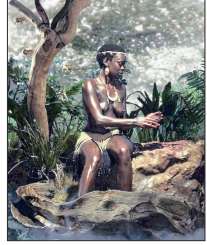


what's on

'Editions' at Goodman

*Editions*, an exhibition of photographs, sculpture, video/multi-media works, lithographs, linocuts and photogravures, will show at Goodman Gallery in Sir Lowry Road until Saturday.



The exhibition includes Kudzanai Chiurai, Gerhard Marx and Clive van den Berg. Call 021 462 7573.

Contemporary art

Art Portfolio presents an exhibition of contemporary paintings by local artists at the Sanlam Hall in Kirstenbosch from today until May 2 from 10am to 5pm. Entry to the exhibition is free after garden entry is paid. Call 021 799 8621.

Mumiy Troll

Russian band Mumiy Troll will perform an acoustic set with support band Long Time Citizen at On a Roll in Mowbray on Thursday at 7pm. Entry is free. The bands will then take to the Ragazzi stage in Loop Street on Friday at 9pm. Tickets are R40. See www.mumiytroll.com

'The Songs'

Singer Magdalene Minnaar will perform in *The Songs*, a recital of well-known songs and arias, at Erin Hall on Friday. Call 076 835 6561.

'Supernova' launch

Wendy Oldfield will launch her new album, *Supernova*, together with Lionel Bastos at Red Gallery Restaurant in Steenberg on Friday at 7.30pm. Tickets are R80. Call 021 701 0886. They will perform at Monkey Valley Resort in Noordhoek on Sunday at 3pm. Tickets are R50. Call 021 789 8006.

'Afro-Catalan'

Avital Lang Gallery and Studio will present an exhibition of work by Juanjo Sandoval, *Afro-Catalan*, at Two Oceans House in Mouille Point from Saturday at 6.30pm until May 4. The works are mainly mixed media on canvas and deal with the convergence between Sandoval's Latin background and his experiences as an artist in Africa. Call 021 439 2124.

'Dog's Bollocks'

Gaëtan Schmid will perform in *The Dog's Bollocks* at Kalk Bay Theatre until Saturday at 8.30pm. The one-man physical comedy show is a celebration of people's need to communicate and desire to be understood. Tickets are R75 to R95. See www.kbt.co.za

Symphony performance

The Hugo Lambrechts Symphony Orchestra will perform on Sunday. The orchestra includes current and past students and teachers of the Hugo Lambrechts Music Centre in Parow. Tickets are R80, or R50 for students and pensioners. Call 021 939 9105.



SOARING: Wim Botha rejects the magic and trickery associated with visual artifice.



IN ORBIT: Wim Botha's polystyrene, wood and fluorescent tubes installation at the Sasol Art Museum. Pictures: MARIO TODESCHINI, COURTESY OF STEVENSON, CAPE TOWN AND JOHANNESBURG

ALCHEMICAL FEEL

# Flying high, carving skyward circles

Exhibition: **WIM BOTHA'S SOLIPSIS V** The fifth in this series of polystyrene and neon installations at the Sasol Art Museum until Saturday. **LUCINDA JOLLY** reviews

WIM BOTHA'S dense dark sculptural drawings of the maquettes for *Blastwave* and the frenetic tooth and claw of *A Thousand Things*, are as about as far away as you can get from his new work, *Solipsis V*.

It is distant from the heavy winged goddess of victory, Nike, and closer in spirit to the Wright brothers' simple spruce and muslin flying machine.

It's all creamed feather flight, light as spun sugar.

It's a piece at the zenith of a series that has the alchemical feel of the phoenix reborn out of its own ashes suggesting death and rebirth. *Solipsis V* rises fully realised as a flush of pristine white carved polystyrene wings forever rising above the ocular well of a circular room as if on thermals around a neon halo of light towards a rococo stucco ceiling.

These headless, bodiless, footless creatures of flight seem a fully realised state leaving behind the dark dense material beginnings associated with the crow.

This highly evocative piece is just as much about cerebral and projected flight as it is intensely physical. And we experience it as such.

Botha tells the tale about how at an exhibition in Sweden, *Solipsis 3* had a couple rooted to the spot – consumed by its physicality.

They told him that they had not experienced such feelings from an artwork in a long time.

Winged creatures have always sparked the imagination. One of the earliest record of a shaman's symbol on the walls of a cave was that of a bird on a stick.

Carl W Ernst's dissertation on the Sufi master Ruzbihan Baqli writes of Biblical angels, near east deities and winged souls in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the power of the wing to lift the soul to paradise.

Baqli and many others have seen the bird as the inner essence of humanity forever seeking its divine counterpoint while trapped in the human body. In Indo-European belief, souls could take the form of birds.

The Latin word "aves" meant both "birds" and "ancestral spirits."

The fifth in the *Solipsis* series explores the physicality of the closed circuit and beautifully

reflects the title which refers to a "philosophical position where nothing exists or can be known to exist outside of one's own mind".

Or as Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote "hell isn't other people. Hell is yourself".

This intense self involvement and alienation from others has been interpreted by the Abrahamic faiths as the ultimate sin, such as that of despair which in turn separates humankind from God.

Wim Botha was chosen as the Stellenbosch Wordfest Artist for 2013 and *Solipsis V* was his exhibit.

Of *Solipsis V* Botha has previously said that he hadn't wanted to create an artwork with an underlying meaning but rather something in which people could find their own meaning, without being "right" or "wrong."

The installation's final incarnation draws some of its power from

its profound fit with the mezzanine exhibition hall of the Sasol Art Museum with its circular form, high rococo stucco ceilings and huge windows framing a large sky and clouds.

Yet it was not conceived specifically for the site, but in the process of making took on the specific dimensions dictated by it.

*Solipsis V* is connected to Botha's previous projects and all are linked through mark making.

Instead of a pencil or brush Botha draws in space using constructions of fluorescent light and blocks of polystyrene. Initially he tried cutting the soft blocks of polystyrene with a chain saw; soft material and a powerful tool. The idea was compelling, but the result was messy and the chain saw difficult to control.

To achieve the effect he imagined with a chain saw, Botha ended

up using a hot wire cutter contraption he invented. This allows for marks more consistent with those of drawing, retaining a graphic quality rather like 3D doodles.

Because the wire cutter runs inside the block it's not possible to see the cut while it's being made. The result is spontaneous marks that can be a bit of a surprise for the creator. Some of the wings are made from a single cut.

In current times there is a strong rejection of the narrative and anything too aesthetically pleasing.

*Solipsis* is highly aesthetic, but as Botha points out, it has a darker side too.

By exposing the hardware, the boxwood constructions and the dangling cables, Botha rejects the magic and trickery associated with visual artifice.

Allowing the viewer to see the hardware is equivalent to taking the glass off a painting, thereby making it more real and accessible.

It was Botha's work with the Handspring Puppets that allowed him to understand that once the viewers become accustomed to the inner workings they disappear from consciousness after a while.

In other words, in spite of our exposure to how they work, we become caught up in the drama of

the piece and soon forget them. *Solipsis* references a kind of hopelessness. The fact that these wings will never truly be airborne provide it with a bitter sweetness which both prevents and makes the idea possible.

Conceptually and physically the circle is the key. It may suggest the vortex, a black hole, circling electrons or Japanese circle paintings. "It's as if birds are tending to some kind of engine."

*Solipsis V* isn't reflective of a change in direction in Botha's work. He is involved in making something that has its roots in a project from 12 years ago. His approach is to "make what comes up and what needs to come up".

What is consistent is a certain rigorosity. For Botha, his visual practice is closely affiliated with the demands of spiritual practice. As soon as his practice becomes too certain and formulaic he steps back and challenges it.

This is definitely worth the trek to Stellenbosch. Go see.

● At 52 Ryneveld Street, Stellenbosch. Call 021 808 3695. Closed on Mondays. Open from 9am to 4.30pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and from 9am to 8pm on Wednesdays, and from 9am to 5pm on Saturdays and from 2pm to 5pm on Sundays.

'Solipsis V' explores the inner essence of humanity which is forever seeking its divine counterpoint like a bird, while trapped in the human existence

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