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body of work

Artist and designer Driaan Claasen delves into mental health, trauma and the mind with his explorative sculptures

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Exploring mental health, along with the impact of trauma, is a recurring theme in contemporary African art. Creating new visual metaphors of neurodiversity, Cape Town-based artist and studio Reticence Design founder Driaan Classen takes viewers on a (often self-reflective) journey through the mind, each piece shaped by the myriad emotions he, as the artist, has felt.

His glass-walled Woodstock studio-cum-gallery (there's also an in-house workshop), painted all white, is a lightbox within which he displays his pieces; carved locally sourced wood stands tall, taking up space in a truly regal manner, while elsewhere, crystalline pieces shimmer in the sunlight.

The sculptures are emotive, striking and their narratives are open ended, seemingly left up to you, the viewer, to fill in the gaps. Driaan's catalogue shifts from deep and dark tones to works lacquered in bold, bright colours. A self-taught artist with a background in design – the move towards his current work has taken honesty, vulnerability and a frank exploration of trauma – you'd be right to call these pieces cerebral.

At a glance, there are works that feel almost anatomical while others look like they were carved by nature itself.

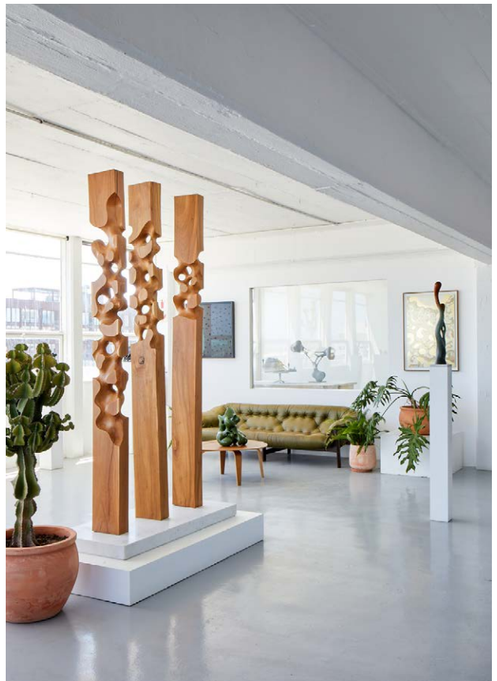
Central to Driaan's practice is how materials are able to shapeshift and embody new traits while providing a cathartic experience for both artist and viewer.

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You're a self taught artist and work with a variety of mediums (from wood to copper) – can you elaborate on the journey that led to Reticence Design?

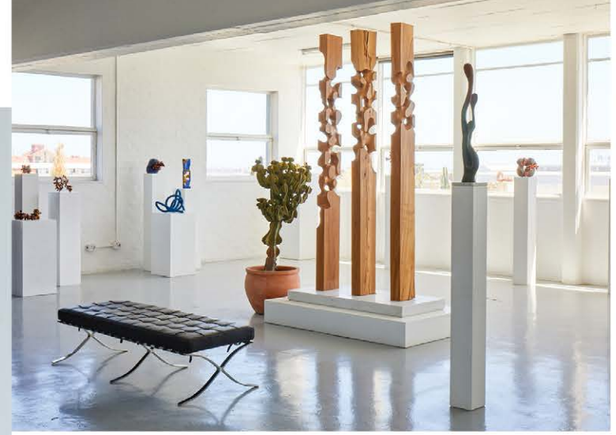
Studying animation was my foray into materials, forms, design and, ultimately,





OPPOSITE PAGE Tacius borum iundenborum iundendae dae ne expla borum iunde
ABOVE Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde andae
LEFT Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde andae





'The work I've produced is around the MAPPING *of the MIND and following CONSCIOUSNESS'*

conceptual exploration. This naturally progressed into the physical creations of forms and getting to see the constraints of manufacturing and materials. Through this research, I ended up mentoring at Bronze Age Art Foundry, which allowed me to build up an invaluable set of skills and knowledge around manufacturing. It was soon after this that I realised I wanted to create for myself, exploring timber and textiles and collaborating with other artists – it doesn't feel like I'm looking for inspiration, but more that material catches my eye and informs me what it wants me to say.

Shape and material are important aspects of your work. Are they indicative of specific emotions? Do you see these qualities within the materials you choose?

Previously, I had worked with metal, which is a very unforgiving material. It has to be worked and refined to a point in order to stand on its own. Wood is much warmer and more forgiving. It has a sense of wanting to be touched and giving permission to be touched. Metal feels like it has more distance to it. My work is around the mind but I always aim to bring it back to basic principles: colour, form, texture and pattern. I try to evoke certain emotions by having a combination of those different primary forms.

Your work often delves into mental health, our emotions, the mind and discussing trauma.

It's a very cathartic process. Dealing with mental health challenges myself, I called one of my collections 'SSRIs'. It's a very personal journey of exploring what those emotions feel like and being able to externalise them gives me space to observe, without being as subjectively attached. Part of the work I've produced is around the mapping of the mind and following consciousness. It's about the origin story, the birth of a neural pathway right up until its decay, when the cycle begins again.

You're taking something deeply personal, making it incredibly public – and opening yourself up to criticism – how has that been?

The feedback has been positive, because I guess in some sense, I'm being vulnerable without inappropriately making it personal.

In the beginning, I was heavily involved in every aspect of the process and being able to take a step back has been helpful. I've taken the role of being a creative head, working on ideas and laying groundwork for other projects. A lot of my work is about reintegration of the shadow, that can be applied to the pieces but also social settings and structure. In order to have a healthy system, it's important that we make space for integration. Mental health is a tough topic to discuss and sit with. So I try to use beauty, colour and playfulness to invite discussion or to simply enjoy the work. ▪

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Tacius borum iundenborum iundendae dae ne expla borum iunde Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla.



LEFT Tacius borum iundenborum iundendae dae ne expla borum iunde Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde

BELOW Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde andae Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde andae







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Tacius borum iundenborum iundendae dae ne expla borum iunde **ABOVE** Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde andae **RIGHT** Nobi tatquo de vellum sit. Nus maxim. Macius ne expla borum iunde andae