SA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL MAGAZINE

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8 BOLD
URBAN SPACES EXPLORED

SIX GREAT ARTISTS
INVITE US IN

PHOTOGRAPHED AT NANDO'S
PERI-PERI-HOT CENTRAL KITCHEN

30+
CREATIVES
ON OUR RADAR

LET'S COLLABORATE

SA TALENT WORKING TOGETHER

What is it about bronze we prize so much?

Perhaps it is the medium's durability or the intriguing alchemy of its creation. Maybe it is the inherent contradiction of a material that possesses such tremendous tensile strength, yet lends itself quite seamlessly and beautifully to capturing the most expressive of gestures and minute details. Whatever it is, bronze has historically captured the public imagination like few other materials and it continues to captivate.

Driaan Claassen is a Cape Town-based, South African designer whose timeless bronze works exquisitely showcase the sensuality and strength of the material all at once. Inspired primarily by nature, Claassen's bronze pieces play on duality and contrast, be it in form, patterns, textures, heft and scale. A solid seven-foot geometric bronze bench quietly drifts into open space, dissolving before our very eyes. Gleaming, polished, smooth surfaces are peacefully juxtaposed against the intensity of a black, highly textured ore, revealing a deeper, multi-layered story of the forged bronze.

Beyond the tangible, Claassen's bronze works are also characterized by a certain quietness - a refreshingly restrained refinement that tells us just enough about a piece, its function and the material from which it was forged. Stripped of the verbose, what consistently emerges is an elegant commentary on tensions - the constant tension between light and dark, smooth and textured, weight and heft, form, function and meaning. Claassen is a designer engaged not only in pushing the boundaries of creativity and utility, but ultimately engrossed in a quiet and intense study of the material itself.

We had the privilege of meeting with Driaan in Cape Town to discuss his work with bronze, the challenges and creative opportunities the material presents and of course the meaning behind it all.

Driaan, you are an artist and designer with a rather eclectic background in photography, graphic design, computer animation and much more. Can you tell us a bit about how you got into the arts and sculpture in particular?

I think at times I detest a specific path and praise ambiguity in my journey. This openness for uncertainty leaves room for greater movement and moments to arise than the mind can weave together. This unconstrained vastness and constant exploration inevitably led me on a path of working with bronze. A medium within which I could fully refine and embody certain emotions and ideas that other materials seemed incapable of. My path is a metaphorical current that pulls and pushes in every direction, a constant stream that fatefully landed me on the doorstep of my great mentor and friend Jan Otto du Plessis from Bronze Age Foundry. He gave me an opportunity to freely express my ideas and supported me every step of the way. He unblocked a lot of internal insecurities I had by guiding me and feeding me with the correct knowledge that revealed a whole new world for me to explore internally, as well as externally.

Your material of choice appears to be bronze. What drew you to this material and why?

I do predominantly work with bronze and it is truly a powerful material with a long history and culture to pull from. However, I believe my reason for working with it had more to do with my natural path and stumbling into it, rather than a personal decision or choice. I enjoy working with different kinds of materials and each one has a way of speaking its needs and revealing its imbued qualities. Even something like chalk, that can so easily be overlooked, has a soft pastel beauty that can transform rough surfaces into faint textural treasures. When any material is observed in isolation and explored, each one has an exceeding potential and a unique language that can unfold when observed in isolation. The more you come to use a material and allow yourself to be present with it, the more vivid its qualities become. Bronze carried a specific spiritual connection for me, its ability to both be extremely textural as well as its capability to be refined into a polished mirror-like surface, truly captured the contrast of the physical and spiritual world for me.

Has your background in diverse creative fields influenced the aesthetics of your work?

My understanding is that all forms of exploration ultimately lead to and feed a central curiosity - a growth that drives the mind in different directions only to turn back on itself; a sort of expansion to broaden the mind and encompass larger and more elaborate ideas; followed by a contraction to focus the new energy back into the work and my central unchanging ideas. There is an unseen thread that binds, and builds them together. A lack of understanding or exploration in one medium can cause a need for structure in other parts to further experience growth. When I, at times, get stuck working on bronze or carving wood, I take a break and head out to do some photography or lose myself in drawing. It is in these moments of stepping away from the work for a period of time that, on my return, a certain internal knot would be undone and the flow that was at first hindered would then flow freely again.

Working in bronze obviously has ancient roots and requires a great deal of skill and craftsmanship. However, we live in a world in which creative and production processes are augmented by technology. Do you integrate the use of new design technology into your creative and production processes? If so, how so?

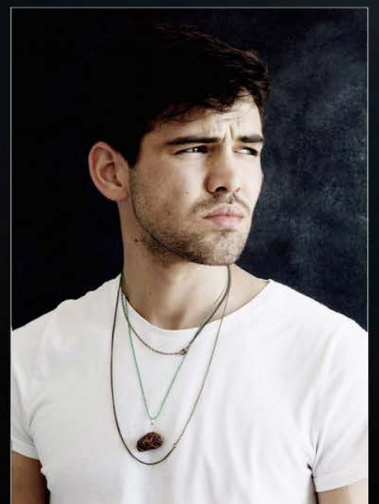
I think it is difficult to draw the line of where to use technology and where to stay away from it. New technology is becoming more accessible and available and can easily become a crutch to the creative mind. This crutch can cause numerous artists, who rely on the same process of manufacturing, to have work that reflects the same style and energy rather than sustaining their individual essence and vision. Relying on a specific kind of technology can throw the mind into a repetitive cycle of working within the confines of the machinery's capabilities rather than extending beyond it and making the process a tool rather than a means to an end. This is especially true if the history behind the technology is not appreciated and alternative manufacturing processes are not considered. When reaching forward into time to create novel work, you need a vision of the past in order to see more clearly into the future to avoid repeating something that has already been done. I simply could not do without technology, it is an invaluable tool to use and I have come to integrate it into so many parts of my work. In other moments I detest its use and would prefer working by hand

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BECAUSE

ALL THAT GLITTERS CAN BE BRONZE

By adding a raw texture to bronzed luxury, Driaan Claassen creates furniture and sculptures that are perfect in their imperfection.





In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell concludes that it takes roughly 10 000 hours to achieve mastery in a field. At 23, bronze artist Driaan Claassen seems to have already achieved mastery, and that in only 6 months.

Before he started working in bronze, Driaan dabbled in drawing, photography and writing, and focused on creating photorealistic images for product visualisation. "But sitting behind a desk all day for long periods of time became a bit too much for me," he says.

In early 2014, Driaan came across the Southern Guild Show and fell in love with the idea of creating furniture pieces that resemble works of art. Seeing how bronze has the ability to bring a new level of attention and appreciation to mundane objects, he changed his focus. He was taken in by Otto du Plessis, founding member of Bronze Age, and given a studio space where he learnt how to cast bronze.

Driaan finds beauty in nature's ability to create forms that are flawless and random, a simplicity underlying chaos that cannot be replicated by man. This is what inspires his work.

In a world where cultural trends are fleeting, the young bronze artist wants to create sculptures, vessels and furniture pieces that are timeless one-offs.

- **reticence.co.za**
- **bronzeage.co.za**
- **071 261 6415**

01 Driaan Claassen.

02 Contrasting light and dark, beauty and chaos, Driaan strikes an imperfect balance with *Swirling Cavity* (2014), aiming to symbolise strength through gentle movement.