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Department of Arts and Culture

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## Media Advisory

### **SAHRA AND WSU TO UNVEIL THE DECLARED BROSTER BEADWORK COLLECTION OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and Walter Sisulu University's (WSU) will unveil the specifically declared Joan Broster Beadwork Collection "A collection from abaThembu, amaMpondo, amaMpondomise, amaBomvana, amaXhosa and amaXesibe at the institution's Mthatha main Campus on Friday, 18 March 2016.

SAHRA declared the Broster Beadwork Collection as a Specifically Declared Collection on 19 June 2015 in terms of Section 32(4) of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999, after extensive consultation with WSU and other stakeholders. This means that the Collection is protected and shall be conserved for future generations.

The Collection was purchased from Joan Broster, in the 1980s, by the then University of Transkei, (now Walter Sisulu University). It is mainly from the Qebe area in Engcobo, Eastern Cape and was collected by Joan Broster (nee Clarke), between 1952 and 1966.

The Broster Beadwork Collection comprises many objects that are significant in furthering the knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of Southern Nguni peoples in the Eastern Cape (EC). Joan Broster's grandfather pioneered a trading business in the Engcobo district of the Transkei in 1875.

Four Clarke generations lived among the abaThembu Clan before Joan Broster, as a young bride, moved to the village of Qebe in 1952, to run a family trading store. There she studied AbaThembu traditions, and developed a passion for their beadwork. Joan collected and documented her extensive collection, particularly the local costumes and beadwork of the AbaThembu, which demonstrated how minutely beadwork mapped social identity within this Xhosa-speaking community.

She also used her contacts with the network of traders in the region, to collect beadwork from other Xhosa-speaking groups, such as amaMpondo, amaMpondomise, amaBomvana, amaXhosa, and a refugee group of the amaXesibe that had settled among the abaThembu in the early 1800s, and adopted their customs and dress.



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This is one collection that is worthy of conservation and that cannot be recovered if lost by this generation. Beadwork is under represented in the historical narrative of our archival institutions, hence an undertaking to preserve this historic collection so that it could be bequeathed to future generations.

It was several decades later in 1995 that WSU, recognising the importance of the pieces to the Xhosa heritage, would buy the collection from Broster.

The assortment contains 3 000 objects depicting the cultural history and beadwork tradition of the Qebe community which were used for ritualistic and symbolic significance and personal adornment.

“This collection is very important in furthering the knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of Southern Nguni peoples in the Eastern Cape. As much of the traditional material culture has left the province, and there are few similar collections left, even in museums, it is important, wherever possible, to preserve what is held by other institutions, for future generations to research and enjoy,” said WSU Africana and Special Collections Library head, Ms Vuyiswa Lusu and Ms Nolitha Ngcai: SAHRA Heritage Officer.

Following the collection’s elevated status, WSU quickly resolved to find new premises devoted solely for the safe and secure storage and maintenance of these national treasures. “The University has upgraded a venue for purposes of storing this collection. This has been an on-going project and many phases have already been successfully achieved, including public participation drives involving relevant stakeholders, most notably the Qebe community,” said Ms Lusu and Ms Ngcai.

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**ISSUED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY (SAHRA) AND  
WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY (WSU)**



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