

RE-WILDING

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'Imagine a world where humans are completely captive... Over time, people lose their creativity, vitality, and sense of freedom. Now imagine the opposite: a world where humans are free to roam in nature, create with their hands, and connect with their surroundings.' Ken Breniman's words – from *Subversive Acts of Humanity: A Survival Guide for Choosing Evolution over Self-Destruction* – define the spirit and set the tone for Artyli's exhibition, Re-Wilding. In a captive world, innovation is vital. In a denatured world, the elemental is the greater source for survival. In their pursuit of evolution over self-destruction, the exhibiting artists do not present a shared ideology, but in singular ways evoke a spirit of human endurance in a richly interconnected world. Mother Nature is at the restorative core.

Phumzile Buthelize's abstract painting understands the inseparability of the plant world from the human world. Both are fragile, both in unison yearn for grace. Keonah Nyembe echoes this view. Her monotypes – described as 'metamorphic landscapes' – reveal the coexistence of life forms whether vulnerable or strong. To thrive, all must exist in productive unison. Sylvester Mqeku's ceramic shell-like vessels similarly understand the fundament of being – in his case the ancient solace of clay – that shapes a fulfilling world. For as the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu reminds us in *Tao Te Ching*, the creation of a vessel adapts 'the Nothing therein', the hollow, to afford Something, for it is 'by virtue of Nothing' that a vessel becomes useful. This existential truth can only be ignored at one's own peril. By placing human life at the apex of the Chain of Being, we forget the vital importance of co-dependency, the core relationship of Nothingness *and* Being.

Carey Carter revises classical sculptural form. Against the sovereignty of Whiteness built into Western, principally Greek aesthetics, Carter broadens the complex of Race. Preferring to see Classical art as an inclusive ideal, she embraces non-divisive human connection. Cassian Robbertze, who is also drawn to classicism, splices it to a reflective and critical vision of the role of technology in our lives, and our dangerous dependency on it. While Henrico Greyling abandons the classical ideal, turning to the raw organicity of rocks and their simulation through rusted steel. His is a primordial but also a profoundly modern vision, one stripped of the narcissism of 'Man' as the apex of evolution. Robert Macfarlane's reminder, in *Underland*, that 'Trillions of neutrinos pass through our bodies and on through the Earth's bedrock, its mantle, its liquid innards, its solid core,' is a chastening reminder of our negligible vanity. Here, John Moore reaffirms a cosmic

connection and relationship between the bestial and the elemental. Finally, Paula Anta's monumental fusions of sea and earth – her 'Kelp Series' – affirms the indelible imprint of nature, principally the sea, as a vital source and frontier for survival. For we are not solely earthly creatures, we are amphibian, and, as such, non-binary, open, ever-searching - *enduring*.

With these artists, their diverse yet unified vision, Artyli enters a new stage in its creative enterprise. If the show, *Re-Wilding*, is seminal, it is because it expands the frontier of creativity. Fundamentally intuitive, the exhibition challenges the division between feeling and thing, the notion of art as solely and objectifiable product. Instead of promoting human separation and supremacy, *Re-Wilding* advocates a heightened connection. It is because we are done with the sterility of control, the fantasy of human mastery, because we seek a deeper creative and spiritual connection to the earth and to culture, that we now enshrine a 'reflexive sensitivity, one that attempts to understand by attending carefully to what is being experienced ... a sensitivity to imperfection and impermanence.' Which is why Julian Baggini, in *How the World Thinks*, advocates a 'relational self' This is because a 'proper understanding of the world and ourselves is found as much in the spaces between things as it is in the things themselves'. Denial and separation are not options. Ours is an Anthropocene world, created through destruction, which we must now learn to survive.

Our artists, here, provide intuitive answers to this quest. The works exhibited announce the interconnection of the organic and inorganic, substance and its nurturing void, and, as such, allow for what according to Baggini 'can be seen as almost a kind of religious observance.' Instead of projecting ideals onto the world, what is now required is a 'trained intuition.' We need to reinvent how and what we look at, what we see. This is the core drive of *Re-Wilding* as a principle and an art exhibition. As its curator, Karen Cullinan, notes, 'In this exhibition, the term expands beyond ecology to encompass the emotional, cultural, spiritual, and political terrains that have been shaped, managed, and constrained.'

'*Re-Wilding* ... asks what becomes possible when we loosen our grip – on land, on bodies, on narratives, on time itself. Here, the wild is not chaos but relation.' Great connection occurs when we cross a divide, refuse the predictive, anticipate the unknown. As Baggini starkly reminds us, today 'We are as close to nature when we use computers as we are when we walk along the coast because nature is as much in silicon and steel as it is in sand and sea.' The artists who are participating in this exhibition, therefore, are not mere utopian fantasists, they are vitally connected to the complexity of a social-psychological-

cultural-political-historical moment that is teetering on a precipice. Never dogmatic, each artist in their own way asks us to consider our own relational self, our ability to overcome the tyranny of forms, the determinism of reason, the rule of law. It is the experiential that counts more, the silence between the notes. The rupture at the heart of things. For what is vital, moving forward, is 'a way of making space for what has been silenced, fenced in, or forgotten to grow again.'