

Inter-Breyten. Breytenbach in Context (26-27 November 2026)

The symposium examines the prismatic nature of the creative and reflective oeuvre by Breyten Breytenbach (1939-2024). Taking a contextual approach, it seeks to understand the artist-philosopher in relation to the complex of aesthetic, ideological, and philosophical ideas with which his voice resonates. Various frames of reference will be scrutinized, such as intermediality, pan-African thought, surrealist and other modernist cultural discourses, Afrikaans within the South African context, and political resistance to apartheid. Themes include:

- international reception and connections
- intertextual and intermedial references
- interpersonal networks
- inter-African ideas

The symposium highlights various facets of Breytenbach's public persona, exploring connections with other writers, philosophers, visual artists, and political thinkers. Attention will also be given to the afterlife or *Nachleben* of Breytenbach's stature and work. This includes the formation and preservation of archives relating to a productive and multidisciplinary artist such as Breytenbach. His work will be discussed against the background of the aesthetic and political climate in which he was active for decades, with particular interest in (intercultural) connections to other linguistic and intellectual traditions, as well as his positioning in debates on Afrikaans. *Breytenbach in Context* builds on transnational and analytical research by scholars who have studied the poet's literary and visual oeuvre, his political-ideological, linguistic, and cultural-philosophical views—such as pan-African thought, language-political issues surrounding Afrikaans, and Zen Buddhist frames of reference—and his transnational reception.

Objective of the conference

The conference pursues three main objectives:

- O1:** To map the literary, political, and philosophical legacy of Breyten Breytenbach two years after his death.
- O2:** To develop an interdisciplinary, transnational, and multilingual perspective on Breyten Breytenbach's artistic output.
- O3:** To connect authors, academics, translators, publishers, and students engaged in Breytenbach studies across Europe and Africa.

The conference convenes contributions addressing the literary, artistic, political and philosophical legacy of the South African and French writer and painter Breyten Breytenbach. In this way, we hope to inspire a broad academic discussion on the topic of Breytenbach's works in research on Afrikaans and the study of South Africa. Breytenbach's poetry and essays are considered as landmarks in Afrikaans literature. Likewise, his critical reflection on Afrikaans as what he called a "bastertaal" [creole language] remains influential in current discussions on the origins and political significance of the language. At this conference, academics from different backgrounds and disciplines bring their own specific conceptions and approaches, resulting in a transnational and cross-cultural exchange on Breytenbach's legacy, and in a broader sense on the meaning of Breytenbach's posture in discussions on language and politics. By drawing together a diverse range of perspectives we strive to make a new contribution to the scholarship of prominent Breytenbach experts among whom Francis Galloway, Alwyn Roux, Alfred Schaffer and Louise Viljoen.

Apart from academic insights, the conference will also mark the publication of a commemorative book on the legacy of Breytenbach's poetry and essays, with testimonies by 40 writers (academics, translators and poets) from South Africa, the Netherlands and Belgium. *Postumiteiten voor Breyten. Door het oog van dichters en vorsers* [*Posthumities for Breyten. Through the eye of poets and scholars*, ed. Yves T'Sjoen, Skribis/Naledi, 2026] will be presented at the conference, in the presence of several contributors, as well as members of Breytenbach's close family.

By facilitating an interdisciplinary, transnational conversation on Breytenbach's legacy, the conference will deepen current discussions around national and linguistic identity, transnational exchange, and literary intermediality. Students of Afrikaans and Dutch literature at Ghent University will be invited to attend the conference for free, and to submit a written reflection paper as a course outcome. Thus, the conference draws together scholars and contributors at different career stages, and initiates connections that may persist across countries and languages.

Scientific importance of the conference

By drawing together a range of linguistic, disciplinary, and geographical perspectives, this conference makes a significant contribution to the study of Afrikaans literature in a global context. Thanks to its multilingual approach, the call for papers attracted scholars from various disciplines (literature, cultural studies, history, sociology, philosophy, musicology) and different countries (Belgium, France, Senegal, Netherlands, South Africa, Namibia, United Kingdom, Poland). Together, the selected papers will facilitate a broad transnational academic discussion on the legacy of one of the most important writers in South Africa and Afrikaans after the Second World War. This multi-lingual and transnational approach expands existing approaches to Breytenbach studies, which have predominantly been situated within South Africa and the Low Countries. It also sets a precedent for multilingualism in the context of literary studies—an innovative approach that disrupts the monolingual methodology of literary analysis.

Two eminent authorities on different aspects of Breytenbach's literary and artistic work in South Africa have agreed to be keynote speakers at the conference – **Louise Viljoen** is an expert on Breytenbach's multidisciplinary output, with numerous academic articles and book publication [*Die mond vol vuur. Beskouings oor die werk van Breyten Breytenbach*, SUNPress, Stellenbosch, 2014]. Poet, translator and scholar **Alfred Schaffer**, senior lecturer in postcolonial literature at Stellenbosch University and University of the Western Cape, is an expert of Breytenbach's poetry in the context of migration, anti-colonial and pan-African discourse.

Alongside the esteemed literary keynotes, the third keynote speaker offers a perspective on Breytenbach as pan-African philosopher, activist, and community builder. **Doudou Dia** is Executive Director of GORIN (Senegal) and worked together with Breytenbach as co-founder of the institute on L'Île de Gorée and executive director of the department of culture (GORIN). Thus, the conference moves beyond a purely literary perspective, to situate Breytenbach's work, and Afrikaans literature in general, within a broader pan-African philosophical and political discourse.

Proceedings

A selection of presented papers will be published in a special issue of the peer reviewed journal, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* (SA Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns). The conference organisers will also select three papers presented by students, to be developed for publication in *Tydskrif vir Nederlands & Afrikaans*. Ghent Centre for Afrikaans and the Study of South Africa has a strong working relationship with *TN&A*, which has in the past published articles based on papers presented at the GAZ annual conference, always with a foreword by the conference organizers.

A further peer reviewed publication related to the conference, is a monograph on Breytenbach and the imagination of Africa (A. Roux & Y. T'Sjoen (eds.), ACCO, Leuven, 2027). Chapters from the book will be presented at “Inter-Breyten. Breytenbach in Context”, for feedback and discussion. The monograph, when published, will be open access.

The conference programme will be announced on 15 July 2026.

Scientific Committee

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Organizing Committee

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