

KNYSNA FINE ART

Lionel Smit

Lionel Smit was born in 1982 in Pretoria, South Africa and is best known for his contemporary portraiture executed through monumental canvases and sculptures. Perhaps more than anything else, Lionel Smit's art is defined by a deeply rooted symbiotic relationship between sculpture and painting. Each of Lionel Smit's works offers us an entry point into the variety and richness that lies beneath every face we encounter in life, whether applied in bronze or in paint. The blending of techniques across genres is a display of Smit's work in multiple media, all bearing visible overlap.

His paintings start with abstract lines and swaths of colour that establish a base for the subsequently overlaid image of a face or bust – in most cases posed by anonymous models from the Cape Malay community. For Smit, the Cape Malay woman epitomises hybrid identity within a South African context, and reflects the disintegrating construction of identity within our increasingly globalised world. His work is loaded with both historical and aesthetic precedent; clearly focused on the dialogue between the figurative and expressive abstract. Smit thus translates his own understanding of identity - drawing from images in his daily surrounds.

Smit's subject matter is consistent. The people he paints or sculpts possess a particular quality that appeals to his visual sensitivity, but nothing more in the way of social influence. The sitter's face acts, quite simply, as a vessel for Smit's experimentation with colour, stroke and technique.

In regards to bronze, Smit's treatment of the medium reveals it to be especially well suited to the translation of his painterly activities into sculpture.

Smit's bronzes are created using the lost wax casting method - one of the oldest known metal-forming techniques. Patinas commonly available to artists working in bronze include natural browns, blacks and greens. However, considering the importance of colour to Smit in his painting, he uses alternative methods that result in a unique fusion of intensely saturated patinas onto the bronze. Brilliant streaks of blues and greens enrich the grooves of an ear, while the natural shadow of an eyelid is intensified by the deepening of rich black patinas. Combining his ability to manipulate the patination process and his focused enthusiasm for surface gradations - Smit's avant-garde approach to the medium has allowed him to consistently push the envelope.

Smit continues his visual and tactile exploration of hybrid identity and its ever changing and emerging nature within South Africa's psycho-social landscape. While retaining all their austerity and peaceful aesthetic, Smit's figures remain highly charged with the emotive and gestural energy of his creative process. Based in Strand, Cape Town, Smit's process as an artist today remains adaptive, inventive, and physically engaging. Through this he has achieved success all over the world including sell-out exhibitions in London and Hong Kong. His work continues to inspire and captivate the minds of art novices and experts alike from Europe to America.

Smit's painting has been exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in London where it received the Viewer's Choice Award, as well as selected as the 'face' of the BP Portrait Award 2013 for all campaigns. In recent years he has also been honoured with a Ministerial Award from the Department of Culture for Visual Art. A highlight of his career has been the publication of one of his paintings on the cover of Christie's Auction Catalogue. In June 2016, Smit, in collaboration with Cynthia-Reeves Gallery, installed a public art installation, *Morphous*, in Union Square, New York. Over the past 10 years he has established a substantial international following with collectors ranging from the Standard Chartered Bank to Laurence Graff Art Collection at Delaire Graff Wine Estate.

Selected Exhibitions

2016

Art Miami, featured artist, Cynthia-Reeves Gallery, Miami

Faces of Identity, solo exhibition, Didrichsen Art Museum, Helsinki

JHB Art Fair, featured artist, Everard Read, Johannesburg

Echo, solo exhibition, Cynthia-Reeves Gallery, Massachusetts

Art 16, solo artist, Rook & Raven, London

Obscura 2, solo exhibition, Rook & Raven, London

Trace, solo exhibition, Rook & Raven, New York

Cape Town Art Fair, featured artist, Everard Read, Cape Town

2015

Art Miami, featured artist, Cynthia-Reeves Gallery, Miami

Recurrence, solo exhibition, .M Contemporary, Sydney

JHB Art Fair, featured artist, Everard Read, Johannesburg

Close/Perspective, solo exhibition, Everard Read, Johannesburg

Origins, solo exhibition, Rook & Raven, London

Obscura, solo exhibition, Everard Read, Cape Town

Art Central Art Fair, featured artist, Rook & Raven Gallery, Hong Kong

Accumulation of Disorder, installation, Independent Art Projects, MASS MoCA

Campus, USA

2014

Art Taipei, The Cat Street Gallery, Taiwan

Conronym, solo exhibition, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong

Morphous, solo exhibition and installation, Circa, Johannesburg

Cumulus, solo exhibition, Rook & Raven, London

Fugitive Identity, group exhibition, Cynthia Reeves, USA

2013

Art Miami Fair, featured artist, Cynthia Reeves, Miami

IS Sculpture, solo exhibition, IsArt, Tokara, Stellenbosch

Strata Art Fair, Saatchi Gallery, Rook & Raven, London

Fragmented, solo exhibition, Rook & Raven, London

Accumulation, solo exhibition, Everard Read, Johannesburg

BP Portrait Award Exhibition, Viewer's Choice Award , National Portrait Gallery,

London

Wonder Works Exhibition, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong

Metal Work Public sculpture, Stellenbosch

2012

Compendium, solo exhibition, 34FineArt, Cape Town

Accumulation of Disorder, installation, University of Stellenbosch Gallery,
Stellenbosch

Strata, solo exhibition, Rook and Raven, London

Robert Bowman Gallery, India Art Fair, India

JHB Art Fair, Everard Read

2011

Surface, solo exhibition, Artspace, Johannesburg

34FineArt, ArtMonaco '11, Monaco

2010

Out of the Office, group exhibition, Kunstmuseum Bochum, Germany

Cynthia Reeves Projects, Art Miami, USA

We are not Witches, Saatchi Gallery, London

Submerge, solo exhibition, 34FineArt, Cape Town

2009

F.A.C.E.T., Charity Auction, Christie's, London

Relate, solo exhibition, Grande Provence, Franschhoek

Qualifications and Awards

2013 Visitor's Choice Award, PB Portrait Award, National Portrait Gallery,
London

2013 Ministerial Award from Department of Culture for Visual Art, Western Cape
Government

2009 Merit Award, Vuleka, Sanlam Art Competition, Cape Town

2008 Achievement Award, Pro Arte School of Arts

2000 First prize in the MTN Art Colours Awards of Gauteng

1999/2000 Best painting student Pro Arte School of Arts

Catalogues

Cumulus LIONEL SMIT, Rook & Raven, London 2014

Formulation LIONEL SMIT, Tokara, Stellenbosch 2013

Accumulation LIONEL SMIT, Everard Read, Johannesburg 2013

Strata LIONEL SMIT, Rook & Raven, London, 2012

Surface LIONEL SMIT, Artspace, Johannesburg 2011

We are not Witches, Saatchi Gallery, London 2011

Submerge LIONEL SMIT, 34FineArt, October 2010

Christie's, F.A.C.E.T (catalogue cover), October 2009

Residue, Grande Provence Gallery, October 2009

Group therapy, Sandton Civic Gallery, 2005

Pretoria, Everard Read Gallery, November 2004

Books

Fragment, Lionel Smit, March 2016

Faces, Lionel Smit & Didrichsen Art Museum, September 2016