

Mandy Johnston

portfolio.

**Berman
Contemporary
All Women Art
V&A Waterfront**



MANDY JOHNSTON

ARTIST STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY

I am a multidisciplinary artist. I work mainly with alternative materials, alternative photographic and printmaking techniques and experiential sculptural installation. Through my work I explore human connectivity and the fragility of existence. I employ contextual and traditional definitions attributed to materials to support these themes. For example, I often use copper wire to suggest information and energy transfer, bridging both raw material value and information value systems.

Because I am interested in contradictions and binaries I consider how something has been defined by its antithesis or the possibility of its absence and how this shifts its value and meaning. Absence often create possibility, a once filled space for example becomes open and vulnerable to be absorbed, used, ignored or quoted. Absences are also that which exists "unseen", such as light and shadow. Elements like fire and transferred shadows bring concepts of transience and memory to the forefront of my experiential sculptural installations.

I am currently exploring alternative possibilities for rites of passage and the lack thereof in my societal context. I am asking questions around the possibility of alternative support structures to institutionalised ones and ways we can better support each other through transitions in life.

Mandy Johnston (b.1978) is a multidisciplinary artist who works with alternative materials, experiential sculptural installation, alternative photographic, film and printmaking techniques. Her passion for sharing knowledge has led her to be involved in artist-led initiatives, to develop and present professional practice workshops and to mentor artists within her practice.

Johnston received her MFA from the University of the Witwatersrand(2003), a Marteinssen merit award for installation(1998 and 1999), was a Sasol New Signatures finalist(1999, 2010) and an ABSA L'Atelier finalist(1999,2012), Ithuba trust award(2012), was a PPC Young Sculptors Awards finalist(2011,2015), was presented as the festival artist of the Klein Karoo National Art festival(2019).

Johnston presented her first solo exhibition is 2012 and has presented 5 more since, most recently showing at Everard Reed, Circa Cape Town in 2024 and AfrikaBurn 2025. Johnston's work is part of multiple corporate and private collections Including RMB and ABSA.

Johnston's work a part of Berman Contemporary's inaugural exhibition, Contours Unveiled. Johnston will exhibit at Investec Cape Town Art Fair with Berman Contemporary and is working towards her new solo with the gallery.

Berman Contemporary All Women Art V&A Waterfront

ARTIST RESUME

Solo Exhibitions

2025	Conduit II, AfrikaBurn, Invited Artist Grant
2024	Conduit I, CIRCA Everard Read Cape Town
2020	Back to Back: They Faced Each Other, in conversation with Cow Mash, Everard Read
2019	Hindsight: in conversation with Cow Mash, Lizamore Gallery
2019	SPUN, KKNK25 Festival artist Oudtshoorn and Pretoria
2018	Reasons for Silence, Lizamore & Associates Gallery
2016	In the Presence of Absence, ABSA Gallery, Johannesburg
2012	Subject to Change, Room, Apr–May
2002	Masters Solo Exhibition, Bag Factory, Johannesburg

Group Exhibitions

2025	Contours Unveiled, Berman Contemporary, Cape Town
2025	Decompression, Castle of Good Hope, Live burn event of Conduit I figures
2024	For(Sea)Change, Association for Visual Arts (AVA), The Printing Girls
2024	Yield, Local Worx, The Printing Girls
2023	A Kaleidoscope, White River Gallery, curated exhibition, The Printing Girls
2021	Shrapnel and Other Treasures, Johann van Heerden Gallery, Pretoria, curated by Carina du Randt
2020	On a Good Day, Johann van Heerden Gallery, Pretoria, curated by Cow Mash
2019	Lizamore & Associates Gallery, Hindsight, Two-person show with Cow Mash
2019	Salt, Trent Gallery, Pretoria
2019	Spun (reshowing), Pretoria overlooking Union Buildings
2019	Platform 13, Fish Hoek, 'Precarious Winter's Tales of Earth, Wind, Fire and Rain'
2018	Platform 13, Fish Hoek: Between the Lines Two-person show with Gordon Froud
2017	Lizamore & Associates Gallery, Sacred and Profane
2017	Priest Gallery, Johannesburg: The Underworld, art book & object exhibition
2017	Trent Gallery: Art Book Exhibition
2016	ABSA Gallery: Curator/Creator, curated by Lucia Boer, pinhole works
2016	Everard Read Cape Town: Material City, paper sculptures, salt works, ink drawings
2016	Art Room JHB: Here Be Dragons, Salt Prints (Cloud I, II, III), Turbine Hall Art Fair
2016	Assemblage Group Exhibition: Monotype and Drypoint works
2016	KKNK, Catalyst, curated by Lucia Boer
2016	KKNK, The Spaces Between Maps, curated by Stephan Erasmus
2015	Open @Open, curated by Lucia Boer, cyanotypes & sculpture
2015	Lizamore at Turbine Hall Art Fair, Mnemiopsis Ileyde, sculptures & cyanotypes
2015	Kalashnikovv Gallery in association with Constitution Hill, On The Back of His Words
2015	PPC Sculptor's Awards: Caste
2014	Materiality, Ouroboros I–XI, Inhale I–III
2014	ABSA Gallery: Assemblage Group Exhibition, Degrees of Separation
2014	Turbine Hall Art Fair: Ouroboros I & II, concept sketches
2014	Nirox Sculpture Fair: Duality, copper, 6.5 × 6.5 m
2014	Bayliss Gallery: Exorcising the Fetish, Triptych
2014	ABSA Atelier: Mixed media sculptures
2013	Diptych Assemblage: A Negotiation (collab with Sandile Radebe)
2013	Abisa Atelier: Fabricated, pinhole drawings
2013	Turbine Hall Art Fair: Dutiful Object II: Oroborous
2013	KKNK: Dutiful Object II: Oroborous
2013	New Voices, Artspace Gallery: Dutiful Object I: Pomegranate
2012	Ithuba Trust Group Show, "traversed and recorded"
2012	Media Mill: Outsiders Group Show
2012	ABSA Atelier: Coir, finalist
2012	<Dis/play>, Goethe on Main
2012	NewARC Studios Launch Exhibition: What Demolish Meant?
2012	Jan Cilliers Group Exhibition: War of the Worlds I–III
2011	Artspace: 360 Degrees, War of the Worlds I–III
2011	PPC Young Sculptors Awards, Merit Award, Transcending the Materia
2011	Assemblage: Group exhibition, Braamfontein pop-up, Crucible
2011	ABSA Atelier, finalist
2011	Joburg Fringe, Assemblage Group Exhibition: Drawing & Sculpture Coir
2011	Assemblage: All This Will Pass, Salt installation
2010	Sasol New Signatures, Restraint
2009	Summer Art Event Exhibition
2004	Johannesburg Art Gallery – Arbitration (performance with Anthea Moys)
2003	Joubert Park Project & Johannesburg Art Gallery: Salt Lines
2002	Colour Blind Cell C – City Billboard Campaign
1999	ABSA Atelier, Top 100
1999	Sasol New Signatures, Purity and Danger
1999	Wits USA Tour, Present/Absent
1998–99	Marteenissen Prize Exhibition, Merit Award, Cake

Berman Contemporary All Women Art V&A Waterfront

ARTIST RESUME

Art Fairs

2026 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, Berman Contemporary, South Africa

Projects & Seminars

2025 Art incubator residency, Tankwa Karoo
2021 Artist Lab Professional Practice Workshop, Norval Foundation
2011–18 Assemblage Trustee, workshop coordinator & facilitator
2014–17 Mentorship Programme Development, Assemblage
2013 Wits Art Museum: City Kids Workshop Coordinator
2012 <Dis/play> Inner City Kids Project (Assemblage & Goethe Institute)
2012 Seminar, Goethe Institute: Performance Art Logistics
2010 MoMA New York Seminar: Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now
2010 Triangle Arts Trust, New York (Intern)
2010 Artspace Seminar: Professional Practice
2009 Fietas Festival Installation (with Bronwyn Lace)
2007–08 Max Institute of Art, Urban Weaponry Installation
2004–05 Occupied Art Events, Coordinator & Facilitator
2002–03 Assistant Photographer – Hannelie Coetzee Commissions
2022 Be Still, steel, copper & concrete sculpture, Kings Campus Garden
2021 Undone, steel-mesh relief sculpture
2019 Mushroom, copper wire sculpture, Century City Housing Project
2004 Arbitration performance, Johannesburg Art Gallery
2003 Salt Lines performance, Johannesburg & Canadian National Galleries
2002 Art in the Inner City, Cell C Billboard
2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development – Artwork

Education

2000–03 Master of Fine Art, University of the Witwatersrand
1997–99 Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours, University of the Witwatersrand
1991–96 Rand Park High School

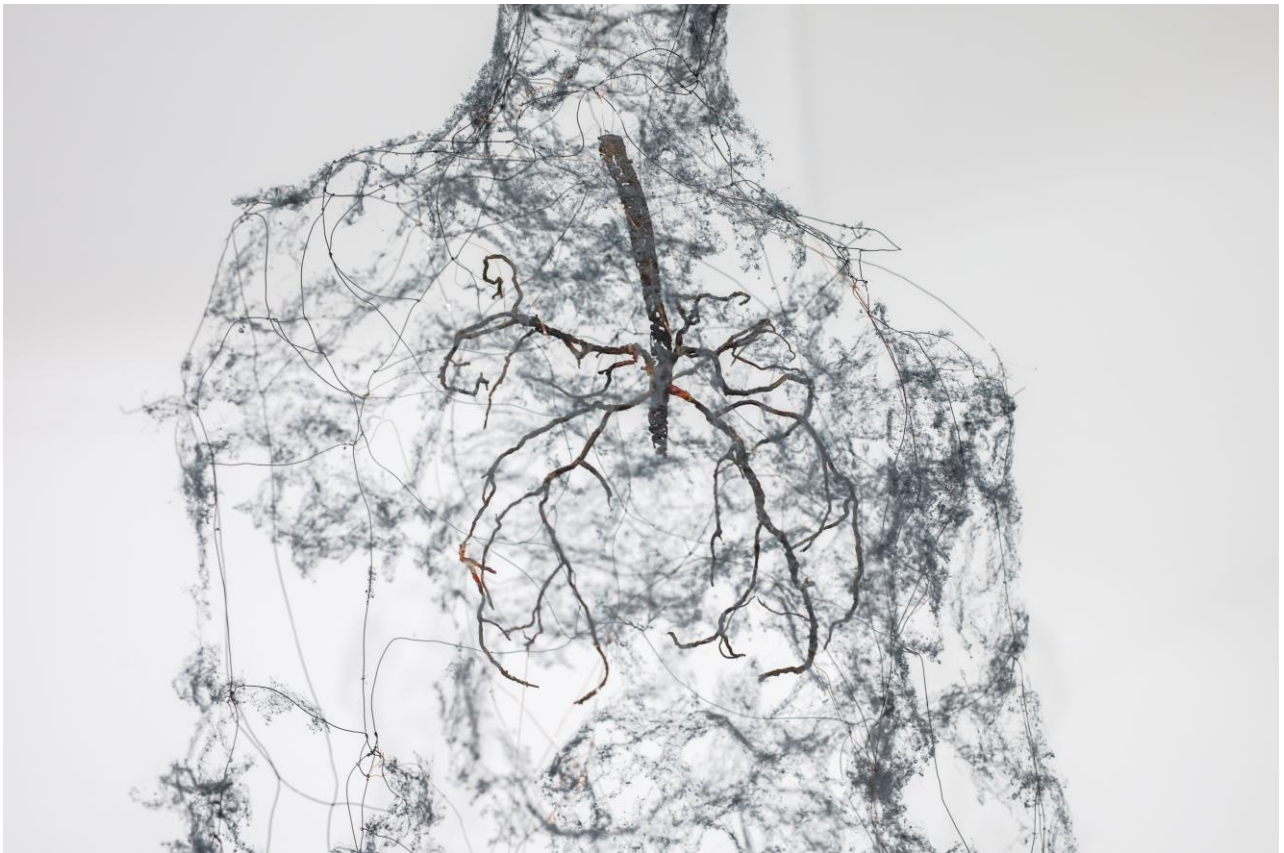
Employment

2025 Mothership studios Cape Town - owner
2009– Visual Artist (exhibitions, workshops, studio mentee programme)
2014– Yield House, Artist Retreat & Residency Project, Port Nolloth
2010–19 Assemblage, Workshop Coordinator & Mentorship Programme Developer
2008–17 Art Teacher, St Teresa's Mercy School & Highlands North Boys High
2005–08 Owner, Pure Zin (pewter jewellery, trophies, corporate awards)
2004–05 Occupied Art Events (co-founder)
2002–05 Co-owner, The Songwriters Club (live music & art venue)
2001 Assistant to Karel Nel, South Africa House UK Project



CONTOURS UNVEILED

When I started working toward this body of work I was thinking about human connection and shared experience. What I came to is the thought that the only truly shared experience of life is that of being within or part of an organism. What sets humanity apart from other organisms is the ability to imagine, choose and create. So, we are essentially conceptual beings, navigating a physical realm. We are conduits of thought and makers of meaning. For the pieces, the material that burns is steel wool. It is metaphorically representative of our organism. We believe it to be indestructible but, in this form, it is incredibly fragile just as our bodies are. These sculptures burn to highlight the fragility of life and try to make sense of the transitions we go through. I see this process as a rite of passage.



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONTOURS UNVEILED | BERMAN CONTEMPORARY | 2025

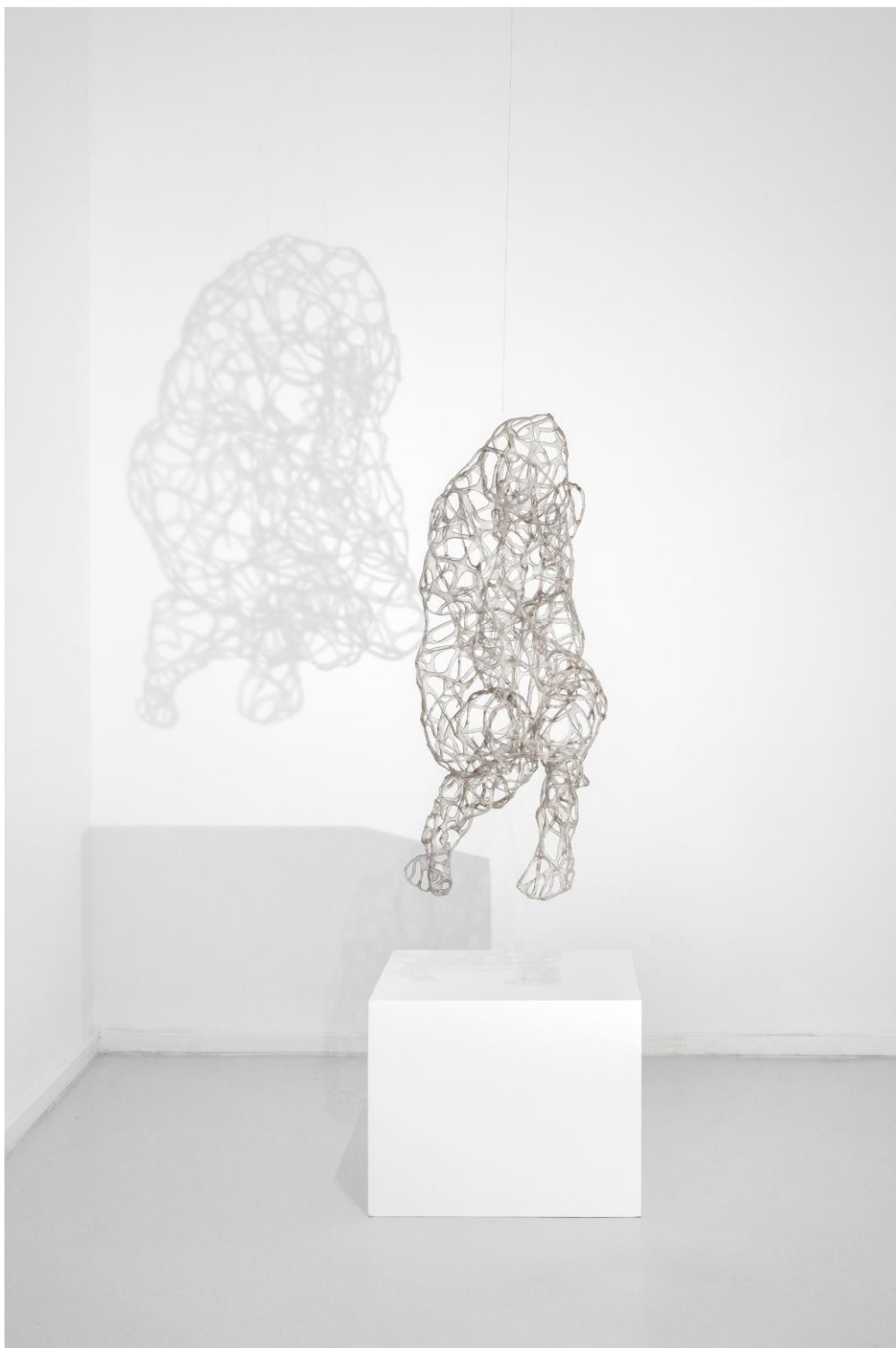


Conduit – Breath
Stainless steel wire, copper wire, Steel wool fibre and shadow
180 x 40 x 40 cm

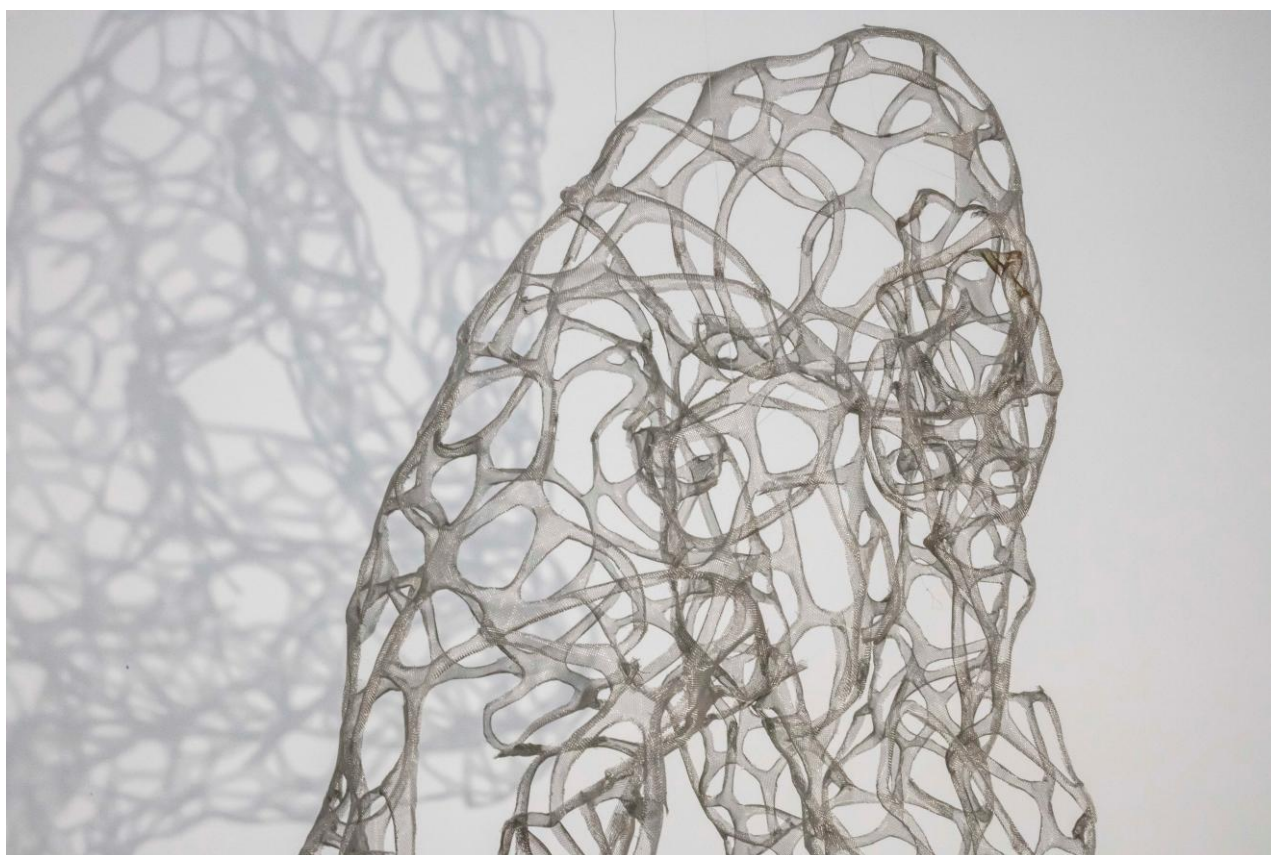


[PLEASE FOLLOW THIS LINK TO VIEW A VIDEO OF THE SCULPTURE BURN](#)





INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONTOURS UNVEILED | BERMAN CONTEMPORARY | 2025



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONTOURS UNVEILED | BERMAN CONTEMPORARY | 2025

CONDUIT I

"We are conduits of thought and makers of meaning"

Where I live, on the South Peninsula of the Western cape there are seasonal wildfires that simultaneously give and take life. They threaten and destroy homes and compromise the food sources of local wildlife, yet they are necessary for rejuvenation of ecosystems, and are essential for the survival of the fynbos. The protea plant, for instance, is dependent on this cycle as the fire triggers the release of its seeds. The seed then benefits from the nutrient-rich soil created by the fire. Interestingly, almost reverently no new protea grows on the exact site of its predecessor. Their absences are reminders of these catastrophic and life affirming events.

Just as the fynbos relies on fire for rebirth, we often need to relinquish the remnants of the past to progress. Our bodies, in this metaphor, are the conduits, through which our thoughts and experiences traverse, embodying both our role as navigators of our lives and passengers within our physical forms.

Life within or part of an organism is the only universal experience that connects all living things. What sets humanity apart from other organisms is the ability to imagine, choose and create. If the question is survival, I think the answer should be found through the lens of regeneration versus expiration. One that is cognisant of the reason for the destructive forces and not based in fear or ignorance of them. Incorporating a cyclical understanding of existence that it is regenerative.

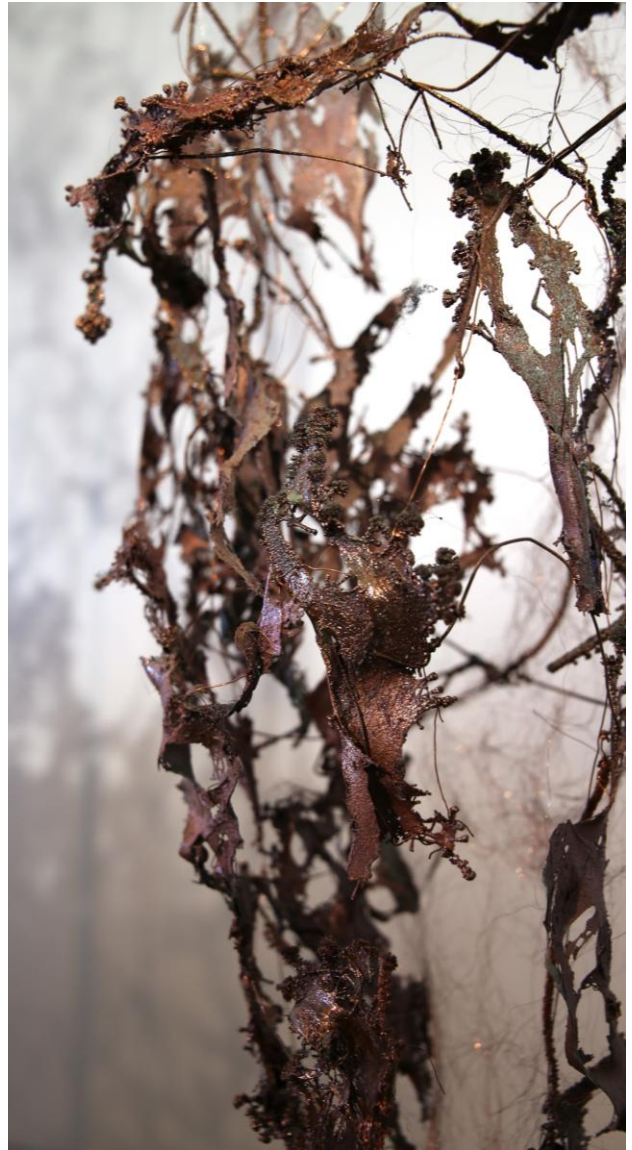
Note: Steelwool as a material metaphor for our organism.



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONDUIT I | CIRCA GALLERY | 2024



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONDUIT I | CIRCA GALLERY | 2024



CONDUIT II

The title refers to the idea that we are more than our material beings. We are conduits of thought and makers of meaning. We have the ability to construct and navigate our realities. We are not cultural passengers because we can choose and create and effect intentional change.

Conduit II is a body of work that is presented with intention of generating conversation around poignant moments of transition in our lives and about community support. This work poses questions about how we can reenvision formalised rites of passage ceremonies to better support each other.

I observe and think for valid reasons in many cases that there has been a move away from traditional, ceremonial ways of marking important moments in our lives. Shifts in traditions are important as contexts and cultural values shift in society. The challenge with total negation of these rites is that all the peripheral support and teaching and support structures are being simultaneously minimised. The result as I see it is that people are turning more often to institutionalised services for these supports instead of fellow community members.

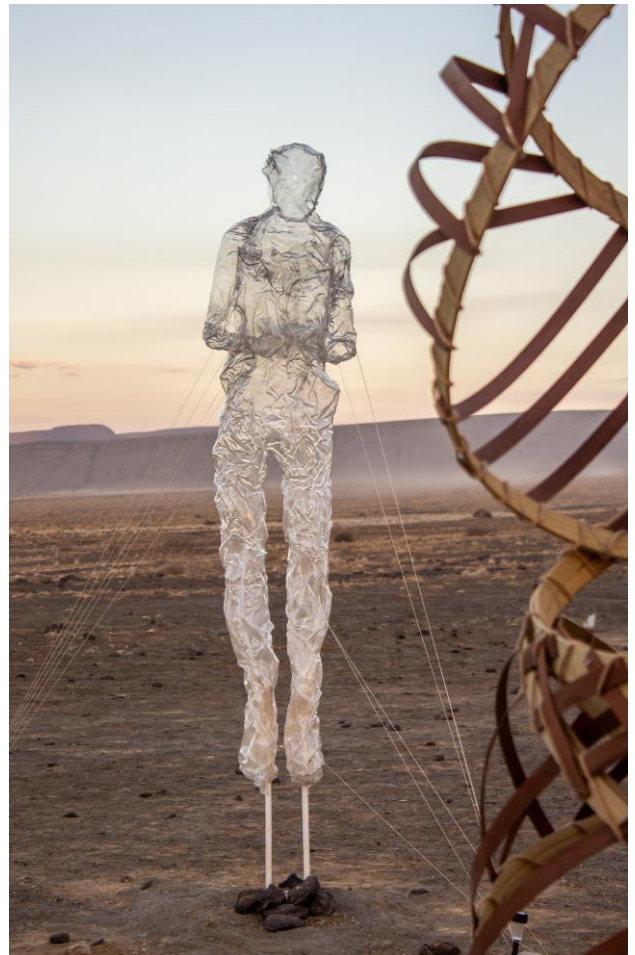
Each of the figures presented transitioned in material form in some way throughout the course of the week. Each were effected by it and showing visible signs of it



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONDUIT II | AFRIKABURN | 2025



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONDUIT II | AFRIKABURN | 2025





Conduit II – figure 1
Burned wood with bees wax seal
260 x 140 x 70 cm



Conduit II – figure 2
Burned wood with bees wax seal
260 x 75 x 35 cm



Conduit II – figure 3
Burned wood with bees wax seal
260 x 50 x 740 cm

COIR.

Made with coir. This work looks at material value systems. In Polynesia coir is a prized material because it is very salt resistant. In South Africa we use it to line hanging baskets for and carpets. For the drawing work I burned coir and made ink with the ash, I then spent 54 days redrawing the rope I burned. In doing so subverting the value system based on material coir on for and converting it into another time and art. The ball of coir contains gold.



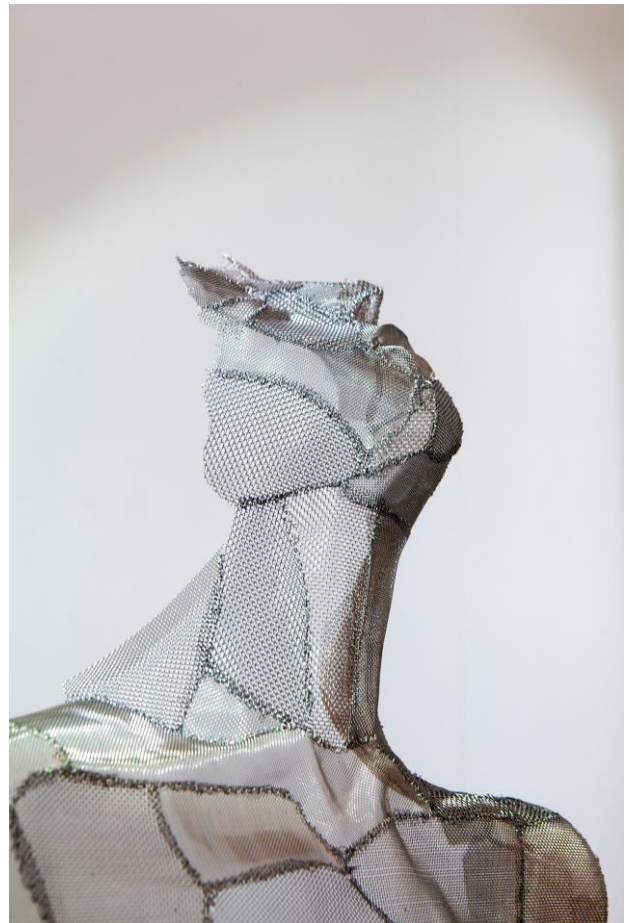
INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | CONDUIT II | 2025



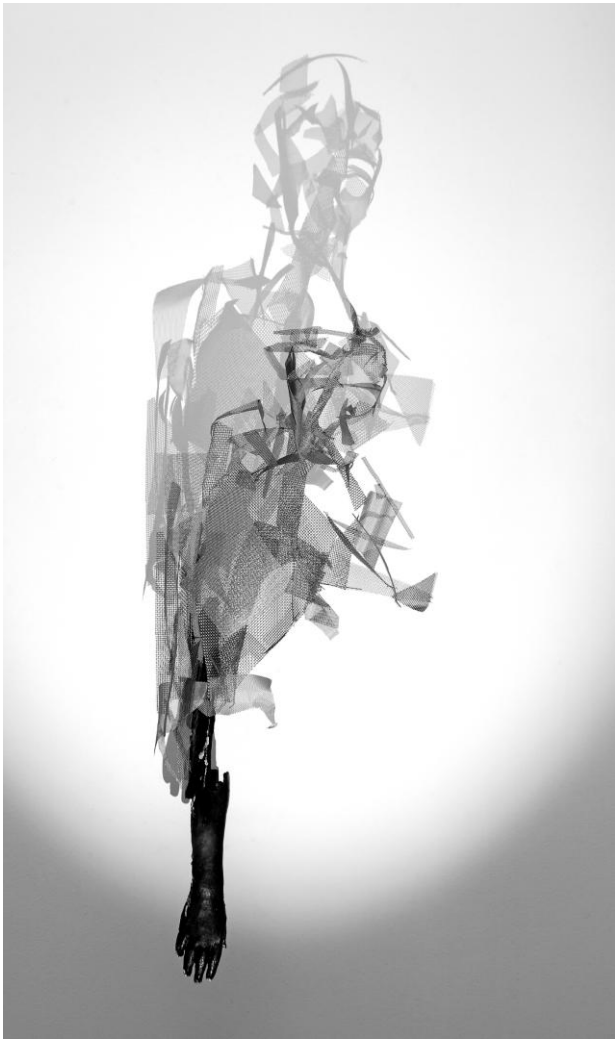
HINDSIGHT

I am formally interested in the use of alternative materials as well as the contextual values, definitions and symbolisms attributed to them. I enjoy researching the physical world and finding interesting connections and contradictions in the values attributed to objects and materials. My work is informed by specific historical and cultural context. Things are often defined by their antithesis and that the formation of a value is often around the threat of absence or the obvious presence of it. There is pain or fear associated with absence, with a thing that once filled space both literally or figuratively, now open and vulnerable to be absorbed, used, ignored or quoted.

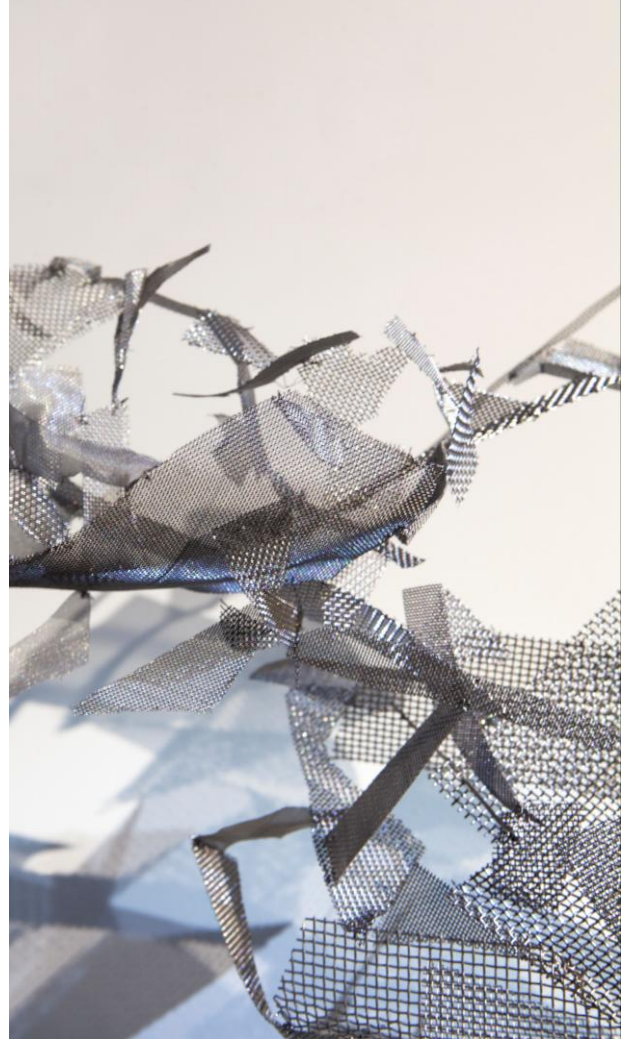
Further than this I am driven by a passion for sharing knowledge. These works are the product of my thoughts around the topic of tradition and object making as ritual. I consider reasons for what has been kept and what has been passed on. Passed on meaning both overlooked or swept aside and in antitheses, collected and given showing within recent generations. The humour is subtle and intentional. The fetishized, sentimentalised and distorted forms mirror the attribution of value to both materials and aesthetics I observe practiced in much of contemporary visual art today.

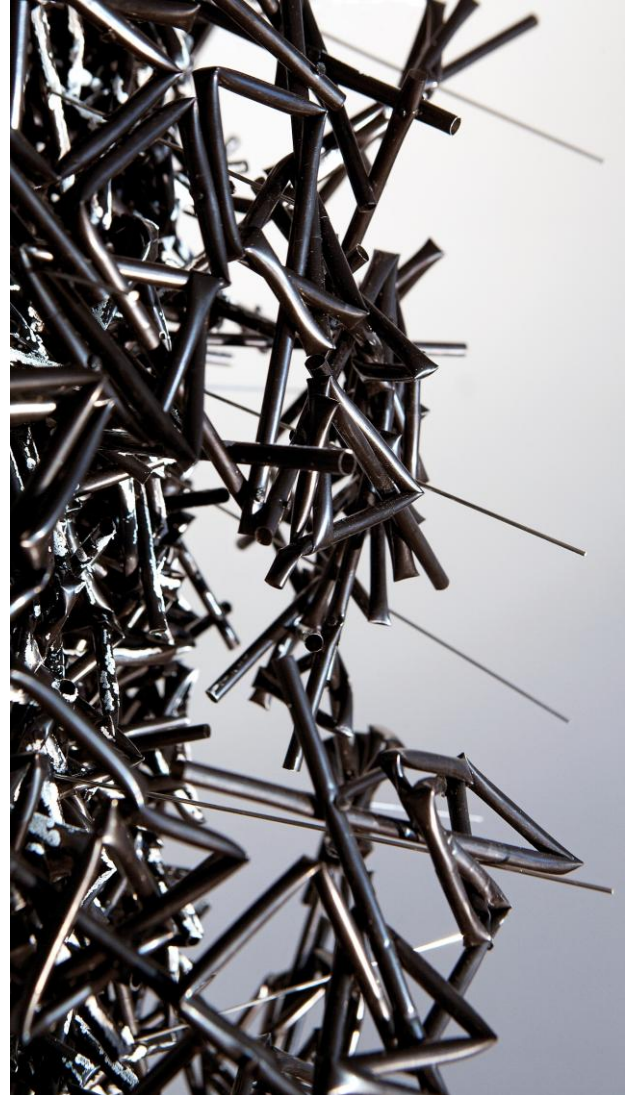


INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | HINDSIGHT | CIRCA GALLERY | 2020



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | HINDSIGHT | CIRCA GALLERY | 2020





INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | HINDSIGHT | CIRCA GALLERY | 2020



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | HINDSIGHT | CIRCA GALLERY | 2020

IN THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE

'Absence suggests experience and traces are its subtle cues that reveal this in our environments and points to the existence of something that is no longer present. There are often feelings of loss, nostalgia or fear associated with absence'.

This body of work explores ideas surrounding governance and the negotiation of space through materials and how the materiality of objects are used to speak dually about an intimate and collective formation/fabrication of value. The materials used in constructing the works are particular to the idea of the temporary and transient understanding of space. Where the materials become shadows of themselves and through the artist's intervention carry a secretive history of their origin and the subject matter that is explored through the process of manipulation, formation and fabrication.

These works become keys to very intimate, personal experiences of the boundaries created by presence and absence, mirroring broader societal, political and existential issues. The exhibition speaks about the physical, conceptual and metaphorical negotiations of space through the ideas contained in the physical, emotional and cognitive understanding of land, borders and boundary lines as well as the ownership of land and the power to construct boundary lines. The ideas explored in In the presence of absence are not revolutionary; they are, however, current, basic and inherent in the human condition.



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | IN THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE | ABSA GALLERY | 2016

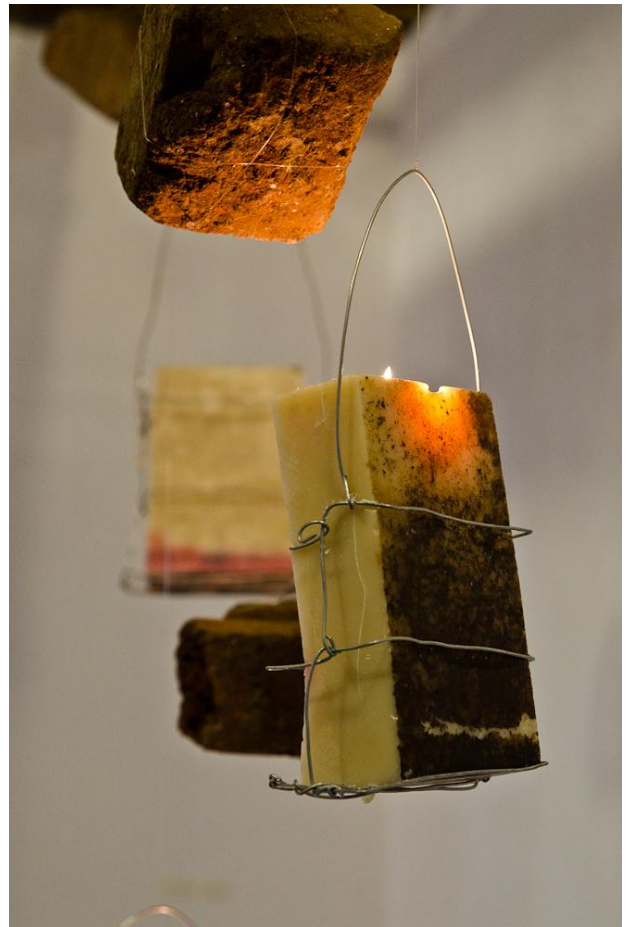
WHAT DEMOLISH MEANT

Bricks/ fragments of cement counterweighted on a gut by candles, hung over a beam. The 'candles'/wax block with wick will be lit. As they melt the bricks will begin to move because the weight is shifted. There will be a box of candles available to viewers to add to the container. If the viewers do not add to the candle the bricks will fall.

Conceptually, I am playing with ideas of construction, deconstruction and how we as users of spaces in effect cause them to be, not only as they are but what they are and what they represent. We are responsible for how the materials 'hang' together and the formations they take on. This is referred to by the box of candles available for use to the viewer. I am interested to see if people will actively add to the installation or allow it to fall. A metaphor for the studio space.

In using these materials, I am referring to the history of this area, the fact that it is the original site being Brickfields was destroyed by fire and a warehouse area was built. As the original site of rejuvenation in the city that in effect means that something was lost and something gained.

I am intrigued by the notion that this building is considered demolished by the city of Johannesburg. I am playing with fire literally- the threat of the candles moving higher toward the wooden beams will refer to this.



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | WHAT DEMOLISH MEANT | NEWARC STUDIO | 2011

RESTRAINT

In this work Mandy Johnston used the dog collar shape and filled with images of scorched South African farmland (a necessity for fertile soil but also a defense against fire) hidden in the image of the earth are images of people who were victims of xenophobic attacks. Their scorched bodies still soldering. Titled Restraint the work urges that there be restraint of urge to reopen wounds in order to heal. That sometimes we need to endure discomfort to progress and in time to rejuvenate.



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | RESTRAINT | SASOL NEW SIGNATURES | 2010

**Berman
Contemporary
All Women Art
V&A Waterfront**

Berman Contemporary is a pioneering gallery dedicated to women artists. Through mentorship, visibility, and sustained support, we nurture creative practices and amplify women's voices. Our mission is to enable women artists to shape the future of contemporary art, both locally and globally.

bermancontemporary.com
gallery@bermancontemporary.co.za
+27 (0)84 843 8302

