

Beautiful Project, GIPCA's final 2011 performance

The Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) is celebrating the culmination of a valuable artistic year with the Beautiful Project, to be held at UCT's Hiddingh Campus and the Cape Town City Hall on 9 and 10 December 2011.

This unique two-day event calls into question the definitions of 'beauty' and 'ugliness', with some specific reference to the African continent, through music, film, theatre, culinary experiences and conversations.

Leading cultural commentator and critic Sarah Nutall will give the keynote address from which the event takes its thematic inspiration. Nuttall is recognised locally and internationally as a prominent voice in the on-going debates on cultural theory, particularly for her fresh perspective on the contemporary South African context. Here, she takes a closer look at exoticism in the context of women and race, particularly through the work of Harlem Renaissance performer Josephine Baker, and Johannesburg-based artist Mary Sibande.

Creative explorations of the notion of "aesthetic" will take place in various forms over the two days. On Friday, the emphasis is on the feminine, while on Saturday the focus is drawn to issues of masculine identity.

Three films will explore versions of beauty

Dancer-choreographer Nelisiwe Xaba will perform "They Look At Me And That's All They Think". Fresh from London's Dance Umbrella, it probes the ideas of beauty and the gaze, using the story of Saartjie Baartman as allegory. The theatre work of Nicola Hanekom takes on a different approach to the notion of beauty and women's bodies. With Hol, a work directed by Fred Abrahamse that is performed almost entirely on a treadmill, Hanekom investigates the pressure and consequences of notions of beauty and excellence.

On Saturday afternoon three films explore versions of beauty, mainly through the masculine. "The Adonis Factor", from the director of "The Butch Factor" and producer of various E! Online's True Hollywood Story, looks into stories of the 'buff' and the 'unbuffed', illustrating the roots, stress, addiction and consequences of body obsession. "Glitterboys and Ganglands" is Lauren Beukes' peek behind the drag curtain at Miss Gay Western Cape.

On Saturday evening, the grand finale of the Beautiful Project, The Beautiful Feast, an eight-course 'processional dinner' takes place at Cape Town's City Hall, prepared by theatre director and chef Peter Hayes. This unusual experience promises a night when food, art, dance and theatre interweave and reflect each other's peculiarities. The evening includes collaborations with James Webb, the UCT choir, Julia Raynham, Fiona du Plooy and Gaetan Schmid.