

{ ART }

# Rorschach taste

He can afford more than pilchards now, but painter Zander Blom is still taking risks, writes **Alexander Matthews**

**Z**ANDER Blom crouches down and picks up a blob of paint that has become dislodged from a canvas. He holds onto it as he walks, slowly inspecting the paintings lining the bowels of Stevenson gallery in Cape Town. Many of his beige canvases are taller than our heads; each is painted differently — there are smoothly smeared melting geometrics, thickly layered oceans of brown and purple, fat, plasticky beads.

When he's satisfied that they've survived the trip from Joburg relatively unscathed, we dash through rain to The Kitchen, a café across from the gallery. It's a week before the launch of New Paintings, his fifth solo show to appear at Stevenson. Tired of producing work that was becoming increasingly delicate and detailed, these paintings are "bolder, rougher", he says. "I wanted to make more hardcore, weird, punk, childlike, freer stuff."

Painted with palette knives and squeezed from tubes and syringes, Blom's abstract marks offer a visceral immersion in his emotional and imaginative landscape. He compares his work to a colourful Rorschach test. "There's no story," he says. "It keeps floating around, being open to interpretation. It is perpetually activating your imagination."

Blom, 32, grew up in Pretoria. At high school,

he loved painting, often working till three in the morning on his artworks. After matriculating, he began studying information design at the University of Pretoria, and was soon failing his theory subjects because he was too busy organising group art shows with his friends, doing printmaking and "a lot of really lame videos" — the medium, he then believed, "serious artists" practised.

While on internships at advertising agencies, he met art directors who made art on the

side. "I realised if I kept on this trajectory, I was always going to be an artist in my spare time, and it's either everything or nothing," he says. He decided he would "rather be a poor artist than a comfortable, unhappy designer".

And so, at the end of his second year, he dropped out, moving to Joburg to become a full-time artist. His parents were unhappy with his decision but he managed to convince them to help him cover the rent of a

the past. Abstraction offered an escape from SA's politics, identity and history.

Of course, abstraction has a vast history of its own, and engaging with this has been unavoidable. Blom's favourite modernists — Picasso, Francis Bacon, Matisse — have influenced his practice. But instead of feeling burdened by this tradition, he sees their work and the devices they used as a starting point he can "plunder" from to create new work, couched in a language of his own.



Painting '1.632 Untitled'. Top, Zander Blom

room in a friend's house in Brixton. "I was completely broke," he recalls. To make ends meet, he ate a lot of pilchards and took on some freelance illustrating work.

Initially, the art he made was mostly ink drawings on paper because that was all he could afford. He then created installations in his room, photographing them — exhibitions were too expensive. And he started painting. He had always wanted to work with oils, though it took several years before he was confident enough to share his work. The better he got, the more tired he became of sitting in front of a computer editing photos. "If you're a photographer, you spend 90% of your time immersed in moments that are gone. I think it's hard to live in the present. With painting, you're perpetually in the present. If it works, it works. If you can't get it to work, you throw it out and you start something new." It's a process of "capture rather than manufacture".

Blom's work soon became abstract. He wanted to avoid "resistance art" — "that struggle shit" — as he felt it belonged to

Joburg's dry, drab winters have inspired the ochres and browns he's been using, while the city's tension and roughness have also filtered into his work.

"We're quite paranoid living in Brixton, and I think the paranoia gets into my body somehow and affects my art," he says. He and his wife, Dominique, will soon be moving to Cape Town for a change of scenery. "I just hope I don't move here and start making pretty pictures," he grins.

In March this year, Blom won the Jean-François Prat, a €20 000 international prize for young painters. Having never won an award before, Blom is happy but a little bit surprised that "a bunch of people in Europe want to give some white kid in Africa money for making paintings". Aside from the obvious financial fillip, it's hard to see it having much of an impact on his art, however, when he's driven by something else entirely. "The end goal is to just make more and more exciting work," he says. **LS**

**• New Paintings is on at Stevenson Cape Town until October 4. [stevenson.info](http://stevenson.info)**

**Thinking of improving or renovating your home?**  
Then there's really only **one place** you should visit...

**Hundreds of home improvement exhibits under one roof...**

- Free entrance!
- Free secure parking!
- More than 170 permanent exhibits!
- Brochures for every exhibit!
- Getting quotes has never been easier!
- Browse at your leisure!

Monday to Friday 08h00 - 17h00  
Saturday 09h00 - 16h00  
Sunday 10h00 - 14h00

**FREE ENTRANCE! OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK!**

11 Sunrock Close, Sunnyrock Park Ext 2, Edenvale  
Tel: (011) 455 6002 Fax: (011) 455 6005  
E-mail: [belinda@homeideas.co.za](mailto:belinda@homeideas.co.za)

[www.homeideas.co.za](http://www.homeideas.co.za)