



RETURN OF THE ARAB PRIEST

MEDIA STATEMENT



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The Arab Priest Returns

In 2011 the impact of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999 was evident when South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) refused the permanent export of Irma Stern's, Arab Priest. SAHRA found that the artwork by the prolific artist is a "valuable artistic document" that "transcended and crossed boundaries of religion and culture". Therefore, it "serves as a valuable document for South Africans of mutual respect between diverse cultures and religions". Following rigorous consideration, SAHRA and the owner, Qatar Museum Authority (now Qatar Museums) reached a mutual agreement resulting in SAHRA granting a temporary export permit for a period of twenty (20) years on condition that South Africans have access to the artwork once every five (5) years. In 2019 the artwork was on display at the Iziko South African National Gallery in an exhibition titled Irma Stern's 'Arab Priest': Image and Context, later that year it was exhibited at Javett Art Centre at the University of Pretoria.

This year, the 'Arab Priest' returns and the dialogue continues presenting an opportunity to engage on intersections of art, heritage and markets. We warmly invite community members, students, researchers, and heritage enthusiasts to exhibitions that inspire dialogue, learning and appreciation of our heritage to visit the second instalments of the 'Arab Priest' at the following institutions:

University of Pretoria

Hatfield Campus, Old Arts Building

20 March to 9 September 2026

Exhibition: The Return of the Arab Priest

The curated exhibition will focus on the materiality, construction and the conservation relevant interpretation of the; as a unique case study of restitution and repatriation of African cultural property; what lessons can be drawn for artefacts/artworks that are considered as part of the national estate and a particular focus on Stern's biography and practice with particular reference to her engagement with the City of Tshwane.

Iziko South African National Gallery

Cape Town

September 2026 – March 2027

For more information on the artist, artwork, hosting institutions and SAHRA's Mandate follow the link <https://www.sahra.org.za/news/the-arab-priest-returns/>

