ensured that the stories, our stories, of this turning point in human history is preserved and told in a way that science and academics could never relay. So why do we still find ourselves in a place of undervaluing the very thing that ensures we live forever?

If you want to be on the side of history that encourages and celebrates our voices, particularly in an African context, join Cornerstone Institute for their 50th Anniversary virtual concert on 28 November 2020 from 6.30 to 8.30pm. Cornerstone has long been an organisation that shines a bright light on music, creativity and the arts in general. This is evident in their 2021 launch of the country's first BCom qualification in Arts Management, and their stellar lineup of local and continental musicians who will bless your screens as we collectively send Cornerstone Institute off into the next 50 years of producing socially justice-driven graduates.



Saturday
28
 NOV
 18:30 - 20:30

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 Darkroom Contemporary
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 ... and many more.

Directed by: Basil Appollis
 Audio-visual: Eastern Acoustics
 Project Support: Cape Cultural Collective

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