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Artist to exhibit in New York

Digital art pieces catch eye of Agora Gallery

SANTHAM PILLAY

AS a child, artist Michelle Benjamin once sent off hundreds of handwritten entries to a magazine that was giving away a trip to New York.

Her dream to visit the city only materialised in 2008, and this week she learnt she would be returning to the Big Apple.

"New York was always a place I wanted to visit. At the time of the competition, I was underage so I sent the entries under my mother's name," said Benjamin.

She visited in 2008 with husband Gavin. But she will return to New York soon because five of her digital art pieces have been selected as part of a three-week exhibition at the Agora Gallery in Chelsea, New York.

Now living in Pretoria, Benjamin maintains her artistic talents are deeply rooted in her home town, Durban.

"I come from an artistic family. When we were growing up, my cousins and I were always doing sketches or painting or dabbling in some kind of art."

Benjamin, 45, has been working with digital art for nearly 20 years,



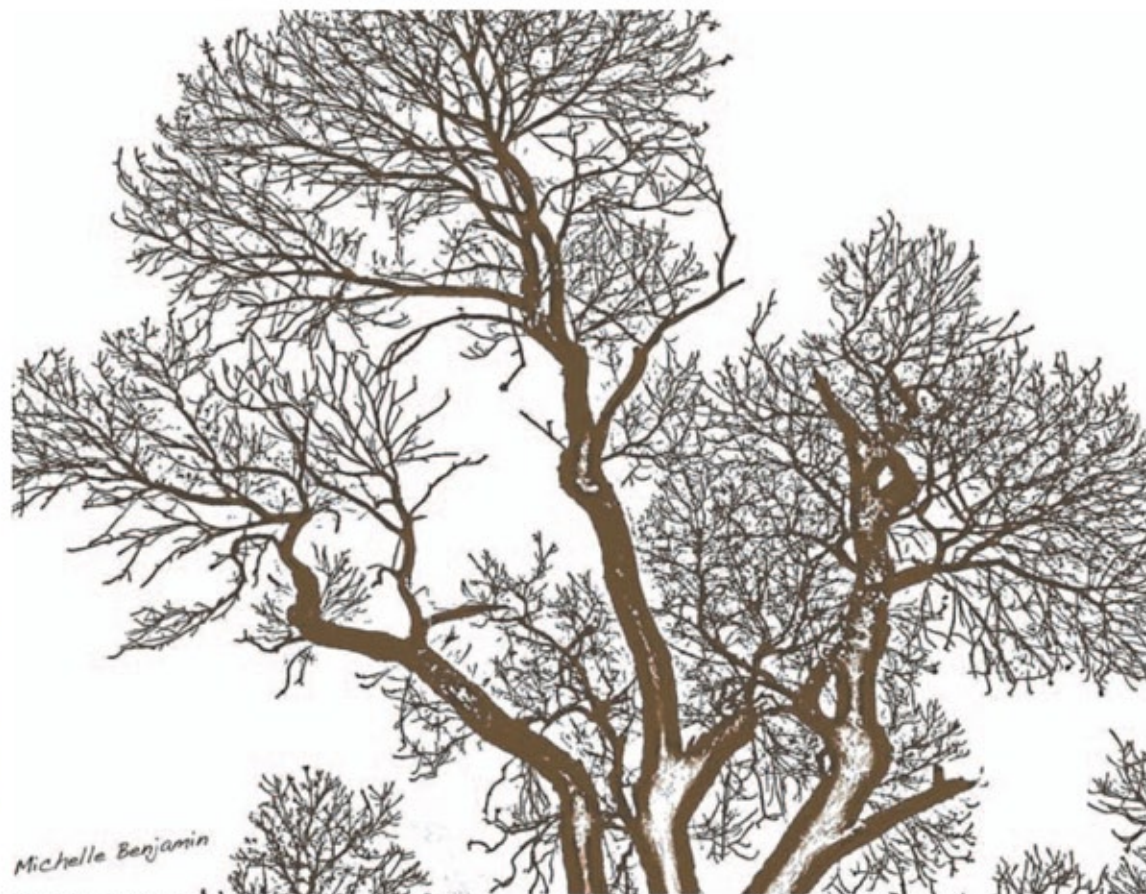
MICHELLE BENJAMIN
Childhood dream realised

but it was only after plans to relocate to Canada fell through at the last minute that she began looking at ways to market her art.

"It was a frightening time for us. My husband had already left his job and then to have our plans come apart at the last minute was obviously devastating.

"But we moved to Pretoria and I think that I have been inspired more here by the place and the people than I ever would have been if we had moved to Canada," she said.

Benjamin began showcasing her



STARK BEAUTY: These examples of Michelle Benjamin's digital art are titled 'Life Within', top, and, below, 'Leafless Beauty'
Pictures: SUPPLIED

work on internet galleries after she became frustrated with local art galleries who turned her away because she specialised in digital techniques.

After being rejected locally, she was awe-struck when she was informed that the American gallery wanted her pieces.

"Initially, I didn't believe it. I got the e-mail confirming my inclusion in the exhibition at 2am. I think I must have woken up the neighbourhood, I was so excited."

Her photographs and sketches undergo digital evolution and transformation in her studio, where they are combined with digital design techniques.

A wildlife lover, she has handed over the rights to one of her pieces to the Save the Rhino Trust.

The illustration, "It's my horn", will be used on merchandise that will be sold to fund the fight against poaching — something she was proud to be a part of.



"I believe that, before we pass on, we have to leave some kind of a legacy. I feel that these opportunities I am being given now at this stage of my life, are my

legacy," she said.

The exhibition, called Altered States of Reality: an Exhibition of Analog and Digital Photography, runs from April 24 until May 15.