



Outgoing Festival artistic director Ismail Mahomed (far right) chairs a Think!Fest panel with Marcel Meyer, Margit Niederhuber and Albie Sachs. Photo: Cue/Michelle Laver

## Artistic expression of history

Adriana Georgiades  
Cue student reporter

“I just want to thank you all for doing this show and telling these stories, because the history books don’t tell us that there were so many white people that fought for us.”

These were the words of a 17-year-old PE schoolgirl to Jackie Rens, the woman who played Ruth First in the play *Ruth First 117 Days*. The play is an adaptation of the struggle activist’s autobiography. Rens is teary-eyed as she recounts the moment she realised the importance of bringing stories like these to the stage; stories that she admits even she was unaware of.

With many of the works featured in this year’s Festival inspired by

biographies and novels, a panel discussion entitled *Words That Inspire and Conspire* met to discuss the merit of this kind of work.

According to Marcel Meyer, writer of *Ruth First 117 Days*, the biggest challenge was condensing the 200-page book into a play while still incorporating the visual and auditory aspects absent from the book.

Chairperson Ismail Mohamed, outgoing artistic director of the Festival, asked where artists get their inspiration from in today’s uncertain, shifting world. Albie Sachs and Margit Niederhuber, co-editors of *My Johannesburg* who were also on the panel of speakers, agreed on the value of drawing inspiration from novels as they convey important stories buried in history by retelling them on the stage.

## The sights and sounds of Jozi

Chelsea Haith  
Cue student reporter

Margit Niederhuber and Albie Sachs wandered down memory lane together at Think!Fest on Friday morning when they spoke about their collaborative effort, *My Johannesburg*, a book of interviews and photographs telling the stories of people who live in South Africa’s biggest city.

Niederhuber has put together similar books on Nairobi, Maputo and Dakar. As an Austrian, she says that when she began moving between Africa and her home country she found that Europeans didn’t understand that Africa had cosmopolitan cities. “I’ve had so many beautiful experiences here that Europeans don’t understand,” she says. Her books are written in English and German to cater to

a European readership.

Sachs spoke of his experience of Johannesburg from his 15 years working at the Constitutional Court. Despite currently living in Cape Town, Sachs got to know Johannesburg in his days of working in anti-apartheid activism. “If you want to get to know a place, do clandestine work in it,” says Sachs.

The book also functions as a springboard for trombonist and composer Christian Radovan to create a concert of music, which he is performing at the Thomas Pringle Hall. Radovan is an Austrian who grew up in Gauteng. “He found the book so inspiring and composed music for it. The performance is a mixture of music and text,” says Niederhuber.

*My Johannesburg*, Thomas Pringle Hall, Monument, today, 3pm



Margit Niederhuber (left) and Albie Sachs in conversation. Photo: Cue/Megan Kelly