

# Walter Oltmann



## Biography

Walter Oltmann (b. 1960, Rustenburg, North-West Province, South Africa) has an extensive record of creative work produced since the early 1980s, including a number of public commissions. Since the 1980s, he has developed an interest in the relationship between fine art and craft. In his own practice he employs hand-fabricated processes of making and has researched wire craft traditions in southern Africa. In his works, Oltmann makes connections to domestic textile practices and explores such forms of making in evoking fragility and the passage of time. He often combines aspects of decorative ornament with subject matter that seems somewhat contradictory or disturbing in relation to handcrafted embellishment. His sculptural works are executed by way of weaving in wire and using handcrafting methods that reference African and Western traditions of weaving. He is deeply interested in the influence of craft traditions in contemporary South African art.

He obtained a BA Fine Arts degree from the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (1981), and an MA Fine Arts degree (1985) and PhD in Fine Arts degree (2017) from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg – where he worked as a Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor in Fine Arts.

In 2001, Oltmann was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Arts. His solo exhibition which followed travelled throughout South Africa. In 2014, the Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg hosted his solo show *In the Weave* which profiled three decades of the artist's work.

Oltmann received the Claire & Edoardo Villa Will Trust's Extraordinary Award for Sculpture for 2022, enabling him to produce an extensive body of work, undertaken in the Villa-Legodi workshop at NIROX Sculpture Park where the works were also publicly shown. A book on his work titled *In Time* will be published shortly.

In his PhD thesis titled *In The Weave: Textile-based Modes of Making and the Vocabulary of Handcraft in Selected Contemporary Artworks from South Africa*, Oltmann examines how and to what ends contemporary artists working in South Africa have chosen to engage in practices that are common to textile-based handcraft traditions of weaving, stitching and tying. His focus is on how these artists have understood manual work and its philosophy, and how conceptualization in their creative practice is accessed through the physical act of repetitive making by hand, based particularly on those traditional textile craft practices associated with weaving.

Collections include: Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, Norval Foundation, Cape Town and the Seattle Art Museum, Washington.

Oltmann lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa.

## Artist Statement

My main area of creative focus is in sculpture, and more particularly in fabricating woven wire forms which sometimes reference local craft traditions. My drawings are also based on and explore similar references. I have researched and written on the use of wire in African material culture in this region and am deeply interested in the influence of these traditions in contemporary South African art. While I exhibit my artworks quite regularly on group and solo exhibitions, I have in recent years also been involved in large-scale commissions.

In my sculptures I use images of natural phenomena (human, plant and animal) and play with the idea of mutation, hybrids and reconfiguring the familiar. Through dramatically enlarging and/or transposing features of one to the other, I play with the paradox between vulnerability and the monstrous. Using the language of craft, my artworks are always a product of labour and time.

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## Solo Exhibitions

**2022** *ARMOUR & LACE: A Bestiary*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA

**2015** *Cradle*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

**2014** *In the Weave*, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

**2013** *Penumbra*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

**2008** \_Shared exhibition with Peter Schütz, Goodman Gallery, South Africa

**2007** *Walter Oltman* Solo exhibition at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

**2001** *Standard Bank young Artist* travelling exhibition, South Africa

**1998** *Icons and Idols*, Two person exhibition with Peter Schutz, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

**1993** \_Two person exhibition with Peter Schütz, Goodman Gallery, South Africa

## Group Exhibitions

**2019** *Lasting Influences*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, SA  
**2016** *Summer Show*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, SA  
**2016** *Air: Inspiration-Expiration*, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, SA  
**2016** *New Revolutions: Goodman Gallery at 50*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**2016** *New Revolutions: Goodman Gallery at 50*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa  
**2015-2016** *Disguise: Masks & Global African Art*, Seattle Art Museum WA, Brooklyn Museum NY, Fowler Museum CA, USA  
**2015** *TWENTY: Art in the Time of Democracy*, Beijing International Art Biennale, Beijing, China  
**2014** *From Sitting to Selfie*, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**2012** *Coming of Age: 21 Years of Artist Proof Studio*, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**2012** *Pointure*, University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**2011** *Water, The [Delicate] Thread of Life*, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**2010** *9 Linocuts*, Gallery AOP, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**2010** *The Marks We Make*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa  
**2008** *Matrix Natura*, 18th International Contemporary Textile Exhibition, Como, Italy  
**2007** *Sasol Wax Art*, Johannesburg Art Gallery/Izikho Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa  
**2005** *In the Making: Materials and Process*, group exhibition at Michael Stevenson Contemporary Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa  
**2004** Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa (shared exhibition with Kevin Brand and Samson Mudzunga)  
**2003** *Coexistence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa*, The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Boston, USA  
**1998** *Holdings: Refiguring the Archive*, Group exhibition, WITS University, Johannesburg, South Africa  
**1995** *Three Sculptors – Three Readers*, Three person travelling exhibition with Neels Coetzee and Peter Schütz  
**1985** *Cape Town Triennial Exhibition*, Cape Town, South Africa

## Teaching, Lectureships and Workshop

Current: Lecturer, Division of Visual Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

## Awards and Merits

**2010** Ampersand Fellowship, Ampersand Foundation  
**2007** Sasol Wax Art Award  
**2001** Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art

## Academic Record and Residencies

### Postgraduate

**1982-1985** MA WITS University, Johannesburg

### h2. Undergraduate

**1978-1981** BA, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg

## Collections

University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal  
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg  
Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town  
Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg  
Durban Art Gallery Museum  
Johannesburg Art Gallery  
King George VI Museum, Port Elizabeth  
Pretoria Art Museum  
J Stegman Gallery, University of the Free State  
Standard Bank Collection, Johannesburg  
Oliewenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, Port Elizabeth  
21C Hotel Museum, Kentucky  
21C Hotel Museum, Ohio  
Seattle Art Museum, Washington  
Seguros Art Centre, Bogota, Colombia

## Commissions

**2008** SAB Headoffice, Sandton, Johannesburg (2 large banners)  
**2007** Wall sculpture for the Wits Medical School foyer  
**2005/6** Wits Origins Centre: world map interpretation  
**2004** SAB wall sculpture, Sandton, Johannesburg  
**2003** New Constitutional Court, chandeliers and lamp shades, JHB  
**2003** Arabella Sheraton Hotel, Cape Town: suspended sculpture  
**2003** Dimension Data: suspended sculpture, Bryanston, JHB  
**2000** Sandton Convention Centre: wall sculpture  
**1999** ABSA North Towers: sculpture, Johannesburg  
**1998** MTN wall sculpture, Sandton, Johannesburg  
**1997** Durban Convention Centre: wall sculpture  
**1995** Gencor wall sculpture, Johannesburg