

GOING FOR BRONZE

Sarah Richards is an established South African artist and sculptor. *InFlight* recently chatted to her to learn more about her love of art.



✕ Richards specialises in bronze sculptures, a medium she loves. “A bronze will outlive generations. It’s an investment in time. If you buy a bronze for your business, it’s a testament to the belief in your legacy. It says: ‘We are here to stay [and] you can trust us,’” she explains.

Richards always enjoyed creative pursuits, whether in the form of holiday art classes in clay sculpture or painting pictures for Father Christmas. “I always took the making of artworks very seriously. I recently found a picture of myself painting when I was about seven or eight, and you can see that I took it very seriously even then.”

Being an artist was tough in the beginning, she says. Because she loves so many aspects of creating, she found it difficult to settle on a subject matter, let alone a medium. Eventually, the decision was made – and bronze has been her medium of choice for the last 15 years.

THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

Being an artist requires one to enjoy the creative process, as well as to master the business side of it. This includes dealing with clients, developing relationships with galleries and so on. “I make the works because I want to make them. I don’t want to keep them. I choose bronze to give the clients the best. I don’t have a lot of attachment to the work I make. I love to know they have a good home to go to and that someone will love them. I make them for other people’s enjoyment. My enjoyment comes in making them.”

For Richards, there is much to be inspired by. Rather than delve into the darker aspects of life, she focuses on the world’s beauty and its inhabitants. “I am inspired by the challenge of making each work, discovering and learning through my hands, via my hands.”

BIRTHING ART

When it comes to creating her artworks, Richards says her creative process is a little chaotic. “I sometimes start with a plan – especially as a sculpture requires an armature [internal metal structure] that has to be made first,” she says. However, she invariably ends up changing it as she goes along, cutting out bits of wire if they are in the wrong places. At times a weakness such as being impatient can become part of the process, in a healthy way.

“I generally tackle a problem head-on – and I can be impatient. So, I have to redo sections or improve on them as I go, or as I understand the subject better,” she explains. “This includes getting to know someone better by creating their portrait – studying the face of someone often deceased and





beloved, being reminded of mortality, and when it comes to animals, the fact that they are all so unique, and wondering what their lives are like.”

CAST IN FIRE

Richards believes people will be “awestruck by the complexity and skills required to make a sculpture. Not just the artwork itself but the whole casting process.” It is in this where the true value of bronze lies. It’s the labour involved, the skills of several different people and the casting materials that are the costly part of the process – not the bronze itself.

She is currently working on a variety of artworks and is in the planning phases of others. This includes a pair of giraffes for a client as a gift for his wife, and a mural of a tree as a fundraising initiative for Thembelihle Primary School, a small school in Howick, KwaZulu-Natal. “I am painting the tree, and we will be selling leaves and birds for the tree to raise funds for the school. I am finishing off a half-size figure hugging her knees, and more contemporary works that use moulds from the ground to make panels and for other creations – these are a bit more experimental,” she says.

“I have several projects in different stages of experimentation and this keeps the creative juices flowing – a small element of the unknown, and a challenge.” ✕

