

# TOWARDS EASTER SUNDAY 2025: WHO AM I?

An exhibition by  
Gert Swart



Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg  
2 March - 27 April 2025

Towards Easter Sunday 2025: Who Am I?  
For Istine, with love and gratitude  
An exhibition by Gert Swart

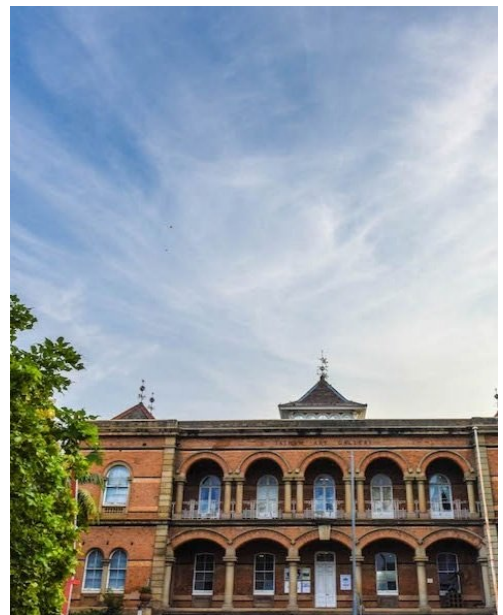
*Gert Swart.*

Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg  
2 March - 27 April 2025

## FOREWORD

Gert Swart, a distinguished South African sculptor from Pietermaritzburg, has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the Tatham Art Gallery. The Gallery is privileged to have two of Gert's most significant sculptures in its permanent collection, one dating back to as early as 1987.

The Gallery acquired the mythical *Contemplation: Restoration*, carved from a single tree stump, from Gert's exhibition at the NSA Gallery in Durban in 1987. At that time, Lorna Ferguson was the Director of the Tatham Collection, which was then housed in an upstairs gallery in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall before moving to its current location in the Old Supreme Court building in 1990.



In 1997, Gert held an exhibition at the Tatham Art Gallery titled “Contemplation: A Body of Work by Gert Swart.” From this exhibition,

the Gallery acquired *Grace*, a larger artwork that evokes a boat-like journey over the River Styx. Brendan Bell, the Gallery Director at the time, entered this artwork for the Helgaard Steyn Award for Sculpture, which Gert Swart won. Bell noted Gert's intense dedication, privacy, faith, creativity, and self-discipline.

Over the past 45 years, the art community in KwaZulu-Natal has been aware of Gert producing an exceptional body of work. Many of his sculptures were public commissions, but his spiritual outlook on societal issues and personal experiences consistently shone through. His art often addressed the harsh realities of apartheid and the untold stories of South Africa's history, as seen in his notable works like the monument for Zulu warriors who died in the Battle of Isandlwana.

It is fitting that Gert's retrospective exhibition, "Towards Easter Sunday 2025: Who am I?" will take place at the Tatham Art Gallery during March and April this year. This exhibition promises to be a profound exploration of identity and self-discovery, reflecting Gert's ongoing quest to explore the complexities of human existence through his art.

A collaboratively written text by  
TATHAM ART GALLERY



## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

He has made everything beautiful in its time.  
He has also set eternity in the hearts of men;  
yet they cannot fathom what God has done  
from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Welcome to this exhibition of my recent sculptures — a few have an older legacy, but I found myself returning to them and adapting them. I hope that it will be a participatory space in which you will feel both challenged and encouraged. In fact, an important idea for me as an artist in this regard is that of "Scenius" as developed by the musician and thinker Brian Eno. In his words, "Scenius" is "the intelligence of a whole operation or group of people." He continues: "I think that's a more useful way to think about culture. Let's forget the idea of 'genius' for a little while, let's think about the whole ecology of ideas that give rise to good new thoughts and good new work."

The exhibition's layout is like a labyrinth of sculptural portals which visitors are invited to navigate. At first sight, the space may seem overwhelming; a space in which you are likely to get lost. But as you find yourself drawn to a particular portal and as you begin to engage with it, the idea is that you will begin to find yourself in some way.

Perhaps you will re-find a dimension of yourself that was somehow mislaid. As you find orientation, you might decide to tackle other portals that felt less immediately intuitive or appealing. Perhaps they felt intimidating? But this might change as you explore further.

If you want to learn more about specific works, you will find reflections on many of them on my website — just follow the QR codes present in the exhibition space. There you will also find information about the price of works that are available for sale.

\*\*\*

The dominant theme for this exhibition of sculptural thresholds and their portals, was born out of my 1997 “Contemplation: A Body of Work by Gert Swart” exhibition, also held at the Tatham Art Gallery. And it begs the question as to why, in 2025, it will have taken twenty-eight years for this exhibition to come to fruition.

In the foreword of the “Contemplation” catalogue, Brendan Bell wrote that: “Gert Swart is a man of great intensity. He is intensely dedicated, intensely private, intensely religious, intensely creative. This exhibition is the result of over twenty years of intense self-discipline in concentrating on the production of sculpture rather than the promotion of self. Working in relative isolation from the mainstream, often under trying financial circumstances, it has always been the integrity of the artist that has won through ...”





As a direct result of the strength and artistic merits of the “Contemplation” exhibition I received the prestigious Helgaard Steyn Award for Sculpture (late 1997). However, having only sold one sculpture from this exhibition, in a desperate attempt to keep the wolf from the door, together with my wife, Istine, we had no other option but to take on whatever sculpture commissions that came our way, both of a public and private nature. Istine played a vital role in all of this as she did all the administration and negotiations to bring these commissions about as well as a fair share of the actual sculpting work.

In between commissioned work, I made what felt like slow progress with my threshold and portal theme. This created a great tension in my life, exacerbated by other exigencies of an extreme nature that were difficult to endure. All of this came to a head when I accepted a huge commission that in my inmost being I knew I should never have taken on. It went hopelessly wrong, despite having put my heart and soul into it. And because of this inner and outer tension, I woke up one morning with a paralysed left arm! The cause of this calamity was a severe bout of stress-related shingles that had also attacked my arm’s motor nerves. This happened towards the end of 2011, with my 60th birthday just around the corner, in 2012.

The rehabilitation of my left arm took a long time. More than that, on a psychological level, I had to regain the will and desire to make meaningful sculptures once again, sculptures that can now, in hindsight, truly address the searing question of who I am, that is evoked in the title of the exhibition — in particular, who I am positioned before what I believe is the greatest portal of all; that which was formed

through the agony and resurrection glory of that first Easter. And I must add it is only by God's grace and the encouragement of close friends that I have been able to do this!

It was in spring of 2024 when I began to feel overwhelmed by the miraculous awakening of nature from its dormant state. It was of course spring here, in the southern hemisphere, where I "live and move and have my being." And this brought to mind a mysterious quote from the Polish writer and visual artist Bruno Schulz's book *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* that has both enchanted and perplexed me no end over the past 40 years, when I first became aware of his writing:

How green with oblivion spring becomes;  
old trees regain their sweet nescience and wake up  
with twigs, unburdened by memories  
although their roots are steeped in old chronicles.

Gert Swart

March 2025



# A REMEMBRANCE

Anne Marie Chelin

I am so pleased to witness the work being accumulated for Gert Swart's next exhibition at The Tatham Art Gallery, one of the major art museums in South Africa. I am proud to say that I have been privileged to have had Gert as a creative mentor during the years of 1991 – 2003. This was at the Midlands Arts & Crafts Society in Pietermaritzburg where I was a contributing member of the Sculpture Group.

Gert talks of the concept of "Scenius" — a committed collective genius. I think back to the time we spent working as a collective but working on individual artworks at this time. Yet, one of the most recognised contributions we made as a group was that of the *Peace Tree* which we erected in the grounds of the Tatham. As can be noted on Gert's website [www.gertswart.com](http://www.gertswart.com) this tree at the time of Christmas made use of used vehicle tyres which we painted. Historically in South Africa motor vehicle tyres had been used for the despicable inhumane murderous act of "necklacing." We purposefully used the tyres in a positive way creating a Peace tree which stood proudly tall in a vibrant public space. As a group we "rallied the troops" and under our own steam we collected used tyre donations from car yards and rolled up our sleeves to create our "Monument to Peace."

I think of Gert's encouragement of each individual member of the group to learn the techniques of sculpture at this time. He planned a workshop where he would tutor us for a few days and asked for details of our planned attendance over the time. I recall saying I might get there for a few hours on the Saturday of the workshop weekend but that was about it. "Uh, Huh? You think so? Are you committed to learning in this instance? If so, make some effort, make a commitment!" was the response. Nothing less was expected. I remember my family visiting from the Transkei at the time on one of the days, welcoming them on their arrival and excusing myself for the next two solid days!!!! Yes, Gert taught us about commitment for sure — in his usual fashion: with intensity.

So often we could observe his commitment to his values and beliefs as he went about the work of his beloved sculpture — each piece so meticulously and deliberately crafted.

It is with sincere admiration and respect that I acknowledge the personal contribution that Gert has made to the South African community on so many levels — his website depicts the details of this contribution in the correct chronological order together with detail of the awards he has received over the years — so richly deserved. May this next exhibition by Gert Swart be showered in blessings.

## FURTHER ALONG

Rick Andrew

To start, I have to go back to the floods of 1987, when torrents of water inundated our world. It rained uninterrupted for five days and nights. Roads were blocked, retaining walls collapsed, graveyards were uprooted, coffins washed out to sea, and trees fell, including a large yellow-wood tree in Bulwer Park. This tree had a great deal to do with the trajectory of Gert's life.

An architect who had admired his work, commissioned him to repeat the inspired work he'd done before: to carve a tree out of a tree. So, he delivered a section of the fallen yellowwood to Ringwood — the place where he and Istine were staying after their marriage. A contract was entered into, and, happy to have this commission, Gert took up his tools and set to work.

In a very short time Gert started to feel ill and weak. He took a short break, but that didn't help. Every time he started work with mallet and chisel, he got sick to the point of incapacitation and was laid up for days, which turned into weeks. The architect, his "patron", became impatient with these delays and cancelled the commission — he'd missed the deadline. He came with a truck and took away the timber. This poison entered Gert's body in ways more subtle and long lasting than anyone could have predicted, or doctors could discern.

Gert found himself wandering about in a darkened landscape of insane politics and glandular problems — problems that still plague him to this day. In 2000 he was diagnosed with “chemical sensitivity,” but a diagnosis doesn’t remove the symptoms, namely extreme sensitivity to chemical odours like deodorants, cigarette smoke, detergents, paints and the like. For example, it can take him days to recover from a visit to a shopping mall. Needless to say, this has limited his abilities to go out into the world and so he has been forced to live a secluded life, to work from home with few worldly distractions.

And now — in retrospect, we who were part of that Christian Arts Group (CAG) of the 1980s and 90s, are well aware that we as South Africans are on the periphery of major world concerns. Yet as passionate artists, we stand on the African earth seeking to bring visions - both humbly and aggressively, as we have to compete against a world of media, television, Hollywood, Vietnam, Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol and American culture to name but a few of those powerful forces.

Yet there remains the community which we sought and found in Christ — a bunch of fallible, enthusiastic individuals who met to give support to one another.

I’d like to remind myself and my readers of what I said in the opening address I gave for Gert’s exhibition “Contemplation” in the Tatham gallery in 1997.

“I recall those early days of enthusiasm — the place where we started. We were not really sure of what we understood of ‘Christianity,’ but we were inspired by the vision of hope it contained — the glory behind the appearance of things. The obligations of love. We awakened to a new sense of purpose. The thorns of apartheid tore us at every turn. Its laws were so patently damaging to the human spirit and to the nation. Our knowledge was limited, but our enthusiasm led to deep exploration, questioning, a strength of resolve, and to times of great testing.”

In our older years now, much of the journey lies behind us, but still ever before us is the drive to express not a vision of confusion or death, but one of life.

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

\*\*\*

To make a brief comment on Gert’s work is difficult because he has been so prolific, and he has a large body of work. It’s not easy to generalize about it, except to say that his work is primarily symbolic in that he creates pieces that trigger the imagination in many different ways.



Unfortunately, I have not seen many of these works other than as a digital image on a computer, where so much is lost in terms of scale and tactility. Sculpture needs to be seen in the “flesh,” and digital photographs only give one a general idea of the work. However, as I am acquainted with Gert’s work and have witnessed his range of scale from large to small, I think I can make a reasonably informed comment. So, I will comment on three of his more recent pieces. All carved from wood and using colour.

***The Initiate, 2024 (Cat 30)***

I’ve seen Xhosa initiates in Grahamstown fresh from their wilderness ordeal strolling gaily along the pavement wearing their new jackets and shoes, and this piece seems to echo that sense of happy celebration. The hat with the feather feels quite jocular to me. The shape of the hat reminds me of the hats worn by the Boer commandoes during the Anglo Boer war.





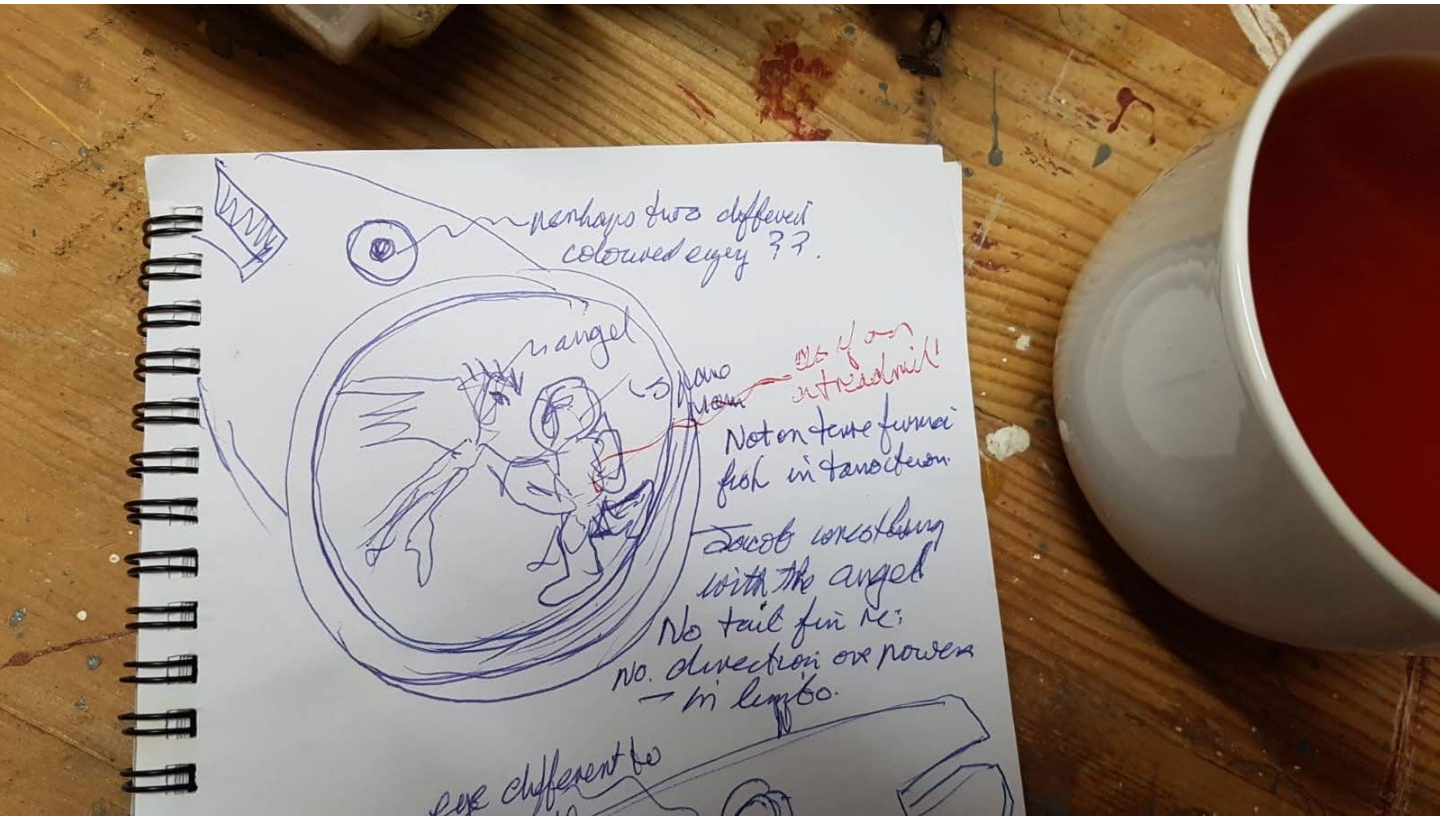
***The Emboldened Seven, 2021  
(Cat 34)***

This is an example of sensitive and finely detailed wood carving. Tactile and enchanting these emboldened ones stand proud, like sentinels.

***Because our Wings Are Our Only Nest, 2024 (Cat 17)***



The first thing that struck me about this piece was the tactility of the form, rounded and subtly coloured. I enjoy the gloved hand dropped down and holding a propeller, which has a symbolic link to the circular RAF insignia that was emblazoned on the wings and sides of the Spitfire fighters during World War Two. Wings are the strength and comfort of all flying creatures.



Gert Swart, Selected working drawings, 2024

# PIERCING QUESTIONS: THE SCULPTURES OF GERT SWART

Jorella Andrews

“All meanings, we know, depend on the key of interpretation.”

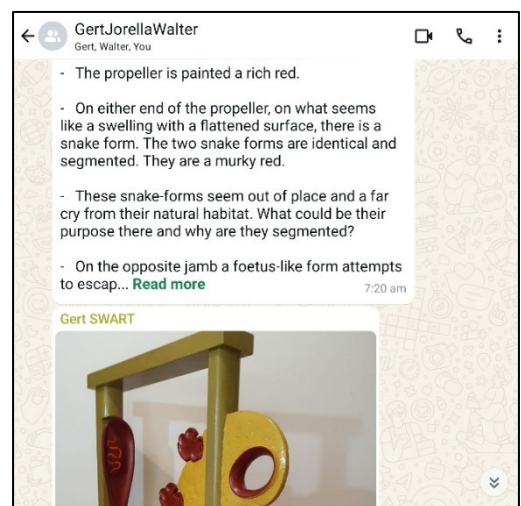
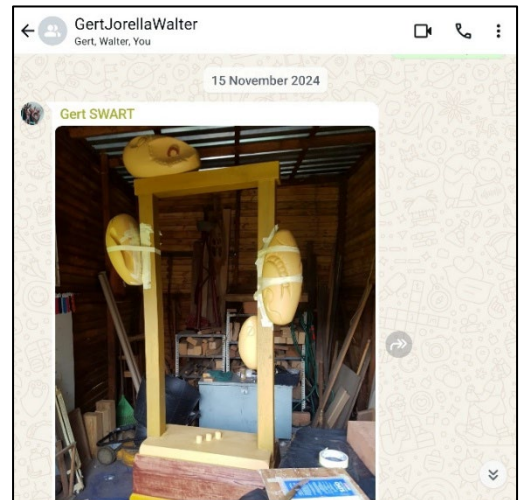
George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876.

## Interpreting from afar

As I write this essay (January-February 2025), the South African sculptor Gert Swart’s exhibition “Towards Easter Sunday 2025: Who am I?” is still in emergence, reverberating with the energy of the studio. This is an energy that I love: the energy of sketches, working drawings, and experiments; of thought — indeed, material thought — in process. It is an energy Swart hopes will also infuse the exhibition. He intends visitors to feel as though they have stepped into just such a working space, requiring navigation, and inviting active even challenging participation.

Working on this essay has also felt participatory and collaborative, even though I am writing from a place of prospection (from my perspective, Swart’s exhibition is yet to come) and at a

geographical distance of almost six thousand miles (I live in London in the United Kingdom whereas Swart is based in Pietermaritzburg). Inevitably, I have only been able to access the sculptures that Swart will display as digital images. But, since June 2024, I have been involved in frequent online “conversations” (Figure 1) with Swart, and with Walter Hayn, a London-based South African painter and teacher who is a good friend of Swart — Hayn and I are also friends; it was he who introduced me to Swart several years ago. In June, we began building a website to accompany and contextualise the exhibition and we started planning the exhibition catalogue.<sup>1</sup>



On the one hand, then, this essay is taking form amid an expanding treasury of online images, ideas, and texts, nourished by the forms of digitally enabled exchange that are increasingly the norm in our developed and developing worlds. While digital critics might scoff, our collective opportunities to plan, reflect, and debate in this

way have sparked intimacy, investment, involvement, and affection (the latter is a theme to which I will return). But on the other hand, I do also feel that I have been writing from within a “cloud of unknowing.”

“Cloud of unknowing!” These are words borrowed from the title of an influential religious text written by an anonymous late-fourteenth century English mystic. As it turns out, given the Christian associations announced in Swart’s exhibition title combined with its intended exploratory character, it is a useful concept from which to approach Swart’s project. In its original context, the “cloud of unknowing” is that which separates human beings from God. As the scholar and translator A. C. Spearing has explained (the mystical text was written in Middle English), the text’s author — most likely a priest, and possibly a Carthusian monk<sup>2</sup> — was immersed in a theological tradition known as the *via negativa* or way of negation. In this tradition the focus of contemplation is “not on God’s human nature [i.e., as revealed in Christ] but on his divine nature, seen as totally transcendent, totally beyond the reach of human understanding and human language”.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, according to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, it is nonetheless possible to pierce through this cloud, if only momentarily, not by any intellectual effort but only by love. How interesting, then, that one of Swart’s recent smaller sculptures, *The Dream’s Insistence* from 2024 (Figure 2, Cat 39) also incorporates an enigmatic, cloud-like form. Here, though, it is the cloud itself that pierces. Despite its appearance of relative intangibility, like an

uncanny arrow, it seems to be pressing into the weightier, strangely face-like triangular entity beneath, causing it to collapse into itself.

My own reference to writing, at least in part, from within a “cloud of unknowing,” does not imply my uncritical acceptance of all aspects of the *via negativa* tradition in which the late medieval mystical text in question is immersed. The bible makes claims about the incarnation of God in Christ, and Christ declared that “The one who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). This indicates a God who is intent on self-disclosure, even if this disclosure can only be experienced as incomplete; at issue, after all, is a matter of infinite reality communicating with we who are finite. (Might *The Dream’s Insistence* also be interpreted from this perspective?) Furthermore, scripture repeatedly declares that creation itself — the natural world — unceasingly declares the glory of God.<sup>4</sup>

Nor am I making a point about the ultimate impossibility of interpretation. As I see it (and here I may be departing somewhat from the author’s original meaning) the “cloud of *unknowing*” [my emphasis] and the “cloud of forgetting”<sup>5</sup> with which it is associated,



point to a humility characteristic of all genuine attempts at encounter and understanding. This attitude is also a core feature of the philosophical practice with which I am particularly aligned: phenomenology. That core feature is “epoché,” which refers to a researcher’s attempts, while perceiving and thinking, progressively to suspend judgment and set aside assumptions and prejudices. This is especially important in early-stage research. It requires that we do not assume familiarity even with what appears manifestly before our eyes or within our grasp. It requires not only openness but also a willingness to become unravelled by encounters experienced as fresh, unfamiliar, and possibly also in some way threatening. Furthermore, it requires an enriched and extended understanding of thought beyond what can be conceptualised and spoken. But particularly important in the context of this discussion is the fact, already indicated, that in *The Cloud of Unknowing* such orientations are possible only if guided by “a loving faculty”<sup>6</sup> — here is that connection with the experience of affection I cited earlier, and, if I may turn to it again, surely, too, a sensibility conveyed with gentle potency in *The Dream’s Insistence*. Indeed, according to our mystic, “love may reach God in this life, but knowledge may not”.<sup>7</sup> Although I don’t think that *The Cloud of Unknowing* directly makes this point, this reminds me of the scenarios in Genesis 2 and 3 where the first man and woman were presented with a command and a choice: they must not eat from the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil [my



emphasis] which stands at the centre of the Garden of Eden. They are told by God that this act of seeking knowledge in and of itself, and no longer in the context of relationship with God, would lead to death. But they *are* invited to take an alternate path which the bible's symbolic language describes in terms of eating freely from every other tree, including the tree of life.

I think that the best art emerges from, and enables access to, the open, often ineffable, and potentially piercing encounters I have just tried to describe. At the level of intention, this is what Swart's sculptures, and his exhibition, seek to activate. Indeed, the exhibition's title, "Towards Easter Sunday 2025: Who am I?", is a question — more than that, a cry — directed towards the greatest of all activating mysteries, the death and resurrection of Jesus, which in Christian terms is the only point (temporally), and the only portal (spatially), through which reconnection with God can be attained. But Swart's cry is material and multifaceted, human and more than human, a cry that has been wrought in and released from the very stuff, fabric, and texture of this world.

This brings me to a final remark about the challenges of writing this essay and the routes into interpretation that have nonetheless been available to me. Alongside the two routes I have already presented, there is a third. At once paradoxically oblique but materially specific, it connects the hereness of my desk and my study

in London with the thereness of Swart’s studio, the thereness of the works over which he is still labouring, and the not-yet-ness of the exhibition to come. This third route is enabled by a set of small, infinitely precious works of art: delicate entities carved from jelutong wood and painted an earthy red ochre. Each one is a unique combination of extension, curvatures, and crevices, each a miniaturised expression of “length and width, height and depth”



(Ephesians 3:18). With the collective title of *Jorella’s 9 Findings*

(Figure 3), Swart made and gifted them to me in 2019.

“Findings” refer to a whole class of sculptures that Swart has been making for almost half a century. It is also a term used by jewellers for the clasps, links, and rings that hold pieces of jewellery together and make them wearable. The emergence of Swart’s *Findings* is fascinating, and much can be learned from these works about the artistic ethos he has taken to heart over the decades and into the present. One aspect of this is a concern for material stewardship. To cite Swart: “In reductionist sculpture-making” — he works predominantly with wood, sometimes purchased, sometimes salvaged — “there is a lot of waste. I remember buying my first piece

of yellowwood in response to a newspaper advert (this was in the late 1970s) and I had the idea of trying to save the waste bits to carve into some smaller pieces”.<sup>8</sup>

Later, these small pieces took on additional significance, extending from a desire to conserve physical resources to the broader realm of social stewardship. Key for Swart was the need to ignite political justice and accountability particularly on the part of white South Africans who were benefitting from and implicitly, if not overtly, supporting the apartheid regime. In 1983, towards the end of a two-year period at art school as a mature student (and by now five years into his Christian journey, having converted and been baptised in 1978), Swart read Roger Cole's book *Burning to Speak: Life and Art of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska*, about the French, British-based “Vorticist” artist who died in active service during the Great War, aged only 24. As Swart reported in a 2023 interview with Anne Schauffer for *Michelangelo* magazine, “The book’s title comes from what Ezra Pound so insightfully noted about why Gaudier was not well known to the general public at the time. In his opinion, it was because we are ‘terrified ... of a man with an unusual faculty, of a man burning to speak’.”<sup>9</sup> Inspired, Swart began carving small works that people could carry around in their pockets as hand-held inducements to reflection and action. In this respect, his *Findings* may be regarded as provocative *non-word-based* contemporary versions of an old,

orientational object that has long intrigued me: the *vade mecum* (literally “go with me”).

A *vade mecum* — such as the one pictured in the Netherlandish painter Jan Gossaert’s *Portrait of Francisco de los Cobos y Molina* (about 1530–1532) (Figure 4), most likely made from folded parchment and leather — was, in effect, an early modern form



of mobile information technology containing summaries of the important facts and details associated with a given

profession or area of expertise. Most of us now depend on our smart phones, at once communication devices and archives of the information, images, and other resources we take to be indispensable. But where might these portable assets be directing us? How far and how deep are they able to take us? What forms of communication and connection do they enable and how honest and aware are they? Do they encourage genuine and, if required, fearless examinations of lived experience — of the kind that may demand that changes be made — or do they enclose us complacently in

increasingly self-referential, self-confirming, alternate realities? Such issues have always been pivotal for Swart. Indeed, in 1983 (the year he had been so moved by Cole's book *Burning to Speak*), his convictions led him to leave his studies in Fine Art at the Natal Technikon. For during a time of extreme political turmoil in what was then apartheid South Africa, amidst desperate mass black-African-led agitations for racial justice such as those led by the United Democratic Front, and with the townships ablaze, the art school environment was officially intent on steering itself away from political answerability. For Swart, this was insufferable. A student work such as *The Lectern*, 1983 (Figure 5), conveys raw anger and, I think, a call to action. It sets up a collision between a large metal tree-like form that Swart first welded and then broke into pieces, and a block of marble from the cornice of a colonial style house. As such, he at once created and undermined an object, a lectern, that is normally associated with educational, religious, even political authority; it is a site from which someone who is identified as "knowing," someone who is identified as authorised to guide others, is positioned to speak. In a religious



context it is also that which has been deliberately installed to support another object, the bible, that is, God's word. But in Swart's version we find a site of catastrophe.

Swart's political concerns led him to move away from art school. Between 1983 and 1987, as well as continuing to sculpt, he taught in the non-racist Community Arts Workshop, Durban, which he helped found. This venture was aligned with the aims of the Community Arts Project (CAP) which operated in Cape Town between 1977 and 2008 as a non-sectarian and non-racial group of cultural workers. Swart's political concerns did have an older history, however. Towards the end of the 1970s, inspired by the legacy of



Inkosi (Chieftain) Albert Luthuli — the anti-apartheid activist, Christian minister, politician, President-General of the African National Congress (from 1952 until his death in 1967), and 1960 Nobel Peace Prize laureate — Swart had begun investigating ways in which he might renounce his “white” identity. In 1960, Luthuli, then under his third government issued banning order, had famously called upon his fellow South Africans to participate in a

non-violent anti-pass (passbook) campaign scheduled for the end of March.<sup>10</sup> When the Pan-Africanist Congress brought this action forwards by a week, armed government retaliation in Sharpeville on 21 March 1960 left 91 people dead and 238 injured. As a result, both the PAC and the ANC were banned. In response, Luthuli publicly burned his own passbook (Figure 6), for which he was arrested.

From 1981, Swart's critique of "whiteness" was also incorporated into his art making. For instance, *National Day of Prayer for Rain*, 1983 (Figure 7) included an altered presentation of the then South African Flag, nicknamed "Oranje, Blanje, Blou" (orange, white, blue). Notably, he replaced the flag's opaque white stripe with the

revealing and implicating transparency of clear Perspex. Decades later, Swart would win a competition commissioned by the Chief Albert Luthuli Memorial Project to create a monument to Luthuli. It was erected in KwaDukuza (formerly Stanger, the place of Luthuli's death) in front of the Municipal Council Chambers and was unveiled by then President Thabo Mbeki on 21 August 2004 (Figure 8). Swart was insistent that this

monument should not be positioned out of reach upon a plinth. Instead, he installed it to enable face-to-face encounter — and





indeed, evidence of such encounters is found in the fact that the pointing forefinger of his figure's right hand has become worn from having been touched over and over again. Words by Moray Comrie, writing about the "Luthuli Monument" in *Natalia: Journal of the Natal Society* are worth citing at some length since they reveal how the values of participation, including access to political participation, were encoded into the physicality of the

design and its setting:

While he is the sculptor, Mr Swart attributes a full share in the conceptualisation of the monument to his wife Istine and to Pietermaritzburg architect Tony Wilson. The vision for the monument goes beyond a single statue of Luthuli. From street level, a wheelchair ramp and a broad sweep of shallow steps invite one up to the paved area where the sculpture stands, and from this a path leads between landscaped lawns to the door of the council chamber. This in itself reminds one of the interaction between ordinary people in the street and their



elected representatives in council that is crucial to the democratic process for which Luthuli campaigned.<sup>11</sup>

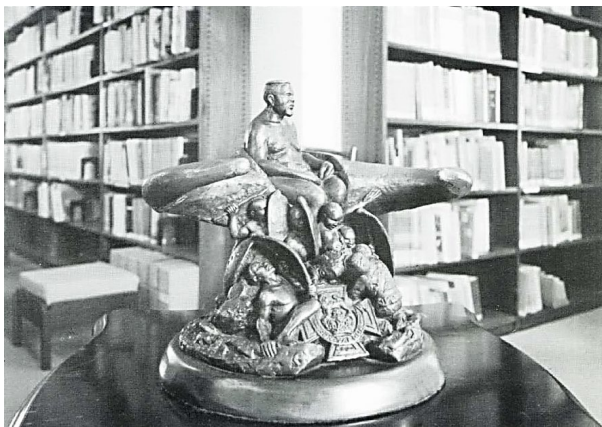
Comrie continued: “On the side of the paved area towards the town hall stands the Indaba Tree (Figure 9), where king Shaka himself held council as he consolidated the Zulu nation. In conceptualising the whole monument, Swart was mindful of how the idea of an African renaissance rests on recognising the greatnesses of the past and building on them”.<sup>12</sup>

During the 1990s, two other important politically invested public monuments by Swart came into being. The first was the collaboratively made *Peace Tree*, a six-metre-high Christmas Tree created from car tyres — then commonly used in South Africa in a brutal form of political torture and execution known as necklacing — and erected to quite some controversy in Pietermaritzburg's main square in 1991 (see page 10 of this catalogue) where both City Hall and the Tatham Art Gallery are located. In Swart's words, "We took the symbol of necklacing, and





we converted it into a goodwill symbol for the people of South Africa to show that change is going to take



place".<sup>13</sup> Eight years later, in 1999, Swart's *Isandlwana Zulu Memorial*, KwaZulu-Natal, was unveiled (Figure 10). This was a commission from the KwaZulu Monuments Council to commemorate the Zulu warriors who died in the Battle

of Isandlwana, 1879. Having already designed a figurative memorial in 1991, showing the Zulu King Cetshwayo weeping over his lost warriors (Figure 11) — this was an edition of 20 bronzes of which ten were created for the overseas market and ten sold locally — the design for this large-scale piece was based on the “isiqu” or necklace of valour that only deserving Zulu warriors were allowed to wear. In Swart's words — referencing these necklaces as “findings” of sorts and as a

type of *vade mecum*: “after a battle, the warrior carved the elements of his necklace himself. There will no doubt have been something deeply cathartic about this process. The extant necklaces are so varied, some intricately carved and others quite crude”.<sup>14</sup> The layout of the sculpture also evokes “the attack formation used by the Zulus. The left horn attacked the British soldiers while the right horn skirted the mountain to prevent the British from escaping”.<sup>15</sup> Engaging with this structure connects the visitor into the terrible dynamics of the battle in a visceral way.

Swart’s most recent public monument, unveiled on 29 May 2008, was created to mark Nelson Mandela’s last speech before his arrest in 1962. It took place at the Arya Samaj Hall in Imbali in March 1961 which is where the monument was erected. It takes the form of a voter’s cross cast from anti-corrosive corten steel which nonetheless gains a beautiful rust patina over time. The form echoes Mandela’s words: “One man, one vote, is the key to the future.”

Cultural objects at their best, be they tools, technical and communication devices, or works of art, enable us to face existential facts, including hard facts. At the same time, they proffer creative ways in which we might intervene in those facts to bring about a greater good. Here, it is worth returning to that early modern cultural object, the *vade mecum*. In terms of its layout it was not unlike a concept map depicting a web-like flow of data that presented itself as comprehensive and cohesive (thus memorable) but not necessarily

as complete. Indeed, the *vade mecum*'s many blank spaces left room for further, perhaps even divergent, details to be inserted, should this become appropriate. As such, it functioned both as a retainer of existing knowledge and, being at once structurally taut and open-ended, as a potential springboard for further thought. Or, changing metaphors, as a kind of temporal hinge between past, present, and possible future ways in which knowledge, action, and accountability might unfold. Here, Gossaert's portrait is insightful — the following comments will also harmonise with earlier remarks about Swart's Inkosi Albert Luthuli Monument. Note the hands so beautifully portrayed in the bottom-left of the painting. The sitter's right hand loosely cradles his left hand which in turn holds the precious device. But his right hand, with its pointing forefinger, is also gesturing into our space and towards a yet unknown future. This brings me back to Swart's *Findings*, which are intended to have an agency akin to the probing finger that brings such vivacity to Gossaert's painting. Certainly, my own *Findings* have such a function. I keep them in a small wooden tray on my desk and they accompany me when I am writing and thinking. I often pick them up and handle them when I am in uncertain terrain and want to find a way forward. And so, as I work on this essay, I find myself picking them up again and again, holding them, and turning them this way and that. As I do so, I sense that these strange key-like, hinge-like, spindle-like, tool-like entities are quietly setting things in motion. This is because, having passed from

Swart's hands into my own, they also remain in material, gestural, and symbolic resonance with his body of work as a whole. They partake in the same code.

Not surprisingly — and here I am thinking of that burning question of how we position ourselves in the world, temporally as well as spatially — Swart's *Findings* have also often been created with the very specific purpose of marking the passing of time and invoking reflection on what has been, and what is still to come: “For my God-daughter, Megan,” he reports, “and for three other youngsters, I made twenty-one findings each. These were individually wrapped and given to them. They could open a finding for the number of birthdays they had already accumulated and thereafter, on each birthday, they could open another one, right up until their twenty-first birthdays”.<sup>16</sup> For his own forty-eighth birthday, Swart created a large, vertically structured sculpture incorporating forty-eight findings. He called it *In my Father's House*. Birthdays, of course, are those profoundly personal moments of memorialisation, and often also of interruption, when we find ourselves considering our journeys thus far, and our journeys to come. In addition, Swart often gifts his *Findings* unpainted so that choices of colouration are left to the gift's recipient. Hayn received one such set in 2017 and in 2019 commissioned another, *Nexus: Ethan's 18 Findings, 2023* (Figure 12), named for his son. Here, Swart had also challenged Hayn to conceive of a “meaningful way” of displaying the works. Hayn's solution was a cross shaped board to



which  
eighteen metal  
plates were  
attached,  
each matching  
the size of the  
findings.  
Magnets were  
attached to

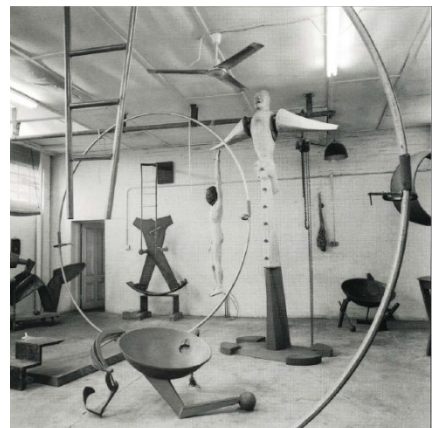
the back of each finding enabling them to be arranged and rearranged in different configurations. As such (to repeat), and on a small scale, they call for those qualities of considered engagement Swart hopes will also characterise his exhibition.

### **A forest of signs**

Swart has said that the 2025 exhibition will be focused on themes and phenomena that have been important to him throughout his life as an artist: those of portals and thresholds. For the exhibition, he is working on what he has described as “a labyrinth of portals.” As such, the exhibition and its works might also be thought of as a forest of strange signs to be interpreted, not necessarily at an immediately conceptual level, but certainly in a way that calls for bodily, intuitive, emotional, and symbolic modes of sense-making.

And indeed, as I examine a photograph of the intended layout design for the 2025 exhibition, currently hanging on Swart's studio wall (Figure 13), two strong visual associations come to mind. In the first place, I sense that the exhibition's aesthetic will be akin to that depicted in the front and back cover images of the catalogue for Swart's 1997 exhibition "Contemplation. A Body of Work by Gert Swart" (Figure 14) which was also held at the Tatham Art Gallery. Indeed, in many ways, the 2025 exhibition is in conversation with that earlier show.

These photographs present scenes of intense juxtaposition, in which works crowd, overlap, interrupt, and perhaps even agitate one another; it is difficult, when looking, to maintain a steady gaze. The photographs here were not taken in the space of the Tatham Art Gallery itself, but in what was then Swart's studio. The 2025 exhibition, as indicated, will present a similarly charged environment, a scenario that each visitor will be invited somehow to unlock. Indeed, a second scene to which Swart's layout design transported me was the mesmerising interior of the Musée Le





Secq des Tournelles in Rouen, France, which I first visited more than two decades ago, and which is devoted to the collection and display of wrought ironwork. Of note, in terms of what seems to me to be its remarkably similar composition, is the complex

configuration of a locking device fitted within the inside lid of the museum's so-called "Nuremberg" Safe (Figure 15), a seventeenth-century trunk with security features that include a false, central keyhole.

As indicated in the exhibition layout diagram, all the sculptures will be displayed together in one large space. Most of the works have been completed within the last two or three years but in some cases were begun years earlier. Indeed, two of the three key works forming what Swart calls "the central spine of the exhibition" have had a long prior life. They were displayed in the Tatham Art Gallery in 1997 and are now reappearing there reworked. The reincarnated, or resurrected, and reinstalled works in question are *Pieta: Ground Zero*, 1986-2022 (originally titled *After Michelangelo's "Pieta": A Concourse*, 1986-1996) (Figure 16, Cat 1) and *Propellor Cruciform*, 1996-2024 (Cat 3), which Swart describes as the exhibition's central piece, the



one in relation to which, in fact, all the other pieces are orientated; thus, there *is* an underlying coherence to the exhibition layout, but it is one that may become apparent only slowly and as a result of gradually becoming sensitised to the installation as a whole. Between *Pieta: Ground Zero* and *Propeller Cruciform is Yearning' (Tribute to Istine)*, 1997-2024 (Figure 17, Cat 2), which Swart began to carve shortly after the 1997 exhibition closed.

Also evident across the works for display in 2025 is a re-engagement with key symbols that were present in the 1997 exhibition: chairs, propellers, trees, boats, the abacus, oars, horns, hands, and cruciform shapes. Now as then, they are at once mysterious and compelling. This is Swart's symbolic thought in sculptural form, sharing our space in a way that is powerfully charged, personally, biblically, and politically. An exploration of just one piece, *Pieta: Ground Zero* — the first work to be encountered by visitors upon entering the exhibition space — makes this clear.

In art historical terms, “*pietà*” (which literally means “pity”) refers to works of art depicting the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of the adult Jesus on her lap. Perhaps the best-known example is the one alluded to in the first iteration of Swart's sculpture: Michelangelo's great, marble *Pietà* of 1498-1499, housed in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City. Michelangelo's piece was remarked upon at the time for its surprising stoicism. Swart's interpretation, in its earlier and in its current iterations, is likewise



devoid of the sentiment that pietàs have traditionally tended to evoke.

The sculptural core of *Pieta: Ground Zero*, which dates to 1986, is a carved coffin-shaped form with a rudder on both ends, locked in opposite directions to convey an irresolvable condition of stalemate. A set of found oars was positioned on top of it, unused. The work's chair-structure, made from welded mild steel, was added in the early 1990s. In 2019, just as the threat of the Covid 19

pandemic loomed over the world, Swart felt compelled to take the work out of storage, to repaint and rework it. This led to the oars, the tips of which now look as though saturated with blood, being somewhat repositioned. But the main addition was a substantial base on which, in Swart's words, he painted "a target-like insignia, to signify 'ground zero': the area directly below a nuclear explosion where everything gets vapourised. An area of total annihilation!"<sup>17</sup>

As I look at *Pieta: Ground Zero*, I cannot help but make connections with *Lectern*, discussed earlier, another structure in which the weight of brokenness is somehow held. In a traditional Pietà, Mary may also be interpreted as a type of lectern since she

holds Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. In Swart's *Pieta*, we know that it is above all the wounded body of South Africa that is being held. Indeed, as Swart reveals more about the history of this work, dark personal memories come to the fore. To cite Swart again: "Its genesis goes back to a sketch I made during tumultuous political times in South Africa, around 1985. The sketch was of a coffin/sarcophagus with some sort of a chess game being played out on its top surface." But the image had a deeper site of origin: "I immediately knew that this idea went even further back in my subconscious and stemmed from a double exposure photograph that my father (a fledgling policeman at the time) had taken before I was born, and that appeared in one of his photo albums." The image to which Swart is referring was an accidental image of the kind that sometimes occurred when analogue, wind-on cameras were used. And yet how politically astute it was! For the photograph happened to superimpose a group of white people "sitting around drinking, in party mode" with an image of a dead black man in a mortuary. The latter was an image that the dead man's family may have asked Swart's father to take. This did sometimes happen because at that time many black families had no recourse to photographic equipment, and this would be their only way of obtaining a memento of their loved one — and perhaps also a crucial piece of documentation. Swart speaks of this photograph having haunted him ever since he can remember and of this "true lie" of an image causing him to understand "... even in

those tender formative years of my childhood [...] that all was not well in the South Africa I was destined to grow up in”.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, reflecting on the work’s completion, he recalls surprise about the overlap of the work’s re-emergence with two important memorial days. Having consulted his Facebook page, he realised that he “had posted photos of the finished piece on South Africa’s Women’s Day, 9 August 2022, which also happened to be the seventy-seventh anniversary of the detonation of an atomic bomb over Nagasaki. The spiritual symbolism of seventy-seven,” he added, “is unlimited forgiveness!” How interesting, then, that two large horns are depicted on top of both the earlier and the later versions of Swart’s *Pieta*, in which the fact of death in its layered manifestations — including the seeming death of care, resolve and hope — is held up and held out to those who will look. In biblical symbolism, horns are symbols of strength.

### **Arise!**

The earliest piece to be exhibited in “Towards Easter Sunday 2025: Who Am I?” is *Self Portrait* from 1985 (Cat 4), another wooden chair-based sculpture, placed on or rising from a new yellowwood plinth — and here it is worth noting that the yellowwood tree is a symbol of South Africa. The form appears either to be morphing from or morphing into a landscape of tree forms that speak of the material’s



origins. But these tree forms, and the way in which the piece has been shaped overall, also recall a collection of bones, a strange skeleton. The work is positioned in a prime position within the exhibition space, at its far end opposite the entrance, from where it can survey the entire scene. What does this chair-like, tree-like, bone-like entity see?

It largely sees a period of time between 1997 and 2025, and a journey that has been turbulent personally for Swart, and in the greater context of ongoing, post-

apartheid political unrest and inequality: for Swart the two realms cannot be pulled apart. During this period — inaugurated by the 1997 Tatham exhibition and Swart's receipt of the prestigious Helgaard Steyn Award for Sculpture (1997) but then marked by a series of extreme life challenges including a sudden paralysis of his left arm followed by slow rehabilitation, and a longstanding chronic illness — Swart has said that the progression of his ideas has been slow.

I think it is fair to say that the scene laid out before *Self-Portrait*, 1987, and internalised within its very structure, is strikingly akin to that of a vision described by the great biblical prophet Ezekiel: the "Valley of Dry Bones" (Ezekiel 37: 1-14). Certainly, this scripture

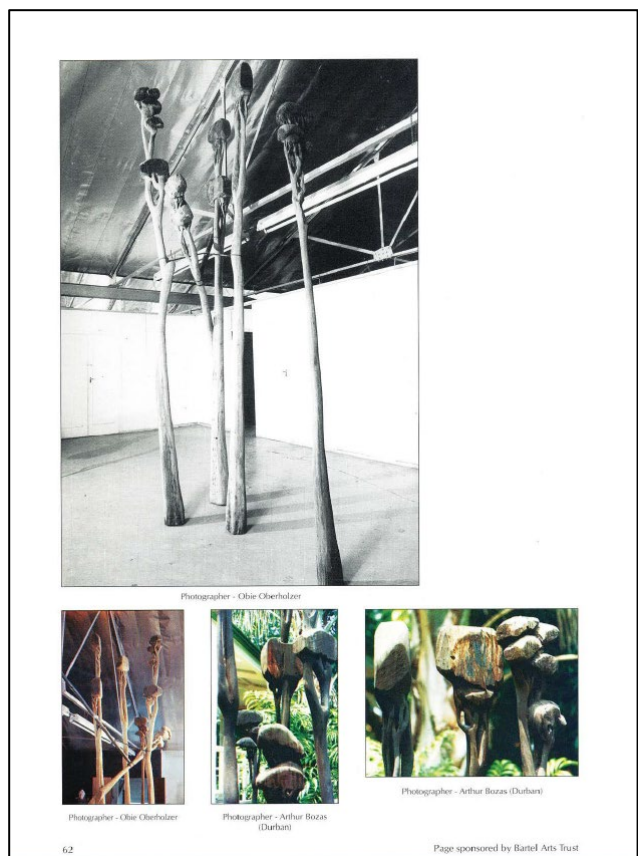
has been pressing into my thoughts as I have been visualising (what is still, for me) Swart's emerging exhibition, and his efforts in this regard. The scripture begins as follows: "The hand of the Lord [...] set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them. There were a great many of them on the surface of the valley, and they were very dry. Then He said to me, 'Son of Man, can these bones live?'" Ezekiel's reply was that only God could know the outcome. God's response was to command Ezekiel to start prophesying life over them and, indeed, they began to gather tendons, flesh, and skin, and be infused with breath so that "they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army." In his own way, Swart too was prophesying over the bones as he continued to create, tenaciously, over those difficult decades, supported, not without considerable shared hardship, by his wife Istine. Let me therefore bring this essay to a close with Swart's own words, words written, significantly, on Armistice Day 2024:

Jorella, it would be wonderful if you could use the dry bones scripture/prophecy to give impetus to my 2025 exhibition. I like the way Ezekiel has to walk back and forth through the dry bones before he is compelled to prophesy and that is what I am hoping to achieve in my exhibition. When the bones are revived, taking on form and character, they still need that vital breath (from the four winds) and, perhaps the breath

needed can be likened to the creative impulse/will (findings, portals) needed to link the individuals to the whole (vast army).

In my 1997 *Contemplation* exhibition catalogue towards the back (Figure 18), there are photos of the first tree-forms I made in 1983 while at art school. Very briefly, I wanted to take discarded pieces of wood (railway sleepers) and carve tree-forms out of them, thereby giving the wood back its former dignity. The parallel to this was that, in South Africa, the indigenous, disenfranchised peoples should be given back

their dignity. What was very disturbing about this analogy was that it was like taking a piece of human flesh and carving it into a human form! It is only the creative “breath” that can give it true meaning.<sup>19</sup>



---

<sup>1</sup> See [www.gertswart.com](http://www.gertswart.com) from where a digital copy of the first edition of the catalogue can be accessed. A second edition will be produced once the exhibition has closed; hopefully it will include responses submitted by exhibition viewers and participants.

<sup>2</sup> The Carthusian order is a closed religious order of Catholic monks and nuns, founded by Bruno of Cologne in 1084. The first Carthusian monastery in England was founded in 1181.

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Spearing, 'Introduction'. In Anonymous and A. C. Spearing, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, Penguin Classics (Kindle version), 2001 n.p.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1: 20.

<sup>5</sup> In chapter five of *The Cloud of Unknowing* we read that “just as this cloud of unknowing is above you, between you and your God, so you will need to put a cloud of forgetting beneath you, between you and everything that was ever created.” Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, edited by A. C. Spearing, Penguin Classics (Kindle version), 2001 n.p.

<sup>6</sup> See Anonymous, 'Chapter Four,' *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, edited by A. C. Spearing, Penguin Classics (Kindle version), 2001 n.p.

<sup>7</sup> See Anonymous, 'Chapter Eight,' *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, edited by A. C. Spearing, Penguin Classics (Kindle version), 2001 n.p.

<sup>8</sup> Gert Swart, WhatsApp message, 5 January 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Schaffer (editor), 'Gert Swart - Sculptor', *Michelangelo*, October 2023, 42-46, 45.



---

<sup>10</sup> For an article from the British Press regarding this call, see "Africans urged to burn pass books", Thursday 28 April 1960. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/century/1960-1969/Story/0,,105518,00.html>. Accessed 26 January 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Moray Comrie, "Notes and Queries: Luthuli Monument." In *Natalia: Journal of the Natal Society*, No 34, December 2004, 93-94, 93. Available online at [Natalia 34 Notes pp91-98 C.pdf](#) Accessed 26 January 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Moray Comrie, "Notes and Queries: Luthuli Monument." In *Natalia: Journal of the Natal Society*, No 34, December 2004, 93-94, 94. Available online at [Natalia 34 Notes pp91-98 C.pdf](#). Accessed 26 January 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Costa, 'Sculptor Gert Swart depicts the stories that went untold,' *South Africa News*, 24 February 2024. Available online at <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/saturday-star-south-africa/20240224/281728389453087> Accessed 26 January 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Gert Swart. WhatsApp message, 19 January 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Gert Swart. WhatsApp message, 19 January 2025.

<sup>16</sup> WhatsApp communication dated 4 January 2024.

<sup>17</sup> See: <https://www.gertswart.com/portfolio-collections/my-portfolio/pieta-ground-zero>. Accessed 26 January 2025.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.gertswart.com/portfolio-collections/my-portfolio/pieta-ground-zero>. Accessed 26 January 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Gert Swart. WhatsApp message, 9 November 2024.

---

## Image List

Figure 1: Screenshots, GertJorellaWalter WhatsApp Group, 2024.

Figure 2: Gert Swart, *The Dream's Insistence*, 2024, painted wood, 58 x 45 x 7 cm (also Cat 39).

Figure 3: Gert Swart, *Jorella's 9 Findings*, 2019, jelutong wood. Photo: Jorella Andrews.

Figure 4: Jan Gossaert, *Portrait of Francisco de los Cobos y Molina*, about 1530–1532, Public Domain.

Figure 5: Gert Swart, *The Lectern*, 1983, marble, metal, 143 x 112 x 64 cm. Collection: Craig Bartholomew.

Figure 6: Inkosi Albert Luthuli publicly burning his passbook, March 1960. Image courtesy of #ThrowbackThursday on X.

Figure 7: *National Day of Prayer for Rain: January 1983*, 1983, wood, metal, Perspex, wax, 133 x 82 x 60 cm. Photographer: Obie Oberholzer.

Figure 8: Gert Swart, *Inkosi Albert Luthuli Monument*, 2004, KwaDukuza. R: President Thabo Mbeki unveiling the statue on 21 August 2004.

Figure 9: Indaba Tree outside the Municipal Council Chambers, KwaDukuza, and (R) Swart's rendering of it within the structure of the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Monument.

Figure 10: Gert Swart, *Isandlwana Zulu Memorial*, KwaZulu-Natal, 1999, bronze.

---

Figure 11: Gert Swart, *Maquette Isandlwana*, 1991, bronze.

Figure 12: Gert Swart in collaboration with Walter Hayn, *Nexus: Ethan's 18 Findings*, 2023, painted and varnished wood, 54 x 34 x 7 cm.

Figure 13: Gert Swart, Diagram showing planned layout of Swart's 2025 Tatham Art Gallery exhibition.

Figure 14: Front and back cover images of the 1997 Exhibition Catalogue *Contemplation: A Body of Works by Gert Swart*.

Figure 15: The 'Nuremberg' safe, 17th century, wrought iron, cut, chisel-finished, assembled with rivets and screws and painted, German or French. Collection: Musée Le Secq des Tournelles, Rouen.

Figure 16: *Pieta: Ground Zero*, 1986-2022, Painted wood and mild steel, 168 x 168 x 62 cm (also Cat 1).

Figure 17: *Self Portrait*, 1985, Camphor wood, 154 x 18 x 23 cm (also Cat 4).

Figure 18: Page 62 of the 1997 Exhibition Catalogue *Contemplation: A Body of Works by Gert Swart*."

## CATALOGUE OF IMAGES

Compiled by Walter Hayn





1. *Pieta: Ground Zero* (1986-2022), Painted wood and mild steel, 168 x 168 x 62 cm.



2. *Yearning: Tribute to Istine*  
(1998-2024), Jarrah wood and  
yellowwood, 123 x 110 x 36 cm.





3. *Propeller Cruciform* (1996-2024), Painted wood and mild steel, 272 x 152 x 42 cm.



4. *Self Portrait* (1985),  
Camphor wood,  
154 x 18 x 23 cm.

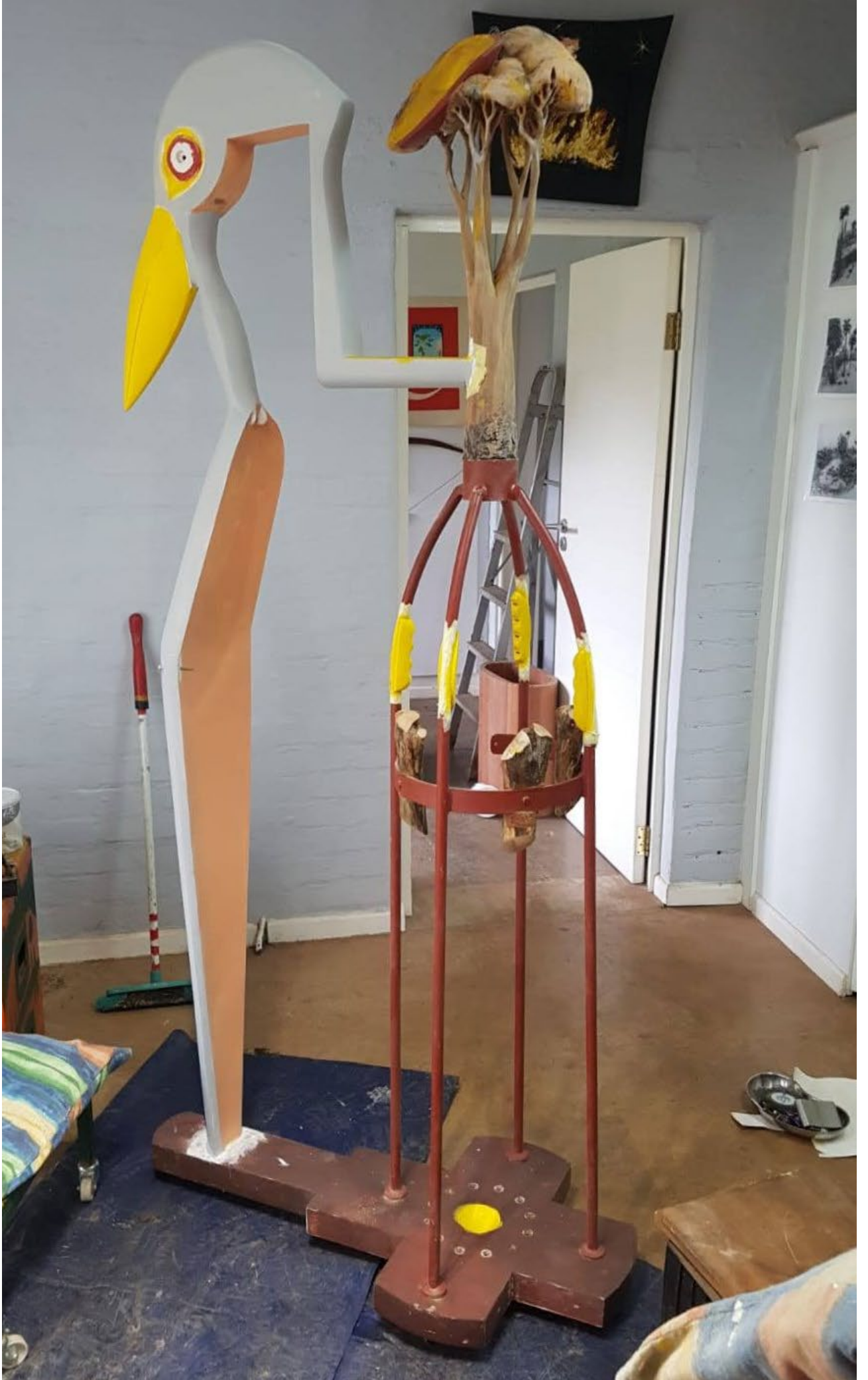


5. *The Staff* (1983-1986),  
Jarrah wood, wax and mild  
steel, 236 x 15 x 23 cm.



6. *Who am I?* (2024),  
Painted wood and mild steel.  
235 x 105 x 95 cm.





7. *Blue Note* (2025),  
Painted wood, mild steel,  
216 x 110 x 52 cm.



8. *Small Flame of Hatred*  
(Holocaust Memorial Day 27  
Jan 2022), Painted/varnished  
yellowwood and saligna,  
23 x 14 x 11 cm.



9. *Warrior's Lament* (2022),  
Painted wood  
112 x 667 x 42 cm.



10. *Expectation: A Timeline  
and Eight Chairs (2022)*,  
Painted wood, mild steel and  
magnets, 202 x 158 x 46 cm.





11. *Distressed Space Capsule:  
Where Superman's Cape  
Intersects Batman's Chair*  
(2021), Painted/varnished  
jarrah wood, 197 x 74 x 18 cm.



12. *Pollard Tree and Red  
Boots: After Rodin's Strident  
Man, circa 1900 (2024),  
Painted/varnished wood,  
225 x 108 x 72 cm.*



13. Time Longer Than Rope  
(Late 90s-2019), Painted  
wood, 208 x 82 x 36 cm.



14. *White Sculpture*  
*Remonstrating with Infinity*  
(2024), Painted wood,  
172 x 104 x 56 cm.





15. *The Forest's Cave* (2024),  
Painted wood and mild steel,  
221 x 114 x 42 cm.



16. *The Redeemed Lizard and the Caged Hourglass* (1996-2022), Painted wood and mild steel, 290 x 165 x 50 cm.



17. *Because Our Wings Are  
Our Only Nest (2024),*  
Painted wood, 89 x 50 x 8 cm.



18. *The Propeller's Transgression*  
(2024), Painted wood,  
125 x 87 x 30 cm.





19. *Atlas' Chair and Blue  
Shoes* (2023), Painted Wood,  
104 x 30 x 30 cm.



20. *The Dilemma of Twenty-One* (2024), Wood,  
212 x 122 x 49 cm.



21. *If Not For You*  
(South Africa Heritage Day 2022),  
Painted wood,  
72 x 34 x 20 cm.



22. *LASSO* (2019) (reworked),  
Painted/varnished yellowwood  
and mahogany,  
230 x 122 x 38 cm.





23. *Revisioning Humpty Dumpty:  
After Paul Nash's  
'We are Making a New World'  
1918 (2018-2022),  
Red milkwood, yellowwood and  
assegai wood, 33 x 26 x 21 cm.*



24 *The Essa's Lectern* (2006),  
Varnished wood,  
20 x 110 x 67 cm.



25. East of Eden (2023),  
Painted wood, 40 x 101 x 18 cm.



26. *The Glove* (2019) (With the Threat of Covid 19 Looming), Painted/varnished American poplar and white pear, 34 x 20 x 9 cm.





*27. Yellow Fish, Blue Interior:  
As In Before and Thereafter (2021),  
Painted wood, 94 x 35 x 14 cm.*



28. *An Ark, a Cloud, Six Yellow  
Waves and the Absence of the  
Proverbial Dove* (2024),  
Painted wood, 96 x 44 x 46 cm.



29. *'Peace, Peace' But There Is  
No Peace (2024),*  
Painted wood, 39 x 39 x 23 cm.



30. *The Initiate* (2024),  
Painted Yellowwood and Burmese  
teak, 26 x 27 x 16 cm.  
Private collection.





31. *A Tree, an Egg, Boulders  
and Stairs* (2024), White pear  
wood, 18 x 16 x 9 cm.  
Collection Dianne Hayter.



32. *Headrest: Upholding of  
Dreams (2024)*, Painted wood,  
16 x 36 x 7.5 cm.



33. *Headrest: New Morning*  
(Spring 2024), Painted wood,  
16 x 35 x 6.5 cm.



34. *The Emboldened Seven*  
(2021), Yellowwood,  
33 x 22 x 10 cm.  
Collection: Dave and Sandy  
Scheiby.





35. *The Threshold's Three  
Emissaries* (2021),  
Yellowwood, 37.5 x 12 x 6 cm.  
Collection: Dave and Sandy  
Scheiby.



36. *We Have all Dreamt of  
Flying* (2024),  
Painted Jacaranda and  
yellowwood, 33 x 30 x 14 cm.



37. *Beyond The Garden of  
Eden* (2024), Painted wood  
163 x 98 x 55 cm



38. *Watch and Pray* (2024),  
Painted wood, 48 x 48 x 36 cm.





39. *The Dream's Insistence*  
(2024), Painted wood,  
58 x 45 x 7 cm.



40. *The Owl Seat* (2024),  
Varnished jacaranda



41. *Bird's Eye Maple*  
*Sculpture (2024)*  
Maple wood, 36 x 15 x 7 cm.



42. *Contemplation*  
*Restoration* (1985),  
Balau wood, 66 x 34 cm.  
Tatham Gallery Collection



## IMAGE LIST

1. Pieta: Ground Zero (1986-2022)  
Medium: Painted wood and mild steel  
Dimensions: 168 x 168 x 62 cm
2. Yearning: Tribute to Istine (1998-2024)  
Medium: Jarrah wood and yellowwood  
Dimensions: 123 x 110 x 36 cm
3. Propeller cruciform (1996-2024)  
Medium: Painted wood and mild steel  
Dimensions: 272 x 152 x 42 cm
4. Self Portrait (1985)  
Medium: Camphor wood  
Dimensions: 154 x 18 x 23 cm
5. The Staff (1983-1986)  
Medium: Jarrah wood, wax and mild steel  
Dimensions: 236 x 15 x 23 cm
6. Who am I? (2024)  
Medium: Painted wood and mild steel  
Dimensions: 235 x 105 x 95 cm
7. Blue Note (2025)  
Medium: Painted wood, mild steel  
Dimensions: 216 x 110 x 52 cm

8. Small Flame of Hatred.

(Holocaust Memorial Day 27 Jan 2022)

Medium: Painted/varnished yellowwood and saligna

Dimensions: 23 x 14 x 11 cm

9. Warrior's Lament (2022)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 112 x 667 x 42 cm

10. Expectation: A Timeline and Eight Chairs (2022)

Medium: Painted wood, mild steel and magnets

Dimensions: 202 x 158 x 46 cm

11. Distressed Space Capsule: Where Superman's Cape  
Intersects Batman's Chair (2021)

Medium: Painted/varnished jarrah wood

Dimensions: 197 x 74 x 18 cm

12. Pollard Tree and Red Boots (2024):

After Rodin's Strident Man (circa 1900)

Medium: Painted/varnished wood

Dimensions: 225 x 108 x 72 cm

13. Time Longer Than Rope (Late 90s-2019)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 208 x 82 x 36 cm

14. White Sculpture Remonstrating with Infinity (2024)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 172 x 104 x 56 cm

15. The Forest's Cave (2024)

Medium: Painted wood and mild steel

Dimensions: 221 x 114 x 42 cm

16. The Redeemed Lizard and the Caged Hourglass (1996-2022)

Medium: Painted wood and mild steel

Dimensions: 290 x 165 x 50 cm

17. Because Our Wings Are Our Only Nest (2024)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 89 x 50 x 8 cm

18. The Propeller's Transgression (2024)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 125 x 87 x 30 cm

19. Atlas' Chair and Blue Shoes (2023)

Medium: Painted Wood

Dimensions: 104 x 30 x 30 cm

20. The Dilemma of Twenty-One (2024)

Medium: Wood

Dimensions: 212 x 122 x 49 cm

21. If Not For You (South Africa Heritage Day 2022)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 72 x 34 x 20 cm

22. LASSO (2019) (reworked)

Medium: Painted/varnished yellowwood and mahogany

Dimensions: 230 x 122 x 38 cm

23. Revisioning Humpty Dumpty: After Paul Nash's 'We are Making a New World,' 1918 (2018-2022)

Medium: Red milkwood, yellowwood and assegai wood

Dimensions: 33 x 26 x 21 cm

24 The Essa's Lectern (2006)  
Medium: Varnished wood  
Dimensions: 20 x 110 x 67 cm

25. East of Eden (2023)  
Medium: Painted wood  
Dimensions: 40 x 101 x 18 cm

26. The Glove (2019) (With the Threat of Covid 19 Looming)  
Medium: Painted/varnished American poplar and white pear  
Dimensions: 34 x 20 x 9 cm

27. Yellow Fish, Blue Interior:  
As In Before and Thereafter (2021)  
Medium: Painted wood  
Dimensions: 94 x 35 x 14 cm

28. An Ark, a Cloud, Six Yellow Waves and the  
Absence of the Proverbial Dove (2024)  
Medium: Painted wood  
Dimensions: 96 x 44 x 46 cm

29. 'Peace, Peace' But There Is No Peace (2024)  
Medium: Painted wood  
Dimensions: 39 x 39 x 23 cm

30. The Initiate (2024)  
Medium: Painted Yellowwood and Burmese teak  
Dimensions: 26 x 27 x 16 cm  
Private collection

31. A Tree, an Egg, Boulders and Stairs (2024)

Medium: White pear wood

Dimensions: 18 x 16 x 9 cm

Collection Dianne Hayter

32. Headrest: Upholding of Dreams (2024)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 16 x 36 x 7.5 cm

33. Headrest: New Morning (Spring 2024)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 16 x 35 x 6.5 cm

34. The Emboldened Seven (2021)

Medium: Yellowwood

Dimensions: 33 x 22 x 10 cm

Collection: Dave and Sandy Scheiby

35. The Threshold's Three Emissaries (2021)

Medium: Yellowwood

Dimensions: 37.5 x 12 x 6 cm

Collection: Dave and Sandy Scheiby

36. We Have all Dreamt of Flying (2024)

Medium: Painted Jacaranda and yellowwood

Dimensions: 33 x 30 x 14 cm

37. Beyond The Garden of Eden (2024)

Medium: Painted wood

Dimensions: 163 x 98 x 55 cm

38. Watch and Pray (2024)  
Medium: Painted Wood  
Dimensions: 48 x 48 x 36 cm

39. The Dream's Insistence (2024)  
Medium: Painted wood  
Dimensions: 58 x 45 x 7 cm

40. The Owl Seat (2024)  
Medium: Varnished jacaranda

41. Bird's Eye Maple Sculpture (2024)  
Medium: Maple wood  
Dimensions: 36 x 15 x 7 cm

42. Contemplation Restoration (1985)  
Medium: Balau wood  
Dimensions: 66 x 34 cm  
Collection: Tatham Gallery Collection



## BIOGRAPHY

Gert Swart's artistic career has spanned almost fifty years. Born in Durban, South Africa in 1952, he began pursuing art in 1976 in the midst of a short career in the Durban Municipality Health Department. During this period, he was exposed to the breadth of racial inequality imposed by apartheid, observing how people lived and worked across all sectors of society. His art has very often sought to address and redress the outcomes of pain and injustice inflicted by the Nationalist hegemony. In 1978, Swart converted to Christianity (he was baptized in the sea at Addington Beach opposite his place of birth), and this greatly impacted the direction his life would take, personally, artistically and politically. Between 1983 and 1987, for instance, he worked collaboratively with the non-racist Community Arts Workshop, Durban, which he co-founded. During this period, in December of 1985, he also married Istine Rodseth, who would go on to dedicate considerable energy, labour and skill to supporting Swart's career as an artist.

As the power base shifted in the foment before and after Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 and the 1994 elections, Swart was creating a body of work which exposed and commented on the



pain and hopes of those years. His landmark exhibition at the Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, in 1997, brought this body of work together. Over the last couple of decades, Swart has continued to work despite overwhelming physical-health setbacks. The exhibition "Towards Easter Sunday 2025: Who am I?" at the Tatham Gallery brings into the public view a large body of new works made predominantly during the last two years.

Swart won the prestigious Helgaard Steyn Award for Sculpture in 1997. Key public commissions include the Isandlwana Zulu Memorial, KwaZulu-Natal, commissioned by KwaZulu Monuments Council (1999), the Chief Albert Luthuli Memorial, KwaDukuza, KwaZulu-Natal (2004), and the Nelson Mandela memorial, Arya Samaj Hall, Imbali (2008).

Swart lives and works in Pietermaritzburg. He may also be found on social media: on Instagram @gert.swart65 and on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/gert.swart.50>. The website <https://www.gertswart.com/> was created in 2024 to support this exhibition.

# **A NAVIGATIONAL TOOL: EXTREME LIST-MAKING**

Entering an exhibition and being confronted with unfamiliar works of art is challenging, even for art experts. This is how it should be. Gert's exhibition is intended to be labyrinth-like, requiring navigation. You may find this technique helpful.

## **What is 'extreme list-making'?**

We all make lists for practical reasons (shopping lists, to-do lists). Extreme list-making is about documenting everything you notice (observations, impressions, thoughts, feelings, questions) when looking at an image, object, soundscape, performance — or in this case an exhibition — until fresh insights come into focus, blind-spots are exposed, or you are surprised by an unexpected perceptual shift.

## **Step One**

Having identified a specific sculpture, or a portion of the exhibition that you would like to examine more closely:

- Note down everything that comes to your attention in the form of a list. Don't over-analyse or judge. Just write down one thing after another, line after line. Sometimes, a scribble or a shape may be exactly what is required.

- Whether the process takes two minutes, ten minutes, or more, keep going until you feel you have run out of new observations.
- You might also want to take photographs (if permitted by the Gallery) or make drawings of the sculptures or portions of the exhibition that interest you, so that you can work with these images later.

## **Step Two**

- Review your list. Notice shifts from outer to inner awareness, notice repetitions and patterns, notice unexpected perceptual or conceptual shifts. Has a blind spot suddenly been exposed? You could use colour or additional marks to make connections between different parts of your list.
- Notice where and how your list sparks new ideas and/or a desire to investigate further.
- If fresh observations come to mind, just add them.
- Some or all of your observations could form the basis for a review, poem, story, or testimonial.
- In the spirit of "Scenius," referred to earlier in the catalogue, if you would like to share your responses with the artist, please email them to [gertpswart@gmail.com](mailto:gertpswart@gmail.com)

## NOTES

## NOTES

