

EVERARD READ



Formed

Lionel Smit

Everard Read Johannesburg's CIRCA Gallery

April 2024

He has been one of South Africa's most popular painters and sculptors for decades, but Lionel Smit is not resting on his laurels. For an award-winning master of his craft, he's refreshingly modest and open about his art and practice.

His focus on sculpture for this new exhibition, *Formed*, is case in point. Smit has been producing the latter for years, but for this body of work, he has upped the ante. "Usually, I predominantly paint, but I'd gone into a new process of trying to sculpt more frequently. I got into a rhythm of sculpting and that's when the whole idea of shaping something in a three-dimensional form, from a painter's point of view, became intriguing", he says.

After hard hours of work, the result is a series of heads and busts, and for the first time, full figures, made in his quintessential abstracted style. It's these forms, and indeed the forming of them, that give the show its polysemous title. Smit has also put the emphasis on the pause in the moment of how a piece is modelled. "That's the essence of what I've tried to capture", he explains. There are a handful of paintings on the exhibition but they very much compliment and foreground his bronzes.

The movement, markings and shapes that he has fashioned in clay and then cast in bronze are evocative of the energy-filled brush strokes that bring the women in his paintings to life. They also illustrate Smit's profound understanding of both the evolution of art and its artistry. There is something of the Ancient Greek, of Michelangelo, and of hours spent grappling with human anatomy in his latest

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beauties. The *Contrapposto* poses and the hesitation over whether a fragmented figure is still being built up or in the process of decaying, are there too.

“I loved it, but it was also terrifying”, Smit says candidly of this new direction. “I think I had the armature in my studio for two years before I started working. I had to gather the stamina and confidence to be able to do it”, he adds. He started with the smaller figures and that led him to an understanding of form and shape that he could then transfer into larger pieces.

It's this sense of the craft and of his developing his skill that Smit would like his audience to engage with. As he puts it, “I hope it makes them reflect on the process of sculpture and the idea of how things are formed and shaped. From both spatial and making points of view, I think people will get a completely different idea each time they look at the works”.

Formed runs from 12 April 2024 at Everard Read Johannesburg's CIRCA Gallery. For more information about the exhibition, contact Gina Mollé at gina@everard.co.za

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