

Willemien de Villiers

Willemien de Villiers is a South African artist and writer, born in Pretoria and currently residing in Muizenberg. She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts at the University of Pretoria and her work has been shown in both group and solo exhibitions around the country.

Her work is a dialogue between real and imagined microscopic biological phenomena, reconstructing the common cellular history of all living things through atomised patterning. The process of decay and disintegration, and the inevitable new growth and integration that follows, inform this major theme in her work, especially with regard to memory (personal, political and social).

The making of her work demands patience: painting, stitching, knitting, knotting and cutting. This layered process conceals the banal and the obvious and reveals what is only sometimes glimpsed. This is further explored by affording the reverse side of her free-hanging embroideries ("the backstories") the same emotional and artistic weight as the front views.

Her writing is inspired by connections between people, as functioning or non-functioning relationships – in her first novel, *Kitchen Casualties* (Jacana, 2003; Albanian translation in 2004, *Viktima të Kuzhinës*, Botimet Max) she explores themes of sexual abuse within a familial setting, and the devastating imprint that keeping secrets can leave on a family. Her second novel, *Virgin in the Treehouse* (Jacana, 2007) explores themes of the sacred male/female, a search for wholeness, and coming home. A father-daughter relationship dominates here.

Her stories are published in various collections: *180 degrees*, (Oshun, 2004); *Women Flashing*, (Edited by Anne Schuster and Maire Fischer, 2004); *Dinaane: Short Stories by South African Women*, edited by Maggie Davey (Telegram, 2007); *Lovely Beyond Any Singing – landscapes in South African writing*: an anthology compiled by Helen Moffett (Double Storey, 2006).

Recent Exhibitions

2011 : **Interior/Binneruimte** | Upstairs @ Bamboo (Johannesburg) with textile/felt artist Ronél Jordaan

2011 : **Seedbed** | Kalk Bay Modern (Kalk Bay, Cape Town)

2011 : **Bloom 2** | Group exhibition at Casa Labia, Muizenberg, curated by Margie Murgatroyd

2012 : **Art in Clay** | isart, Franschhoek

2012 : **Literary Festival Exhibition** | isart Gallery, Franschhoek. Group show curated by Ilse Schermers.

2012 : **Koopkuns** | g2 Gallery, Shortmarket Street, CT. Curated by Julie Plaistowe

2013 : **Muse** | Casa Labia, Muizenberg

2013 : **Group Show** | isart, Franschhoek

2014 : **The Signature of All Things** | Mogalakwena Gallery at 3 Church Street, Cape Town

2014 : **Seeking Eden** | Casa Labia, Muizenberg

2014 : **Group Show** | isart, Franschhoek

2015 : **At First Blush** | Culture Urban+Contemporary, Woodstock

2015 : **Vantage** | Upstairs@Bamboo, Johannesburg (Carol Lee Fine Art)

2015 : **Turbine Art Fair**, Johannesburg (Carol Lee Fine Art)

A poet's response to **Seedbed: Space, Time and Interiority in Willemien de Villiers' paintings**

– Gabeba Baderoon

In this exquisitely curated show, as we enter the space of the gallery, we meet eyes that open directly from the consciousness inside the canvas. The paintings evoke the past, and also a space of interiority within the canvas themselves.

It is clear from the paintings gathered here that Willemien lives by the sea. The patterns in her paintings repeat infinitely to form a new and unimagined coherence, and yet are not static. The faint patterns on canvas look like that on caked, salted, dry skin. There is a coherence of patterns, of moulds, of skeins of pattern that repeat, and change and create something new. Blues and greens come from the sea and sky, and generate a bodily hunger for red.

Willemien's experience as a writer, sculptor and textile designer is evident in these paintings. In our conversation, she revealed that the language of her novels fulfilled her but eventually the visual was the only language in which she could speak in these paintings.

The titles of the works are exquisitely crafted in themselves. In the paintings Willemien appears to listen to objects speaking – there is a sculptural quality to the relation of the objects in the paintings. The arrangement and posture of bodies in relation to one another are evocative and delicately observed – three poised swimmers come from an old family photograph. The calm Madonna whose face appears in several paintings is both old and new. Willemien has also been inspired by old anatomy books, evident in the image of the belly opening up like a flower.

Through these paintings, she is an artist who balances the push of originality and the thees nurtured and shaped by older histories, by what speaks through her.