

Cronus Complex

Since completing her Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours Degree in 1993 Jenny Nijenhuis only began exhibiting her work in 2012 at the Bag Factory in Johannesburg. She was shortlisted for the Top 3 Lizamore Mentorship the following year and is premiering her first solo exhibition at Lizamore this year.



Jenny Nijenhuis, *The Cronus Complex*

The rest, as it is often said, is history. She says, 'It finally feels like I've arrived at the right place at the right time.' She had always wanted to be an artist but she had to seek work in order to survive. She taught herself design and now runs a company with two designers and web developers that also offers marketing communication. 'It's not a big leap. From my perspective of life everything you do has to have a creative outlet,' she says. But even with this creative outlet she still yearned for the career she had always wanted: to be an artist. After a lengthy conversation with her husband some years ago now, she chose to cut back and focus on select clients, build a studio and begin to sculpt and take photographs again. She is not looking back.

Her life experience and research have brought her to some hard conclusions. She does not feel free in the world today and is keenly interested by the archetypes of the human psyche that perpetuate this lack of freedom in society. 'I just feel that the structure that we live in is so dictated and we are not made to actually feel free,' she states. In *Scarecrow*, she looks at an archetype of ownership and land possession. The scarecrow is also an indirect religious commentary because it is mounted on a cross and 'symbolically they are almost a fill in for a person and almost like a deity.' It speaks to an underlying fear at the heart of humanity's possessiveness over land as well as questioning the idea of ownership when nature's birds that freely roam and eat at leisure are forced out by scarecrows. The image she depicts is surrounded by egg-like pods that speak to the fleeting nature of ownership as even these relics now stand on fragile ground; they are no longer needed to stand as the odd gods of land.

In *The Cronus Complex*, the Titan god of destructive time who so feared usurpation that he devoured his children immediately after birth, Cronus is shown with eyes and



lips bleeding red. The solemn figure is the prototype of all-consuming power. Nijenhuis attributes her perspective to a difficult young life. She now knows this history to be part of her potent ability to embody restriction and speak to structures of power. She became aware of the images that govern society when she was in primary school. 'I went to a convent my whole school career. A very strong Catholic education and we weren't even Catholic. So I didn't always agree with how life was represented,' she says. She had many questions as a child that followed her throughout her adult life. She ruminates that perhaps that was also the reason for the large gap between completing her degree and discovering herself as an artist. She says, 'when I just had questions, I had nothing to say.'

Questions can become self-consuming. When they are about a life of unexplained pain they can eat away at someone from the inside and inflict even more suffering on the victim; from within like Cronus, who was eventually

forced to expel Zeus from his belly. For Nijenhuis, her Cronus is surrounded by lines pointing in all directions. They are as the various options open to him but he stands still like a monk of silence, bleeding quietly from his shut mouth. She has become aware that 'whatever reality you are living in can be a different one if you just change your mind'.

Even though she believes that it is 'very difficult to say that you are free,' she enacts her freedom through her art by making the choice to create alternative ways of being. Art is an 'alternative way of thinking,' she says. By physically moulding her thoughts, Nijenhuis is more aware of the choices she makes. Simply put, 'it feels like what I'm meant to be doing,' she says and breathes a sigh of relief, as though she has finally allowed herself to say that she is free. One of the questions she used to ask was: 'Is there more than one reality?' She now sculpts her own answers. **CF**



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Both exhibitions run from 6 August – 29 August

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Gallery Hours: Tues to Fri 10:00-17:30 Sat
10:00-15:30