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# BBC NEWS

## EDINBURGH, FIFE & EAST SCOTLAND

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### Famed South African apartment block Ponte City focus of new exhibition

**A new exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery features the work of two photographers who documented the remarkable transitions taking place at an iconic Johannesburg landmark.**

At 54 storeys high and the tallest residential skyscraper in Africa, Ponte City originally offered luxurious homes to the wealthy.

But while it remains a landmark in Johannesburg, several transitions have left it looking far from how it did 39 years ago, when it was first built.

South African photographer Mikhael Subotzky and British artist Patrick Waterhouse have documented the apartment block's journey from luxury flats to a refuge for immigrants, from a potential prison site to a derelict half-demolished shell occupied by those who are either squatting or awaiting eviction.

They first had the idea to tell the story of the building and its colourful past in 2007 and began documenting the life of the residents over the next five years, interviewing the remaining tenants and photographing daily life in the dilapidated building.

They say they aimed to create a visual "before and after" of the building, from its original plans to

its more recent incarnation: a place that has "come to symbolise urban decay", perceived as "the epicentre of crime prostitution and drug dealing in Johannesburg".

**The results will be on show from Saturday 6 December at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh.**

The photographers came across this scene where three men were kneeling in prayer with Ponte City towering in the background. The hill site is used by many religious groups as a holy place.

During their visits to the building, Subotzky and Waterhouse met many of the residents, some of whom invited the photographers to document their routines -some more intimate than others. This couple were getting ready to go out dancing for a night on the town.

Subotzky and Waterhouse often photographed people in one of the many lifts that service the 54-storey Ponte City building; in this picture the young woman was on her way to a wedding.

Subotzky and Waterhouse photographed the view from every window within the multi-level structure. This is the view from flat 5005, where Joe and Vaneshka live, just one of the many families residing in the tower.

Visiting the site during September/October of 2008, the photographers captured the clean-up of the central atrium, which had been used to dump the debris from the renovation of the building. The cylindrical tower is open to the sky at the top and light floods in from above illuminating the apocalyptic-like scene below.

Many families welcomed the photographers into their homes, often keen to show what life in Ponte was really like for them. Subotzky and Waterhouse returned repeatedly to document the tower and its residents over a period of five years. During that time many people moved away and new residents came in their place.

