

Sunday  
Times  
HOME

# MEET THE MAKERS



## BORN FROM STONE

This artist couple's home and studio at the foot of one of the world's oldest mountain ranges invites inspiration from nature and is a sculpture in its own right

Angus Taylor and Rina Stutzer are a force in the South African art world. Not only are they both respected artists in their own right, they also run one of SA's most advanced sculpture studios and foundries, Diomysus Sculpture Works (DSW), which casts many of our most renowned local fine artists, including Deborah Bell, Joni Brenner and Norman Catherine.

Angus has created some of SA's most recognisable large sculptures, often combining materials such as bronze, steel and stone, although he also works with more ephemeral materials like rammed earth and packed thatching grass. His stacked stones in the form of reclining giants evoke some of man's most ancient interactions with Earth.

Angus is probably still associated foremost with his figural work – usually male figures, hard to define when it comes to age or race – that engage profoundly with the tension between permanence and the transitory nature of human life. At first glance they might even appear to be made after quite a traditional idiom, but he has always subverted any notion of the monumental bronze statue by putting them in the context of ancient and, beyond that, geological timescales embodied in varieties of carefully selected stone.

Rina's role at DSW involves creative input and implementing core changes on various projects, as well as work on her own large-scale public sculptural works. But she is perhaps best known as a painter.

As a counterpoint to the fire, noise, heat and primal energy at DSW, Angus and Rina's studio at home represents a more

private, reflective space where a sense of the tranquillity and connection to nature allows ideas to germinate.

Their home studio is an extension of their house just outside Pretoria, designed for them by local architect Pieter Mathews (Mathews & Associates Architects) and built by Angus. The house is almost a sculpture itself, clad in granite offcuts from one of the stonemasons Angus works with. In fact, Pieter said he drew inspiration from Angus's sculptural works, incorporating materials that are bold, raw and honest, so that his plan and Angus's interventions work harmoniously together.

The studio's enormously high doors – suspended from above and trundled aside on wheels cast from an original Angus found in an antique shop – make it seem almost like a modern interpretation of a tower, or an ancient stone structure like a cairn. In its tacitly and earthiness, as Rina puts it, the granite "physically grounds or anchors the studio as the cornerstone of our life", but at the same time its volume and openness give it an airy, open quality.

With the doors wide open to the semi-indigenous garden and "void" next door, natural light pours in through the skylights in the concrete roof slab.

"Its ambience changes constantly," says Rina. "Sometimes birds and bats fly



In the studio, Rina Stutzer is creating a 5.5m tall faceted mirror-finish, stainless-steel sculpture referencing the geographic shape of the African continent.

through. During and after dusk the chirps of the spotted eagle-owl and the murmur of bush babies is audible from the trees surrounding the studio.

This studio is where Angus and Rina currently make maquettes and armatures, and where some of the smaller-scale preparation and finishing takes place (and, of course, painting).

Dotted around the studio are one-fifth scale models of a 5.5m-high faceted stainless-steel representation of Africa that Rina is working on for a large commission. It's here that she's honed its shape and polished its surfaces.

"I work down the plaster, then a mould is taken of that and cast in metal," she explains. "There are many layers of cleaning up to get those crisp edges and the flat facets so that the structure and surfaces show the desired refinement."

Although there are parts of the process that involved computer-aided design, all the models were first made by hand, which creates a rhythm and balance that would never have been possible with an algorithm alone. "This process incorporates or welcomes a degree of human imperfection compared to the sterility of computerised hyper-perfection," says Rina.

She adds that her work usually involves "grime, patinas, ruin" and the transformative potential of decay, and that the shiny, geometric perfection of this

work is a departure for her.

"I looked at the idea of us looking at ourselves, and Africa being self-aware," she says. "That's why I went specifically with mirror-finish stainless steel. That's why it will fragment and scatter and multiply."

Angus also works and reworks sculptures here. During our visit, he's busy with a stainless-steel sculpture, the body of which he'd already cast and finished. He had planned to carve the head from haematite, but decided to first sculpt it from clay and cast it in plaster before carving the final version in rock. He says haematite is more or less 68% iron, "which is what the stainless steel is mainly made from, so there is a direct relation between the stone and the cast metal".

But it's in this studio that its clay features are shaped by hand, gradually built up and scraped away before it will be cast; the rough work done on the stone by his assistants before he settles down to do the finer work himself.

Given the setting of their house and studio, it's not surprising Angus and Rina's thoughts turn to the power and presence of Earth: both the transitory and the seemingly permanent. It's at the foot of the Bronberg, which is essentially the eastern part of the Magaliesberg mountain range. "Around the studio, you have some of the oldest stone on Earth," says Angus.

There's something he enjoys about the effect of contextualising human achievements in a geological timescale. "It's humbling," he says. "It just takes a bit [of the grandeur] out of it."

He's fond of pointing out that if earth's existence were represented as a day, humans have only been around for the last 80 seconds or so before midnight.



"There's a Buddhist term, Tsu Jan, which means the 'is-ness' of things," he says. "[The stone] is something already. If you work with that something, it's a collaboration rather than domination."

ANGUSTAYLOR



TEXT GRAHAM WOOD PRODUCTION SVEN ALBERDING PHOTOGRAPHY WARREN HEATH/ALL BUREAUX; BUREAUX.CO.ZA

OPPOSITE PAGE: 1 Cape robin-chats, speckled pigeons, Cape wagtails, house sparrows and Cape Serotine bats sometimes fly through the studio as if it were an outdoor space. "I feel as if it brings nature into my space, into my mind," says Rina. "It's like the muse visiting." 2 At the entrance to the couple's home is a granite-clad tower which houses the studio. "I saw these offcuts, like crusts of bread," says Angus, who convinced the stonemason he often works with to cut them into manageable blocks for him. He collected these for about 18 months, then packed them out on the ground in front of the studio. Eventually he climbed on the roof and organised the composition. He used drill marks to create a cross-hatch pattern, then numbered them and fixed pins to each to mount them to the wall. "They weighed up to 50kg apiece," says Angus. The circular driveway was designed by master landscaper Ivan Roux of Rekopane Landscapes. "Rina's idea was to create a slate pattern within the circle," says Angus. He says the slate shards create an "almost liquid state of swirling, to bring a bit of energy into it". 3 The main entrance to the studio is a short walk across a wooden deck in front of the house, so living space and work space are closely connected.

MEET THE MAKERS

ANGUS TAYLOR AND RINA STUTZER  
SCULPTORS, PRETORIA



"Most of the time we weren't here," he says. "Some of these stones go back to six o'clock in the morning." And, he adds, you can pick them up in your hand and contemplate the time they represent. "It's tangible," he says, which is why he likes to include them in their raw state; collaborate with them rather than making them bow to his will as an artist.

"There's a Buddhist term, Tsu'jan, which means the 'is-ness' of things," he says. "[The stone] is something already. If you work with that something, it's a collaboration rather than domination. There's a narrative already that you can build on." He sees his work as a dialogue with the "is-ness" of his materials. They speak for themselves.

On a shelf in the spare bedroom, there's a small rendering of Angus's sculpture "Portrait of a Plot House". It's a portrait of the house he grew up in; just the features of the house as seen from outside. "I often draw it or sculpt it from memory," he says. The sculpture explores the ways in which the shapes and surface of a "building to which you have an emotional connection" can express something of the feelings associated with it, a bit like a portrait.

This version is mounted on a stack of rocks, including

**ABOVE:** Outside the studio are two figures from Angus's "Resistance as Nurture" series. In the living room above an antique Balinese daybed is "Body Corporate", an oil painting by Frikkie Eksteen.

**BELOW:** The long table in the dining area was made by a good friend, the late Kevin Roberts. "When you put down a wine glass you might lose it, because it's a bit wonky," says Angus, "but it's Kevin's table." Rina adds: "He also made a lot of other objects in the house. He salvaged wooden elements whenever he could, and would then reshape them." "Coelacanth", a linocut by Walter Oltmann, hangs at the end of the table. Next to it is a plate by ceramicists Anthony Harris and Gerhard Swart and below is a work by Martyn Schickerling. The giraffe skull was cast in plaster of Paris by Otto du Plessis and Charles Haupt. The painting of the horse above the fireplace is by Johan Louw. The bathroom contains elements of the surrounding environment.

3.6-billion-year-old verdite – a representation of the complexities of human memory and experience with its foundations in the depths of geological time. Less than an attempt to deflate something monumental – architecture might represent permanence, but it's a humble little house – this one captures the poignance of the fleeting memory of a place, and perhaps how the deep time of stone might hold a little of that ephemeral meaning before, as Angus puts it, "memory closes its doors".

Angus and Rina's house and studio seem to acknowledge that sense of things. It seems like a respectful collaboration with nature, not just the ancient stones of the mountains nearby, or the fleeting appearances of bats and birds, but of the pursuit of artistry and inspiration that takes place within the studio walls.

Tacit is a group exhibition of artists who have been affiliated with Dionysus Sculpture Works since its inception in 1996. See the exhibition at Oliewenhuis Art Gallery, Bloemfontein, until August 26. FNB Joburg Art Fair, Sandton Convention Centre, September 6-9. Visit [www.dswartstudio.com](http://www.dswartstudio.com).

