

**Laura de Harde**

***Inherited Obsessions***

Best Creative Collection: Exhibition Catalogue

## A VISIONARY ARTIST, RESEARCHER, AND CURATOR

**W**e are thrilled to highlight Laura de Harde, a dynamic force in the scope of art, research, and curation and the recent recipient of the prestigious Best Creative Collections: Exhibition Catalogue at the 2023 HSS Awards. Laura's journey unfolds as a narrative of passion, collaboration, and profound exploration into the heritage and cultural narratives that shape our understanding of the world.

Laura, a former Postdoctoral Fellowship recipient with the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), completed her fellowship at the University of Pretoria in September 2022. Her collaboration with Matsani Getrude Siabila, the curator of anthropology at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, led to the creation of an exceptional exhibition catalogue. This collaborative endeavour delves into the significance of our relationship with heritage artefacts, posing vital questions about global and South African heritage.

The award-winning exhibition, unveiled on Heritage Day in



2022, stands as a testament to years of dedicated collaboration with academics, co-collaborators, the museum, the university, ESI Press, and the NIHSS. Laura's multidisciplinary approach, blending creative expression with scholarly inquiry, resulted in a thought-provoking book that not only encapsulates her vision but also provides a platform for non-authors to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse.

Laura initiated this project in response to the NIHSS's concerns about post-colonial approaches to heritage scholarship, and her innovative response has now been recognised as an exemplary contribution to the field. The transformation of the project into a peer-reviewed publication allowed Laura to give back to her collaborators, generating nine subsidies for contributing authors.

As we delve into Laura de Harde's journey, we are invited to witness the fulfilment she found in merging her roles as a researcher, curator, academic, and artist during her NIHSS fellowship. The cherry on top, as she describes it, is the acknowledgment received through

## HSS WINNERS :: 2023



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the Best Creative Collections award, marking the culmination of a truly remarkable and rewarding experience.

Laura's story is one of vision, creativity, and collaboration, and her achievements resonate not only as a personal triumph but as a testament to the power of interdisciplinary exploration in shaping our understanding of heritage and culture.

### **Winner for Best Creative Collections: Exhibition Catalogue 2023 HSS Awards**

My name is Laura de Harde, and I am an artist, researcher and curator and most recently I completed my Postdoctoral Fellowship with the NIHSS as a research fellow at the University of Pretoria and that was at the end of last year September 2022.

### **What is the significance of the awards to you**

This award recognises the exhibition catalogue that I co-produced in collaboration with Matsani Getrude Siabila, the curator of anthropology at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Our collaboration involved working with the museum's archive to explore our heritage through objects, questioning the relationship we have with these artifacts housed in museums. The project aimed to engage with the broader questions surrounding global and South African heritage.

The exhibition, which opened on Heritage Day in 2022, was a culmination of years of collaboration and conversations with various academics, co-collaborators, the museum, the university, ESI Press (the publisher), and the NIHSS. Bringing together these collaborators allowed us to produce a book that includes contributions from non-authors like me, contributing to the ongoing conversation. The efficient production of this book within a short timeframe indicates the genuine excitement and interest in engaging with these ideas. It highlights the importance of having a space to grapple with these concepts creatively, visually, and through text, as showcased in both the book and the visual components of the exhibition.



**What were you trying to achieve with this project**

I initiated this project in response to one of the overarching concerns highlighted by the NIHSS regarding perceived shortcomings in post-colonial approaches to scholarly thinking about heritage. Taking this as my starting point, I contemplated a visual and creative response, along with a text-based one. Initially, I wasn't certain about the direction I wanted to take, but my supervisor suggested a book at the outset of my fellowship.

Around a year and a half later, recognising the need for an exhibition, I decided to create an exhibition catalogue. Wanting to give back to the contributing authors, I transformed it into a peer-reviewed publication. This decision allowed me to generate nine subsidies, enabling each author to achieve a peer-reviewed publication from their contributions. This aspect of the project was immensely rewarding, providing a meaningful way to give back to the collaborators involved.

**Do you have a parting message**

That's a good question, and throughout the entire process, I felt a sense of fulfilment. When I initially wrote my proposal for NIHSS fellowship, and Dr. Justine Vincis, my PhD supervisor, mentioned that it would be the cherry on top of the PhD cake, I didn't fully grasp the significance. However, looking back over the 2 1/2 years since I started the fellowship, I can affirm that she was absolutely right. It has been an incredible opportunity to bring together various aspects of my passion, research, creative endeavours, and artistic practice to create something I am genuinely proud of.

This fellowship allowed me to realise my vision of what it means to be a researcher, curator, academic, and artist, amalgamating all these roles into one project. The collaborative nature of the endeavour, with contributions from various collaborators, made the two years truly wonderful. Being awarded this fellowship is like the cherry on top of the cake, and it has been a fantastic experience overall.



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