Artisanal mining refers, mainly, to subsistence mining (miners who are not formally employed by mining companies). These workers sometimes do not have mining permits and are, therefore, often regarded as ‘illegal miners’. There may also be undocumented foreign miners who are not legally authorised to work in the country. Artisanal mining has recently moved into the national spotlight, following several deeply disturbing incidents across South Africa that involve this marginalised community. The artworks interrogate the social, environmental, and occupational health and safety impact on this mining community.

David Rees, Professor emeritus at the University of the Witwatersrand, anticipates that the exhibition will initiate discussion on the lives of the miners, highlighting “the necessary steps to find interventions that are humane, sound and pragmatic to protect them, their families, the surrounding communities and the environment.”

Rose and Allen-Spies used a variety of art mediums to explore the complex narratives. The artists allow the voices of these communities to siphon through the artworks and tell the story of what drives one to engage in such precarious and arduous work. Amongst the dust and dreams, what is unearthed from these miners’ psyches is a story of hope and the resilience of the human spirit to persevere against unlikely odds.

Prof. Peter Glendinning, Professor of Photography at Michigan State University, United States, lauded the exhibition, stating, “[it] is an outstanding example of how creative vision, applied to difficult human circumstances, can both share information and provide a viewer with a series of striking visual experiences.”

MC Roodt, curator at the William Humphreys Art Gallery, stated that “an exhibition like this truly legitimises the lived experience of undocumented workers, a large and important community that is shaping Kimberley in numerous ways.” Referred to as ‘zama-zamas’, their story has mixed narratives and perspectives of criminality and environmental destruction that pervade the discussion. The exhibition explores these constructs but also brings to the surface the everyday struggles of the miners.

The exhibition “weaves together the thread of their humanity with that of the viewer so that we are left feeling empathy for their plight and their struggle to survive from day to day”, says Dr André Rose. Prof. Allen-Spies reflects that, “We get glimpses into their struggle for decent work, improved housing, and access to basic services, and a desire for their humanity to be acknowledged. These communities are often invisible, but the exhibition helps us to touch them and question our stereotypical constructs of the ‘zama-zama’.”

Prof. Crispen Chinguno, from the Sol Plaatjie University, commented, “The exhibition is important as it puts to the fore informal mining, which often is invisible and portrayed negatively in public discourse.”

Janine Allen-Spies, Room in the rain
Janine Allen-Spies is an established visual artist based in Bloemfontein, and a professor in the Fine Arts Department at the University of the Free State. She uses traditional media such as painting, drawing, lithography, photography, installation, and performance art, and explores new media such as animation and digital drawing in her art practice. Allen-Spies' work is held in prestigious collections, such as the Luciana Benneton Collection (Venice Biennale), and Modern Art Projects. André Rose is a public health medicine physician and visual artist born and based in Kimberley. His art practice interrogates complex public health issues.

**Exhibition dates:** 17 August–31 October 2022  
**Venue:** William Humphreys Art Gallery (WHAG), 1 Cullinan Crescent, Civic Centre, Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa

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**Andre Rose, Tjailatyd**

**Andre Rose, That I might hope**  
*Photographs: courtesy of Andre Rose*

**Janine Allen-Spies, Mine with tumble weed**