

EVERARD READ

DEBORAH BELL

(b. 1957 Johannesburg, SA)

Deborah Bell is one of SA's most celebrated contemporary artists. She works in a range of media on canvas and paper, produces dry point etchings and large-scale bronzes. Her earlier more political work has given way to a broader, deeper investigation into the border between mortality and immortality, matter and spirit, presence and absence, the quotidian and the mythic, the grounded and transcendent. In recent years she has developed an immediately recognisable visual language, her images simple, stark, symbolic – grounded, silent, still, poised. As Ricky Burnett has stated: at the very edge of time.

In her iconography she draws from a range of cultures (including African, Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, early Christian and European) and a range of philosophies (especially the Buddhist preoccupation with stillness and the shedding of attachment and the ego) and psychologies (more Jung than Freud) – but her work digs deeper, arriving finally out of an internal and personal place that Bell occupies in the world as an artist, a woman and an explorer. A central task is to make the unknown present – apprehended in a series of powerful images that are both of her and beyond her. Bell's earlier figures, characterised by entrapment (in the country, in the body), gave way to figures embodying the seeker – often accompanied by boats, horses, chariots. Images of lions, dogs, horses and angels recur. These are often intermediary figures between the physical world and a higher more spiritual realm. They are also aspects of herself – the powerful daemons that reside in all of us, which are often accompanied by solitary female figures, some full of assertive confidence, others more vulnerable and less sure of their agency.

Bell is interested in the half-formed image – the unwritten, as yet unformed spaces we move towards in our quest for self-knowledge. More recent work has also become more concerned with surrender – to the higher self, the mystery of the universe, the simplicity of the present. All her art, she has stated, works towards the Zen mark: the single gesture of absolute presence. Her quest is ongoing – and has left in its wake a series of hugely powerful, totemic images from what Yeats called Spiritus Mundi.

Deborah Bell has worked with a great variety of media during her career and has collaborated on various historically important projects with contemporaries such as William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins. Bell received her BAFA (Hons) and MFA degrees at the University of Witwatersrand, and has been an artist working abroad and a lecturer at various SAn tertiary institutions, including the University of the Witwatersrand. Bell lives and works from her studio in Magaliesburg, as well as being a collaborator at the David Krut studios on several projects.

Bell's work is represented in public and private collections around the world including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Smithsonian Institute and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, the Hara Museum, Tokyo and the IZIKO SAn National Gallery, Cape Town.

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SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 Mother Land, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
Sculpture & Painting - 2000-2023, Everard Read & John Martin in partnership, Spirit Studios, UK
- 2023 Sentinels (2003), Chelsea Physic Garden, London, UK
- 2020 Sentinels, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2019 Enthroned, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Invocations to the Plate, David Krut Projects, Johannesburg, SA
- 2017 Recent Paintings and Sculptures, Everard Read Franschhoek, SA
Uncovering Ancient Memory – 15 Years of Etchings, David Krut Projects, Cape Town
- 2016 Dreams of Immortality: Blood and Gold, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2015 Renunciation, David Krut, Johannesburg, SA
Dreams of Immortality: Return of the Gods, Everard Read, Johannesburg & Cape Town, SA
- 2013 What Would Wisdom Say to Your Dark Heart? Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, SA
- 2012 A Far Country, John Martin Gallery, London, and Glyndebourne Opera Festival, UK
- 2011 Presence, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2010 Alchemy, David Krut, Johannesburg, SA
- 2009 Flux, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, SA
Collaborations, David Krut, Johannesburg, SA
- 2007 Objects of Power: memory of metal, memory of wood, Goodman, Johannesburg, SA
- 2005-6 Crossings and Monuments, Oliewenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein, SA
- 2005 Crossings and Monuments, Aardklop Festival, Potchefstroom, SA
- 2004 Sentinels, Goodman, Johannesburg, SA
- 2002 Unearthed, Joao Ferreira Gallery, Cape Town, SA
- 2001 Unearthed, The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 2000 The Journey Home, Art First, London, UK
- 1998 Displacements, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 1995 Muses and Lamentations, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 1989 Deborah Bell, Potchefstroom Museum, SA
- 1982 Deborah Bell, Market Gallery, Johannesburg, SA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 WORDS, WORDS WORDS | Group Exhibition, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2025 The Armory Show, with Everard Read, New York, USA
Winter, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Matter matters, Everard Read, London, UK
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2024 Winter Collection, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
110 Year Anniversary, Everard Read, London, UK
FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2022 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Seduction, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
3D IN 22: South African Contemporary Sculpture, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
Naughty Aughties, SMAC, Johannesburg, SA
Summer Sculpture, Everard Read, Riverhill Gardens, UK
- 2021 Oasis, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Myths, Martyrs, Monsters & Masterpieces, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
Offering, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
- 2020 Odyssey, Everard Read, SA & UK
Still, Everard Read, SA & UK
Pink, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA

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- On Being, Everard Read, Franschhoek, SA
- 2019 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Co-responses, with Ricky Burnett, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2018 FNB Jo'burg Art Fair, with Everard Read, SA
Winter, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Investec Cape Town Art Fair with Everard Read, SA
Summer, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
- 2017 FNB Jo'burg Art Fair with Everard Read, SA
Winter Collection, Everard Read, Cape Town, SA
Bronze, Steel & Stone II, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2016 Bronze, Steel & Stone I, Everard Read, London, UK
Tacit, travelling exhibition, NWU gallery, Potchefstroom, William Humphrey's, Kimberley, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, SA
Deborah Bell, William Kentridge, Diane Victor, David Krut Workshop, Johannesburg, SA
- 2015 1:54 Art Fair with Everard Read, London, UK
- 2013 Centenary Exhibition, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2012 Rainbow Nation: SAn Sculptors, Museum Beelden Aan Zee, Den Haag, Netherlands
- 2011 HORSE, curated by Ricky Burnett, Everard Read, Johannesburg, SA
- 2010 TWENTY, 20 Years of SA Sculpture, NIROX Foundation, SA
- 2009 Contemporary Sculpture in the Landscape, NIROX Foundation, SA
- 2007 Lift Off II, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, SA
David Krut print workshop, UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria, SA
- 2005 Art Basel, with Goodman Gallery, Miami Beach, USA
Works on Paper, collaborative prints from David Krut Print Workshop, Franchise Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
David Krut Collaborations: 25 Years of Prints & Multiples, National Arts Festival, Makhanda, SA
- 2004 Earthworks/Claybodies, Sasol Museum, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, SA
- 2003 Earthworks/Claybodies, Pretoria Art Museum; Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 2000 Icons for the Millenium, Atlanta, USA
- 1999 The Paper Show, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Emergence, Group Show, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, SA
Artery, AVA Gallery, Cape Town & Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Artists in residence, Standard Bank National Arts Festival, 25th Anniversary, Makhanda, SA
- 1998 Earth Hues – Contemporary African Art, World Space, Washington DC, USA
- 1997 Images and Form: Prints, drawings and sculpture from Southern Africa and Nigeria, Brunei Gallery, University of London and Edinburgh College of Art, UK
The Gencor Collection, Sandton Art Gallery, Grahamstown National Arts Festival, SA
Kempton Park Metropolitan Substructure Fine Arts Award Show, Kempton Park, SA
New Art from South Africa, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
Les Arts de la Resistance (Fin de Siècle à Johannesburg), Galerie Convergence; Galerie Jean Christian Fradin; Galerie Michel Luneau; Galerie les Petit Murs, Nantes, France
Not Quite a Christmas Exhibition, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
CRAM, AVA Gallery, Cape Town & Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Collaborations 1986-1997 (11 years of collaborative projects between artists Kentridge, Hodgins and Bell), Johannesburg Art Gallery, in association with the FNB Vita Awards, SA
UB101: Etchings done in conjunction with Kentridge and Hodgins, curated by Fiona Rankin-Smith, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown & Gertrude Posel Gallery, SA
- 1996 Gay Rights: Rites, Re-writes, travelling exhibition, SA
Group Salon, curated by Rose Korber, Bay Hotel, Cape Town, SA
Common and Uncommon Ground: South African Art to Atlanta, City Gallery East, Atlanta, USA
Vita Awards, Johannesburg Art Gallery, SA
Tomorrow is Now, First Canadian Place & Knights Galleries International, Toronto, Canada
Barber Signs, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Recent Drawings, Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg, SA
Ceramics Biennial, Sandton Art Gallery, SA

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- 1995 The Bag Factory: The First Five Years, Civic Theatre Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
The Art of Tea, Kim Sacks Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Group Salon, Rose Korber representing artists at the Bay Hotel, Cape Town, SA
- 1994 Group Show, Newtown, Johannesburg, SA
Anything Boxed, Group Show, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
South African works on Paper, North Western University of Illinois, Chicago, USA
Memo, installation with video in collaboration with William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins,
National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, SA
Lamentations, Art First, Cork Street. London, UK
- 1993 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg, SA
Vita Awards, Johannesburg Art Gallery, SA
Momentum Life Exhibition, Pretoria, SA
Internations of Millenium, Newtown Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Easing the Passing (of the hours), Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Portraits in the round, ceramic exhibition in collaboration with William Kentridge & Retief van
Wyk, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 1992 ICA, 50 Johannesburg Artists, Johannesburg, SA
Paris: The Catalyst, Alliance Francaise, Durban, SA
Looking at Art: Looking at Watercolours, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Vita Awards, Johannesburg Art Gallery, SA
Works made in August, Newtown Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Easing the Passing (of the hours), computer animation, laser prints & drawings in
collaboration with William Kentridge & Robert Hodgins, Waterfront, Cape Town, SA
1991 Little Morals, a portfolio of etchings done in conjunction with Hodgins & Kentridge,
Cassirer Gallery, Johannesburg; Gallery International, Cape Town; Taking Liberties, Durban, SA
Cape Town Triennial, SA
Painted People: Painted Spaces, Newtown Galleries, Johannesburg, SA
Hand Coloured Graphics, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
Tiny Tapestry Show, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 1990 Women choose Women, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, SA
Art from South Africa, MOMA, Oxford, UK
Standard Bank Drawing Competition, Johannesburg, SA
- 1989 Volkskas Atelier Award Exhibition, Vita Awards, Johannesburg Art Gallery, SA
African Encounters, Dome Gallery, New York and Washington, USA
The Little Big Show, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 1988 CASA (Culture for Another South Africa), conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands
Volkskas Atelier Award exhibition, South African Association of the Arts. Pretoria, SA
100 Artists Protest detention without trial, in aid of DPSC, Market Theatre, Johannesburg, SA
Artists for Human Rights Exhibition, Durban Exhibition Centre, SA
Exhibited with Jenny Stadler & Nagel, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
1987-8 Hogarth in Johannesburg, a portfolio of etchings done in conjunction with Hodgins &
Kentridge. This exhibition travelled to all the major centres in SA.
- 1986 Volkskas Atelier Award Exhibition, South African Association of Arts, Pretoria, SA
4 UNISA Lecturers, Bloemfontein; Pretoria Art Museum, SA
- 1985 Cape Town Triennial New Visions, Market Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
11 Figurative Artists, Market Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
MAFA exhibition, Rembrandt Gallery, Milner Park, Johannesburg, SA
1983-4 Exhibited with Hodgins & Sassoon, Carriage House Gallery, Texas, USA

AWARDS & MERITS

- 2013 Medal of Honour for Visual Arts (Sculpture and Painting), Die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie
for Wetenskap en Kuns, SA
- 1997 APSA Award for the best New Signature, Ceramics Biennial, SA

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- 1991 Vita Quarterly Award, runner-up for Main Award, SA
Mamba Award for the Most Sustained Artist
1986 Merit Prize Winner, Volkskas Atelier, SA

SELECTED PUBLIC & PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

BCE, Johannesburg, SA
Bell, Dewar and Hall, Johannesburg, SA
Bristol Myers Squibb Corp. USA
Friends of the National Gallery, Cape Town, SA
Hara Museum, Tokyo, Japan.
Johannesburg Art Gallery, SA
Johannesburg City Council, SA
King George VI Art Gallery, Port Elizabeth, SA
Legal Resources Centre, Johannesburg, SA
Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA.
MTN Art Institute, Johannesburg, SA
Oliewenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein, SA
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C, USA.
Pretoria Art Museum, SA
Roodepoort Museum, SA
IZIKO SAn National Gallery, Cape Town, SA
BHP Billiton SA Ltd.
Sanlam Collection, SA
Sasol Collection, SA
Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C, USA
Standard Bank Investment Corporation, Johannesburg, SA
Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, SA
Telkom, SA
UNISA Art Gallery, SA
University of Pietermaritzburg Collection, SA
University of the Orange Free State Collection, SA
University of the Witwatersrand Collection, SA

COMMISSIONS

- 1999 Sculpture for Standard Bank, SA
1991 Large sculpture for Wits Business School, SA
1991 Artist-in-Residence, Standard Bank National Arts Festival – 25th Anniversary
Grahamstown, SA 1994 Graphics for Weekly Mail Film Festival Poster, SA
1994 Involvement in movie animation for Arts Alive
1994 Title sequence for Grass Roots, NNTV, SA
1993 Graphics for Weekly Mail Film Festival Poster, SA
1990-1 Set of 6 Graphics for First National Bank, SA