



VILLA + the next generation

VILLA + the next generation

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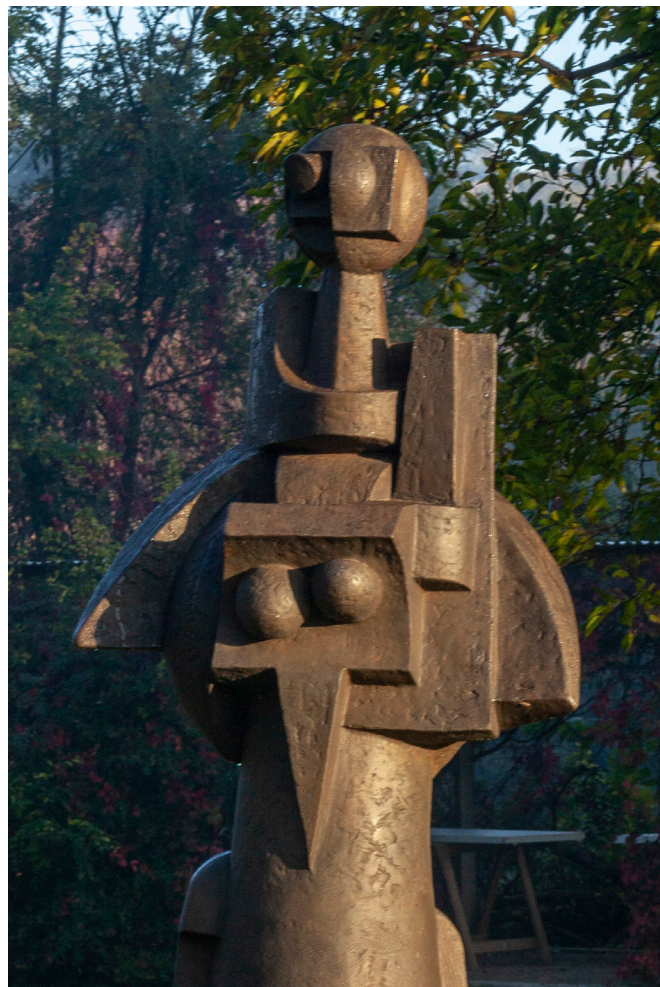
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VILLA-LEGODI
Centre for Sculpture



Edoardo Villa
detail of
Mapogga Woman
1964
Bronze
207 x 66 x 56 cm
On loan from St. John's College

This exhibition features two distinct yet related components: “sculpture as discipline” and “the next generation”. The first is an historical focus on Edoardo Villa’s rigorous approach to the discipline of sculpture, curated by Mary-Jane Darroll and Karel Nel. With forty artworks, predominantly made in the 1960s and ’70s, it focuses on aspects of the figure over a period of nearly twenty years.

This selection shows Villa’s interest in South African identity, examining and celebrating, through a modernist yet uniquely contemporary perspective, a considered and serious engagement with the country and its people through the eye of an Italian who arrived as a prisoner of war and was innovative for his time.

Indoor works by Edoardo Villa are shown in the Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture; established in 2022 to support sculptors through residencies,

workshops, exhibitions, and publications. The centre's ongoing programme enables a new generation to produce work, providing a platform for education and research, enriching critical debate and the appreciation of sculpture, whilst paying tribute to the life and work of Edoardo Villa and his long-time collaborator Lucas Legodi.

The second component of the exhibition, "the next generation", curated by Sven Christian and Tristin Roland, highlights works by recipients of the Edoardo Villa Extraordinary Award for Sculpture, initiated in 2016 in recognition of artists who have made a significant contribution to the discipline of sculpture in South Africa.

The exhibition includes works by Jane Alexander (*DANGER GEVAAR INGOZI*, 2004), Nicholas Hlobo (*Ukuthweswa ngomlilo*, 2016), Serge Alain Nitegeka (*Camp*, 2025), William Kentridge (*Paper Procession IV (Large)*, 2023), Walter Oltmann (*Carapax (Borer) reworked*, 2025), Jackson Hlungwani (*Champion Man*, 1988), and the letter F (1998) and letter G (2012) components of Willem Boshoff's *Blind Alphabet* (1993–ongoing), shown alongside a series of documentaries in the Screening Room that provide context to the many works by Boshoff in the park.

Edoardo Villa
Red Figure
1967
Steel
236 cm (h)
Private collection
South Africa





DISCIPLINE OF SCULPTURE

Mary-Jane Darroll

“Discipline of Sculpture” centres on Edoardo Villa’s legacy. It is an exploration of his profound career and enduring influence on South African sculpture. Villa, an Italian-born artist who settled in Johannesburg after his release from Zonderwater prison post-World War II, became South Africa’s most prolific sculptor, producing nearly 1000 works over seven decades. Deeply rooted in the human figure, his work reflects a unique synthesis of European modernist influences and an African consciousness, shaped by his immersion in Johannesburg’s Italian community and his engagement with African art through the Amadlozi group.

Installation view
“Discipline of Sculpture”
Villa-Legodi
Centre for Sculpture

The exhibition showcases thirty-five of Villa’s works, displayed both indoors at the Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture and across NIROX

Sculpture Park, as part of the broader exhibition *Villa+ the next generation*. Significant works from his early period, such as *Seated Woman* (1950) and *Mother and Child* (1950), echo Brancusi's sensual, solid forms. In later works like *Fantasy in Black* (1952), *The Assailants* (1952), and *African Rhythm* (1956), he deconstructs the figure into delicate, skeletal steel rods that evoke motion and an African milieu. His 1960s and 1970s works, such as *African Sentinel* (1963), *African Figure* (1963), *Mapogga Woman* (1964), and *African Warrior* (1964–5) demonstrate a reverence for African identity.

Two of Villa's largest and most significant works were considered for the exhibition: *Africa* (1959), a monumental steel sculpture now at Norval Foundation, and *Confrontation* (1978), recently relocated to Fredman Drive, Sandton.

Africa was developed through maquettes like *Africa II Maquette* (1958) and *Africa Maquette* (1959). It represents a pinnacle of Villa's exploration of solid steel forms. Tragically, *African Sentinel* (1963), another major work, was lost — bulldozed and sold for scrap — leaving only its maquette as a testament to its existence.

This exhibition underscores Villa's unparalleled output, with the human figure as his central muse, abstracted and reimagined through varied forms and media. Villa's titles — *Heraldic Figure* (1962), *African Warrior* (1964–5), *African Head [African Mask IV]* (1966) — reveal his dialogue with African identity, blending formalism with a visceral, evocative power. This exhibition not only celebrates Villa's monumental contribution to the discipline of sculpture but also mourns losses like *African Sentinel*, urging a renewed commitment to

preserving such cultural treasures. His work remains a bridge between European and African artistic traditions, a testament to his outsider perspective and lifelong fascination with the human condition.

— Mary-Jane Darroll

Installation view
“Discipline of Sculpture”
Villa-Legodi
Centre for Sculpture



LEFT TO RIGHT
Edoardo Villa
African Head (African Mask V)
1965
Bronze
70 cm (h)
Private collection, South Africa

Standing Figure
1968
Bronze
38.5 cm (h)
Private collection, South Africa

African Head (African Mask IV)
1966
Bronze
67 cm (h)
Private collection, South Africa

Africa II (maquette)
1958
Steel
40 cm (h)
Private collection, South Africa





LEFT TO RIGHT: Edoardo Villa, **Reclining Figure**, 1968. Private collection, South Africa; **Messenger**, 1967. Private collection, South Africa; **Winter series**, 1961. Private collection South Africa.





Villa made several realistic works in his early years, such as *Madonna and Child*. Much like Picasso, he went through periods of stylising and creating anomalies of pieces that were an assimilation of forms, ultimately rendering a stylised figural form. The personage of the *Mapogga Woman* is an iconic, individualistic interpretation of a female figure, made up of an amalgamation of circles, spheres, squares and crescents.

Mapogga Woman

1964

Bronze

207 x 66 x 56 cm

On loan from
St. John's College

African Warrior is made of solid pieces of steel. It weighs a huge amount considering its size and requires a crane to move it or at least a rigging device. It has been in the collection of Egon Guenther since acquired and subsequently by inheritance to his daughter Miriam. It's one of the iconic brutalist works, not so much in scale or appearance, but in weight — deceptively hard piece to manoeuvre. It is far from the slender totems or sentinels; a piece that has been pared down.

African Warrior

1964–65

Steel

100 cm (h)

Private collection

South Africa





Black Figure I is from the University of Johannesburg's Collection. It was recently restored. Each figural form in this series is a new interpretation — a new agglomeration of raw brutalist steel forms — representing almost different personalities and visualisations of human likeness.

Black Figure I
1967
Painted steel
224 cm (h)
On loan from the
University of Johannesburg

The *Black Figure* and *Red Figure* works by Villa were made in the late-1960s. They are totemic singularities in their slender, imposing stature, towering over any viewer. With most over two meters tall, they are sentinel like, but influenced by the traditional carved figures of North Africa — the fetish like protrusions very dominant and stylised geometric forms of mechanical origin.

Black Figure II

1967

Steel

215 cm (h)

Private collection

South Africa





Reclining Figure belongs to Wits University. It is of the Hyde Park type, the *Reclining Figure* commission, although the pose is almost more rigid — the legs firmly planted with outstretched torso.

Reclining Figure
1968
Steel
153 cm (h)
On loan from
Wits Art Museum

Many of the works here have been in private collections although this work used to belong to a Corporate in the inner city of Joburg. *Seated Figure* (1970) is reduced to bare essentials: open legs, seated bottom and torso with tilted head — a reduction of detail into minimal symbolism that is nevertheless delicate in its detail of glance — the posture direct and the gaze oblique.

Seated Figure

1970

Painted steel

280 cm (h)

Private collection

South Africa



Villa made approximately five of these *Fallen Warrior* or *Guerriero Morente* pieces. These works speak to his time of being captured in the Egyptian desert and brought as a prisoner of war to Zonderwater in Cullinan. The sharp jagged forms relate to an uneasy reclining figure - symbolic of injury, death and heroism.

**Fallen Warrior /
Guerriero Morente**
1977
Painted steel
120 x 350 x 40 cm
On loan from the
Pretoria Arts Association



The maquette for *Confrontation* was made in the same year as the large work that resides at the FNB head office in Sandton on Fredman Drive. The work like Auguste Rodin's *Burghers of Calais*, talks of a specific time of seige - in the French peoples' case a time of surrender. In the case of *Confrontation Villa* depicts a group of people in a state of conflict, just after the 1976 riots that gripped Johannesburg in a swathe of violence and retaliation against the Apartheid government of the day.

Confrontation (Maquette)

1978

Painted steel

Approx. 120 cm (h)

Private collection

South Africa





Villa made several large heroic *Warrior/Sentinel* pieces. Both were a recurring theme over many years. The strength and brutalism of the steel facets allude to a quiet, strong, watchful presence — a guard keeping watch over others. Movement is implied through the placement of the intersecting planes; a stylised human machine.

Warrior Sentinel

1978

Steel

401 cm (h)

On loan from the
University of Pretoria

The early years showed a Villa interested in naturalism — which over the years is transformed and translated into a minimally stylised geometric form of a mother and child; one unit bonded together in bronze. The desire for naturalistic depiction is replaced by a symbolic representation — Villa's interpretation of motherhood; a quiet bonded stillness forever in a sure embrace. The bronze works are of small editions and you might have seen another one of the casting.

Mother and Child

1983

Bronze

290 x 90 cm

On loan from

St. John's College



Couple is the only artwork featured that does not stylistically fit into the rest of the show – it does however relate to *Seated Figure* in subject. This multicoloured pipe piece comes later in Villa's oeuvre in 1988 and is the start of his obsession with figure and rhythm — static motion, if there could be such a thing. The figural relations become dominant — moving away from the singular figural identity.

Couple
1988
Painted steel
215 cm (h)
Private collection
South Africa



This artwork was cast by Mike Edwards, and is unusual in its totemic form of stacked geometric African forms. It's an amalgamation of figures, shield type shapes layered one upon another.

Totem

date unrecorded
Bronze
88 x 25 x 27 cm
Private collection
South Africa





JANE ALEXANDER

DANGER GEVAAR INGOZI

2004

Bronze oil painted bird,
100 used machetes,
100 used sickles,
1000 used industrial
strength gloves, diamond mesh
fencing, barbed wire, earth
300 x 400 x 225 cm

DANGER GEVAAR INGOZI was created in 2004 for the Lustwarande '04 Triennial of Contemporary Art, 'Disorientation by Beauty', a group exhibition presented in the De Oude Warande in Tilburg, Netherlands. It is the first of several related fenced works associated with South Africa and other parts of the continent. The title, in four of the eleven official South African languages (English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa), is taken from the text on safety signage placed on electrical substations, originally observed in Johannesburg in the second half of last century. The work refers to land and landscape, boundaries, displacement, labour, and security, particularly as these were and are experienced in South Africa. The machetes and sickles

— agrarian tools still used across Africa, associated with the clearing of land, harvest, and conflict — can also be seen to be symbolic of a socialist idyll, with the residue of actual labour embedded in them and the worn gloves. The bird figure has some characteristics of vultures — performative, often silent, social scavengers, linked to spiritual transformation and environmental benefit.

— Jane Alexander



WILLEM BSHOFF: THE BIG DRUID

This showcase includes fifteen units from the letter F (1998) and letter G (2012) components of Boshoff's *Blind Alphabet* (1993–ongoing), a three-dimensional dictionary of words sculpted in wood, presented in steel mesh boxes. Hidden from view to the sighted, the meaning of the sculpted words are made accessible to the blind who do not read the usual 'do not touch' signs in a gallery and also through the inclusion of definitions in Braille. The artist describes this as an 'inversion of power relations, creating a dependency in the sighted on the touching and reading skills of blind guides, to access meaning.'

It also includes three documentary films, shown in a loop: *The Big Druid: Willem Boshoff, Man of Trees*, and *The Big Druid: Willem Boshoff, Land Artist* (2021), as well as *The Big Druid: Willem Boshoff, A Collocation in the Florilegium* (2022).

Produced by Helene Smuts and written, edited and directed by Guy Spiller, these films provide core insights into Boshoff's work, presenting the artist in his home studio, garden, and at NIROX. Here we learn of his near death experience with lead poisoning and the beginning of his recovery at NIROX in 2007, to his

Blind Alphabet

1993 – ongoing
Letter F (1998)
and Letter G (2012)
On loan from Emile Stipp





interests in divination as a method of thinking, informed also by DADA philosophy and its overriding principle of incidence and co-incidence. The final film includes a discussion between Boshoff, his gardener and studio assistant John Mthimkhulu, horticulturist Dawie Human and naturalist Mark Read, about their shared love of plants and their botanical names in relation to their shape and form.

— Helene Smuts and Sven Christian

Willem Boshoff
You Never Know
2017
soil and grass
dimensions variable



NICHOLAS HLOBO

Ukuthweswa ngomlilo
2020
Copper
Dimensions variable

Ukuthweswa ngomlilo (to be “crowned by fire”) is inspired by Louise Bourgeois’ spiders. It is a three-dimensional drawing that references the idea of energy that propels most life; a meeting between the site of NIROX within the Cradle of Humankind and my ever-present obsession with drawing energy lines, through the cutting and stitching of different materials. Here, copper is not only an important conduit but an essential element in our bloodstream that helps to regulate our immune system. Using fire to solder copper is my way to further explore the technique of stitching; a method that embodies a self-reflexive understanding of being. Balanced on seven legs, the sculpture emphasises the fine and precarious balance that holds everything together in

this tiny corner of the universe, amplified by our high-paced environment. Let us think about how a country like South Africa is formed, and continues to form, or the life-span of a human, from birth to death. There is an energy that informs this forward thrust, whether organic, cultural, political, or economic.

— Nicholas Hlobo





JACKSON HLUNGWANI & EDOARDO VILLA

Jackson Hlungwani died in Mbhokota in 2010. A year later, Edoardo Villa passed on in Johannesburg. Both lived their lives intensely focused on their sculptural practices: Hlungwani carving and building his stone-walled sanctuary in remote Gazankulu, on the hilltop at Mbhokota, and Villa in his Kew studio in urban Johannesburg.

Hlungwani's carved wooden sculptures related directly to his treed surroundings and to his vision of a new world, a new Jerusalem.

His work embraced the carving traditions of the Tsonga Shangaan area in which he lived and worked. Installed on two altar platforms, his wooden sculptures of Christ, Gabriel, Cain and Abel bore testimony to their immediate presence in his life. Sculptures such as *Champion Man* —

Installation view of Jackson Hlungwani's **Champion Man** (1988: on loan from Arlene Amaler-Raviv) and Edoardo Villa's **Sculpture II**, (1969–70: on loan from Standard Bank Gallery)

on the exhibition — talk to the redemptive and inspirational nature of his work.

Villa, on the other hand, worked in welded steel or cast bronze. His work embraced innovative movements of twentieth-century sculpture, the fractured nature of the cubist language, while being aware of the rich traditions of anthropomorphic carvings of the African continent. He transformed such imagery into the mechanistic world, one that is depicted as austere, demanding and mechanical.

Villa and Hlungwani admired each other's work. The two met towards the end of their lives and there is wonderful documentation of them walking through Villa's sculpture garden. Combined, these works talk to the power of diversity and of creativity, in a nation fraught by its past.

— Karel Nel

LEFT
Jackson Hlungwani
Champion Man
1988
Nkonono (Silver Clusterleaf
Tree/ Vaalboom)
18 x 159 x 140 cm
On loan from
Arlene Amaler-Raviv

RIGHT
Edoardo Villa
Sculpture II
1969/70
Steel
280 cm (h)
On loan from
Standard Bank Gallery





WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Paper Procession IV (Large)
2025
Steel
415.7 x 353.8 cm

Provisionality is a constant in Kentridge's work, as is contradiction.

Created as part of a series of six, *Paper Procession IV (Large)* (2025) is no different. Monumental in scale, it brings together the artist's interests in the constitutive power of fragments and expressive gestures, which he learnt while studying theatre at the L'École Jacques Lecoq in Paris in the early-1980s. Of the many references one could use to describe the work, Rainer Maria Rilke's caged panther comes to mind ('this dance around the centre ... the pacing, and the gap'). Others might include the artist's frequent reference to Plato's cave ('a sense of the world as process'), his reluctance to accept anything as given, and his use of *trompe-l'œil*, where one material (steel) is made to resemble another (paper), creating the illusion of a figure dancing or leaves falling.

As writes John McDonald: 'In the Aeneid, Virgil relates how the prophetess, the Cumaean Sibyl, would sit in her cave and "sing the fates", writing her discoveries on oak leaves arranged in rows at the entrance. Should a sudden gust rise up and scatter those leaves, she saw no need to "set in order what the winds disperse".' The myth recurs in a number of Kentridge's works, including his short film, *Sibyl*, where the artist 'transforms those leaves into the leaves of a book, its pages filled with oracular statements that might be addressed to you or me.' 'Nothing is certain in these prophecies, plastered in banner letters over the pages of a dictionary or some technical manual,' continues McDonald. 'Waiting for the next pronouncement we watch abstract splashes of black ink resolve themselves into trees, leaves, or dancing figures taken from Goya.'

— Sven Christian





SERGE ALAIN NITEGEKA

Camp

2025

White canvas,
PVC conduit tubing, light
Dimensions variable

Refugee camps of the late-twentieth century Central Africa, in their tents and makeshift structures, attest to the itinerant experience of displaced peoples. A camp represents a temporary shelter, where individuals are in transit — on their way somewhere else. My interest stems from the dynamics of fleeing, managing possessions and survival. The in-between space one navigates, from the homes they leave behind to new and unfamiliar ones they encounter. *Camp* is an ongoing, accumulative series, comprised of a number of sculptures that resemble tents, set out in an open field. Made from white canvas and PVC conduit tubing, the sculptures are stitched solid. At night, a warm yellow-orange light radiates from within,

visible to passersby — often those coming to and from work.

The glow implies occupation or presence; people going about their evening routines before going to bed; a marker of life, resilience, and hope.

— Serge Alain Nitegeka





WALTER OLTMANN

Carapax (Borer) (reworked) 2025

Anodized aluminium
wire and spray paint
Dimensions variable

In 2022 Walter Oltmann offered insight about a key idea underpinning his practice: ‘I am very much concerned about our human attitude of superiority in relation to [...] other living creatures — our insistence that we have a superior take on life.’ If humans have invented scientific typologies to make sense of a natural world perceived as external to themselves, Oltmann’s works defy such categorisations, where life forms often combine human characteristics with those of insects, fish or plants. *Carapax (Borer)* is woven from wire that has been anodised and overlaid with black spray paint. Speaking about another of his *Carapax* works, he indicated how a carapace of human size enables the viewer to imagine experiencing the world from the perspective of the being depicted. While alluding

to chain mail, this costume seems more exuberant than most, as if it were a relic from a masquerade, offering not only protection but opportunities for display — a mechanism for defence but also for fashioning and parading an identity.

His works are easily read as “uncanny”, a word derived from the German word *unheimlich*, which means “unhomely”. In the case of *Carapax (Borer)*, the “unhomely” is simultaneously invoked in a more literal sense: borer beetles feed off wood used within the home, and are therefore commonly considered “pests”.

—Brenda Schmahmann





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DESIGN

Sven Christian

FRONT COVER

Edoardo Villa
detail of *Black Figure II*
1967

PHOTOS

Brett Rubin
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