Walter Oltmann

Biography

Walter Oltmann (born 1960, South Africa) is a practicing artist who lives and works in Johannesburg. 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. He taught in the Fine arts department at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1989 to 2016.

Oltmann 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. 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.

In his artworks 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.

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.

Walter Oltmann

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