

## 2019 Creative Works Award

### Design-build exhibition: *Macassar "Who we are"*

#### Mr Clint Abrahams

Clint Abrahams is an architect and emergent academic at the School of Architecture, Planning & Geomatics. He is the founder of *Studiolight*, a non-profit through which mutually beneficial relationships between communities and higher learning institutions are explored for the emergence of socio-spatial restorative architecture. Abrahams' *Studiolight* exhibition entitled *Macassar "Who we are"* explores the re-authoring of socio-spatial narratives and how these can critically engage the postcolonial challenges of displaced communities in South Africa. It counters dominant stigmatic narratives by re-telling the stories of Macassar, a community blighted by crime and other socio-economic challenges to build community resilience amidst conditions of hopelessness and public mistrust.

In 2016, with no civic-institutional support, meetings held in Macassar living rooms and backyards developed into a street photography project involving youth from the area. This built new relationships, trust, and appreciation for their community, framing a new story for the area. Using found objects to curate the photographic material, a nomadic spatial practice emerged to sustain the project. In 2018, community meetings were held to plan the hosting of an exhibition in the public library and two private homes. The installations were built as participatory spatial interventions which resulted in shared (common) spaces for intergenerational dialogue. Stories by elders in response to images taken by the youth were included in the exhibition to instil new stories of hope and dignity.

This intersection of altered perceptions and innovative spatial practice is imperative for thinking through interdisciplinary ways for different forms of practising architecture to emerge. Practices that can allow us to imagine shared spaces that can disrupt the narratives of apartheid legacies which plague our displaced communities. This is the project's biggest contribution and has resulted in the planning of a shared space to allow the work to find permanence in the community. This year the refurbishment of a community space, a collaboration between the Studiolight, the community and four universities is a testimony to the relevance of Macassar's story of resilience, that change comes from within. A change that echoes in youth participant Elcardo Samuels' quote as he describes the impact the two-year project has had on its participants and the immediate community of Macassar.

*"From a distance, one's sees the struggle. Once you are near it is what is close that moves and inspires"*

Other Studiolight youth participants are Charlton Abrahams, Elton Abrahams, Giovanni Alexander, Stephanie Alexander. They were assisted by John Coetzee, Shafiek Matthews along with Bachelor of Architectural Studies students, Chinenye Chukukwa, Christine Ho, Kayleigh Jonkers, Nchima Kamwendo, Phimzile Konile, Charlotte Mabatha, Mxolisi Moyo, Biyelwu Xiphu. Cedric Hendricks assisted with conducting interviews.