



Carving X

The Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture

# Carving X

1 – 16 October 2022

In 2021, the Claire and Edoardo Villa Will Trust granted the Edoardo Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture to Jackson Hlungwani, the first of its kind to be awarded to an artist posthumously in acknowledgement of Hlungwani's significant contribution to South African sculpture.

In addition to the production of a publication on Hlungwani's work, the award intended to honour the memory of Hlungwani and further the woodcarving tradition by making provision for another sculptor, Collen Maswanganyi, to develop his practice through a four-week residency at NIROX. As part of this award, Maswanganyi proposed a workshop titled *Carving X*, during which he collaborated with fellow sculptors Richard Chauke, Amorous Maswanganyi, and Ben Tuge. The workshop began on Monday 5 September and ran until 2 October.

During this time, the artists worked together to produce two large-scale collaborative works (*The Presence of God* and *Mabyongo / Pfungwa*) as well as a series of smaller independent works from a large fallen Oak at NIROX. Many

conversations were had during this period. Some focused on the process of carving itself, exploring the different types of wood used, the finish, or the idiosyncrasies involved in, say, painting in acrylic or enamel, or not at all, letting the wood show through. Other conversations focused on the role of writing, the place of artist statements, the context of exhibition, and how to go about pricing and marketing one's work. This aspect of the workshop led to the collective decision that, while the Centre would take no commission, *Carving X* should be a selling exhibition, with the Centre enabling communication between the artists and potential buyers.

Showcased alongside pre-existing works, the exhibition explores the role of collaboration, grappling with questions of authorship, individual and collective identity, and the role of community in the making process, while foregrounding a variety of material choices and techniques, from the Maswanganyis' painted matt, smoothly-sanded figures to the polished, enamel figures of Richard Chauke, and Tuge's burnt, chisel-finished works in Jacaranda and Oak.



# Collaborative works

Two of the three artworks included in the pages that follow – *The Presence of God* and *Mabyongo / Pfungwa* were produced collaboratively by Collen Maswanganyi, Amorous Maswanganyi, Richard Chauke, and Ben Tuge, while in residence at NIROX (2022). Both were made from the same fallen Oak. The collaborative nature of these is referred to in the title of the latter; the Tsonga and Shona word, respectively, for 'brains'; a nod to the coming together of four minds and artistic expressions. The third, *Not a Sperm Donor*, was produced by Collen Maswanganyi and his father, Johannes Maswanganyi, in 2019.



**Collen and Amorous  
Maswanganyi, Richard  
Chauke, and Ben Tuge**  
*Mabyongo / Pfungwa*  
2022  
Oak  
162 x 50 x 50 cm  
R210,000



**Collen and Amorous Maswanganyi, Richard Chauke, and Ben Tuge**

*The Presence of God*

2022

Oak

785 x 230 x 120 cm



**Collen and Johannes  
Maswanganyi**  
*Not a Sperm Donor*  
2019  
Leadwood, acrylic, steel  
83 x 81 x 122 cm  
R60,000

‘Usually the female fish will lay eggs and the male will come to fertilise them. But the baby fish won’t know their parents. They have to fend for themselves. In contrast, my grandfather made these tools for my father and his siblings, to say “Ok, go and learn to carve, in order to carve a future for yourself.”

# In conversation

An informal discussion which took place on 2 October 2022, during a walkabout of *Carving X*.

**Ben Tuge [BT]:** Considering the thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of carvers, artists, throughout the years when Jackson Hlungwani lived, why was his artwork so special, to the extent that you would write about his art?

**Karel Nel [KN]:** He was a deeply spiritual man. He lived on the hill at Mbokoto, which was a Stone Age site. Which was a link to his ancestral past. When he chose to make a church there, he didn't make it in the western form. He made these circles of stone, and he created a community which was really a spiritual community. He was a healer, a shaman.

**Collen Maswanganyi [CM]:** He was many things.

**KN:** Yes. In his later work he started to make sculpture for sale, but in the beginning his sculptures were not for sale. They were his link to the spiritual world, his ancestors. He didn't chop down trees. He worked from trees that had fallen, and his sculptures were a conversation between himself and the form of the tree. In a sense, exactly what you're doing there [points to *The Presence of God*]. It's part of that tradition. But then again, like what I see around me here, there were times in his early work where he was very precise. The four crucifixes that he made in the 1960s were some of the most precise carving he ever did. They're very beautiful. And he was never interested in money.

**CM:** I think even in his later years as well. We used to go to his homestead. When people came to buy his work, and asked how much it cost, he would say, 'Please, consult Jesus. Ask the price from Jesus. Jesus will tell you the price, and that's what you will pay me.' So it wasn't like, 'Ok, this is how much I want for my work.'

**KN:** So that was a problem, because people took advantage of him. I mean, I went up there often, and he would say the same thing to me. And I didn't want to buy because, how do you... you know?

**BT:** That's very interesting, because some did take advantage of him. They could see the value, but they could not help or be honest with him and say, 'You know what, your work is more valuable than what you're charging.'

**KN:** Well eventually, Ricky Burnett and Rayda Becker said to Jackson, 'Don't sell pieces. Don't give them away,' because he would, and they tried to create a proper market value for him. Eventually Ricky arranged a very big exhibition in 1989, in Newtown, and proper prices were put onto those pieces. That's when he decided to sell the alters, because they were disintegrating on the alter site. So the one is at Johannesburg Art Gallery and the other is at Wits. We did a show last year, where we brought those two alters together at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town. It was amazing to see them together again, and for people to understand what a great sculptor he was. He was one of the great sculptors. I mean, there was also [Sydney] Kumalo and [Ezrom] Legae, who worked in the 1960s and '70s, but in the '80s it was really Jackson Hlungwani. Dumile Feni also created really amazing sculptures, but most South Africans haven't seen a lot of his work, because a lot of it was overseas. There was also amazing work that came out of Venda at that time.

**BT:** If one is to imagine what would be termed a great work of art, I sometimes battle to come up with an answer to that. Does it matter what others feel about your work, or is it just an opinion that you have?

**KN:** I think each of us as artists need to work from our most skilled point. You only really get the attention of people once you've created a body of work and you keep working.

**BT:** So it's about consistency?





**KN:** Consistency, but also not just carving the same thing. Like, I've made this and it sells well and let me just keep making the same thing. [To Collen] Your father has always been amazing like this. I remember first seeing the works he carved for the sangomas in Soweto. I bought one of those very early on, and I remember amazing Biblical sculptures, and then visiting him up there and seeing sculptures of Verwoerd, and of PW Botha. I asked him, 'What are you doing?' And he said, 'No, Verwoerd sells very well up here.' So he knew his markets, but he developed his own language, just by carving and carving. His skill developed, yours developed, and so we learn from those who have carved before us. That's how we develop our eye and our understanding. It's not just that we learn from each other at a generational level, but we also need to look back, to understand where we come from in order to move forward. And there's a tradition in Venda that is truly great, and it's very often not seen or remembered.

**BT:** If you go to Zimbabwe now, or even if you go to William Nicol and Main, you'll find most of my fellow countrymen there are artists, or dealers. They make these geometric works, but sometimes they don't get it correct and it becomes decorative, but like you say, that work sells very well. That's why Zimbabwean artists, especially from the '90s, the 1990s, right up until the 2000s, were mostly more selling curios. They would see someone making money from that kind of work, because there were a lot of people buying, and then they would join them, because if you study it you can actually copy it.

**KN:** I don't know if you know the work of Boira Mteki and Nicholas Mukomberanwa?

**BT:** Yes, those are the greats.

**KN:** Beautiful work.

**BT:** Those are the greats, you can't copy that.



Ben Tuge, installation view of *Evolve*, 2022. Burnt Oak, offcut chips, 100 x 160 x 147 cm. Photo: Manthe Ribane.

**KN:** It's not slick, it has great power. And it's exactly what you were asking about earlier: how do you know if it's good? So they were trusting their own image making. They weren't trying to copy somebody else because it sells well. That's what we always need to keep in mind as artists. In my own work, I had a hard time, because my work wasn't political. And if your work wasn't political in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, you weren't relevant. One just has to do what you do, focus, and find your own voice, but it takes commitment. I always had another job so that I could do what I wanted. I also had a very good dealer who looked after me in London, but here in South Africa I had one or two dealers who tried to own me; who would tell me what to make, and I didn't want that. It didn't do my career any good, because in one does need to have a gallery. It's very difficult to do that on your own. It's complicated terrain, but the important thing is to make the work.

It's what you've done Collen, sustainably making. If one can share that with one's community and look after each other, like you're doing now, help each other, then you're on the right track.

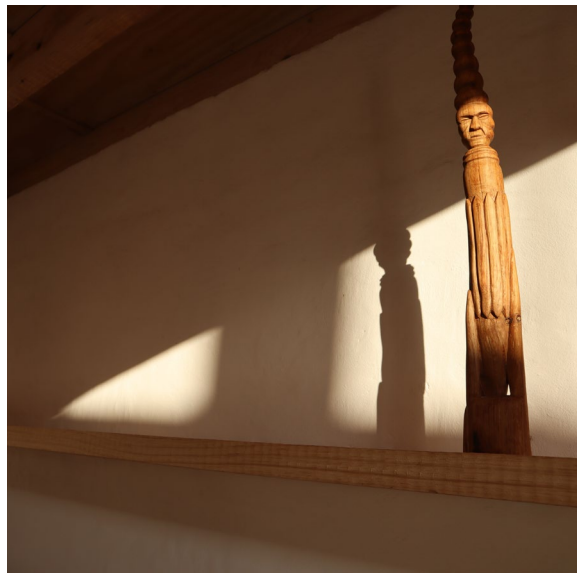
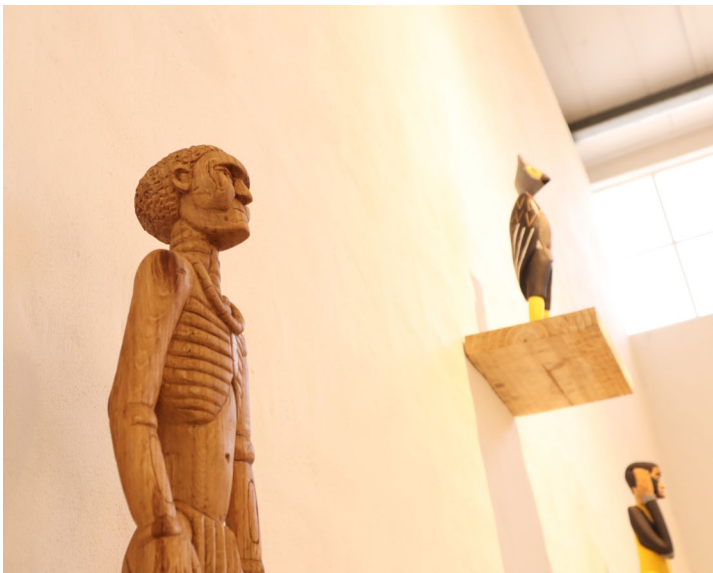
**BT:** It's something that we discussed as part of the workshop as well, and I've learnt a lot. I've taken advantage of the fact that we're here, having these conversations. Pricing is an issue: maybe I'm

underpricing my work, or overcharging, you know?

**KN:** It's a very difficult thing. I've had to rely on gallerists or somebody from an auction house to help me price. Once you have a base price, you can raise that price slightly each year so that you build your prices. There have been many young artists who come in with a huge price. They might sell two works, and then their market is gone. Nobody is prepared to pay that, so you have to build up a community of people who collect your work. From there it filters out into the world. It helps once you've got that base level, because the prices shouldn't go up and down.

**CM:** That was the challenge with my father. The consistency wasn't always there in his pricing.

**KN:** Galleries are also very, very expensive. You can imagine how much it costs to have a space, to have staff, to send out invitations, to take people around... It's a huge cost. So my dealer used to take between 40 and 50% commission. She was in central London. So when works sold in the gallery they would have one price, and when I sold them from my studio I would sell them for the same, so there wasn't a gap between the two. But your gallerist often gets your work out into collections. They know who is interested in buying, so you may lose money by having a dealer, but it builds your career.



# Amorous Maswanganyi

Amorous Maswanganyi is a fourth generation artist within the Maswanganyi family. He learnt to carve from his uncle Johannes Maswanganyi and cousin Collen Maswanganyi. Born in 1989 in Noblehoek Village, Amorous went to Haaka Primary School in 1995, and furthered his studies at Noblehoek High School. His interest in wood-carving started in 2005, when he created several artworks that spoke about the lives of school learners, most famously *pregnant school girl*. Most opportunities to show his work through the Ribola Art Route and Lodges, who support art in the Elim and Tzaneen area, particularly Nahakwe and Madi a Thaba I in Louis Trichardt. Through his uncle and brother, Amorous was able to exhibit works like *Dance with my father* at the house of Zelnor Oberholzer, *Beautiful things* at Graskop. His work is in the collection of JP Morgan in Rosebank. He was invited to show his work at the National Arts Awards in Sandton.



**Sarah**  
2021  
Oak, acrylic  
51 x 29 x 12 cm  
R4,500



**Old Woman**  
2020  
Corkwood,  
acrylic  
40 x 20 x 18 cm  
R3,500



***Fish Miracle***

2021

Corkwood,  
leadwood stand, acrylic

50 x 35 x 47 cm

R12,500



**Businessman**  
2021  
Corkwood, acrylic  
55 x 14 x 17 cm  
R4,500

'The businessman is answering the phone.'





**Maria**  
2021  
Corkwood, acrylic  
54 x 25 x 17 cm  
R12,500



**Lizy**  
2018  
Oak, acrylic  
46 x 13 x 14 cm  
R3,800

'Waiting for the taxi.'



**Old Man**  
2022  
Oak  
55 x 21 x 17 cm  
R3,500



**Human Skeleton**  
2022  
Oak  
50 x 11 x 6 cm  
R3,500



**Fish**  
2022  
Oak  
23 x 37 x 16 cm  
R1,500

'This angel comes from God. It's come to share the spirit of God. The angel comes in many shapes and forms. It can be a fish, or an owl, to tell us what will happen in the future, or what has happened in previous times.'



**Angel**  
2022  
Corkwood,  
acrylic  
47 x 10 x 10 cm  
R3,500



**Swikhovha**  
2022  
Oak  
54 x 35 x 17 cm  
R6,500

# Richard Chauke

Richard Chauke was born in 1979 in Gandlanani Village ka Khani. He is the third born of Jackson and Delela Chauke. He first went to school in 1987 at Kutsakeni Primary School and went to Malenga High School in 1994. His interest in art began in 1992, when he saw the artist Settlers Chavalala (known as Mayengani) selling his work in Soweto. When he went back home, Chauke was encouraged to learn of the Ngoveni brothers, who were woodcarvers, and was inspired to start woodcarving. Richard has since participated in several events, organised by the greater Giyani Municipality and Mapungubwe Arts Festival, and has exhibited work at the Polokwane Art Museum. He was selected for Spier Art Collections, Sasol New Signatures, and the Absa L'Atelier, amongst others.





**David**  
2022  
Oak  
39 x 10 x 10 cm  
R6,800



**Mandela and  
De Klerk:  
Negotiations**  
2017  
Jackalberry,  
varnish, and  
enamel  
38 x 16 x 31 cm  
R9,500



**Mandela and  
Tutu: Freedom  
Day**  
2017  
Jackalberry,  
varnish, and  
enamel  
41 x 25 x 14 cm  
R9,500



**Jacob Zuma:**  
**Heritage Day**  
2018  
Jackalberry, varnish,  
and enamel  
45 x 14 x 14 cm  
R7,000

'Long ago there was a draught. There was no food to eat. People began to cook and eat the skins of domestic animals, because there was no food, no rain, for many years. People suffered. They looked like ghosts. You could see their bones.'

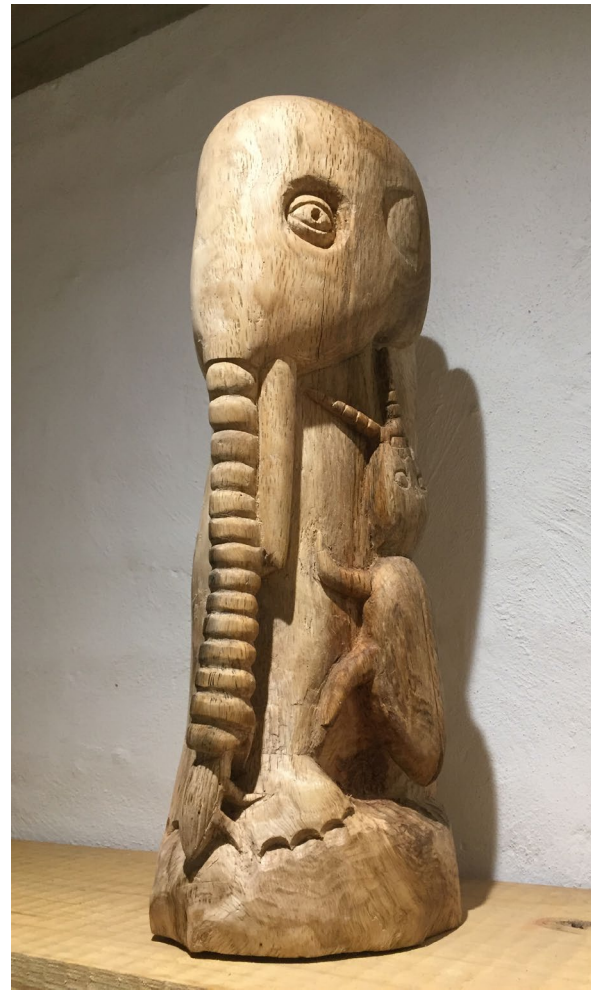


***The Year of Hunger***  
2022  
Oak  
56 x 13 x 13 cm  
R6,800



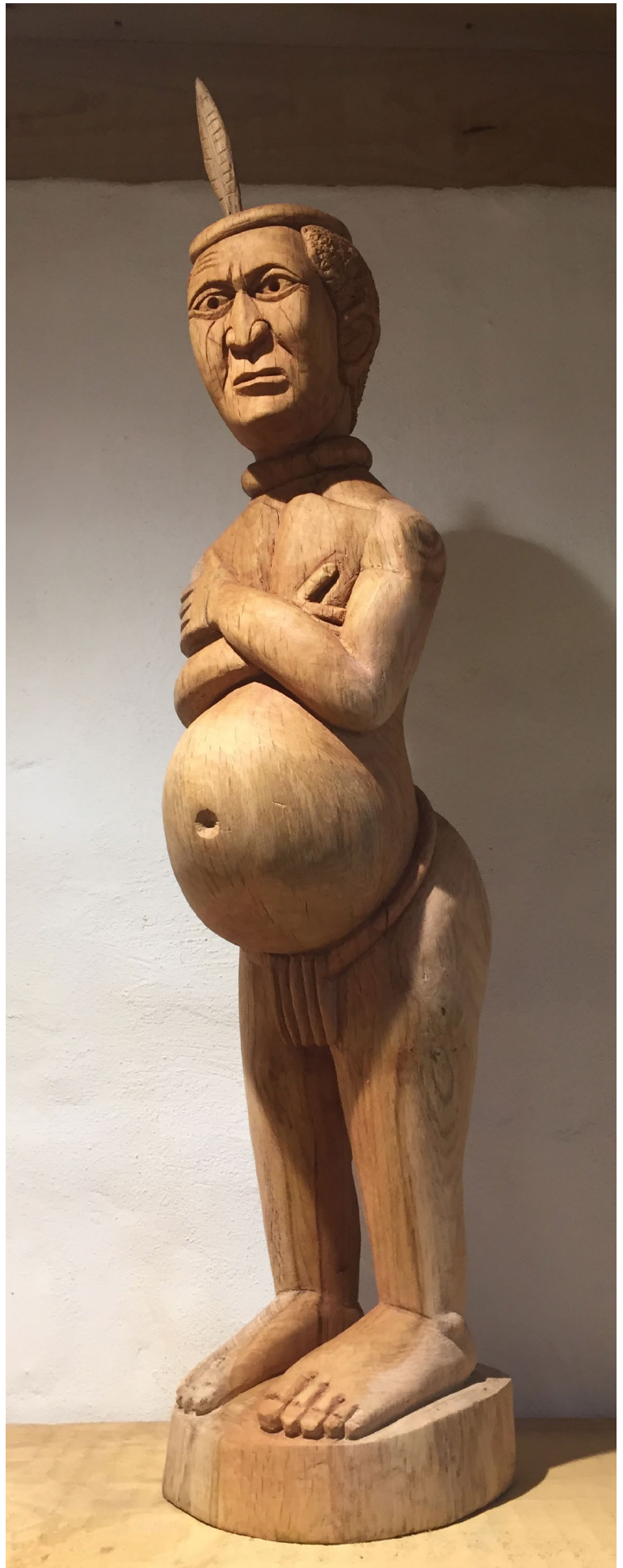
**Nwafhokoro**  
2022  
Oak  
52 x 7 x 5 cm  
R3,000

'That one is a magic worm. It helps those who graze domestic animals. When they disappear and go off to eat the food, you sing to them. They come out of their hole and show you the direction the animals went by pointing with their heads.'



***The Ant and  
the Elephant***  
2022  
Oak  
44 x 17 x 17 cm  
R6,800

'This is the story of a single insect that killed a big animal. It got inside the trunk and began to walk around in there, disturbing the elephant. The ant's legs made it want to sneeze and blow, but the ant wouldn't come out, so the elephant went around hitting its trunk against the trees to try take out the ant, until it collapsed and died.'



**The Hunter**  
2022  
Oak  
62 x 16 x 16 cm  
R6,800

# Ben Tuge

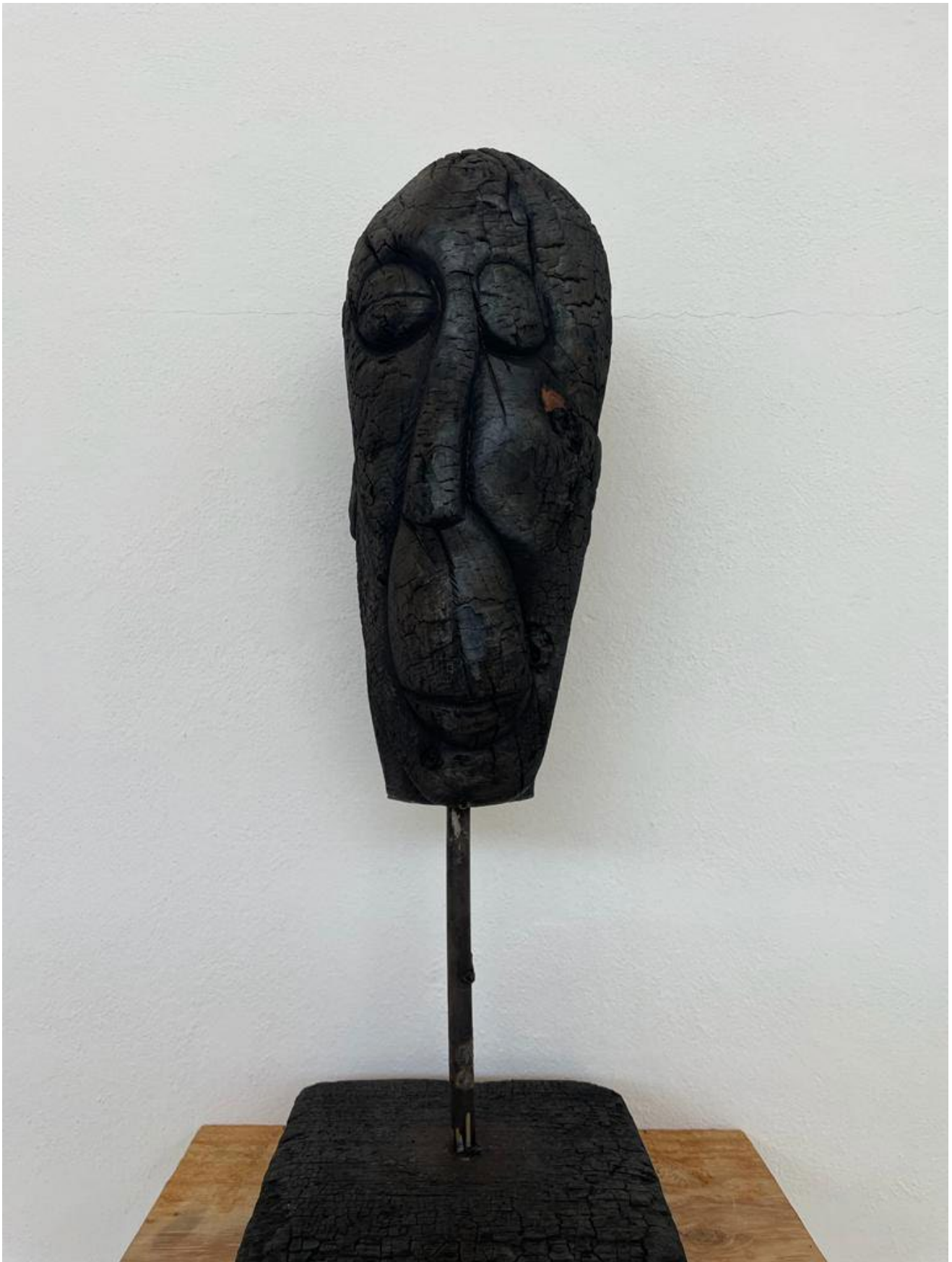
Randburg-based visual artist, Benjamin Tuge is, to say the least, a standalone talent. He is such a versatile sculptor, a master carver of thought-provoking woodcarvings, a satirical landscape and portrait painter, a spiritual scribe, and a visionary thinker. Born in 1969 in Masvingo, a town in south-eastern Zimbabwe and the capital of the Karanga people. He was raised in a town close to Great Zimbabwe, the national monument from which the country takes its name. As a sculptor who specialises in human figures, Tuge's fine art, abstract and contemporary works are created with various types of wood, metal, paintings, and stone. He enjoys exploring African lifestyle and culture. He develops art images where the traditional way of life of the African people is portrayed, and adds a touch of humour in detail.





**Evolve**  
2022  
Burnt Oak, offcut chips  
100 x 160 x 147 cm  
R85,000

*"Evolve talks about the things that we make or create as human beings; the cultures that separate us based on colour. The sculpture is of a king, burnt black, but the unburnt chips at its base came from the same piece of wood. They're offcuts of different colours. They are his subjects. They worship him. Is it possible that one day we will have a different king? It's either a white king for the black or a black king for the white, is it going to happen one day, or maybe it's just wishful thinking."*



*Head of State*  
2022  
Burnt Oak, steel,  
wooden base  
49 x 17 x 16 cm  
R45,000

\*The artist reserves all rights.



***Love is Contagious***

2022

Burnt Jacaranda

21 x 15 x 27.8 cm and 31 x

15.5 x 20 cm

R55,000

\*The artist reserves all rights.



"It's refined, the texture, detailed. It's titled The Kiss. If you look closely you'll notice two faces, kissing, but also smiling. They're merged, because when you kiss it feels like you are one."

**The Kiss**  
2020  
Leadwood, steel, wooden  
base  
51 x 18 x 10 cm  
R25,000

\*The artist reserves all rights.

'I play when I work. There's a moment when I get happy or excited. You can see it in this work. The top and central parts are more detailed, whereas the bottom section is rough. That's the point at which I got inspired. It's important for me to listen to that, no matter what, because it's an expression. Look at the eyes of the two guys, trying to watch each other's backs. It's about dishonesty, about how toxic society has become.'



**Watch my Back**

2020

Leadwood, steel, wooden

base

46 x 19 x 13.5 cm

R22,000

\*The artist reserves all rights.



**Father and Son**  
2021  
Leadwood,  
wooden base  
33 x 15 x 6 cm  
R12,000

\*The artist reserves all rights.

'*Wait for Me* is a work about ashes. It was motivated by people being burnt to death, lynched, during apartheid. That's when we began to experience a human burning another to death for whatever reason. From 2019, we have had so many foreign nationals being burnt. This is the spirit of one of those people, burnt in South Africa, saying "Wait for me" to those who were burnt before.'



***Wait for Me***  
2022  
Burnt Oak  
58 x 20.5 x 16.5 cm  
R28,000

\*The artist reserves all rights.



**The Spirit**  
2022  
Oak  
58 x 56 x 42 cm  
R80,000



'ChaMinuka was a well-known spiritual medium in Zimbabwe, during the first Chimurenga liberation struggle. ChaMinuka prophesied that a people would come to our land, with no legs and knees, to look for wealth. He said that because he was not familiar with the trousers that most Europeans came to Africa wearing. He could not see the legs. So this is the queen of the people with no knees and legs, and her bag and her crown. It's Cape Ironwood that I found in Zimbabwe. You can see the wood is very old, and it was actually used as a railway sleeper. The British would have laid this sleeper, when coming to look for the wealth. The steel at the base was part of the sleeper.'

***Chiporofita cha  
chaMinuka***

2021

Cape Ironwood,  
steel, wooden base  
133 x 21 x 18 cm  
R65,000





***Ndakateerera***  
***(I am Listening)***  
2022  
Burnt Oak  
40 x 40 x 25 cm  
R65,000

# Collen Maswanganyi

Collen Maswanganyi was born in 1977 in Noblehoek, near Giyani, in Limpopo. He began school at Haala Primary in 1983, matriculating from Ndegeza High School in 1995. His early education in art stems from his familial legacy, having been raised in an artistic family. He learnt to carve through his father, Johannes Maswanganyi, a well-known sculptor (in turn taught by his uncle, Piet Maswanganyi), while his mother, Mphemphu Maswanganyi is a talented bead maker. Between 1997 and 1999, Collen studied Fine Art at Technikon Witwatersrand. Like his father, he works with wood and paints most of his sculptures. Sometimes he makes life-size or larger-than-life works. 'My art is about the old and new. I look at life generally where I make sculptures dressed in African tradition and modern fashion. I look at technological development.



'Men are afraid of injections, but not cash injections. As you know, during Covid, the unemployed would get R350. And some realised that if they don't go get vaccinated they will lose their R350.'

**Cash Injection**  
2022  
Plywood, Corkwood,  
acrylic  
60 x 40 x 12 cm  
R30,000



*Booster* is a relief-carving. It's made from Plywood, but I've added Corkwood, which is what I usually use to carve. The work is about someone who goes to a sangoma to boost her business or her life. The sangoma applies muti on the wound that they make with the razor, which goes into your bloodstream and brings good fortune. But it also talks about plastic surgery, when people go under the knife.'

**Booster**  
2022  
Plywood,  
Corkwood, acrylic  
47 x 40 x 18 cm  
R20,000



**Inflation**  
2022  
Plywood,  
Corkwood,  
acrylic  
47 x 40 x 12 cm  
R20,000



**Black Coffee**  
2013  
Corkwood, acrylic  
50 x 10 x 10 cm  
R8,700



**Man of Swag**  
2015  
Corkwood, acrylic  
50 x 14 x 12 cm  
R8,700



**Tasting, testing**  
2017  
Corkwood, acrylic,  
Pine base  
58 x 24 x 53 cm  
R60,000



**Done Digging**  
2011  
Corkwood, acrylic  
49 x 19 x 20 cm  
R15,500

**Done the Spade Work**  
2011  
Corkwood, acrylic  
49 x 19 x 20 cm  
R15,500

'The man with the pick, I call him Done Digging. The man with the spade is called, Done the Spade Work. Both are labourers, people from the working class. But the work also relates to investigative journalism or the police, those who go digging for information, not in a literal way, but hence I've said Done Digging. He's finished, but maybe he was digging for information on a politician or something. When he's got that information, if he shows it to these prominent people he will earn their respect, because they thought he was someone they could just throw around, send him up and down. Or maybe it's just to show him a piece of land to dig, but this is a different digging. Done with Spade Work is the same. Wanting to know more or to get more than what is expected.





**Float like a  
butterfly, sting  
like a bee 2**  
2020  
Corkwood,  
acrylic, steel,  
Leadwood base  
151 x 50 x 53 cm  
R\_\_\_\_\_

*'The title of this work, Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee 2, is a reference to Muhammed Ali. It's part of a series. When boxers train, they tend to become punching bags. You don't just deliver but you feel the sting too. So the bees are on their way up. They want to reach the top, to find the sweet honey. But you have to withstand the sting that comes with it, you have to allow yourself to be a punching bag.'*



**The Choir**  
2020  
Corkwood, acrylic  
46 x 25 x 26 cm  
R34,000



***Spears and Shields***  
2016  
Corkwood, acrylic  
38 x 35 x 12 cm  
R20,000

'This one is titled *Spears and Shields*. In this work I'm talking about three rich men. The man in the middle is showing his spear. He's boasting about what he has, so he has exposed his spear. It relates to Booster, Inflation... That he is showing his size, who he is, as compared to these other two gentlemen, who have shields. I've transformed the tie into a shield so that it covers his manhood. So he is rich, but people don't know how rich. The same as the other man. As you can see, it's like he's mocking this man. Asking like, "Are you sure?" Like really, is his spear the biggest? While in other interpretations it could mean that he's better off.'

*Enjoying the  
Family Legacy*  
2021  
Corkwood,  
acrylic  
94 x 17 x 12 cm  
R12,500





**Locks**  
2022  
Corkwood,  
acrylic  
56 x 19 x 21 cm  
R28,500

## The Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture

NIROX Sculpture Park,  
24 Kromdraai Rd (D540),  
Kromdraai,  
Krugersdorp,  
South Africa

### Opening hours

Monday – Thursday: appointment only  
Friday – Sunday: 10AM to 5PM

### Contact

Sven Christian (curator)  
sven@niroxarts.com  
sven@villa-legodi.com  
+27832371099