

**BERMAN
CONTEMPORARY**
SOUTH
AFRICAN
ART

INVESTEC

CAPE TOWN ART FAIR | 2022

CHRISÉL ATTEWELL

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ARTIST STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY



We are surrounded by landscapes and societies that are traumatised. Within these landscapes, there are traces that could tell us more about the many ways in which we are connected to each other, to other species, and to the Earth. Finding such traces in the environments around me, and deciphering their nuanced meanings and histories, is the driving force of my artistic practice.

My work is a response to the natural environments that I explore around me and often includes natural materials, such as clay, glass, wood, and stone. A central part of understanding my work is to consider what these materials communicate. Each material contains information about our interconnectedness with the Earth and involves elements of curiosity, play, transparency, fragility, tension, and balance.

Chrisél Attewell (b. 1994) is a multidisciplinary artist from South Africa. Her work is research-driven and experimental. Inspired by current socio-ecological concerns, Attewell's work explores the nuances in people's connection to the Earth and each other. She works with various mediums, including installation, sculpture, photography, and painting, and prefers natural materials, such as hemp canvas, oil paint, glass, clay, and stone.

She received her BAFA (Fine Arts, Cum Laude) from the University of Pretoria in 2016 and is currently pursuing her MA in Visual Arts at the University of Johannesburg. Her work has been represented locally and internationally in numerous exhibitions, residencies, and art fairs. Attewell was selected as a Sasol New Signatures finalist (2016, 2017) and a Top 100 finalist for the ABSA L'Atelier (2018). Attewell was the 2018 recipient of the Young Female Residency Award, founded by Benon Lutaaya.

Her work was showcased at Contemporary Istanbul 2019 with Berman Contemporary and her latest solo exhibition, titled Sociogenesis: Resilience under Fire, curated by Els van Mourik, was exhibited in 2020 at Berman Contemporary in Johannesburg. Attewell exhibited in the 2021 online Cape Town Art Fair. Now in 2022, she is showcasing in the Main Booth at Investec Cape Town Art Fair with Berman Contemporary.

Instagram: [@chrisel_attewell](https://www.instagram.com/chrisel_attewell)

Website: chriselattewell.com

Click [Here](#) to Download Full Artist Portfolio

ARTIST RESUME

Solo exhibitions

- 2020 SOCIOGENESIS– Resilience Under Fire, Berman Contemporary, curated by Els van Mourik, Johannesburg
- 2019 Substratum, Lizamore & Associates Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2018 Architectus Konstruksie, Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK), Oudsthoorn, Western Cape
- 2017 Under Construction, Assemblage, Braamfontein, Johannesburg

Group Exhibitions

- 2022 WORKS ON PAPER, curated by Els van Mourik, Berman Contemporary, Johannesburg
- 2022 ANNUAL SUMMER SHOW, curated by Els van Mourik, Berman Contemporary, Johannesburg
- 2021 THE LIMINAL SPACE, curated by Morgan Kunhardt, Berman Contemporary, Johannesburg
- 2021 Making and Interpreting Art in 2021, SARChI, curated by Dineke van der Walt
- 2021 ANNUAL SUMMER SHOW, curated by Els van Mourik, Berman Contemporary, Johannesburg
- 2020 Learning to Breathe Differently, Berman Contemporary, curated by Els van Mourik, Johannesburg
- 2019 #ARTladies, curator Els van Mourik, Berman Contemporary, Johannesburg
- 2019 Artybollocks!, NOW Gallery, Open Window Institute, curated by Bland&Boring, Pretoria
- 2019 Collecting Contemporary, Lizamore Gallery, Johannesburg
- 2019 Artybollocks!, the Project Space, curated by Bland&Boring, Johannesburg
- 2019 Collecting Contemporary, Lizamore Gallery, KKNK, Oudsthoorn
- 2019 SAFFCA Group Exhibition, Gerhard Sekoto Gallery, Alliance Française, Johannesburg
- 2018 Aftermath, Firststrand Bank Gallery, curated by Olwethu de Vos, Johannesburg
- 2018 Unsettled, ABSA Gallery, curated by Thabo Seshoka, Johannesburg
- 2018 Talking to Deaf Ears, ABSA Gallery, curated by Sarah McGee, Johannesburg

Art Fairs

- 2022 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, curated by Els van Mourik, Cape Town
- 2020 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Christie's Online, London
- 2019 CI - Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair, Istanbul
- 2018 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, The Project Space, curated by Asha Waja, Cape Town
- 2018 Turbine Art Fair, Young Female Residency Award, The Project Space, Benon Lutaaya, Johannesburg

Publications

- 2022 [A Matter of Contemporary Connections, ART TIMES, February 2022](#)
- 2022 Collectors Edition Cover - Chrisél Attewell, featured on the Opener and dust jacket of House & Leisure Magazine, Vol. 4 : Build – shaping the future, Page 208, February 2022
- 2022 [Works on Paper exhibition at Berman Contemporary allows for viewers to engage with the artists' process of creating, Edward Tsume, February 2022](#)
- 2021 [The 10 artists participating in The Liminal Space exhibition at Berman Contemporary test artistic limits, Edward Tsume, August 2021](#)
- 2020 [Whispers of Inspiration, Bernie Hellberg Jr, Signature, May 2020](#)
- 2019 [Selections, Curated by Contemporary Istanbul, September 2019](#)
- 2019 [RMB Turbines Art Fair's Potential to Challenge Traditional Arbiters of Taste, Nkgopoleng Moloi, Bubbegum Club, July 2019](#)
- 2019 [The Young Female Residency Award: Entrepreneurship and Arts, Art Africa, July 2019](#)

Awards

- 2018 ABSA L'atelier, Top 100.
- 2018 The African Arts Trust Grant, as part of the Assemblage Exhibition Programme.
- 2017 Thami Mnyele Fine Art Awards, top 100, Johannesburg
- 2017 Sasol New Signatures, finalist, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria

Collections

- 2020 Quorum Properties Collection
- 2018 The African Arts Trust
- 2018 The ABSA Bank Collection
- 2018 The Project Space Collection

Commissions

- 2020 The Leonardo Building, Sandton.

Residencies

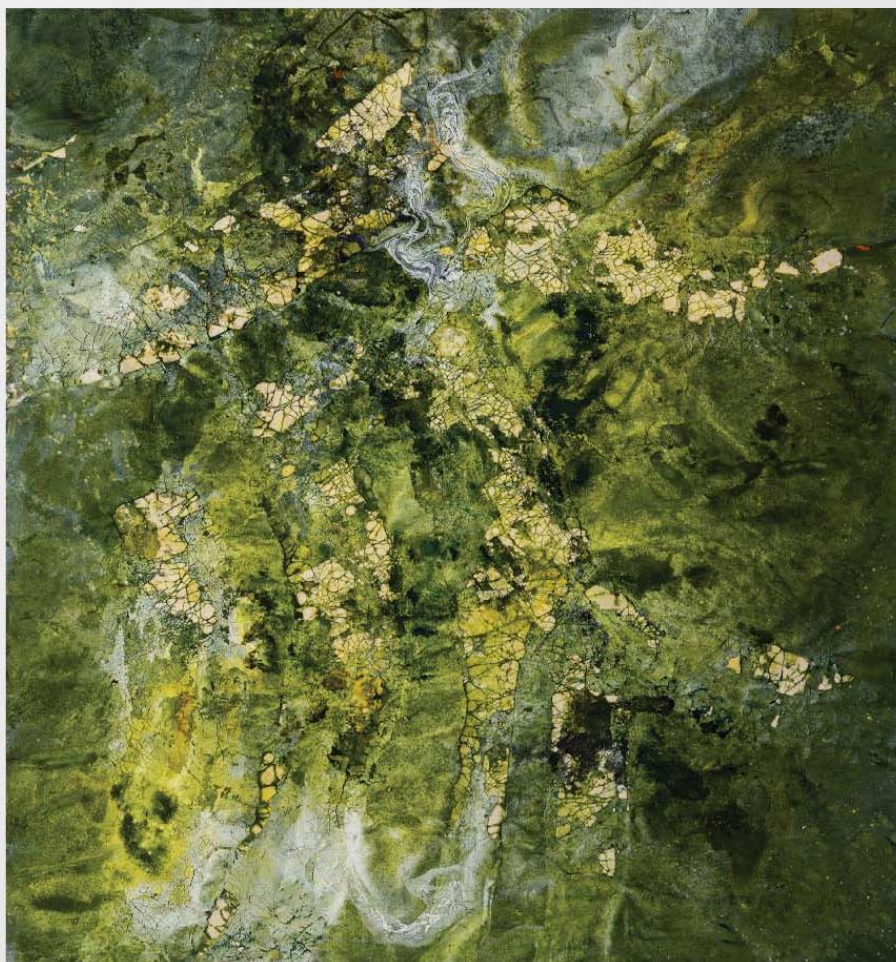
- 2019 Southern African Foundation for Contemporary Art (SAFFCA), residency at Entabeni Farm, Knysna
- 2018 Recipient of the Young Female Residency Award with The Project Space, founded by Benon Lutaaya

Education

- 2021 - MA in Visual Arts, University of Johannesburg
- 2016 BA(FA) Fine Arts, Summa Cum Laude, University of Pretoria.
- 2012 National Senior Certificate, with average 89%, Hoërskool Noordheuwel

HOUSE AND LEISURE

Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2022



Collector's Edition Cover

The First Green I, 2020
Chrisél Attewell represented by Berman Contemporary

COLLECTORS EDITION COVER | CHRISÉL ATTEWELL | HOUSE & LEISURE | FEBRUARY 2022

SOCIOGENESIS– Resilience Under Fire | 2020

ARTIST STATEMENT BY CHRISÉL ATTEWELL

The colony is a kind of creature, and so is our society. I have been exploring this idea since I started working on this exhibition. SOCIOGENESIS – resilience under fire, found its roots during an artist's residency I attended in Knysna. These roots were dying.

When I arrived in Knysna in August 2019, death stained everything. I came from a phase of death in my own life and yearned to escape it. Knysna could not offer me this escape. I hoped to share the place I remembered – a place of innocent charm and wonder – with Barbara Schroeder, the artist who joined me in residency. Instead, I felt lost, trying to find images in my head of a place I had once adored. The Knysna I remembered was gone. Two years prior, a raging wildfire had swept through the forests, leaving the landscape laid bare like a body struggling to breathe.

Fire transformed the skin of this body. It became thin and stretched, warped and transfigured. In parts, it grew tough and thick, filled with scabs, cracks and peelings. In other parts, it became fragile and transparent. I asked a farm worker what the fire was like. He said: "The water was black." I imagined the lakes and lagoons of Knysna, scattered black over the landscape like third-degree burn wounds.

I wanted to investigate the burnt body of the forest, to find signs of healing and life. The bark of dead trees looked like the burnt skin of a creature. I peeled away at the skin, picking at the scabs, expecting raw infected flesh, but instead I found patterns. Underneath the bark of the dead trees was bare wood, tattooed throughout.

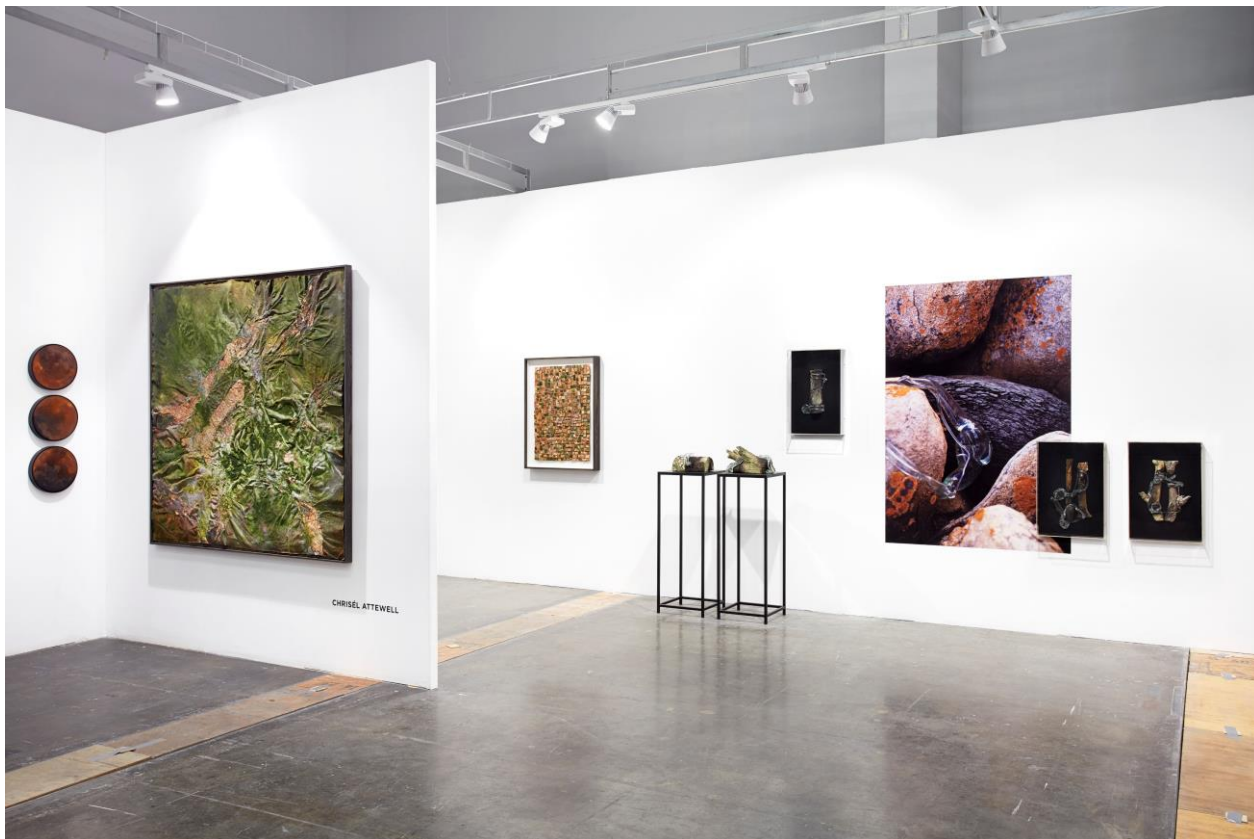
I discovered later that carpenter ant colonies had carved these patterns. Carpenter ants make nests in dead or diseased trees, carving out galleries as they go. This quickens the decomposition of dead trees, fortifying the antifragility of the ecosystem. Antifragility is a concept developed by Professor Nassim Nicholas Taleb. It is the opposite of fragility. It is more than resiliency or robustness. Something which is resilient can withstand blows from adversity. Something which is anti-fragile grows stronger through volatility, shocks, stressors, or failures. My curiosity grew as I observed the ants. I hoped to learn from them how to be more resilient, perhaps even anti-fragile.

Similar to ant colonies, human societies are also sociogenic, where individual determination is socially mediated. The society you grow up in determines your social class, your behaviour, your caste, and your identity. Human societies develop based on their internal structures and rules. The most anti-fragile societies are the ones who embrace adversity and use it to grow and develop. The anti-fragile system works based on trial and error. If individual parts in the system fail or succeed, it provides information to the system on what works and what doesn't. This society then adjusts and grows stronger. A rigid society, that aims to avoid volatility, will as a result become more fragile.

The society I grew up in is very fragile. It is one that has remained unchanged for years, and its failure to adjust with changing times has resulted in it being fragile and isolated. It has rigid internal structures and it cannot accept that which is different. Having different beliefs and worldviews, I often felt like I didn't quite belong. My beliefs and opinions, different to those of the community, made me deviant, and I was recently cast out because of it. I had to leave the colony.

As I left, I wondered again about the skins of the forest. Would I fit in somewhere else if my skin was different? If my skin could not change in colour or type, it would have to change in thickness. When individuals are placed under fire, they often become more resilient. But how can we transcend from being resilient to being anti-fragile? If I have learned anything from the forests and the ants, it is that you cannot become anti-fragile without volatility.

I hope I can be strong enough to accept change, to keep evolving, and to always see beauty and possibility in adversity.



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | INVESTEC CAPE TOWN ART FAIR | BERMAN CONTEMPORARY | 2022

INVESTEC CAPE TOWN ART FAIR

G1 – MAIN BOOTH



Skins of the Forest II, 2020
Oil and Clay on Canvas
177 x 170cm
Framed size: 180 x 176 x 5cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony Frame



The term "soil armour" refers to the protective barrier between living plants and exposed soil. This armour serves as a protection for the soil against heavy rainfall, winds and solar heat, whilst simultaneously retaining moisture in the earth so that microbial life can be sustained. This work is one that references the interdependencies of our ecologies and the structures that support it. We live in a time where desertification and ecological reckoning has become a reality. This work explores the interlocking systems that ties us to the planet, and asks us to discover ways in which we can protect it.

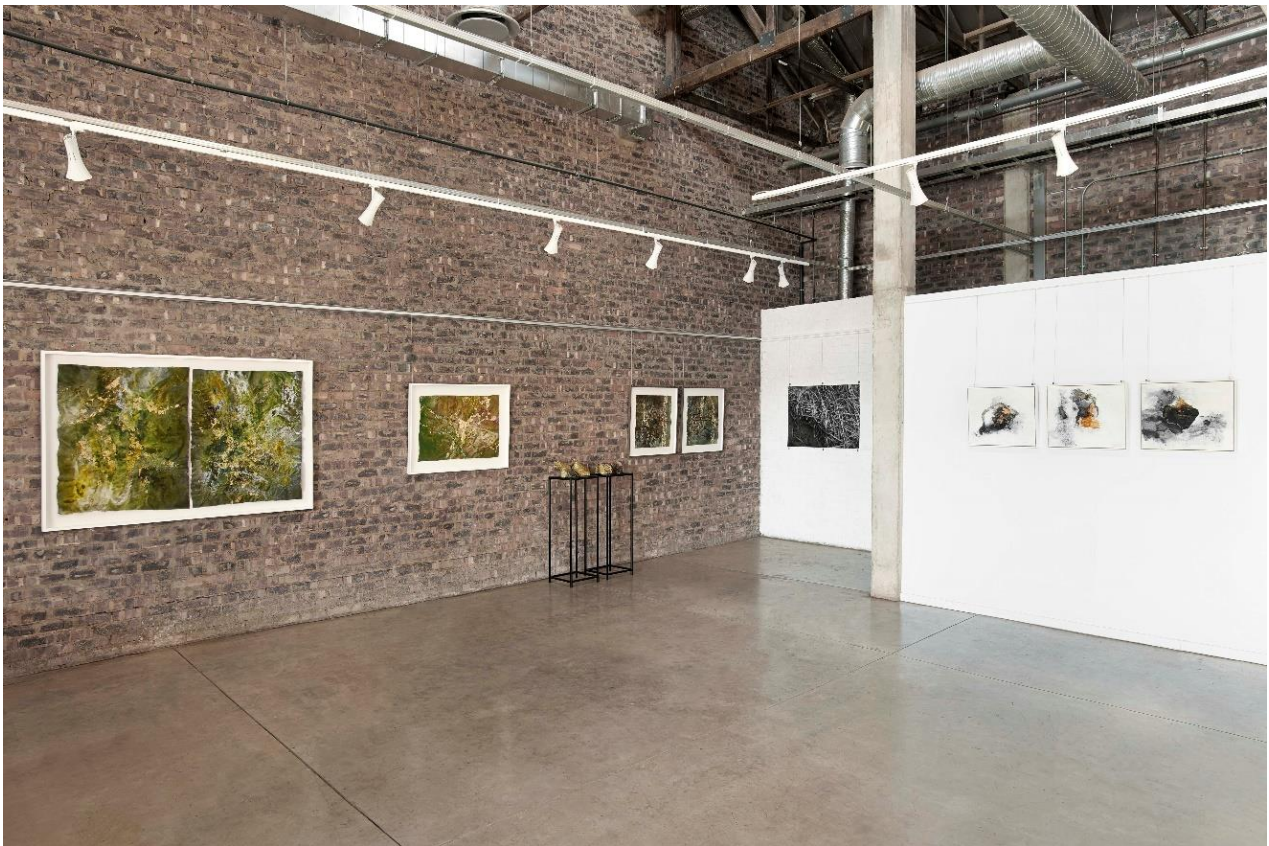


Soil Armour, 2022
Woven and Stitched Oil and Clay on Canvas
87 x 62 cm
Framed size: 100 x 75 x 10cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony built-up Frame with AR glass



Scorched Earth I, 2020
Oil and Clay on Canvas
150 x 170cm
Framed size: 168 x 194 x 5cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony wooden frame with AR glass

"In Artistes de la Terre, two artists are featured that both involve themselves with some of the broader questions concerning our relationship with the natural environment, calling attention to the advice of pioneering artist Gustav Metzger (1926-2017), to 'REMEMBER NATURE'. While the Anthropocene era forged the idea that humans can control the environment, make nature their own, and reduce the world to an exploitable resource, we now know that this is simply not the case." – Els van Mourik



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | ARTISTES DE LA TERRE | CHRISÉL ATTEWELL & BARBARA SCHROEDER | 2021



The Water is Black, 2020
Oil and Clay on Canvas
95 x 123cm
Framed size: 119 x 149 x 5cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony Frame with AR glass



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Craquelé is the French word that means a network of fine cracks in the paint or varnish of a painting. It can be a result of drying, aging, intentional patterning, or a combination of all three. Chrisél Attewell's paintings are created with Clay and Oil Paint on Canvas, which create this Craquelé effect.

Chrisél has been exploring this technique for a couple of years now, she started by shaping the canvas over rocks, trying to make a shape - a landscape. But then she started to flatten it and it cracked. The cracks became more significant to her than the shape of the work resulting in these topographical maps.



(LEFT) Skins of the Forest IV (1), 2019
Oil and clay on canvas
61.5 x 63.5cm
Framed size: 82 x 84 x 3.5cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony wooden frame with AR glass



(RIGHT) Skins of the Forest IV (2), 2019
Oil and clay on canvas
61.5 x 63.5cm
Framed size: 82 x 84 x 3.5cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony wooden frame with AR glass



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | INVESTEC CAPE TOWN ART FAIR | BERMAN CONTEMPORARY | 2022

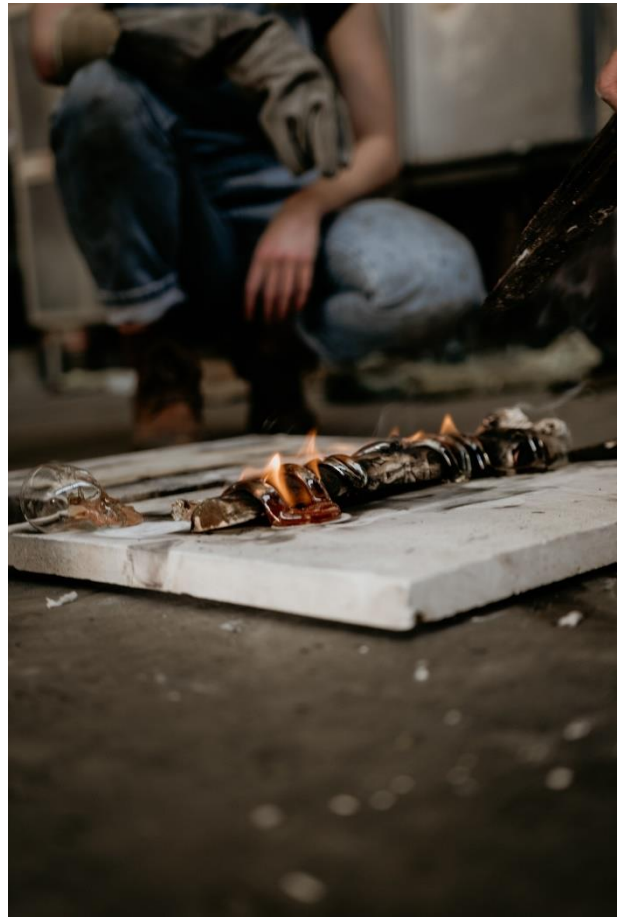


Scorched Earth IV, 2020
Oil and Clay on Canvas
46 x 39 cm
Framed size: 67 x 61.5 x 3.5 cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony wooden frame with AR glass



Oil and Clay on Canvas
41.5 x 33 cm
Framed size: 63.5 x 55 x 3.5 cm
Framed in an Ash-Ebony wooden frame with AR glass





Chrisél Attewell worked with a team from the Glass Forming Academy in Pretoria to create an installation in which the natural forces of the carpenter ants appear as unruly forms that are encapsulated in glass.

The carpenter ants navigated a complex circuitry that is reflected in the mirrored surfaces of glass; the movements of the colony evoking images of data processing and flow of information on a massive scale, through their intricate division of labour and the matriarchal social structure that guide their behaviour. This composition providing us with a view into the secret life of ants and the transmission of information – as if an invasive life force has worked its way through an endless network of passageways and overrun the environment. - Els Van Mourik



The Colony is a Kind of Creature XII, 2020
Stained wood and glass
48 x 22 x 6cm
Framed size: 66 x 43 x 11cm
Framed in a black wrap around frame encased in a Perspex box



The Colony is a Kind of Creature IX, 2020
Stained Wood and Glass
40 x 30 x 8 cm
Framed size: 66 x 43 x 11cm
Framed in a black wrap around frame encased in a Perspex box



INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH | INVESTEC CAPE TOWN ART FAIR | BERMAN CONTEMPORARY | 2022





First Green V, 2020
 Oil and clay on canvas
 43 x 40cm
 Framed size: 57 x 58 x 3cm
 Framed in a white wooden frame with AR glass



First Green IV, 2020
 Oil and clay on canvas
 40 x 39cm
 Framed size: 57 x 58 x 3cm
 Framed in a white wooden frame with AR glass



First Green III, 2020
Oil and clay on canvas
53.5 x 40.5cm
Framed size: 70 x 57.5 x 3cm
Framed in a white wooden frame with AR glass

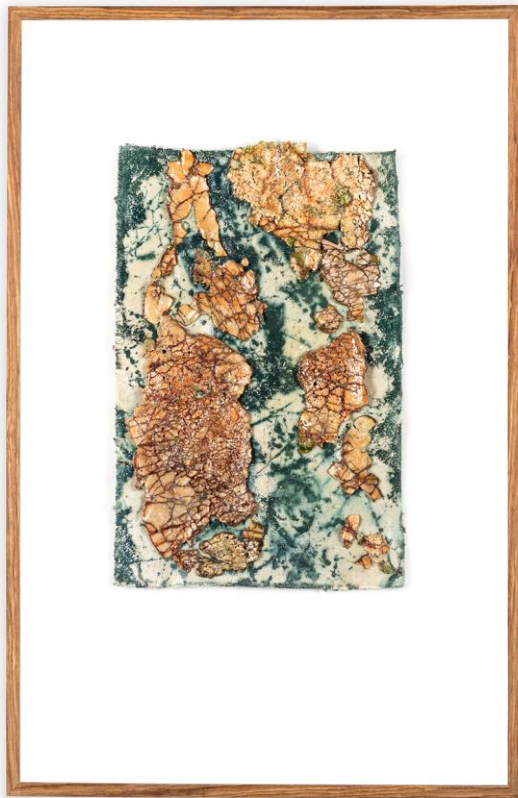


Skins of the Forest VII, 2020
Oil and clay on canvas
Size: 63 x 96cm
Framed size: 83.5 x 117.5 x 7cm
Framed in a white wooden frame with AR glass



Skins of the Forest III (2), 2020
 Oil and clay on canvas
 46 x 48cm
 Framed size: 69.5 x 70 x 3cm
 Framed in a white wooden frame with AR glass

Skins of the Forest III (1), 2020
 Oil and clay on canvas
 46 x 48cm
 Framed size: 69.5 x 70 x 3cm
 Framed in a white wooden frame with AR glass



Skins of the Forest V (1), (2), (3), (4), 2020
 Oil and clay on canvas
 35 x 22.5cm
 Framed size: 61 x 40 x 3cm
 Framed in a Kiaat frame with AR glass



Sunscald I, 2021
Oil and clay on canvas
29 x 23cm
Framed size: 50.5 x 44.5 x 3.5cm
Framed in a Kiaat frame with AR glass

Sunscald II, 2021
Oil and clay on canvas
29 x 23cm
Framed size: 50.5 x 44.5 x 3.5cm
Framed in a Kiaat frame with AR glass

Sunscald III, 2021
Oil and clay on canvas
29 x 23cm
Framed size: 50.5 x 44.5 x 3.5cm
Framed in a Kiaat frame with AR glass



Berman Contemporary is rooted in the growing understanding of the cultural richness and diversity of South African contemporary art. The gallery's collection centres on a vibrant group of artists living and working in South Africa.

Through studio visits, the gallery establishes connections to artists from all walks of life whose unique artistic processes celebrate their historical and cultural heritage and give voice to their complex societal realities, evoking an active and interpretative experience for the viewer.

Berman Contemporary was established to promote the work created by these local artists. The gallery further aims to establish a synergistic network between South African artists and their global contemporaries, many of whom evidently want to engage with the current South African art scene – not only as observers, but as active analysts, experimenters and contributors within this context and with this specific audience in mind.

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