



A  
PLACE  
IN TIME

NIROX sculpture · WINTER 2016

# REVIEWS

## ROCKS

TAYLOR (46) for the first time if you thought you'd slipped and lunged into the current of an

various stages of completion - sand and mud and stone - and people and drawings, and armatures but despite the busyness, you find an unstoppable flow of

established the Dionysus foundry, shortly after he founded it, in 1996. Arguably one of the most massive seated figures of the 20th century is widely respected for his work. He models clay or wax and passes the piece to a team of workers who pass it on to either rammed earth, stone or concrete. It's like a production line, but it's powered by creative energy.

conduit through which the river flows from the source, he says: materials flow through him, and "...will flow after me, like people who have gone before me, the way of the river and even the geology around it is adamant that he does not act as agent for the process to be done by my hands and direct the flow, but rather his flow of creation", he says. He's obsessive. He's inspired by the land and sees the land as "a place where the energy that an artist can feed

But it doesn't come easy. He is a legendary manager of the punk scene in the 1970s, talks of authenticity and authenticity facilitated by "a certain 'fuck it' in the messy process of trial and failure and the achievement of a goal. We learn from doing, he

Winter Sculpture Fair is about a "collaboration" with local artists. The art it is made from two thousand years of stoneware (a material close to the one used in Thabazimbi, Limpopo. In the region volcanic ash and cave Breccia, a material that have been found.

His knowledge of geology is a testament to the integrity of rock and stone, and he refers to source his materials to find a connection to place. He doesn't ignore. Rock is not a tabula

Fine Art candidate at the

## JOHAN THOM: DISRUPTED DREAMS OF UTOPIA

Nestled in the fertile plains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in ancient Mesopotamia, the city of Babylon once bustled with promise. It was home to the tallest manmade structure of the time, the Tower of Babel. And then it fell. Babylon. The place of the celebrated hanging gardens: the birthplace of linguistic diversity, it was synonymous with sin and pride. Exploring binaries of order and discord in his own adaptation of this ancient ruin is JOHAN THOM (40) - a doctoral graduate from London's Slade School of Fine Art, who currently teaches visual art at Pretoria University.

Titled 'Hanging Gardens', Thom's saligna and pine wood terrace (2m x 3m), adorned with a glass greenhouse, stretches up to the heavens with a small "garden" - a patch of growing weeds - inside. They're protected as if they are sacred. The artist reigns over his creation through two bronze feet, the same size as his own, atop the glass vitrine.

The Utopian structure is juxtaposed with an uncontrolled bubbling mass of polyurethane foam. This builder's material which often features in Thom's work weighs 103kg (Thom's weight) and flows from the bronze feet and over the installation, symbolising the ultimate chaos man carries with him.

A sculpture of conflict, 'Hanging Gardens' presents you with binaries: man vs nature; structure vs chaos; control vs the uncontrollable. The sculpture reflects dreams of Utopia, which turn into what Thom describes as a "messy affair."

The work seduces you to come closer, but then it may repel or perplex you: "By setting boundaries you tend to exclude certain people," says Thom. After the fall of apartheid, he adds, optimism reigned in South Africa. Today the pendulum seems to be slowly swinging back to fascist principles, which won't be contained.

In a crisp, polished stainless steel frame, the glass vitrine is, in Thom's description, the "everpresent sparring partner of the museum visitor." The warm wood stands in stark contrast to this detached box; the foam is the "antitheses of the relative, though persistent wholesomeness and naturalness of the garden and the ideals that underpin it."

By "building a nightmarish 'antigarden'" in NIROX Sculpture Park, Thom introduces rebellious discord. "Chaos is a willingness to admit that everything is not planned. We live in a world where many of our freedoms are disappearing because of a small group of farrights and fundamentalists. It's great to be able to make such a large and ridiculous thing ... in an idyllic sculpture park - something completely noncommercial - in a time where the gallery market is dominating the art world. And sometimes the world just needs a good 'fuck it'." Thom's work has always been designed to unnerve. He expects most NIROX viewers will not understand this piece. "That's okay. But if a few are boggled ... I know I'll see them again."

He describes the whole process, the assembly and installation of the work as almost theatrical. Thom plays out the drama of 'Babylon' against the backdrop of the sculpture park and conjures up beauty, unease and confusion in equal measure. To enforced rules, confinements, expectations and idealism, he raises a metaphorical middle finger.

[Liaison Officer at Dionysus Sculpture Works in Pretoria, ELANI WILLEMSE holds her masters degree in Art History from the University of the North West, in Limpopo]