

Reaching Sideways, Creating Our Ways (Makhanda, 23–26 Sep 26)

Fine Art Department, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa, Sep 23–26, 2026

Deadline: Apr 15, 2026

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The 39th Annual South African Visual Arts Historians (SAVAH) Conference and Festival will be hosted by the Fine Art Department and the National Research Foundation (NRF) Arts of Africa Research Programme at Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa, from 23 to 26 September 2026. The theme of this year's conference is: Reaching Sideways, Creating Our Ways.

We invite scholars and practitioners from the arts and other Humanities disciplines to grapple with broadly defined ideas of reaching sideways in relation to the ways that we create. We strongly encourage lateral thinking/creating that expands this concept through personal interpretation, and that crosses the boundaries of disciplines and modes of practice.

The idiomatic phrase, “to go sideways” suggests that something is going wrong – it fails, veers out of control, deviates from the original plan, takes a turn for the worst, or ends up a disaster. Similarly, if a situation “goes south” it is said to be declining, decreasing in value, weakening or decaying. Such idioms are predicated on Western ideas of linearity, hierarchy, privilege and value that favour the global north. But what if we consciously reach sideways? What if we actively embrace a sideways slip and, with lateral thinking, we contest value-driven assumptions about up/down or success/failure?

Positioning this event as a conference and festival, we support presentations that creatively engage with and expand upon academic presentation styles, including collaborative presentations and performance lectures. We welcome student participation, student and staff collaboration, as well as cross-institutional partnership. Proposals for short forms of live art, sound art and video screening will also be considered.

Presentations can relate to, but need not be limited by, the following sub-themes:

- Reaching sideways as collaborative ways of engaging
- Reaching sideways to develop transgressive learning and emancipatory pedagogies
- Intra-Africa and/or south-south research and collaborations that are relevant to our own contexts in South Africa and beyond
- Fostering nimble, lateral thinking that contests colonial legacies in academia as we embrace embodied, spiritual, creative and intuitive ways of knowing and creating
- Working across art history and fine art practice as we activate collaboration and interaction
- Working across disciplinary boundaries as we connect with other Humanities scholars and practitioners

- Reaching sideways through philosophies and practices of ubuntu and indigeneity in the arts
- 'Sideways' forms of self-identification that resist hierarchies, linearities and stereotypes
- Working collaboratively within communities and public spaces in respectful, non-extractive ways
- Upending ideas of success and failure as we counter hierarchical, colonial thinking
- Confronting conventional ways of being in academia as we embrace activism and practices of social justice
- Challenging epistemic traditions and knowledge creation as we question what knowledge looks like and how it behaves
- Challenging facile, romanticised notions of reaching sideways that might flatten the complexities and struggles of building solidarity and collaborating in meaningful ways.

Submission guidelines:

Please submit an abstract of 300 to 400 words via the SAVAH website (Annual Conference > Submit Abstract) by Wednesday, 15 April 2026. Include a short bio with your affiliation (if applicable) and clearly indicate the format of your proposed presentation. The Call for Papers can be downloaded from the savah.org.za website. For any queries please contact conference@savah.org.za.

Limited funding will be available for postgraduate students. Please indicate if you are a student who would like to apply for funding assistance and include your degree, institution and year of registration.

Reference:

CFP: Reaching Sideways, Creating Our Ways (Makhanda, 23-26 Sep 26). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 12, 2026 (accessed Apr 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51952>>.