

NIC BLADEN

(b. 1974 Pretoria, South Africa)

South African artist Nic Bladen has become known for his extraordinary botanical sculptures, which demonstrate the technique he pioneered of casting entire plants in bronze and sterling silver. Born in 1974 in Pretoria, Bladen trained in the field of dental technology, a discipline that requires incredible precision and attention to detail. After working for eight years making gold and porcelain crowns in various dental laboratories in South Africa and the UK, Bladen developed an interest in sculpture and began working at the Bronze Age Foundry, learning large-scale bronze casting as well as all aspects of metalwork. Knowledge of the two seemingly different fields of dental technology and bronze casting precipitated Bladen's experimentations in 2001: casting flowers and leaves. In marrying the micro and macro disciplines, he pioneered a way of developing perfect castings of organic matter. His way of preserving/fossilizing plants and flowers involves a method known as 'lost wax casting', or 'cire perdue', and it involves creating moulds from actual organic material, and then transforming these into once-off sculptures of entire plants.

Nic's first solo exhibition, 'Peninsula', held at Everard Read Gallery Cape Town in 2013, focused on the richness of botanical diversity that surrounds the artist's Simons Town studio, which is situated within the heart of the Cape Floral Kingdom, the smallest yet richest of the world's six floral kingdoms. For this show, concessions from landowners on the peninsula enabled Bladen to harvest such rarities as a Blue disa and the endemic *Serruria Villasa*, amongst others.

In 2015, Nic worked as Artist in Residence at Tswalu Kalahari, a private game reserve in South Africa's Northern Cape Province. The sculptures that he created during this time, a depiction of iconic, beautiful and strange Kalahari desert plants and trees, formed his second solo exhibition: 'Kalahari: a season at Tswalu', held at Everard Read Johannesburg in October 2015.

The title of Nic's third solo exhibition, held at Everard Read & Circa (Johannesburg) in late 2017, is attributed to William J. Burchell, one of the 'immortals' of Cape botany, in about 1810. Referencing the floral abundance and diversity encountered even during severe drought, Nic's latest body of work depicts the tenacity of Cape flora to tolerate this dryness and the splendour with which it does so.

Nic's unique works can be found in the Standard Bank, Ellerman House and Oppenheimer collections, as well as in many other prestigious private collections, both locally and abroad.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021** *Botanical Studies in Bronze & Silver II*, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2020** *Arid*, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Proteaceae*, Everard Read, Cape Town
- 2018** *Botanical Studies in Bronze and Silver*, Everard Read, London, United Kingdom
- 2017** *...even at this unfavourable [dry] season...*, CIRCA Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2016** *New Works*, Everard Read, Johannesburg
- 2015** *Kalahari: a season at Tswalu*, Everard Read, Johannesburg
- 2013** *Peninsula*, Everard Read, Cape Town

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021** *OASIS*, Everard Read CIRCA, Cape Town
- In Conversation*, Everard Read CIRCA, Cape Town
- Masterpiece London, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2019** Masterpiece Art Fair London, Everard Read booth, London, UK
- 2018** FNB Joburg Art Fair, Everard Read CIRCA booth, Johannesburg
- 2017** *Off the wall: A group sculpture exhibition*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2016** *Reality Check*, group exhibition at Everard Read, Cape Town
- 2014** 'Exact Imagination': 300 years of botanically inspired art in South Africa. Curated by Cyril Coetzee. The Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg
- 'Design Miami/Basel 2014, Southern Guild Collection, Basel
- 2012** Conversation Series, with Astrid Dahl, Jane Eppel and Katherine Glenday, n Amaridian Gallery, New York, 2012: SOFA (International Exposition of Sculpture Objects and Functional Art), Amaridian Gallery, New York
- 2011** *Rare*, joint show with Lisa Strachen at Everard Read, Cape Town
- Natural Selection*, joint show with Jane Eppel at Rust en Vrede Gallery, Durbanville
- 2010** SOFA (International Exposition of Sculpture Objects and Functional Art), Amaridian Gallery, Chicago,
- 2009** *Realisme*, Art Fair, Amsterdam
- 2008** Group Exhibition at KZNSA Gallery, Durban
- 2007** *Greenhouse*, group exhibition at Bell-Roberts Gallery, Lourensford