

DEBORAH BELL

Dreams of Immortality: Blood and Gold



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EVERARD READ
CAPE TOWN | JOHANNESBURG | LONDON

CIRCA



PAGES 2–3
Return of the Gods: The Ancient Ones I–V 2013–15
bronze, edition of 6
tallest 280 cm installation size variable

PAGES 4
Without Words 2016
mixed media on Chinese paper
212 x 147 cm (detail)

DEBORAH BELL

Dreams of Immortality: Blood and Gold

Deborah Bell is one of South Africa's most eminent contemporary artists. Her earlier, more political work has given way to a deep investigation into the border between mortality and immortality, matter and spirit, presence and absence, the quotidian and the mythic, the grounded and transcendent. In recent years she has developed an immediately-recognisable visual language; her images simple, stark, symbolic, grounded, silent, still, poised.

Dreams of Immortality: Blood and Gold is a powerful body of work that grew out of Bell's major exhibitions at our galleries in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2015, which were four years in the making. This exhibition encompasses paintings and sculpture, from the most delicate line made on Chinese handmade paper, to monumental bronzes.

In her iconography Bell draws from a range of cultures – African, Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, early Christian, European – and a range of philosophies (especially the Buddhist preoccupation with stillness and the shedding of attachment and the ego) and psychologies (more Jung than Freud) – but her work digs deeper, arriving finally out of an internal and personal place that Bell occupies in the world as an artist, a woman and an explorer.

Her earlier figures, characterised by entrapment (in the country, in the body), have given away to figures embodying the seeker – often accompanied by boats, horses, chariots. Images of lions, dogs, horses and angels recur.

These are often intermediary figures between the physical world and a higher, more spiritual realm. They are also aspects of herself – the powerful daemons that reside in all of us – which are often accompanied by solitary female figures, some full of assertive confidence, others more vulnerable and less sure of their agency.

Bell's work has become increasingly concerned with surrender – to the higher self, the mystery of the universe, the simplicity of the present. All her art works towards the Zen mark: the single gesture of absolute presence. Her quest is ongoing and has left in its wake a series of powerful, totemic images that feel part of what W.B. Yeats described as the collective soul of the universe containing the memories of all time – *Spiritus Mundi*.



LEFT
Shift 2016
mixed media on paper
159 x 121.5 cm (detail)

Mark Read: It's rare to find an artist who seemingly effortlessly moves between print making, painting and sculpture. Sculptors sometimes exhibit works on paper and designs for sculptures, e.g. Henry Moore. Rembrandt exhibited a broad territory from highly furnished paintings to loose, oil sketches and of course many etchings and engravings. You straddle the broadest area of any artist I know working with traditional mediums. Is your painting 'empowered' by mark making?

'To alter matter is to alter the world in which we live. To take substance be it clay or paint and to modify it to stand for something else is in the realm of magic, of alchemy.'

— Deborah Bell

'Deny you are a shadow briefly laid upon a dying world ... 'Through you is ushered in A world unseen, unheard, yet truly there.'

— A Course in Miracles

Deborah Bell: I decided that the text for the catalogue would be best served by an interview. I often start to understand what I am doing through people asking me questions, but I wanted more than one voice, and I wanted the space and time to deeply contemplate what was being asked. I approached close friends, William Kentridge, Ricky Burnett and Anne Sassoon, all artists that I respect and with whom I have worked, as well as Mark Read, my dealer who is equally respected in the art world, to engage with the works and respond to me on email with their questions. What follows are my responses.

DB: By mark making, I'm assuming that you mean the gesture of expression; the dance between material and surface with my body as intermediary. For me it is not only the means by which I find form, but it also leaves an echo or a 'smear' of the energy used to make it – some essential part of me imbued in the work itself. Also, in the journey to find the final image, lots of things may happen in a painting which gets rearranged or obliterated. Sometimes I will add a word or depict something which I will intentionally paint over, knowing that its presence will somehow remain in the work. I believe that all of these acts empower the illusion – the image that becomes the final act. It stands for more than itself, it has a life that precedes it and makes it what it is.

For example, in my painting LEAP, some of the splash, the gesture and the frantic scribbling is still readable in the finished work. A painting like this will have had many stages. On the wall. On the floor. Paint dripped and flung. Form carved out with line, and then all pushed back with colour. It will have gone through many incarnations. The initial putting down of gold above an inky black strip enamoured me as the paint absorbed so differently into the untried soft Chinese paper. I couldn't lay down an even wash – the paper was so thirsty that each brushmark left a record of its shape to create overlapping blocks of gold like pages of gold leaf which I found incredibly beautiful. I was frozen with indecision of how to proceed as I wanted to keep that simplicity, but I didn't know what the painting meant yet, so I had to go forward. I soon found out that I couldn't work in my normal way with drawing and erasing. The paper was too soft – the eraser destroyed its surface, and when wet I couldn't touch it, it was too fragile. I had to slowly apply layers of paint and ended up losing the simplicity that I had originally resonated with, but something in the toiling to get it to work gave the painting something else. A history that no one else may see. Time and energy spent coiled within it. Inherent power.

I also know that that state of the beauty reminiscent of gold leaf is still part of the work. Even if it is unseen.

'Apollonius believed that between the
imperfection of man and the most exalted
among the hierarchy of creation there existed
intermediaries. One of his intermediaries was
the ideal of beauty that we make for ourselves,
an ideal that is formless but is nonetheless
real on another plane of life. This ideal was
the daimon, the reality of which became the
greater in proportion as the idea of it became
the more powerful in its creator's mind.'
— *Mystics and Seers of All Ages* by Reginald Merton

Blood and Gold 2016
mixed media on paper
159 x 121.5 cm (detail)





Ricky Burnett: In his fabulous, but sadly unfashionable, book called *What Painting Is*, James Elkins refers to what he calls '... the impossibly thin membrane between the mundane and the transcendental'. And goes on to say, boldly and arrestingly, 'That is what perfect painting is ...' i.e. a phenomenon hovering in this 'thin membrane'. And he continues, 'Less interesting painters do not know what to do with the choice between substance and illusion.'

So my only question is: How does this sound to you? In framing the question this way I am, I hope, offering you an invitation to talk about things that I believe are close to your heart and your ambitions.

In particular I'd like to hear your thoughts on processes of transformation – transformation of matter, transformation of self and the intimate correlation of these two drives. And, what are the implications of the idea 'transcendence' for you? Can 'transcendence' be pictured?

DB: In order to answer your question, I finally read the Elkins book, and was gratified to read someone who understands the transformative act of painting. His linking art making with alchemy is something that I have understood for a long time, but I was particularly moved by his statement '... one goal of the alchemical processes is balanced stillness'.

Do you remember how in the catalogue for my 2011 exhibition *Presence*, you started your piece on me by saying 'Deborah Bell's art is very still'. This struck a chord in me, and the more I thought about it, the more I realised that the search for stillness is at the core of my art and my life, it is the reason for my meditation and it is what I am searching for in any painting or sculpture I make whether it be a leaping horse or a single contemplative figure. When I reach that state of balanced stillness, then for me the work is finished. It now stands for something that has always been; it becomes its *own state* ... the moment under the moment ... eternity, immortality ... beyond time.

So it is the idea of an image as its *own state* – not the static image captured in a moment of flow as in the snapshot, but the image that contains the time and toil condensed in its stillness such as in oil painting or monumental sculpture – which interests me. I had a brief flirtation with animation, but it was not my medium. Similarly, I have not worked with video, photography or performance. I often wondered at my reluctance to do so, I felt so 'old school'. Now I realise that I am not interested in fracturing or fragmentation. I want my images to stand as something complete, beyond time, to touch on eternity and immortality. I also recognise my need to work with substance – to transform self through matter and matter through self. To work with physical stuff and to be alert in the mind to find a terrible beauty, which I believe can serve as an intermediary between the physical and spiritual world and thus becomes its own means of transformation. I also use the act of making to access that part of the mind that is not really working out what to do next, but exists suspended, open to change and new possibilities – that is in touch with the mind of God. To me this is 'the impossibly thin membrane between the mundane and the transcendental'.

You ask if transcendence can be pictured. By pictured do you mean imagined or arrived at? I may imagine transcendence, but have no way of depicting what I see. However, I think that the *striving* to picture it, to create or summon up an alternative world through the substance of paint or clay is where the transcendence lies. Not so much the completed image, but the act of doing it. Starting from the *tabula rasa* or *Prima materia* to form through thought, imagination, and the battle with physical stuff, something that is not even known. Maybe it is not so much forming, but a summoning from the unknown, from the implicate order, which allows whatever wants to come through to take on a life through substance. It is the journey through time and material to show something that has always existed. In this way it relates to the philosopher's stone.

LEFT
Blood and Gold 2016
mixed media on paper
159 x 121.5 cm (detail)



This is What I am Here For (Breathe through me) 2016
mixed media on Chinese paper
80.5 x 159 cm



Shift 2016
mixed media on paper
159 x 121.5 cm

Anne Sasso: Can you say something about the combination of power and vulnerability in your work? The symbols of protection – strong animals, guardian angels, heroes and weapons – are a bit like the high electric fences in Johannesburg. They suggest a lurking unsafeness – not security but the need for security. That sense of strength and courage in a potentially unsafe environment seems to me to go back to your earliest paintings, the lovers in the empty cinema. Do you see it as an intrinsic theme in your work?

DB: I can identify with the idea that my work is about power and vulnerability, but I'm not so sure that I see it in the context you think. Certainly in my early paintings such as *Lovers in the Cinema*, and *The Rape of Persephone* there was that sense of an unsafe space, an unsafe emotion, where the woman (who is always me) felt trapped. That sense of entrapment was a reference to politics, both sexual and social. But when I look at them now, and feel the unease, the fracturing and dislocation, I realise that these paintings also highlighted the feeling of being caught up in the corporeal world, and reveal a searching for something beyond the mundane. I couldn't bear the thought that this material existence was all there is.

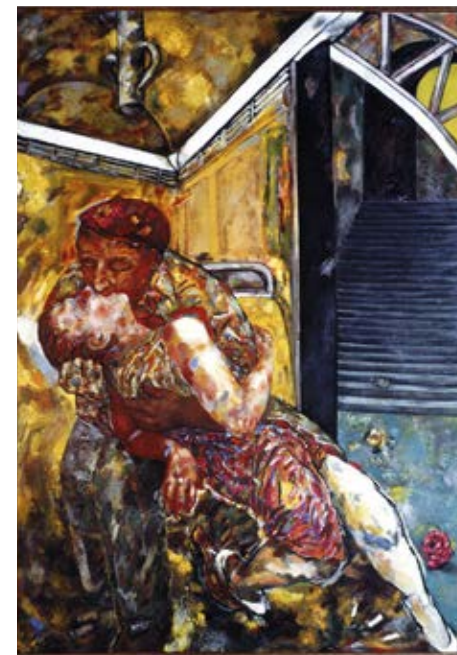
In both these works there is something looming over the lovers' heads, pressing them down into a heaviness, an uncomfortableness in their flesh. Their garments are cumbersome and move with their own emotions, like a second skin, an emotional body. There are suggestions of an escape route ... stairways and doorways, but the thickly applied paint adds to the claustrophobia and seems to make this escape impossible.

The guardians came later – the Sentinel sculptures, the lions, horses and dogs, and finally the angel in the doorway. However, I don't see these as protectors, so much as intermediaries – an in-between linking the physical and the spiritual worlds, much like Anubis who guided individuals across the threshold from the world of the living to the afterlife. In Kotoko culture, the horse and rider talismans are seen as guardians of the soul, the lion has links to alchemy and transformation as well as courage and kingly virtues. For me they are mythic beings, they are daimons – not in the modern understanding of a demon being an evil spirit, but rather as part mortal, part God. The angel stands in the doorway not as a protector, but as an invitation ... waiting for me to cross the threshold.

I see the concepts of power and vulnerability as 'will and surrender', which I embrace in my life, my creative process, the images I make, and in my spiritual work. Elsewhere I talk about will and surrender as necessary for my act of creating. To use one's power to will something into being through intent, but then to surrender in order to let it unfold. I recognise the power within me, and no longer see vulnerability as being fearful in an unsafe space, but rather more akin to being open and receptive ... naked, stripped bare. In my images I often link the two. For example in *Leap*, the powerful red horse carries on its back a small naked woman who looks down in disquiet – as if contemplating the jump. I see both the horse and the woman as different aspects of myself. The horse, as daimon, could be the intermediary between my physical self and my higher Self.

Similarly, in my earlier work *Couer Rage*, I symbolically ride my lion self, and the title *Couer Rage* whilst obviously meaning courage, can be broken down in French to mean rage of the heart. The power of rage and the openness of the heart are both necessary for true courage.

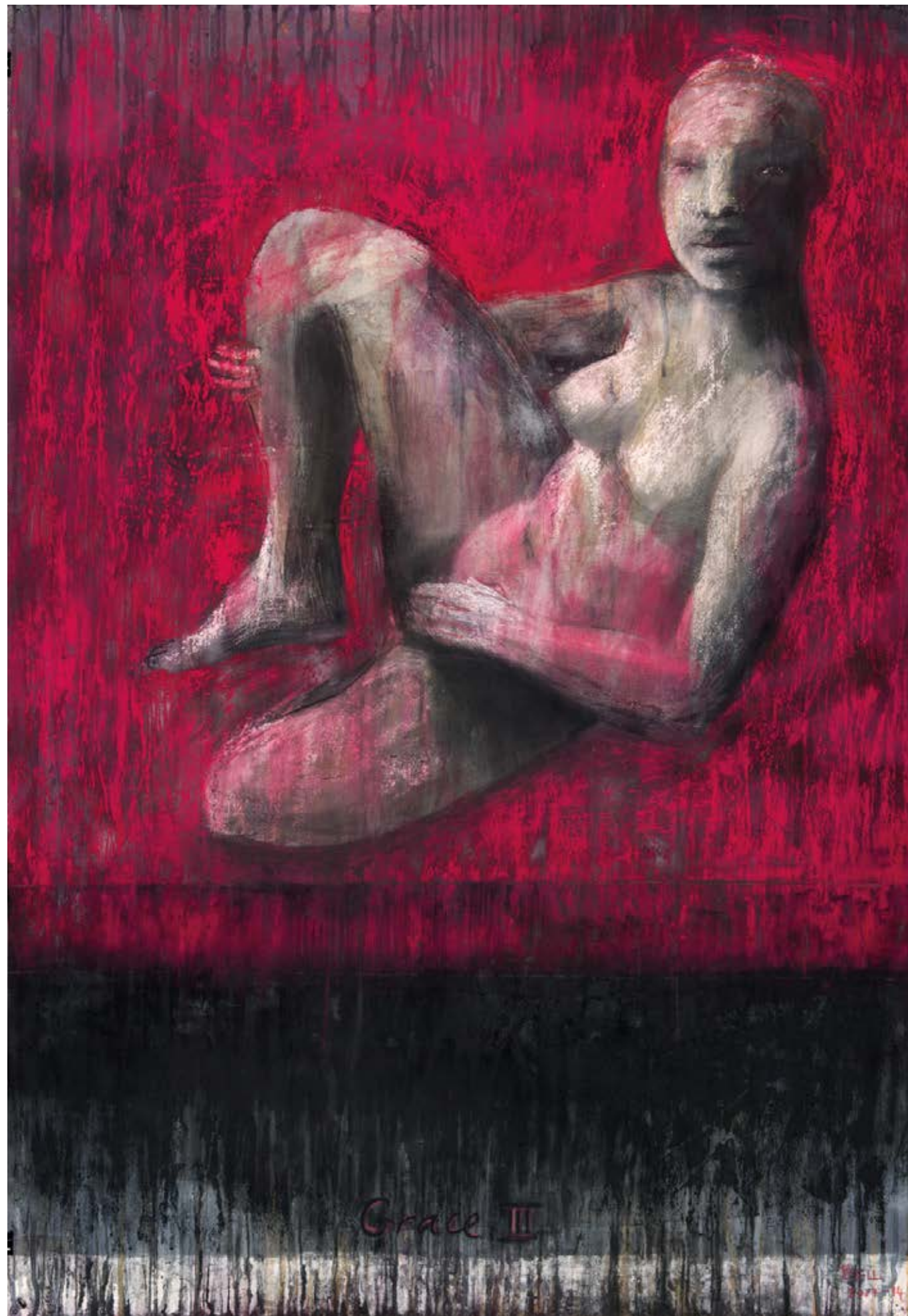
I do have two beautiful large black dogs who are my protectors, and are often the inspiration for my work. In my art they become mythic beings, running in front of the large Artemis sculpture as if they are the arrows from her bow, or standing sentinel on boats, guiding a solitary figure on its journey.



TOP TO BOTTOM
The Rape of Persephone 1986 oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm
Artemis with Dogs 2010-11 bronze edition of 6 height 380 cm
Couer Rage 2008-10 drypoint with handpainting 122 x 202 cm



Traverse II 2016
oil on canvas
86 x 178 cm



Grace III 2007–14
mixed media on paper
111 x 76 cm

Anne Sassoon: Did it take courage to travel so far away from the dark humour and political comment of those early times, especially after working so closely with Robert [Hodgins] and William [Kentridge] – did you simply follow a natural progression or did you try to fight it? Do you ever try to fight what comes up in your work or do you welcome it for what it is?

DB: Perhaps the test of courage is to find your own form, to find your authentic voice by constantly pushing yourself beyond what you know or what is expected of you. It is a tricky business because it is safer and easier to stay in an acceptability of contemporary trends, or what people identify your style as, or even what you think your art is about. I have to admit that that courage is not always there. It comes in fits and starts, and when it comes it usually results in something difficult or unfashionable, something that I as the artist don't even like. I used to think that I was in control, but the longer I make art, the more I realise that in the long run the most interesting stuff is what happens when I as my personality step back. So yes, a controlling part of me does fight the unexpected in my work, whilst another part of me welcomes it and sees it as an act of transcendence; I like to believe that this part of me is getting stronger.

I realise that any use of dark humour and political comment in the early years had more to do with working with William and Robert, and in looking at Hogarth and later Goya in order to produce those series of etchings with them. Satire is not my element. I work more with emotional identification, and a desire for my art to carry a deeper meaning, to act as an object of power rather than to comment on something. I think my *Ubu* series are the only truly satirical works that I have done, where I excluded myself as the subject, and used traditional artefacts to display the horror and atrocities. In all my other works I am the subject, even in my series of *Hogarth in Johannesburg* and *Little Morals*. I remember how at that time I was very aware that I didn't have the same facility for dark humour that William and Robert had, and wondered if satire was perhaps a masculine trait.

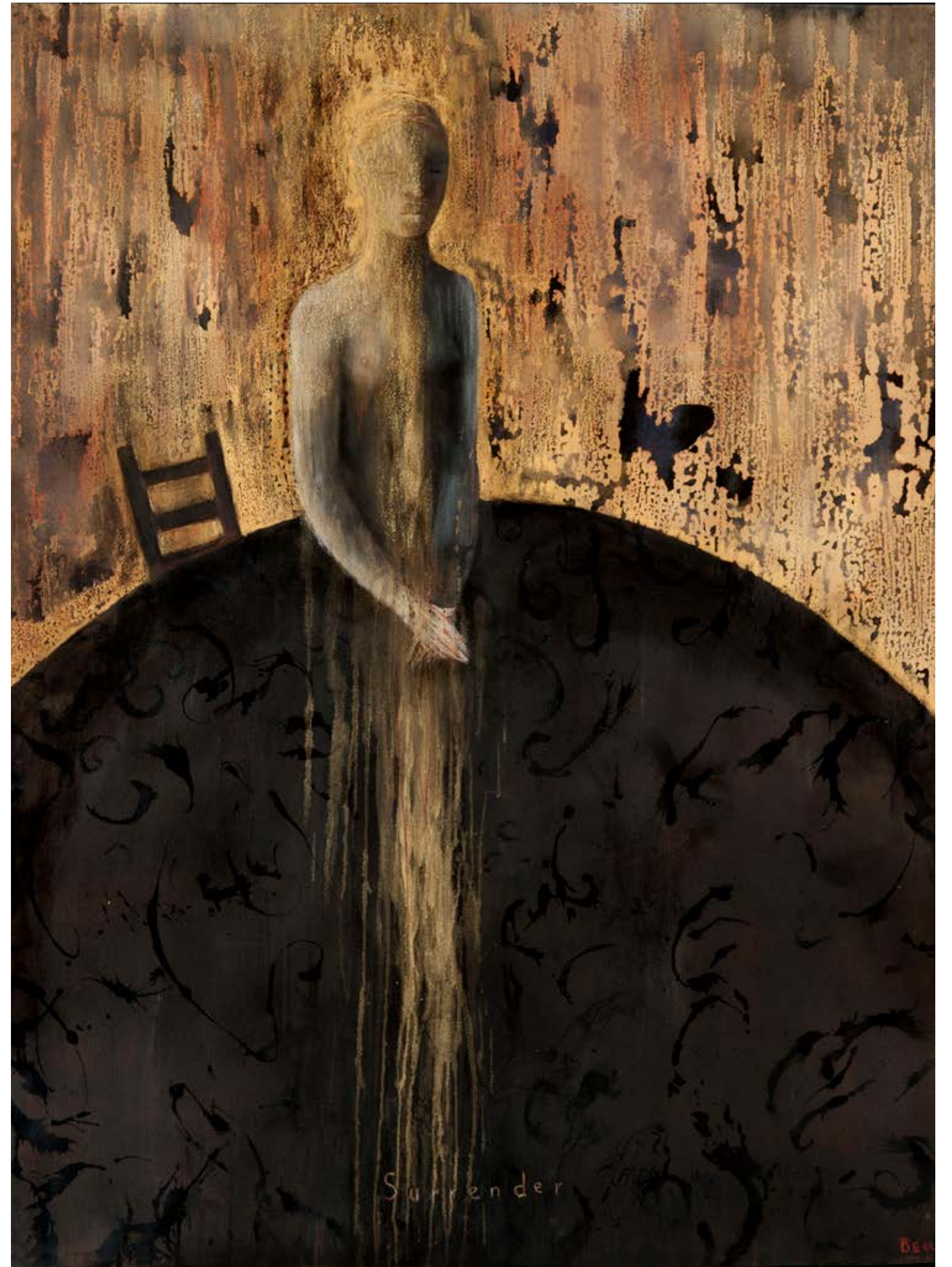
Hogarth in Johannesburg: 1987, *Little Morals*: 1991 and *Ubu 101*: 1997, were three sets of etchings that were part of a collaborative series done with William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins.



LEFT TO RIGHT
Ubu 101: The Grand Tour 1997 drypoint and chine collé 39,4 x 34 cm
Little Morals: Every Word is a Lie 1991 etching and drypoint 23,2 x 32,2 cm
Hogarth in Johannesburg: Marriage-à-la-Mode VI 1987 etching and drypoint 38 x 44,9 cm



Offering 2016
mixed media on paper
159 x 116.5 cm



Surrender 2016
mixed media on paper
159 x 121.5 cm



Without Words 2016
mixed media on Chinese paper
212 x 147 cm



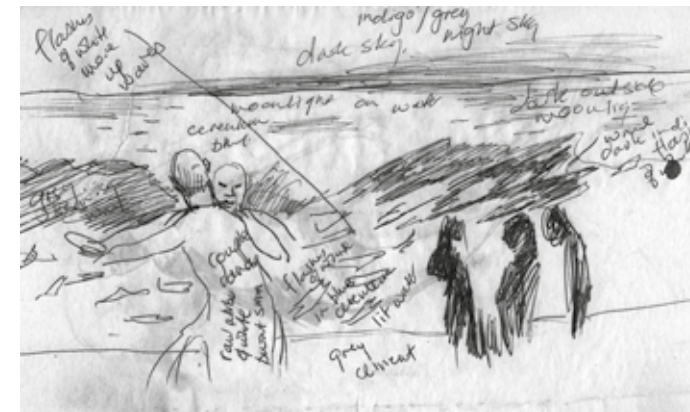
Breath 2016
mixed media on Chinese paper
212 x 147 cm



Dance Through Me 2016
mixed media on paper
131 x 217 cm



LEFT
Dance Through Me 2016
mixed media on paper
131 x 217 cm (detail)



TOP: Deborah Bell sketch of Winslow Homer's *Summer Night*. ABOVE: Winslow Homer, *Summer Night*.



TOP: Deborah Bell sketch of Francisco de Goya's *The Fates*. ABOVE: Francisco de Goya, *The Fates*.

LOOKING AT OTHER ARTISTS' WORK

Over the years I have used notebooks to make sketches from objects and details of paintings in museums, using these drawings (which usually don't have much similarity to the original source) as the inspiration for a new work. For me, the works in museums have become part of our world, have become subject matter in themselves rather than the expression of an individual artist. I feel that I can draw from them as I would draw from nature or a still life. a tree, a bird or a cup. I don't aim to copy, just to be stimulated by.

Recently I have become aware that I'm looking at paintings as a whole. I spent a few years making works that used Las Meninas (both the original Velasquez, and Picasso's version) as inspiration. On this exhibition I have two paintings taken from notebook sketches of other artists works and feel that I need to acknowledge their source.

Dance Through Me comes from a quick sketch I made looking at Winslow Homer's *Summer Night* in the Musee d'Orsay three years ago. He is not an artist that I knew much about, but some quality in the work of a moment in time, and the moonlit light engaged me. My own painting went through many stages, changing from the darkness and the turquoise light that had attracted me, to a surge and flow of gold through the sea and bodies and clothing of the dancing couple. I wanting to create the sense of life and energy dancing through everything – the understanding that life is God.

Your Head in My Hands comes from looking at Goya's Black Paintings in the Prado at the beginning of this year (2016). In this case I was looking at *The Fates*. I was fascinated by Goya's use of floating figures both in this work and in *Fantastic Vision*. They reminded me of my own floating figures and the idea of the 'daimon' or intermediary linking the spiritual and material worlds. In many of my works I have used the image of the dog as an Anubis figure leading a figure from the world of the living to the afterlife. In this painting, a tribute to the death of my beautiful black Great Dane earlier in the year, I am the intermediary.



Your Head in my Hands 2016
mixed media on paper
80.5 x 159 cm



Meditations on a Tree 2016
bronze, edition of 12
34 x 15.5 x 12 cm

Mark Read: Are the surface textures of your sculptures informed by what you achieve by multiple layers of oil on canvas?

DB: Whilst I was working on my large sculptures I had a young intern helping me who commented that I make sculpture like a painter. I realised she was right. At university painting was my medium. I never learned how to make preparatory drawings and maquettes for sculpture. In painting I used to just dive in and see what emerged. I treat sculpture the same way, which is a lot easier in clay than plaster, as I coil the clay and don't need an internal support. My armatures for the plaster works are far more tricky. Whilst I might know I am going to make a running dog or a figure with an outstretched arm, I don't know the shape it is going to take, and my poor assistant spends a lot of time propping up the sculpture and grinding away an arm or a leg, to re-weld a strut in a different position. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that I make so many columnar figures.

In both my painting and sculpture, I work between will and surrender, creation and destruction. I dream of the Zen mark, the single gesture of absolute presence that stands for the whole, but I never get it in one. My initial uninhibited mark may tempt me for a while, but it does not sustain. When I first started working with plaster, I was seduced by how it formed when throwing it and allowing it to drip. It was alive. I understood Giacometti, and was tempted to leave the work at that stage, yet something didn't allow me to do that – it felt like imitation. So I started attacking the plaster with an angle grinder. Careful carving seemed too safe. I needed the impression of pushing against an unwieldy surface, of not being in control. I thought of how I work in printmaking, how I can create a more genuine mark in dry point where my needle skids across and then digs into the hard metal surface, whilst the marks I make in easy soft wax or bitumen seem too safe, too known. My painting builds up in the same way. The wild gesture, the splash of paint, and then the finding of form, the push and pull of surrender and will. The dance of finding beautiful form, but then allowing the gestural mark of accident to bring back a vitality, an imperfection.

My sculptural process is about putting on and carving away. Cycles of creation and destruction. I keep on trying out new materials that will be gentler on my body, but I always end up with an angle grinder in hand, carving a face out of a blob of thrown plaster or hardened clay. Even if I have a chance to model a face in soft clay, when it hardens I will usually attack it with something, a wire brush or a wide tooth pruning saw. There is something in me that won't allow it to be too perfect, too finished.



William Kentridge: How well did you know the five figures BEFORE you started work on them?

DB: My immediate answer was that I didn't know them at all. I didn't set out to make them – I thought I was going to make some smaller, columnar sculptures – harking back to my *Sentinel* figures. These new works, in their solidity, scale and presence, surprised me. Whether I summoned them, or they summoned me to make them, I cannot be sure. But then I remembered that when I had made the first three, I knew that I had to make two more. I knew that there needed to be five, and the year previously I had made a set of five drawings (with five in the title) depicting tall robed figures, eyes open looking outwards. So, perhaps I did know them, or at least had had an introduction to them. I think of these drawings' title *Humanity Unbound* and my title of the sculptures *Return of the Gods: The Ancient Ones* and wonder if they are perhaps the same thing.



Humanity Unbound I–V 2013
mixed media on paper
199 x 62 cm each

PAGES 32–33
Return of The Gods: The Ancient Ones I–IV 2013–15
bronze, edition of 6
tallest 280 cm installation size variable

PAGE 35
Return of The Gods: The Ancient Ones III and V 2013–15
bronze, edition of 6 (detail)





PAGES 36–37
Return of The Gods: The Ancient Ones I and IV 2013–15
 bronze, edition of 6 (detail)



DB: My painting studio has a window onto the outside space where I make sculptures, and for the last year and a half the presence of the five large figures – *The Return of the Gods: the Ancient Ones* – have stood as witness to my working. With them watching me and me watching them, I got to know them very well, I noted their power and their differences, and became aware that each one needed its own voice, its own signature frequency sound.

I approached Philip Miller knowing that he would understand what I meant by this, that he would be able to animate the sculptures through sound, and to find a 'voice' for each one. Philip was excited by the challenge. As he said, 'How do you translate the feeling you get from looking at something into a sound feeling? How do you take a physical presence and turn it into the ethereal?'

Philip knew that for me the figures embodied a higher spiritual force and has intuitively searched for sound to reflect this. He works with a ram's horn, Hebraic chanting, isiXhosa calling out to the ancestors, and the bowing of a single string ... sound vibrating out of the ether to be absorbed from something unseeable into a single body or form.



Dreams of Immortality I 2015
bronze, edition of 9
197 x 16 x 45 cm



Dreams of Immortality II 2015
bronze, edition of 9
197 x 16 x 45 cm

Dreams of Immortality III 2013
bronze, edition of 9
75 x 12 x 27 cm



Mark Read: Does one medium seem to demand that you leave it for another or is it a battle as you seek to be a painter, printmaker or sculptor?

DB: I seem to flow from one to the other. When I have been painting awhile, I yearn for clay, or plaster – and when I am physically exhausted from sculpture, I dream of the slower, gentler act of painting. Print making is like a holiday. It takes me out of myself and allows me to play. Perhaps this is because it seems to be out of my control. I can't really see what I am doing whilst I'm doing it and my responsibility is mediated by the fact that the image will be reversed, and someone else will ink and print it. My small dry point etchings are like little gifts that may inspire my other work. I usually look at my notebooks of sketches from museums when I make them, combining a number of quick small drawings taken from different sources and putting them together in one image to create a poem, a story.



Meditations on Stone 2016
bronze, edition of 12
25 x 14 x 9 cm



Meditation as Rock 2016
bronze, edition of 12
30 x 14 x 13 cm



Meditations: Charioteer II 2016
bronze, edition of 12
55 x 21.5 x 15.5 cm



Meditations: Charioteer I 2016
bronze, edition of 12
51 x 21 x 15,5 cm



Meditations: Charioteer III 2016
bronze, edition of 12
53 x 19 x 15,5 cm



Meditation I, 2016
Indian ink, charcoal and pastel on paper
25.5 x 23 cm



Meditation II–VIII, 2016
Indian ink, charcoal
and pastel on paper
25.5 x 23 cm



Realisation I 2016
Indian ink, charcoal and pastel on paper
40 x 40 cm



Realisation II-IV 2016
Indian ink, charcoal and pastel on paper
40 x 40 cm



RECORDING TIME THROUGH A SINGLE IMAGE

When my friend Laura Ellenberger proposed that she recorded me working in my studio through pinhole photography, I was intrigued. Once she explained the process to me, I became very excited. The idea that an impartial eye, (in this case a pinhole punched into an old cake tin), could record time through light on photographic paper to make a single image – a single *Now*, fitted in with my spiritual understandings.

I played with the word ‘time’, reversed it to its mirror image ‘emit’, and thought about the fact that matter when excited can emit light, and that light can define time. All rather unscientific, but concepts that stimulated my metaphoric artist’s brain. I also contemplated the notion that ‘all time exists simultaneously’, and that the single impartial eye of the pinhole camera, without the time constraints of the shutter, can observe and condense it into a single image. This is so different from the movie camera that records time, or the snapshot photo that captures a particular moment.

Elsewhere I write about my process in making a work of art, and say ‘... it is the idea of an image as its own state – not the static image captured in a moment of flow as in the snapshot, but the image that contains the time and toil condensed in its stillness such as in oil painting or monumental sculpture – which interests me.’

These photographs touch on that for me, but they are the result of a single eye, not the double eye of emotion, and they do not use the body, or toil, to record and condense. They reflect the timelessness of the impartial observer.



TIME-BASED PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES OF DEBORAH BELL'S SCULPTURE

My aim is to visually grasp the space and its contents which are predominantly static, over time, so that the slow infusion of the presence of the working artist, through light and movement, impregnates the photographic image with a tangible presence and energy which cannot be seen, but definitely felt.

The method I have chosen to realise the pinhole paper negatives into paper positives involves painting a light-sensitive solution onto paper and exposing that, through an enormous camera where the front half is in one room and the other half is in the darkroom.

'Black Magic', a light-sensitive photographic emulsion is hand painted onto watercolour paper, in the dark, and the negative is photographed using the room-sized camera. Aiming for a photographic tonal precision but achieving an effect governed by emulsion application, the created surface shows the truth of the hand of the artist, resulting in an image which is photographic yet painterly, much like the original long exposure paper negatives themselves.

– Laura Ellenberger



Deborah Bell – Biography

Solo Exhibitions

- 2015** *Renunciation*, David Krut, Johannesburg
- 2015** *Dreams of Immortality*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg and Cape Town
- 2013** *What Would Wisdom Say to Your Dark Heart?*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town
- 2012** *A Far Country*, John Martin Gallery, London and at the Glyndebourne Opera Festival
- 2011** *Presence*, CIRCA & Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2010** *Alchemy*, David Krut, Johannesburg
- 2009** *Flux*, Goodman Gallery, Cape
- 2009** *Collaborations*, David Krut, Johannesburg
- 2007** *Objects of Power: memory of metal, memory of wood*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2005–6** *Crossings and Monuments*, Oliewenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein
- 2005** *Crossings and Monuments*, Aardklop Festival, Potchefstroom University Library Gallery
- 2004** *Sentinels*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2002** *Unearthed*, Joao Ferreira Gallery, Cape Town
- 2001** *Unearthed*, The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2000** *The Journey Home*, Art First, London
- 1998** *Displacements*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1995** *Muses and Lamentations*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1989** *Deborah Bell*, Potchesfroom Museum
- 1985** *MAFA* exhibition, Rembrandt Gallery, Milner Park, Johannesburg
- 1982** *Deborah Bell*, Market Gallery, Johannesburg

2/3 Person Exhibitions

- 1997** *Collaborations 1986-1997* (11 years of collaborative projects between artists Kentridge, Hodgins and Bell) at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, in association with the FNB Vita Awards
- 1997** *'UB101:'* A portfolio of etchings done in conjunction with Kentridge and Hodgins. Exhibited at the Grahamstown Festival and at the Gertrude Posel Gallery. Exhibition curated by Fiona Rankin-Smith
- 1994** *Memo*, installation with video at the Grahamstown festival in collaboration with William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins
- 1994** *Lamentations*, Art First, Cork Street. London
- 1993** *Easing the Passing (of the hours)*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1993** *Portraits in the round*, ceramic exhibition in collaboration with William Kentridge and Retief van Wyk at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1992** *Easing the Passing (of the hours)*, Waterfront, Cape Town. Computer Animation, laser prints and drawings in collaboration with William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins
- 1991** *Little Morals*, a portfolio of etchings done in conjunction with Hodgins and Kentridge, exhibited at the Cassierer Gallery, Johannesburg, Gallery International Cape Town, Taking Liberties, Durban
- 1988** Exhibited with Jenny Stadler and Nagel at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1987–08** *Hogarth in Johannesburg*, a portfolio of etchings done in conjunction with Hodgins and Kentridge. This exhibition travelled to all the major centres in South Africa
- 1983–4** Exhibited with Hodgins and Sassoon, Carriage House Gallery

Group Exhibitions

- 2016–7** *TACIT : A group exhibition acknowledging 20 years of conjunction and reciprocity at Dionysus Sculpture Works' studio and foundry*, NWU Gallery, Potchefstroom and William Humphey's, Kimberley and Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria
- 2015** *Bronze, Steel & Stone, CIRCA & Everard Read, Johannesburg and Cape Town*
- 2015** *1:54 Everard Read Exhibition, London*
- 2013** *Summer of Sculpture, Everard Read, Cape Town*
- 2013** *Centenary Exhibition, CIRCA & Everard Read, Johannesburg*
- 2012** *Rainbow Nation: Group exhibition of South African Sculptors Museum Beelden Aan Zee, Den Haag*
- 2011** *HORSE: 60 South African artists curated by Ricky Burnett, CIRCA & Everard Read, Johannesburg*
- 2010** *TWENTY, 20 Years of SA Sculpture, Nirox Foundation*
- 2009** *Contemporary Sculpture in the Landscape, Nirox Foundation*
- 2007** *Lift Off II*, Goodman Gallery Cape, Cape Town
- 2007** *David Krut print workshop, UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria*
- 2005** *ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH*, Miami Beach, USA, in collaboration with Goodman Gallery
- 2005** *Works on Paper*, Collaborative prints from David Krut Print Workshop, Franchise Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2005** *David Krut Collaborations: 25 Years of Prints and Multiples*, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown
- 2004** *Earthworks/Claybodies*, Sasol Museum Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch
- 2003** *Earthworks/Claybodies*, Pretoria Art Museum
- 2003** *Earthworks/Claybodies*, Standard Bank Centre Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2000** *Icons for the Millenium*, Atlanta, USA
- 1999** *The Paper Show*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1999** *Emergence*, Group Show, National Arts festival, Grahamstown
- 1999** *Artery*, AVA Gallery, Cape Town – in conjunction with the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1999** *Artists in residence*, Standard Bank National Arts Festival, 25th Anniversary, Grahamstown
- 1998** *Earth Hues – Contemporary African Art*, Group Show, World Space, Washington DC, USA
- 1997** *Images and Form: Prints, drawings and sculpture from Southern Africa and Nigeria*, Brunei Gallery, University of London and Edinburgh College of Art, UK
- 1997** *The Gencor Collection*, Sandton Art Gallery, and The Grahamstown Festival
- 1997** *Kempton Park Metropolitan Substructure Fine Arts Award Show*, Kempton Park
- 1997** *New Art from South Africa*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
- 1997** *Les Arts de la Resistance*, (Fin de Siecle à Johannesburg), Galerie Convergence, Galerie Jean-Christian Fradin, Galerie Michel Luneau, Galerie les Petit Murs, Nantes, France
- 1997** *Not Quite a Christmas Exhibition*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1997** *CRAM*, AVA Gallery, Cape Town – in conjunction with The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1996** *Gay Rights: Rites, Re-writes*, Travelling Exhibition, South Africa
- 1996** *Group Salon*, Rose Korber representing artists at the Bay Hotel, Cape Town
- 1996** *Common and Uncommon Ground: South African Art to Atlanta*, City Gallery East, Atlanta, USA
- 1996** *Vita Awards*, Johannesburg Art Gallery
- 1996** *Tomorrow is Now*, First Canadian Place and Knights Galleries International, Toronto, Canada
- 1996** *Barber Signs*, The Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1996** *Recent Drawings*, Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg
- 1996** *Ceramics Biennial*, Sandton Art Gallery
- 1995** *The Bag Factory: The First Five Years*, the Civic Theatre Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1995** *The Art of Tea*, Kim Sacks Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1995** *Group Salon*, Rose Korber representing artists at the Bay Hotel, Cape Town
- 1994** *Group Show*, Newtown, Johannesburg
- 1994** *Anything Boxed*, Group Show, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1994** *South African Works on Paper*, North Western University of Illinois, Chicago, United States
- 1993** *Gallery on Tyrone*, Johannesburg
- 1993** *Vita Awards*, Johannesburg Art Gallery
- 1993** *Momentum Life Exhibition*, Pretoria
- 1993** *Internations of Millenium*, Newtown Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1992** *ICA*, 50 Johannesburg Artists, Johannesburg
- 1992** *Paris: The Catalyst*, Alliance Francaise, Durban
- 1992** *Looking at Art: Looking at Watercolours*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1992** *Vita Awards*, Johannesburg Art Gallery
- 1992** *Works made in August*, Newtown Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1991** *Cape Town Triennial*
- 1991** *Painted People: Painted Spaces*, Newtown Galleries, Johannesburg
- 1991** *Hand Coloured Graphics*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1991** *Tiny Tapestry Show*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1990** *Women choose Women*, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
- 1990** *Art from South Africa*, MOMA, Oxford, UK
- 1990** *Standard Bank Drawing Competition*, Johannesburg
- 1989** *Volkskas Atelier Award Exhibition*, South African Vita Awards, Johannesburg Art Gallery
- 1989** *African Encounters*, Dome Gallery, New York and Washington, USA
- 1989** *The Little Big Show*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1988** *CASA* (Culture for Another South Africa), conference in Amsterdam, Holland
- 1988** *Volkskas Atelier Award exhibition*, South African Association of the Arts, Pretoria
- 1998** *100 Artists Protest detention without trial*, in aid of DPSC, Market Theatre, Johannesburg
- 1998** *Artists for Human Rights Exhibition*, Durban Exhibition Centre
- 1998** *4 UNISA Lecturers*, Bloemfontein
- 1998** *UNISA Art Lecturers*, Pretoria Art Museum
- 1986** *Volkskas Atelier Award Exhibition*, South African Association of Arts, Pretoria
- 1985** *Cape Town Triennial* New Visions, Market Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1985** *11 Figurative Artists*, Market Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1990–1** Set of 6 Graphics for First National Bank

- 2013** MEDAL OF HONOUR FOR VISUAL ARTS (Sculpture and Painting), Die Suid-Afrikanse Akademie for Wetenskap en Kuns
- 1997** APSA Award for the best New Signature, Ceramics Biennial
- 1991** Vita Quarterly Award, runner-up for Main Award
- 1991** Mamba Award for the Most Sustained Artist
- 1986** Merit Prize Winner, Volkskas Atelier

Collections

- BCE, Johannesburg
- Bell, Dewar and Hall, Johannesburg
- Bristol Myers Squibb Corp. USA
- The Leeu Collection, Franschhoek
- Delaire Graff Wine Estate, Stellenbosch
- Friends of the National Gallery, Cape Town
- Hara Museum, Tokyo
- Johannesburg Art Gallery
- Johannesburg City Council
- King George VI Art Gallery, Port Elizabeth
- Legal Resources Centre, Johannesburg
- Museum of Modern Art, New York
- MTN Art Institute, Johannesburg
- Oliewenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein
- National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C
- Pretoria Art Museum
- Rodepoort Museum
- SA National Gallery, Cape Town
- BHP Billiton South Africa Ltd.
- Sanlam Collection
- Sasol Collection
- Smithsonian Insitute, Washington, D.C
- Standard Bank Investment Corporation, Johannesburg
- Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg
- Telkom
- UNISA Art Gallery
- University of Pietermaritzburg Collection
- University of the Orange Free State Collection
- University of the Witwatersrand Collection

Commissions

- 1999** Sculpture for Standard Bank
- 1991** Large sculpture for Wits Business School
- 1991** Artist-in-Residence, Standard Bank National Arts Festival – 25th Anniversary, Grahamstown
- 1994** Graphics for Weekly Mail Film Festival Poster
- 1994** Involvement in movie animation for Arts Alive
- 1994** Title sequence for Grass Roots, NNTV
- 1993** Graphics for Weekly Mail Film Festival Poster
- 1990–1** Set of 6 Graphics for First National Bank



Return of The Gods: The Ancient Ones II
2013–15 bronze, edition of 6 260 x 84 x 65 cm

Acknowledgements and thanks

For asking me questions that made me think:

Anne Sassoon used to exhibit and share painting ideas with Deborah Bell and Robert Hodgins before leaving South Africa in 1987. Anne is now living in Jerusalem where she continues to paint and exhibit, and to write about art. The influence of South Africa is an integral part of her work.

Ricky Burnett is a painter and a teacher of painting. He has sometimes acted as a curator and one of the most notable of his achievements in this regard is the groundbreaking 1984 exhibition *Tributaries*. He has been a close friend of Deborah's for many years.

Mark Read is the Director of Everard Read and CIRCA galleries. A long standing friend and confidant of Deborah's who has worked closely with her ahead of her solo exhibitions galleries for several years.

William Kentridge is an artist living and working in Johannesburg. He has known Deborah Bell since they were both students at Wits in the 1970s. But the connection began properly when he worked with Deborah and Robert Hodgins on a series of six projects over a period of about 10 years starting in the late 1980s – three suites of etchings and three animated film projects.

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