

SUBLIMATION



by André Stead

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Sentient

The African principle of Ubuntu – we are whom we are because of others – finds its cognate in the Western world through an ‘empathic revolution’. Against the pandemic of narcissism, a disease and a culture epitomised by the ‘Selfie’, artists such as Andre Stead are asking us to return to a more ‘sentient’, intuitive, compassionate worldview. Preoccupied with the ‘ability to feel and to assimilate people, ideas or culture’, Stead has, as a consequence, transformed sculpture into an osmotic metaphor. His figures achieve this by allowing for transparency and letting the viewer’s eye literally pass through the sculpture’s body. In this way, Stead reminds us that self-possession and self-containment is an ego-driven and rational conceit. For example, the female figure entitled ‘Sentient’ is carved from an assembled block made of ‘one hundred tapered modular parts’. By carving this assemblage, thereby breaking the form yet again, Stead reminds us that we are composites, or porous conglomerates.

While Stead’s approach is technical, his mind-set is metaphysical. The sculptures are ‘designed so that when the viewer is directly in front of the artwork, at an intimate conversational distance, the negative spaces align, allowing the viewer to see through the artwork’. Stead’s reflection here is curious. His sculptures are not three dimensional Apollonian ideals but, because they are perforated and therefore as much a thing of air as of substance, evocations of a more open-ended, more fluidly inter-connective ideal.

‘The transparent nature of the artwork is a symbol of our ability to be aligned with others in such a way that we can understand their pain or joy as if it were our own’, says Stead. A view at stark odds to that typically associated with sculpture – that it is a thing to be looked at and revered at a distance – Stead reminds art that art need not be reverential, that its beauty can and must also reside in its connectivity. And in this regard, his sentiment powerfully echoes that of Martin Buber’s I and Thou.

Stead’s understanding of transparency does not suppose a seamlessly aerated bond but the struggle to truly understand others. His sculptures of men and women are the avatars or mediums for this great humane idea. His most powerful work, in which the human form is wholly abstracted – a blob atop a fretwork of legs – forcefully reminds us that human understanding is not reducible to the cognitively perceptible; that the human is the embodiment of a greater idea and not merely the sum of rational transaction and a balancing act of opposed forces, but, all the more, the enigmatic sum of a far deeper synergy. It is curious that Stead should attach this belief to a form, sculpture, which notoriously has shunned such an ideal. But then, contra the rational view of humankind, it is our atomic, porous, and boundless nature which, for Stead, matters the more. For him, human connection is not only possible by reaching outward into the world, it is all the more profoundly possible by turning inward and finding a universe of possibility within ourselves. It is for this reason that I regard Stead as a sculptor of the ethical heart and mind.

An immersion in online platforms revealed to the artist the astonishing ease with which human beings disclose their deepest secrets and longings. And in this regard it is worth noting, after Tom Chatfield, that ‘contrary to popular belief, “sex” is not the most searched-for term on the internet. If you ask Google about “sex”, it will offer just under two and a half billion results: enough to beat most enquiries but, charmingly, still less than a third of the more than seven billion results for “love”’. And it is love – the love of oneself and the love for others – which, equally charmingly, has inspired the sculptor Andre Stead.

By Ashraf Jamal



Sentient
2016
Ethyl carbamate
530 x 500 x 350 mm

Sentient

"Sentient" is a female bust that explores the perceptual cognition of the human mind and our ability to feel and to assimilate people, ideas or culture. The word "sentient" comes from early 17th century Latin and literally means "feeling", describing our ability to perceive or feel. The piece was originally assembled from 100 tapered modular parts that formed the block of material that the bust was carved from. Designed in such a way that when the viewer is directly in front of the artwork, at an intimate conversational distance, the negative spaces align allowing the viewer to see through the artwork. This transparency is symbolic of our ability to be aligned with others in such a way that we can understand their pain or joy as if it were our own. It is a reminder that one does not always need the full picture in order to have a sympathetic understanding of others.

Sublimation

The verb sublimation is from the Latin word sublimare, meaning "raised to a higher status."

"In psychology, sublimation is a mature type of defence mechanism where socially unacceptable impulses or idealisations are unconsciously transformed into socially acceptable actions or behaviour, possibly resulting in a long-term conversion of the initial impulse. It can also be the diversion of the energy of a sexual or other biological impulses from its immediate goal to one of a more acceptable social, moral, or aesthetic nature or use. In Science, sublimation is the transition of a substance directly from the solid to the gas phase without passing through the intermediate liquid phase. When the surface layer of snow or ice turns into fog or steam without melting, this is an example of sublimation." Any solid that goes through a sublimation process or "phase transition" is referred to as a material that will "sublime". According to a 1757 thesis on aesthetics written by Edmund Burke, the Sublime is what has the power to compel or destroy us. In a very real sense, the advent of the information age is akin to the sublimation of mankind, where previously we would write our thoughts down on physical paper, they are now instantly uploaded to the cloud. Images taken of any real world "solid" objects are directly transformed into an invisible "gas" of ones and zeroes that may be transported through cyberspace to any location in an instant. The "Sublimation" series explores the phenomenon of being human in a digital age and the social and cultural ambiguities that may obscure the parameters of the human condition.



Sublimation

2016

Bronze edition of 1

780 x 250 x 210 mm



Communion
2016
Bronze edition of 1
580 x 460 x 220 mm



Icon Architecture
2016
Bronze edition of 6
820 x 300 x 300 mm



Venus construct
2016
Bronze edition of 6
810 x 250 x 200 mm



Sentinals
2016
Bronze edition of 6
466 x 210 x 175 mm



Sentinels
2016
Bronze edition of 6
466 x 210 x 175 mm



Simulant
2016
Bronze edition of 6
370 x 330 x 230 mm



Firewall
2016
Bronze edition of 6
587 x 220 x 165 mm



Legacy
2016
Bronze edition of 6
480 x 200 x 165 mm



Transmissive
2016
Bronze edition of 6
395 x 230 x 180 mm

Integant
20146
Bronze edition of 6
550 x 220 x 165 mm





Destiny
2016
Bronze edition of 6
594 x 220 x 165 mm



Transference
2016
Bronze edition of 6
590 x 220 x 165 mm



Contemplation
2016
Bronze edition of 6
330 x 270 x 165 mm

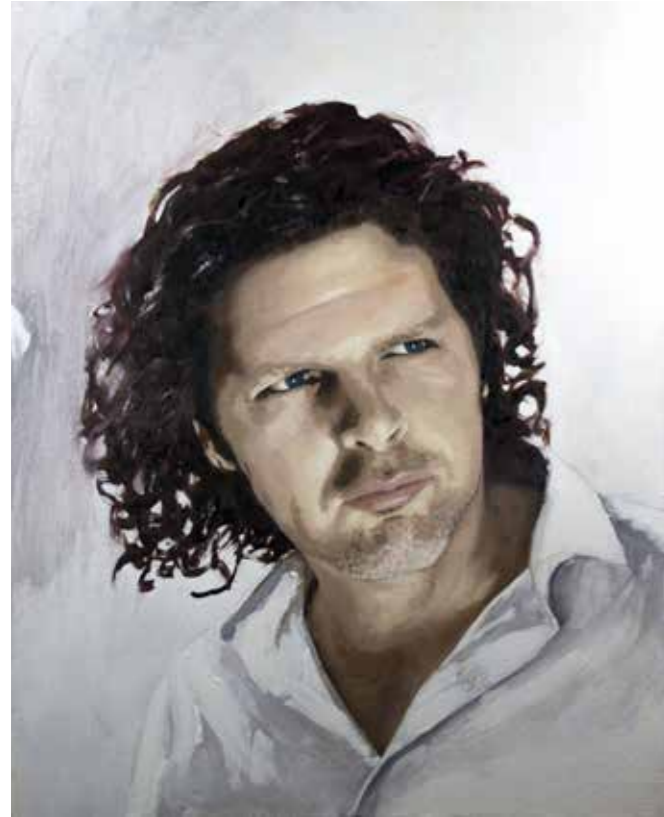




Emulation
2016
Bronze edition of 6
554 x 220 x 165 mm



Serenity
2016
Bronze edition of 6
588 x 225 x 150 mm



André Stead

Born in Evander, 1975. Lives and works in Cape Town.

Qualifications and awards

2007 Eight years at the Bronze Age Art Foundry, Simon's Town
1997 Metal forging tuition, John Allesandri, Cape Town
1995 Graphic design course, Gunther Komnick, Cape Town
1994 Goldsmith apprenticeship, Pretoria
1993 Pro Arte School of Arts, Distinction with colours for Art, Pretoria
1991 Merit award, Iscor Art Competition, Iscor Art Collection, Pretoria

Selected Exhibitions and Commissions

2016

Self-i, Group exhibition, The Read Contemporary, Franschhoek.
Transmutation, Group exhibition, Knysna Fine Art Gallery, Knysna
Cape Town Art Fair, Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art Gallery
Certain Kind Of Madness, Group exhibition, Imibala Gallery

2015

Summer Exhibition, Group exhibition, Knysna Fine Art Gallery, Knysna
Signature, Group exhibition, The Read Contemporary, Franschhoek.
US Woordfees, Group exhibition, P J Olivier Art Centre, Stellenbosch
Cape Town Art Fair, Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art Gallery
Bring your own identity, Group exhibition, Knysna Fine Art Gallery
IS Sculpture at Tokara, Group exhibition, Tokara, Stellenbosch

2014

Murmuration, Commission, Delaire Graff Wine Estate, Stellenbosch
Woordfees 2014, Group exhibition, P J Olivier Art Centre, Stellenbosch
Cape Town Art Fair, Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art Gallery,
The Fountain of youth, Private commission, Oxford, United Kingdom
The Wall of Words, Corporate commission, Oxford, United Kingdom

2013

Koi Fish Installation, Private commission, Singapore
Cape Town Art Fair, Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art Gallery
National Heritage Project Company Commission
Elemental man, Solo exhibition, Knysna Fine Art Gallery, Knysna
Woordfees 2013, Group exhibition, P J Olivier Art Centre, Stellenbosch

2012

Summer, Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art, Cape Town
Young Minds Charity Fund Raiser, st. Lorient, Pretoria
Illumination, Solo exhibition, Christopher Møller Art, Cape Town
Oxford Swallows, Private commission, Oxford, United Kingdom

2011

Flight of the Swallows, Commission, Delaire Graff Wine Estate,
Stellenbosch
Evolution, Solo exhibition, Is Art Gallery, Franschhoek
Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art, Cape Town
Group exhibition, Dawid's Choice Gallery, Johannesburg
Roodt Inc, group exhibition, Dawid's Choice Gallery, Johannesburg

2010

Group exhibition, Dimitrov Art Gallery, Dullstroom
Rooftop exhibition, group show, St. Lorient, Pretoria
Group exhibition, The Upper Deck Gallery, Plettenberg Bay
Group exhibition, Christopher Møller Art Gallery, Cape Town

2009

Group exhibition, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg
Identity, group exhibition, Platform on 18th Gallery, Pretoria
Figures, solo exhibition, Northcliff, Johannesburg
Female series launch, Grande Provence Heritage Wine Estate, CTICC

2008

Angels, group exhibition, Grande Provence Gallery, Franschhoek
Group exhibition, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town
Medallions, Corporate Commission, Burj Khalifa Development, Dubai

2006

Corporate commission, Graham Beck Wine Estate, Franschhoek
Group exhibition, Bronze Age Sculpture House, Cape Town

2000 – 2005

Group exhibition, Seidelberg Wine Estate, Paarl
Miniatures, group exhibition, Bronze Age Sculpture house, Cape Town
Board of Executors, Corporate commission, Cape Town
Group exhibition, Vineyard Gallery, Cape Town

1999

Group exhibition, The Christie Gallery, Cape Town
Group exhibition, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town

1998

Wooden figures, Solo exhibition, Novalis Institute, Cape Town
Sanlam Restoration - Award, Corporate commission, Cape Town
Group exhibition, Association for visual arts, Cape Town

1997

Sanlam Literary Award, Corporate commission, Grahamstown
Group exhibition, Primart Gallery, Cape Town

Collections

National Heritage Project Company
Bernard Fontannaz
Laurence Graff
Willy Woestyn
Johnny Walker Stride Awards
Graham Beck Estates
Board of Executives
Sanlam
Isacor



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