

Pixels to Perspectives

Jagersfontein



BY LEONIE BOLLEURS



“Part of our lives was lost that day.” “The dam broke, and everything changed.” “It’s been two years, and no one has thanked me for the lives I saved.” These are just some of the voices of those who survived the catastrophic dam collapse in Jagersfontein on 11 September 2022, when a mudslide destroyed homes and left scars that the community is still struggling with. The event marks a painful chapter in Jagersfontein’s history – a town known for its diamond mining heritage, now marked by loss and resilience.

Healing through visual storytelling

In September this year, the community came together for the *Jagersfontein Meraka: Pixels to Perspectives* event, an art exhibition and public gathering aimed at promoting healing through visual storytelling. Held at Moth Square, Jagersfontein, the event featured a community photo exhibition, digital stories about the mine tailings dam disaster, and an open mic session for spontaneous performances. Through these creative outlets, the people of Jagersfontein had a platform to process their grief and rebuild their sense of community.

Prof Lochner Marais, Head of the Centre for Development Support (CDS) at the UFS, conducted research related to the Jagersfontein tailings dam tragedy. Data he collected also covered the nature and scale of trauma experienced by the affected community. In the process of working through the data, Dr Anita Venter, Lecturer in CDS, felt that the community had not said everything that needed to be said. In response, she facilitated this public art event, creating a space for collective healing. “People were

talking about photos, memories, and the deep hurt within them,” she said. The exhibition, where old and damaged photos were displayed, allowed the community to remember what was lost and to share their stories in their own voices. “Some people even went out and found the old photos and washed them. A woman told me the photo was of her husband who died five years ago. This was the only photo she had of him,” Dr Venter added.

This approach encouraged participation and ownership of their narrative. “It’s not just about displaying photos; it’s about helping the community heal,” Dr Venter reflected.

Bringing people together

Lenosa Mahapang, a UFS student and public artist, also contributed to the event. He saw first-hand how art brought people together. “Two months ago, some community members couldn’t even speak to one another. Now, through this exhibition, they’re healing as a collective,” he said.

, giving a voice to the survivors



Photos: Leonie Bolleurs



Lenosa Mahapang and Dr Anita Venter.



As the event concluded, Dr Venter left the exhibition in the hands of the community, empowering them to curate their future exhibitions. With plans for the next event already underway, Karabo Legetla, a student and performing artist, aims to host the 2025 exhibition in one of the houses damaged by the disaster, deepening the emotional connection.

Jagersfontein's Pixels to Perspectives represents a step towards recovery and supporting resilience through shared memories and creativity. 

