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'DocuFest Africa' exhibit delves into Sunday Times' historic photo archives

This fascinating photography exhibition in Johannesburg features "rare and unusual images of life in South Africa taken by leading photographers at the height of apartheid"

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June 8, 1976. The setting sun casts a golden glow over the buildings, aerials and motorways of Johannesburg. A Golden city in its 90th anniversary year.

Image: Les Bush/ Rand Daily Mail/ Tiso Blackstar Group

AT A GLANCE:

WHAT: *DocuFest Africa: The Exhibition*, images from the 1950s to the 1980s.

WHO: Images from the Tiso Blackstar Group Collection, as well as photographers including Paul Weinberg, Gille De Vlieg and David Larsen.

WHY CARE: It features "rare and unusual images of life in South Africa taken by leading photographers at the height of apartheid".

WHERE: FotoZA gallery, Rosebank, Johannesburg.

WHEN: Until May 27 2018

FULL REVIEW

Images shot during apartheid are often intense but necessary. While newspaper reports from that dark era in South Africa's history should sometimes be taken with a grain of salt because of bias and propaganda back then, a photograph never lies.

Curated by Reney Warrington and featuring collections represented by Africa Media Online, a new exhibition in Rosebank takes us back to that era through rich imagery that shows the different worlds South Africans lived in - after all, apartheid didn't affect everyone equally.

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So have you ever been curious about what exactly is in the archives of newspaper groups and how they are kept? Phillip Kgaphola, Tiso Blackstar Group's senior photographic librarian, says his job entails processing and tagging all print stories and photographs to make them available for future use and for purposes of syndication.

"The archive hosts all Tiso Blackstar Group's historical content such as vintage photographs, press clippings, microfilm, vast volumes of bound newspapers," he says.

Tiso's archives include titles such as Sunday Times, Rand Daily Mail, Business Day, The World, Sowetan and Financial Mail. About how far the archives date back to, Kgaphola says it varies because it has photographs, transparencies and negatives from various newspaper titles.

The Tiso collections that will be shown at *DocuFest Africa* date from the early 1950s to the present.

Part of the collection, Kgaphola says, is housed at Museum Africa - and "dates back to the early 20th century".

Does Kgaphola have a favourite photograph from the archives?

"It is difficult for me to pick a favourite picture. However, I am more partial to images depicting the architecture and the ordinary life of people living in this great city [Johannesburg]. One picture that stands out for me is a picture of a street scene, taken at Eloff Street, with double-decker buses taking commuters to different parts of the city in the late 1970s."

Why does Kgaphola believe that archiving is important? "[It] plays a critical role in preserving our history. We have a duty to save and preserve our content, not only for easy access and retrieval but for posterity as well."

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