

Karlien van Rooyen



"Clay allows me to set aside my mind and for the body to speak. Through embodied sculpting I evoke reminders of my primal self at the 'cradle of craft', merging a need for expression and utility. My sculptures serve as a textural reminder of our truer nature, bringing raw essence into the homes of those who dare to reconnect".

– Karlien van Rooyen





Karlién van Rooyen (b. 1991, South Africa) is a Cape Town-based ceramic sculptor whose conceptual practice is deeply informed by an unconventional life shaped by science, activism, and personal transformation. Originally trained in medical science with a focus on neuroscience, she later worked as a full-time environmental activist, spending six years living in remote bush blockades alongside Indigenous communities engaged in legal resistance against mining corporations. These experiences profoundly shaped her worldview and now echo through her sculptural work.

Turning to art as a form of healing and self-expression following her departure from frontline activism, Karlién completed a degree in Contemporary Art at the University of South Australia in 2017, where she was awarded the Minter Ellison Award for Outstanding Creative Potential. In 2018, she received an International Project Grant to undertake a seven-week ceramic residency in Jingdezhen, China—the historic centre of porcelain production.

Her work, rooted in the materiality of clay, explores themes of resilience, trauma, and transformation, often drawing inspiration from wild landscapes and the tension between fragility and strength. Through sculpture, she continues to navigate the complexities of the human condition and its entanglement with the natural world.



Education

B.A. Contemporary Art – University of South Australia, 2014 – 2016

Selected Exhibitions

Clay Awards – Rust-en-Vrede Gallery, UNESCO affiliated International Academy of Ceramics (IAC), South Africa, 2024

AWC Contemporary – International Sculpture Park, Dubai, 2024

1-54 London – Somerset House, London, England, 2023

Enter Art Fair – THK Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2023

Unfold – 99 Loop Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, 2020

Shaping Things – SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, 2020

Eight Fingers Crossed – FELT Space, Adelaide, South Australia, 2019

InVivo – Worth Gallery – Fisher Jeffries Gallery, Adelaide, South Australia, 2018

Selected Group Exhibitions

Going Guerilla – Eclectica Contemporary, Cape Town, 2024

Earth Body Blood Water – Nhà Sống Project, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2022

Square – SALA Whitmore Gallery, Adelaide, South Australia, 2019

DWELL – Worth Gallery The Parade, Adelaide, South Australia, 2018

Advertiser Contemporary Art Exhibition – SALA Festival, Keith Murdoch House, Adelaide, South Australia , 2017

[Sic.] Rose – Praxis Art Space FRAN Festival, Adelaide, South Australia, 2017

Helpman Academy Exhibition – Driller Hall, Adelaide, South Australia, 2017

NEST – Urban Cow Gallery, SALA & Adelaide Fringe Festival, Adelaide, South Australia, 2016



Selected Awards

Carclew Project & Professional Development Grant, Jingdezhen, China, 2017

SALA Contemporary Art Prize Finalist, 2017

Minter Ellison Award – Emerging Female Artist With Outstanding Creative Potential, 2017

Adelaide Architecture and Design Award, University of South Australia, 2016

Trudie Alfred Bequest Scholarship for Australian Ceramics, 2016

Golden Key Honors Award, Semesters 1 & 2 for duration of UniSA degree, 2016

Linda Lou Murphy Scholarship, University of South Australia, 2014

Publications

What We're Loving, Fairlady Magazine, South Africa, 2022

Hands On, SA Living Magazine, Australia, 2017

Creative Language At Work, Adelaide Matters p22, Australia, 2017

Feature Artist, Journal of Australian Ceramics issue 56/2, 2017

Spotlight Artist #16 – Adelaide Art History Magazine, Australia, 2016

Feature Artist, Journal of Australian Ceramics, 2016

She's Artistic, Amnesty International Publication, 2015

