



COFA 5 : DR J THOM

Title: Self-portrait with skull (2016)

Artist: Johan Thom

Medium: 3D scan of the artist and human skull cast in bronze, white patina

Dimensions: 50 x 15 x 20cm. Edition of 6

Exhibited:

Tacit, a traveling group exhibition curated by Elani Willemse and held at the Pretoria Art Museum (2016), Fried Contemporary Art Gallery (Pretoria, 2017), The Reservoir at Oliewenhuis Art Museum (Bloemfontein, 2018), the William Humphries Art Museum (Kimberly, 2017), NWU Art Gallery at the University of the North West (Potchefstroom, 2016).

Annotation:

As with many performance artists I have many photographs of myself doing performances or photographs of performances specifically staged for the camera.

For this project I wanted to use the latest three dimensional modelling digital software and hardware to produce a three-dimensional copy of myself doing a performance. I consulted with experts in the field and worked with Dionysus Sculpture Works (Pretoria) and GNC engineering (Johannesburg) to achieve the desired end result through three-dimensional scanning and sophisticated modelling processes.



On surface the work is based on the age old theme of human mortality and our confrontation therewith by way of the human skull (Hamlet refers, for example). However, given that, for this work of art I would be holding the skull of an unidentified female, African homicide victim,

context-specific issues relating to South Africa's colonial legacy, our current politics and the extremely vulnerability of black females in South Africa, are forcefully brought to the fore.

In this artwork the seeming universality of the theme of mortality is challenged the specifics of race, culture, politics and economics. I am privileged, white, male, Afrikaans, educated whereas the simple fact of the absence of any personal details barring material, forensic evidence surrounding the skull would seem to imply that the complete opposite holds true for the individual whose life has been so senselessly, violently taken. I am deeply implicated and the confrontation between the self and the other becomes highly personal and controversial. This confrontation is one as much with myself as with notions of privilege, ethics, art, law, research, race - all Brought forward by the material the reality of the skull and the life experiences implicit therein (which I cannot now ever truly fathom, no matter how piercingly I stare into its eyes or attempt to plug the gap with forms of research).

It briefly clarify the technical process of making the work in some material and technical detail:

The full, three dimensional body scan took approximately 45 minutes to complete.

I was holding the skull in my hand for the duration of the scan and had to stand perfectly still so not to disturb the process (digital distortions may easily occur).

The resulting scan was processed and printed as a wax replica. This replica was moulded and cast in sculptors wax, finished and refined and remoulded for a final cast. The wax model was then cast in bronze and finished once again.

The human skull was separately professionally scanned again by a forensic grade three-dimensional scanner, printed, cast and finished by a professional jeweller to ensure even the finest reproduction of detail - including violent signs of trauma.

The entire process took 4 months to complete.

Special thanks to - and made with assistance and support by - Dionysus Sculpture Works and Sunette Ferreira, Pretoria.