

The new Norval Foundation and why we should care about South African art

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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The recently opened Norval Foundation in the Cape Town suburb of Steenberg offers a proud, new public resource and new levels of excellence in the curation and display of South African and African visual art.



Norval Foundation sculpture garden (Image Supplied)

South Africa's global art legacy

Opened in April 2018, the foundation has been made possible by the donation of land and private art collection belonging to the Norval family, property magnate turned art investor Louis Norval, as well as individual and corporate benefactors. Following the model of international institutions, it is hoped the museum will shortly become financially self-sustaining via take-up of membership, patronage packages, and as a popular destination for educational, cultural, and corporate events which will enable the funding of public art programmes and ensure a legacy for South African artists in perpetuity.



Norval Foundation to provide space for research and exhibition

4 Apr 2018



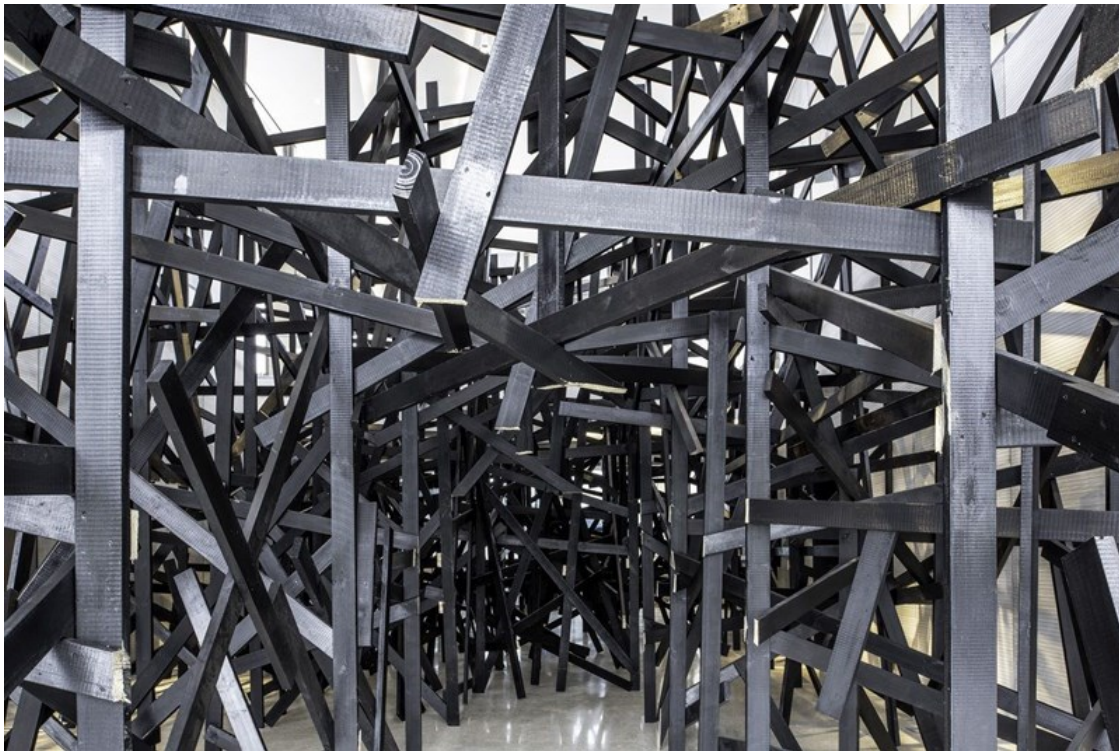
Toads before roads

Located across the road from the US Embassy, the glazed and granite-clad podium designed by DHK architects has made impressive attempts to minimise the environmental impact of the four-hectare eco-sensitive wetland site - such as Keith Kirsten's rehabilitation of the indigenous flora, tunnels constructed under the road to facilitate the migration of the area's endangered leopard toads, a grey-water purification system and solar rooftops.

The long road to art-dom

So what awaits beyond the booms, stanchions and toad-ways of the Norval entrance?

At the moment visitors to the museum navigate a scaffold of black-painted wooden latticework by fellow African artist Burundian Serge Alain Nitegeka. The labyrinthine experience is intended to act as a metaphor for the challenges of migration through life as a displaced person and set the tone for the voyage of discovery through the artistic journey.



Serge Alain Nitegeka, Structural Response III, 2018 (Image Supplied)

Our guide is former ad exec Luke de Kock. It had been as an account manager at M&C Saatchi Abel where he had worked on the branding and launch of Cape Town's other recent giant public art destination, Zeitz MOCCA, that Luke had met Elana Brundyn, who now holds the position of Norval Foundation director and how he had come to make the move from the world of corporate brands to the world of art.



Invoking debate - Q&A with Zeitz MOCAA curator Mark Coetzee

Ruth Cooper 4 Oct 2017



Art and soul

Navigating the *Pulling at Threads* exhibit, revealed examples of art intersecting with crafts such as sewing, knitting, weaving, bead and basket work by the likes of Igshaan Adams, Liza Lou, William Kentridge, and selected local, African, and international master crafters. The show is engaging, tactile, sensory, intended to make a comment on the need for antidotes to the digital and disposable and deserves as much time as we can muster to appreciate the value of the works on display.





Nick Cave, Soundsuit, 2012





Maria Nepomuceno, *Untitled*, 2016

Like the Greek myth of Ariadne, we follow these golden threads onwards to *Re/discovery and Memory* - a groundbreaking retrospective of work by South African artists and sculptors Sydney Khumalo and Ezrom Legae, alongside their friend and colleague Eduardo Villa. The retrospective, the first to be undertaken by any institution globally, offers a profound and perhaps inadvertent insight into the real value of African art in a global context.

Although frozen in bronze, the plinths and pedestals displaying Khumalo and Legae's fantastical forms are imbued with a sense of motion and emotion, texture and text, a vision of the Afrofuturism promised when they were made in Johannesburg's Polly Street Art Centre back in the 1950s under the mentorship of the likes of Cecil Skotnes and Villa himself.



Sydney Khumalo

These parallel exhibits culminate in the flagship space which has provided a fitting destination for Eduardo Villa's retrospective, set rather spectacularly against views of the surrounding landscape through 10m high glass walls. No doubt inspired by the same modernist, cubist and futurist ethic as those imparted to Khumalo and Legae by their mentor, in the end despite their breathtaking display, Villa's work comes across as what it is, the product of the mechanical and industrial ages which have shaped our modernist, urban environments, leaving its soul to be elsewhere 'rediscovered'.



Edoardo Villa

Indeed, with its themes of African spirituality and mythology, the final exhibition hall entitled *Notes on spectrality, sorcery and the spirit* continues this journey of rediscovery, delivering us a step closer towards the heart and soul of our shared South African artistic legacy.

Wake up and smell the art

In Ariadne's myth, she provided the hero with a ball of red thread to be able to find his way out of the maze and escape, after slaying the labyrinth's fearsome Minotaur guardian. Following the threads through the Norval, reminds us that perhaps what needs to be slain is the gross underfunding and undervaluing of South Africa's artistic significance - to our collective identity and to our artistic value within a global context.

After all this profundity you can enjoy a selection of local gins or other beverages in the velvety surrounds of the Skotnes Bar overlooking the landscaped walkways and sculptural installations of the gallery gardens set against the Ou Kaapse Weg and Silvermine backdrop.



The Skotnes Restaurant and Bar named after legendary South African artist and teacher Cecil Skotnes are accessible to anyone without paying gallery admission fees. We met Executive Chef Phil de Villiers, who previously led the Primal Eatery named *Eat Out's* Best Steakhouse of 2017, and sommelier Sean Peterson, who introduced us to the Norval Foundation Skotnes blend wines.

We enjoyed a languid lunch which was simultaneously beautifully presented, sustainable, substantial, delicious, and Instagrammable.

You will want to visit the Norval Foundation again and again and take along all your friends and loved ones. There is a wonderful children's play area, presided over by the playful sculpture, *Holderstebolder* by Angus Taylor, picnic areas, an amphitheatre for future cultural performances and a gift shop to die for.





Nandipha Mntambo, Ophelia





William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx, *Fire Walker*, 2009 – 2010

No expense has been spared in the establishment of this world-class celebration of art, architecture, and landscape. Under the executive directorship of Elana Brundyn and her team, as custodians of the Edoardo Villa Estate Collection, the Alexis Preller Archive, the Gerard Sekoto Foundation, and contemporary art collections, the foundation aims to create high-quality exhibitions and public programming that will broaden the understanding of the visual arts as a means of enriching lives and contributing to our communities in a profound way. Proceeds from entry fees and capital donations will be used to secure the foundation for future generations.

Visit www.norvalfoundation.org for more.

Photography by [Terry Levin](#)

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