

3 February 2026

## **JHF/FOJ Response to JAG Artworks Relocation Plan Proposed by JDA**

Over the past month or so, the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation and Friends of JAG (JHF/FOJ) have noted a number of social media posts and press statements from the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) and the City of Joburg (COJ) regarding the relocation of artworks from the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG).

In the interests of clarity, JHF/FOJ wish to state that we do not support the JDA/COJ relocation plan in its current form.

Since at least September 2024, JHF/FOJ has been instrumental in raising awareness about the deteriorating conditions prevailing at JAG – both in terms of the poor physical condition of the building and the sub-par storage conditions for the priceless JAG collection of artworks.

Following several engagements with JDA during 2025, we are gratified to note that restoration planning for the JAG building is currently underway, supervised by suitably qualified heritage architects. The JHF/FOJ have nominated a working team of independent, experienced engineers and architects on a volunteer basis to provide support and oversight of the entire process. Although still in the early stages, the building renovation process appears to be progressing well and communications between the heritage architects and our working team have been constructive. We would point out, however, that the estimated time frame for the successful completion of this extensive renovation is between 3 and 5 years, not mid-2027 as was announced by Mayor Morero at the G20.

The relocation of the JAG artworks, however, remains contentious.

Following initial discussions with the JDA and COJ, it was acknowledged that the JHF/FOJ was a legitimate stakeholder in JAG and – towards the end of 2025 – it was requested that we all sign a Partnership Agreement so that we may ‘speak with one voice’ on the JAG. JHF/FOJ furnished a draft partnership agreement to the city for their comment but have not yet received a reply.

In the interim, the JDA unilaterally announced that the JAG artworks would be relocated to three sites around the city: Museum Africa (MA), the Johannesburg City Library (JCL), and the Brixton Recreation Centre. Construction began almost immediately on a ‘shell-space’ located on the top floor of MA for storage and restoration of the artworks.

JHF/FOJ has no objection to using the JCL to store the JAG’s book collection and other print material as it is suitably secure and fit for this purpose.

In terms of Museum Africa, following a show-and-tell to the press in September 2025, JHF/FOJ were invited for an inspection on the work completed thus far. Our inspection team

included independent curators, restorers, architects and art experts. The report generated highlighted a number of serious issues with the MA space regarding security, temperature control, water ingress, access points, unsuitable location, etc. The unanimous conclusion was that the new shell at MA was not fit for the purpose of storing the JAG collection.

These detailed findings were communicated to the JDA and a response was received from the contractors describing the remedial action being taken to address our concerns. Nevertheless, the JHF/FOJ recommended that the shell space at MA would be better used to enhance the storage conditions for MA's own valuable collection, and suggested an alternative storage location in Johannesburg that would be more appropriate for the unique and specialised requirements of the JAG artworks.

In order to find a definitive solution that would be in the best interest of the JAG collection, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2026, we requested a site meeting at MA with the JDA to discuss further. No further response from JDA has been forthcoming. Other attempts to organise collaborative events, such as a proposed restoration masterclass, have similarly been rebuffed by the city.

The JHF/FOJ are considering the appropriate next steps but wish to state that we cannot support the JAG relocation plan to Museum Africa in its current form and distance ourselves from the results should it go ahead. We would sincerely like to engage constructively with the city to find a mutually-agreeable solution that meets international best practise.

We would also like to note that no artwork may be removed from the JAG without the approval of the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) and a properly constituted Art Gallery Committee (AGC), and we request that these reports be shared prior to any artworks being moved.

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