

Visual art



Idyllic setting for sculpture: The Nirox Foundation's winter show will feature work by 50 South African artists including Aliza Levi (above left) and Richard Forbes (above right)

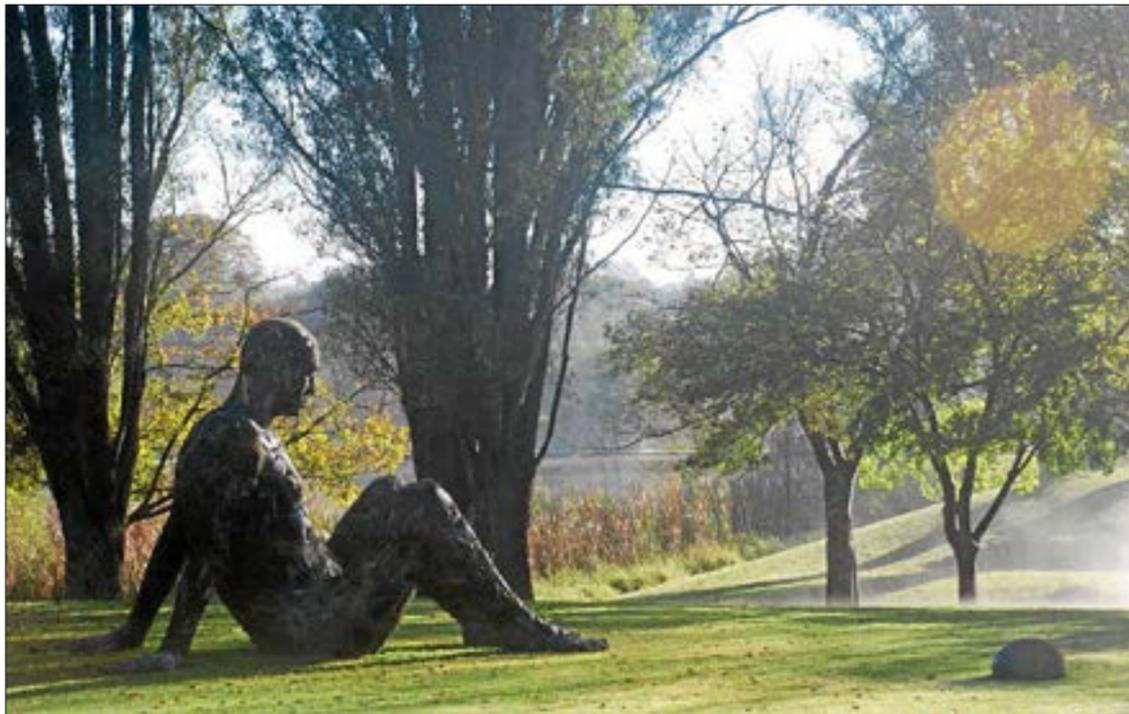
Nature nurtures Cradle's art

The works of 50 South African artists draw heavily on the environment that they find themselves in

Medeine Tribinevicius

I'm always struck by the perfect quality of light at this time of year, as autumn turns to winter. This, combined with the cooling temperatures makes it the perfect time to visit the Cradle of Humankind. And what better excuse to visit than art, specifically the Nirox Sculpture Winter 2014 opening, the second instalment of a very successful exhibition hosted by the Nirox Foundation.

The exhibition features nearly 100 works by more than 50 South African artists, both established and emerging. And, if the promise of art isn't enough to entice you to make the trek, the food and wine on offer at the Winter Sculpture Fair on May 10 and 11 — which also marks the opening of the exhibition to the public — just may be. The best of Franschhoek's wineries and restaurants will set up stalls in the 15-hectare grounds and



Son of the soil: Angus Taylor's *Morphic Resonance* was made by packing earth and other materials into a mould

it will be almost twice the size of last year's event.

The curator of the exhibition, Mary-Jane Darroll, describes it as being

without an agenda or thematic construct, although she says "there is a serious underpinning of excellence. This is an exhibition of the very best of sculpture in South Africa."

Broad in scope, the show brings together artists at different stages of their careers. Darroll approached individuals, galleries and institutions (including the Michaelis School of Fine Art, the universities of the Witwatersrand, Pretoria and Johannesburg and the Bag Factory Artist's Studios) to find the best sculpture.

"We have the perfect conditions for sculpture — our climate, our landscape," Darroll says.

As an outdoor show, it's only natural that the environment will play a supporting role, but many of the works take landscape in an almost literal fashion.

Angus Taylor's massive reclining male figure, *Morphic Resonance*, is made of rammed earth — soil and other materials have been tightly packed into a mould. The resulting sculpture is both physically intimidating and structurally fragile; moving the work is nearly impossible. It is of the Earth but it is also transient, speaking to the fragility and power of the human/nature balance.

This tension between the monumental and the fragile is echoed in Ledelle Moe's *Study for Traces*. For her work, she will live on site for a week, sleeping in a tent and creating small castings and carvings from cement, mixing it with earth and aggregate collected from different places in the reserve and using basic

casting techniques. The sculptures will be small — no more than 30cm — and form a single installation. For Moe, connecting with the space physically highlights the impossibility of owning land, and the act of claiming some of the earth to be incorporated in her work is a reflection on bigger issues, such as land claims and contested territories.

But, ultimately, Moe's repetitive act of collecting, casting and carving is driven by something broader. "It gives voice to the place while considering the collective, history and migratory patterns of animals and humans," she says.

Also interested in the relationship between animal and human are Johan Thom and Guy du Toit. Their work for this exhibition is one of a number of collaborative works Thom has created, all reinterpreting work by Henry Moore made after an elephant skull that was given to him.

In *Elephant Skull Plate 1*, Thom and Du Toit take an elephant skull, open it and cast it in bronze.

"I'm interested in thinking about the complexities of the material encounter of an artist and an elephant, the shared lineage of bone and flesh — the human and animal relationship," Thom says.

But the work can also be read as a return of sorts, bringing the bones of this African animal home. "This is not just a found object. It retains the trace of something. This is something you simply cannot discard."

This is South Africa and the tradition of politically potent work is

strong. In this exhibition, we see the politics of place coming into play in several of the works. Zimbabwe-born Michele Mathison's installation, *Refuge*, is a replica of tented refugee camps set up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in South Africa in 2008 after xenophobic violence broke out in several cities and displaced tens of thousands of people.

The tents, made of mealie meal bags, are the same size as the originals but, instead of doors or windows, there are incisions in the fabric, calling to mind the violence of the attacks and the viewer's inability to penetrate the experience. You can walk around them but cannot enter.

Aliza Levi's installation, *Own*, takes on a different aspect of belonging and identity. After spending many years in Australia, she recently returned to South Africa, which provides "a very different context to work in, in that one is presented daily with very raw, visible encounters".

Her installation addresses this. She has acquired a guardhouse, which will be placed on the lawns at Nirox. She will also hire a guard to inhabit it. Perceptions of the familiar object in this context, a nature reserve, are destabilised, particularly because it is inhabited. Who or what is the guard protecting? And for whom?

From the political landscape to the spiritual, Jo'burg's Kim Lieberman uses her cable-tattooing technique to construct a whole universe in *Tutto/The Landscape*. A steel frame holds the world together as figures and forms — a pregnant woman, a gaggle of children, two whales about to breach, a self-portrait — are suspended in the air. Lieberman describes the lace as representing "events, or even incidents, that have happened that pattern out in waves. If you imagine a war, or a deep celebration, [and] how it can affect everything. The lace is the invisible waves that move out from mighty things that happen."

The cables link the whole work together, tensile but fragile — break one and the rest are affected; one interaction has an impact on everything else.

This year, Frank van Reenen, who is known for his clever, toy-inspired works, has been commissioned to create a sculpture, and he is going big — at 5m high, *The Giant* is not just a clever name.

Many of the artists participating have been part of the Nirox Foundation's residency programme. As a result, this exhibition is not only focused on finding the best sculpture in South Africa but also on fostering it.

			
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The Winter Sculpture Fair takes place from May 10 to 11 at the Nirox Foundation Sculpture Park, 24 Kromdraai Road, Cradle of Humankind. www.wintersculpture.co.za