



smac

MARLENE STEYN

Artist Room

28 . 08 . 20

25 . 09 . 20

MEANDER me and her (2020)

Text by Keely Shinnars

Marlene Steyn's work is all about fluidity. Fluid optics. Fluid subjects. Meanings which are fluid and therefore difficult to grasp, which might explain why viewers often call her work surreal. For me, Steyn's work is less surreal than it is perceptive to fluxes ever-present, but often unseen. It understands embodiment as intrinsically linked to other bodies: human, animal, terrestrial, mythical, and otherwise. The question this body of work — which Steyn began to create during lockdown — asks is, *how do we understand embodiment in isolation?*

In some hours, selves gestate. In others, they evaporate. Days bleed into one another; dreams become days' events. Muddling dreamscape and landscape, Steyn paints memories of a world outside: rock pools, beaches, *koppies*. But, like in memories, like in dreams, these landscapes are somewhat formless, unidentifiable. So too are the faces that become (are becoming of) them: not so much present as they are reiterations of an inner working. *MEANDER me and her* speaks to this: the many wandering, unfurling, ever-becoming personalities that constitute our internal worlds.

i so lay chins, a play on isolation, shows the figure sitting with themselves (their selves), within themselves (their selves). What might have, in

another context, come off as navel-gazey instead portrays a complex net of self-care to which I can relate my own solitude. I mean self-care not in its commodified sense — that is, synonymous with relaxation — but in the sense of coming to know myself (my selves) deeply as I am. bell hooks put it plainly: “When we can see ourselves as we truly are and accept ourselves, we build the necessary foundation for self-love.”¹ This is a messy, and oftentimes painful, process. That Steyn's figures look relaxed — dare I say, happy — speaks either to her comfortability in the unintegrated, or an innocent relationship to harder truths.

Still, the message remains. We are more than meets the eye; Steyn is a painter of *more*. Her challenge to us is threefold: to go deeper within, to imagine better one another's depths, and to understand those depths as entangled.

Isolation is unattainable, even for the class who can afford to isolate. If pandemics prove anything, it is that we live in a world of orifices, far more indivisible — therefore precious, therefore vulnerable — than the world

¹ hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*, 2000.

MEANDER me and her (2020)

Text by Keely Shinnars

of capital may sometimes make them seem. I wonder if that is why the most common configurations in this series are mouths becoming eyes becoming mouths again: Steyn is playing on our softest spots, our openings. Bodies are contagious. Bodies contaminate. Pandemics reveal the politics behind who contaminates, who is contaminated. They reveal the many ways in which we care about one another's survival. They also reveal the many ways in which the world is organised to guarantee survival for some by rendering other lives disposable.

In Steyn's paintings, bodies are full of the world; the world is full of bodies. This fact can be cause for celebration as well as heartbreak. Celebratory when we acknowledge the world as a divine commons: negotiable, mutable, ours. Heartbreaking when we perpetuate colonial understandings of the world: navigable, manipulatable, owned. Which is probably why Steyn borrows the visual cues of South African landscape painters — Pierneef's acacias, Volschenk's sunset hues, Laubser's rounded-off horizons — and inhabits them: Steyn rips the fantasy of the uninhabited away.

Our bodies are carriers of unnameable inhabitants. That is true on microbial, psychological, and ancestral levels. Much like the bodies of water, Steyn's figures appear in (and of). I am thinking now of Astrida Neimanis's hydro-logics: water's capacity for "gestation, dissolution, communication, differentiation, archive, unknowability... hydro-logics configures us in relation to other bodies, in an aqueous politics of location that is about more than abstracted 'fluidity.'"² Or, Sophie Lewis's amniotechnics: "the art of holding and caring even while being ripped into, at the same time as being held. It is protecting water and protecting people from water."³ That is to say, if we accept, as Steyn does, the world (ourselves) as fluid, then we must also accept fluidity's price. What overflows from us — our seepages, our sickness, our sorrows — flows into the world, and vice versa.

How do we understand embodiment? To start, pay attention to how things ripple.

2 Neimanis, Astrida. "feminist subjectivity, watered." *Feminist Review*, 2013.

3 Lewis, Sophie. "Amniotechnics." *The New Inquiry*, 2017.



Marlene Steyn | Artist Room | 2020 | Installation View



Marlene Steyn
a tall atoll
2020
Acrylic on Linen
50 x 41 cm



Marlene Steyn
i so lay chins
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40.5 x 51 cm



Marlene Steyn
me and her meandering
2020
Oil on Canvas
90 x 70 cm



Marlene Steyn
cloud did land shape
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 50.5 cm



Marlene Steyn
we would wood (if we only could)
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 50 cm



Marlene Steyn
ocean bed
2020
Acrylic on Linen
35 x 45 cm





Marlene Steyn
portrait of a landscape i
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 40 cm



Marlene Steyn
portrait of a landscape ii
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 40 cm



Marlene Steyn
the peeking peaks
2020
Oil on Canvas
51 x 51 cm



Marlene Steyn
the baobabe tree
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 40 cm



Marlene Steyn
landscape with koppie
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 45 cm



Marlene Steyn
we will... oh willow!
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
50 x 30 cm





Marlene Steyn
the smoke show stopper
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 40 cm



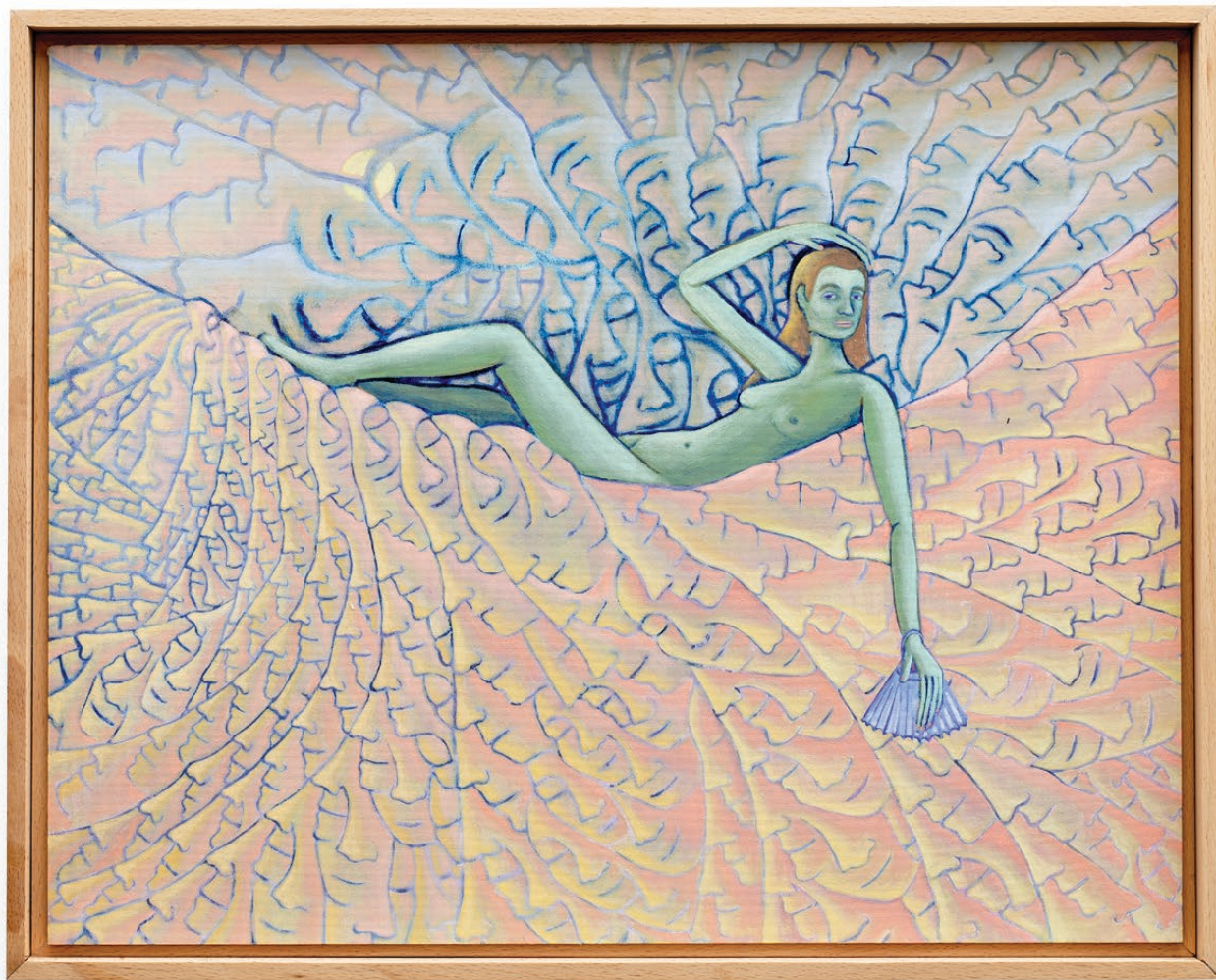
Marlene Steyn
the tree of wisdom teeth
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
44.5 x 35 cm



Marlene Steyn
the gorgeous gorge us
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 30 cm



Marlene Steyn
cactime
2020
Acrylic on Canvas
29.5 x 40 cm



Marlene Steyn
her eyes on horizon
2020
Acrylic on Canvas Board
40 x 50 cm



Marlene Steyn
skin-deeper towards a deep her
2020
Oil on Canvas Board
50 x 40 cm

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Marlene Steyn was born in 1989 in Cape Town, South Africa, where she currently lives and works. Steyn obtained her Bachelor of Arts Fine Arts Degree (MA) at the University of Stellenbosch in Stellenbosch, South Africa in 2011, and her Master of Fine Art degree from the Royal College of Art in London, UK in 2014. In 2018 Steyn participated in a two-month collaborative residency with KAV 16 and Artport Residency in Tel Aviv, Israel. The residency culminated in an exhibition produced with the support of KAV 16 – Community Gallery for Contemporary Art; Ministry of Culture Israel; Mifal HaPais; Yehoshua Rabinovich Foundation for the Arts; ArtPort; Beit Benyamini Ceramics Centre; and Maccabee Beer. She has been selected to take part in the Sundaymorning@ekwc residency in Oisterwijk, Netherlands in 2020.

In 2020, Steyn's work was included in *Staycation* at Lychee One in London, UK, *L'Heure Bleue* at PLUS-ONE Gallery in Antwerp, Belgium; *SHAPING THINGS: An exploration of clay and ceramics in contemporary South African art practice* at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, South Africa; *A Show of Solidarity* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa; SMAC Gallery's group presentation at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) in Cape Town, South Africa; and Lychee One's group presentation at London Art Fair at the Business Design Centre in London.

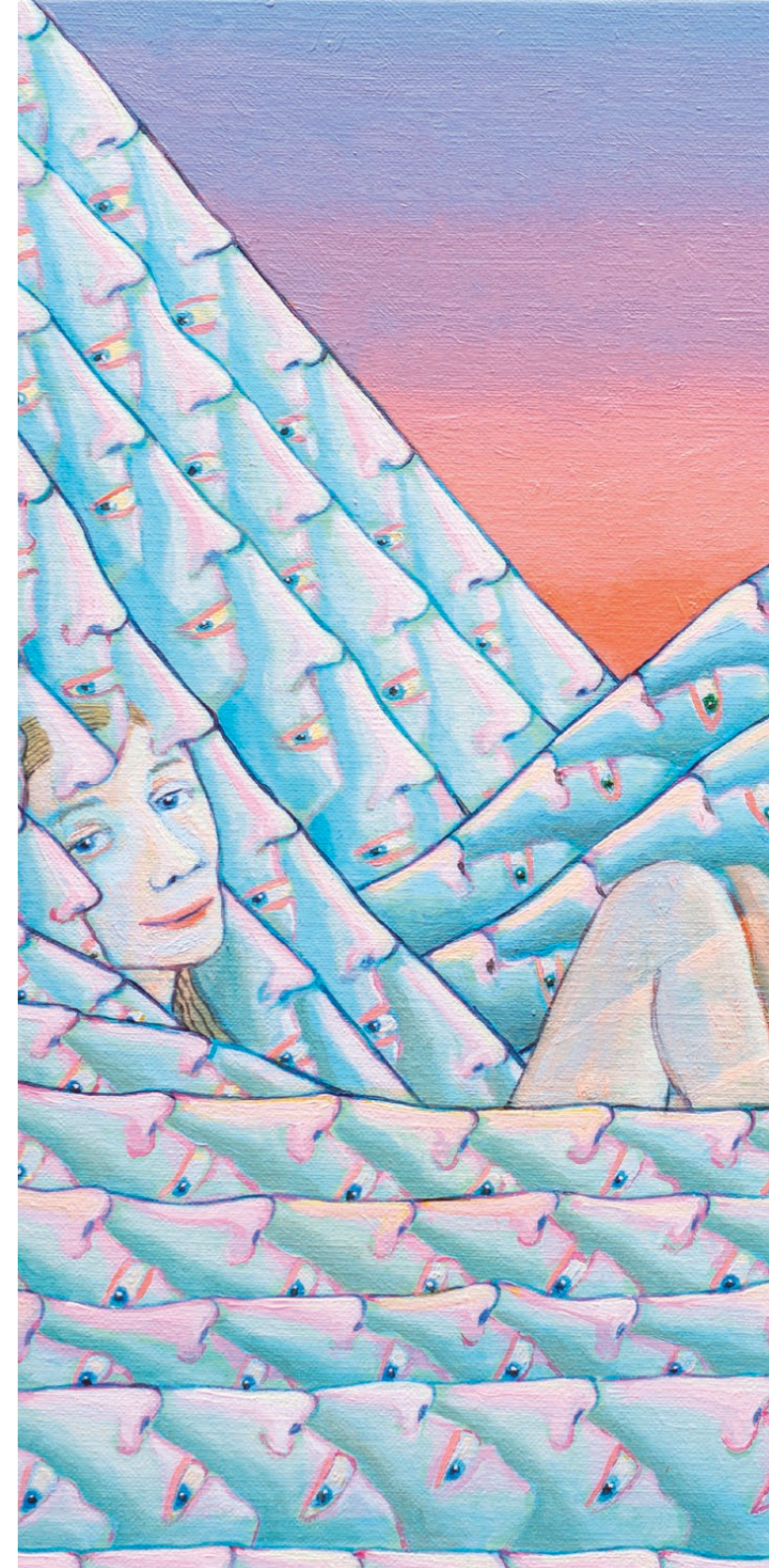
Solo exhibitions include: *Artist Room* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa in 2020; *deep she dive her* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa, and *Unbuttoning my belly*, at Lychee One in London, UK, both in 2019; *Shouty Insides* at Galerie DYS in Brussels, Belgium in 2018; *Knot 1 : I Knot* at SMAC Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2017; *Your Skin Is Not The Best Hiding Place* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa, and *You Can't Cry When Your Head is Underwater* at Lychee One, London, both in 2016;

Mad Love at Lychee One in London, UK, and *The End is Located Underneath Her Third Armpit (if the muscle is flexed)* at Commune. 1 in Cape Town, South Africa, both in 2015; and *How Cannibals Cuddle* at Cabin Gallery in London, in 2014.

Selected group presentations include: Galerie DYS' presentation at Luxembourg Art Week in Luxembourg; *African Textures* at OSART Gallery in Milan, Italy, and *arteBOTANICA* in collaboration with Viviers Studio at the Nirox Sculpture Park in Krugersdorp, South Africa, and collaborated with Viviers Studios to present *OR/ BITING AURABOROS*, a performative installation as part of VIVIER's SS2020 showcase of her latest collection; *Paper Summer* at Galerie DYS in Brussels Belgium; *HOLDING STILL: Psychology and Portraiture* at SMAC Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa, all in 2019; *Paper Cuts*, at the Saatchi Gallery in London UK; *Bone Memory* at Lychee One in London, UK and *Kneading the torsomakes abuzz*, curated by Karni Barzilay at KAV 16 Gallery in Tel Aviv, Israel in 2018; *Another Antipodes Inc* at PS Art Space in Fremantle, Australia and *All Things Being Equal* at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA) in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2017.

Steyn has participated in numerous art fairs including: Miart in Fiera Milano City in Milan, Italy; 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London, UK; Investec Cape Town Art Fair at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) in Cape Town, South Africa; and FNB Art Joburg at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Marlene Steyn's work features in numerous public and private collections, including the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA) in Cape Town, South Africa; the Royal College of Art in London, UK; Luo Yi, YIS Foundation in London, UK and Beijing, China; and the Springmeier Collection in Berlin, Germany.



MARLENE STEYN

CURRICULUM VITAE

smac

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1989, Cape Town, South Africa.
Lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.

EDUCATION

- 2014** Master of Fine Arts in Painting Degree (MA), Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- 2011** Bachelor of Arts Fine Arts Degree (MA), University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

AWARDS, RESIDENCIES & PUBLICATIONS

- 2020** Artist in residence, Sundaymorning@ekwc, Oisterwijk, Netherlands.
- 2017** Kav 16 Collaborative Residency with Abraham Kritzman, curated by Angels Miralde Tena & Karni Barzilay, Kav 16 Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Elderton, L. and Morril, R. ed. 2017. *Vitamin C: Clay + Ceramic in Contemporary Art*. New York: Phaidon Press Ltd.
- 2016** Collaborative Residency with Avantika Agarwal, Shoonya Space Centre for Art & Somatic Practices, Bangalore, India.
- 2015** The Vermont Studio Center Fellowship, Vermont Studio Centre, Johnson, USA.

Collaborative Residency with Abraham Kritzman, & Angels Miralde Tena, Odd Cultural Node & Atelier 35, Bucharest, Romania.
- 2014** Art Residency Programme in collaboration with the Royal College of Art & the British Council, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Finalist, Saatchi New Sensations, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK.

Gordon Luton Award for Fine Art, The Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainer's & Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- 2013** Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Top 46 most promising artists, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK.
- 2011** Noli Procrastinare Public Art Residency, Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA), Laingsburg, South Africa.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2020** *Artist Room*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2019** *deep she dive her*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

Unbuttoning my belly, Lychee One, London, UK.
- 2018** *Garden Smoothie*, collaborative exhibition with Gabrielle Kruger, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

MiArt (SMAC Gallery), Fiera Milano City, Milan, Italy.

Shouty Insides, Galerie DYS, Brussels, Belgium.

- 2017** *Knot I : I Knot*, SMAC Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- 2016** *Your Skin Is Not The Best Hiding Place*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

You Can't Cry When Your Head is Underwater, Lychee One, London, UK.
- 2015** *The End is Located Underneath Her Third Armpit (if the muscle is flexed)*, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa.

Mad Love, Lychee One, London, UK.
- 2014** *How Cannibals Cuddle*, CABIN Gallery, London, UK.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2020** *Staycation*, Lychee One, London, UK.

'L'Heure Bleue', PLUS-ONE Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium.

A Show of Solidarity, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

SHAPING THINGS: An exploration of clay and ceramics in contemporary South African art practice, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Investec Cape Town Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Cape Town, South Africa.

London Art Fair (Lychee One), Business Design Centre, London, UK.
- 2019** Luxembourg Art Week (Galerie DYS), Luxembourg.

African Textures, OSART Gallery, Milan, Italy.

arteBOTANICA, in collaboration with Lezanne Viviers, Nirox Sculpture Park, Krugersdorp, South Africa.

OR/BITING AURABOROS, collaborative exhibition with Viviers Studio, Lotus House, Johannesburg, South Africa.

FNB Art Joburg (SMAC Gallery), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

HOLDING STILL: Psychology and Portraiture, SMAC Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Investec Cape Town Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Cape Town, South Africa.

L'acte final - scene one: Louis & friends, GUS Art Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- 2018** *Wish You Were Here*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

- Bone Memory*, Lychee One, London, UK.
- Papercuts*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK.
- Kneading the torsomakesabuzz*, curated by Karni Barzilay, KAV 16 Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel.
- FNB Joburg Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Desires*, GNYP Gallery, Berlin, Germany.
- Investec Cape Town Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2017** 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), London, UK.
- FNB Joburg Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Another Antipodes Inc*, PS Art Space, Fremantle, Australia.
- X: Part I*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Where they hum*, Lychee One, London, UK.
- All Things Being Equal*, Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA), Cape Town, South Africa.
- X: Part III*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Cape Town Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2016** *across the divide*, curated by Lu Chao & Ian Rosenfeld, Rosenfeld Porcini, London, UK.
- Summer Show '16*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Break the Spell*, Gallery University Stellenbosch (GUS), Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Inside Out*, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, UK.
- Faces & other scenarios*, two-person show with Sofi van Saltbommel, Galerie d'Ys, Brussels, Belgium.
- Paper | Publication | Performance*, Lychee One, London, UK.
- New Monuments*, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2015** *Defining the Narrative*, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town, South Africa.
- LUSH*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Island II - Nativel*, g39, Cardiff, UK.
- FNB Joburg Art Fair (Commune.1), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- His Sprinkled Blood Served to Fructify the Blood of Three Golden Apples*, collaboration with Abraham Kritzman & Angels Miralda, odd and Atelier 35, Bucharest, Romania.
- Art 15 (Lychee One), Delphina Foundation, London, UK.
- All S-He Ever Wanted to Be*, GalleriaM, Kolkata, India.
- Portretteer*, Oude Libertas Art Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Cape Town Art Fair (Commune. 1), V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, South Africa.
- "regARTs" sur "La piscin"*, Espace Croix-Baragnon, Toulouse, France.
- 2014** *Scintilla: An Alchemy Show*, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Saatchi New Sensations Finalist Group Exhibition, Victoria House, Bloomsbury, London, UK.
- Artmagedon: an affordable art show*, West End Centre, Aldershot, UK.
- The Luminous Language*, The Assembly Rooms, London, UK.
- Artists in Transit: A Group Exhibition*, Imibala Gallery, Somerset West, South Africa.
- Stewarts Law RCA Secret*, Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- An Inoperative Mythology*, Imperial College, London, UK.
- PNTNG NOV*, Henry Moore Gallery, London, UK.
- 2013** *Bloomberg New Contemporaries (BNC)*, Spike Islands, Bristol, UK.
- Dreamtime: New Surrealism*, Mirus Gallery, San Francisco, USA.
- Stewarts Law RCA Secret*, Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- Work in Progress Show*, Henry Moore Gallery, Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- Notes to Self 'Thinking Aloud and Making Moves'*, Dyson Building, Royal College of Art, London, UK.
- 2011** *Bachelor's Graduate Show: Gradex*, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- VANSA 2010 Reasons to Live in a Small Town*, Goethe on Main Project Space, Johannesburg, South Africa.

SELECTED PRESS HIGHLIGHTS

- Steer, E. 2016. *Opening This Week: Marlene Steyn: Your Skin Is Not The Best Hiding Place*. Elephant Magazine [online]. Available at: <https://elephant.art/now-showing-marlene-steyn-smac/>. [Accessed 19.01.2019].
- O'Toole, S. 2017. *Marlene Steyn is proving to be an artist worth watching*. Times Live [online]. Available at: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2017-10-24-marlene-steyn-is-proving-to-be-an-artist-worth-watching/>. 24 Oct, 2017. [Accessed 04.03.2018].
- Kawitzky, R. 2016. *Runny yolks and Running Jokes*. Adjective Magazine [online]. Available at: https://smacgallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Runny-yolks-and-Running-Jokes_Roxy-Kawitzky_adjective_2016-09-05.pdf. 5 Sept, 2016. [Accessed 19.01.2019].

Rea, N. 2018. *Here Are 7 Standout Artists to Discover at miart 2018*. Artnet News [online]. Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/market/7-standout-artists-discover-2018-miart-1264568>. 13 April 2018. [Accessed 19.01.2019].

Shorkend, D. 2016. *Playful, sinister metaphors*. Cape Times [online]. Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/arts-portal/playful-sinister-metaphors-2059825>. [Accessed 19.01.2019].

Snoekx, K. 2018. *Marlene Steyn: pretzel perfect*. BRUZZ [online]. Available at: <https://www.bruzz.be/en/expo/marlene-steyn-pretzel-perfect-2018-03-11>. 3 Nov, 2018. [Accessed 19.01.2019].

COLLECTIONS

Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA), Cape Town, South Africa.
Royal College of Art, London, UK.
Luo Yi, YIS Foundation, London, UK & Beijing, China.
Springmeier Collection, Berlin, Germany.
Homestead Collection, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact SMAC Gallery for more information or any other queries.

STELLENBOSCH

1st Floor, De Wet Centre
Church Street
Stellenbosch, 7600
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

CAPE TOWN

1st Floor, The Palms
145 Sir Lowry Road
Woodstock
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

smac

info@smacgallery.com
www.smacgallery.com