

African Critical Inquiry Programme Announces 2021 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards

The African Critical Inquiry Programme has named Bongiwe Hlekiso and Robert Uys as recipients of the 2021 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards. Both are South African students in History at the University of the Western Cape. Support from ACIP's Ivan Karp Award will allow Hlekiso to do significant research for her dissertation, *Becoming a Hidden Treasure: A Biography of Umbhaco and its Interrupted Trajectories*, including work on collections and display histories at the Amathole Museum and East London Museum in the Eastern Cape. Uys will use his Ivan Karp Award support to pursue research in uMgungundlovu (Zululand), Ulundi and Pietermaritzburg for his project *The Place Where the Elephants Meet: Nationalist Myth-making at uMgungundlovu and Dingaanstat, 1838-2020*.

Founded in 2012, the African Critical Inquiry Programme (ACIP) is a partnership between the Centre for Humanities Research at University of the Western Cape in Cape Town and the Laney Graduate School of Emory University in Atlanta. Supported by donations to the [Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz Fund](#), the ACIP fosters thinking and working across public cultural institutions, across disciplines and fields, and across generations. It seeks to advance inquiry and debate about the roles and practice of public culture, public cultural institutions, and public scholarship in shaping identities and society in Africa through an annual ACIP Workshop and through the Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards, which support African doctoral students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences enrolled at South African universities.



About Bongiwe Hlekiso's project:

Becoming a Hidden Treasure will trace biographies of *umbhaco*, a skirt that is worn by Xhosa-speaking women when getting married, attending ceremonies and on other special celebratory occasions. It is mainly - although not always - identified through its off-white colour, floor length span and horizontal black lines in the bottom half of the skirt. Yet, the pattern, colour and length continually change as it undergoes different processes of production, circulation and consumption. This has led me into tracing the different spaces through which *umbhaco* moves, including shops in the Woodstock area in Cape Town, small trading shops in Voortrekker road and Bellville, museums and art galleries. *Umbhaco* has also been repurposed in the fashion industry by designers such as Stoned Cherrie and many more in clothing lines for women and men.

The project starts with locating *umbhaco* within Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG), where it was displayed in the *Hidden Treasures* exhibition from August 2017 to January 2020. Yet the garment is far from being merely a museum object, sometimes portrayed there as fixed in meaning for what is often incorrectly referred to as

Xhosa culture and tradition. I will examine the multifaceted use of *umbhaco* in and beyond the spaces of the museum and these other imaginations of tradition, examining the making of *umbhaco* by different producers and what stories are told through its making. The project will include working with collections, accession records and histories of *umbhaco* display at the Amathole Museum and East London Museum in the Eastern Cape, as well as at ISANG and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. I will also interview producers, distributors and wearers of *umbhaco* to analyse the various narratives around its diverse uses. *Becoming a Hidden Treasure* will interrogate the garment as a cultural commodity and how different and changing meanings and values are placed on it.



About Roberty Uys' project:

The Place Where the Elephants Meet is concerned with the stories of uMgungundlovu (the gathering place of elephants) – a mythically and narratively textured site in Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal.

uMgungundlovu is historically charged and the site of origin for some of South Africa's most salient nationalist myths. It's located near the Zulu Valley of the Kings and was the site of the royal enclosure and capital built by Dingane Senzangakhona Zulu after he assassinated his half-brother Shaka and became king in 1828. It is a site ingrained within the mythic consciousness of what would become known as the Zulu people. Simultaneously, uMgungundlovu has a central role in Afrikaner nationalist myth – this is the place where Voortrekker Piet Retief and the seventy Burgers who sought Zulu land were massacred at Dingane's order. This research will consider the intersecting nationalist mythologies of uMgungundlovu. It will consider how these myths were created, propelled and rebelled against through the different sets of structures built at the site: Retief's grave and a monument erected in 1922, a Dutch Reformed Church mission station inaugurated in 1949 (and burned down in 1989), a replica of Dingane's royal enclosure dating from the 1980s, and a new Multimedia Centre with displays on Zulu history built in 2008. I will explore some of the fallacies of the myths affiliated with these structures. However, the point of convergence will be on how myth was utilized as a positive force, something that brought depth and meaning to people's lives living in and around uMgungundlovu.

Information about the 2022 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards for African students enrolled in South African Ph.D. programmes will be available in November 2021. The application deadline is 2 May 2022.

For further information, see <http://www.gs.emory.edu/about/special/acip.html> and <https://www.facebook.com/ivan.karp.corinne.kratz.fund>.