



PRESS RELEASE: For immediate release

'Implement' by Conrad Hicks invites reflection on the role of beauty in human evolution
Solo exhibition will be accompanied by special studio tours of the artist's forge

Artist-blacksmith Conrad Hicks' upcoming solo exhibition, *Implement*, is the culmination of an intuitive quest for beauty that he traces back to the origins of humankind. His new collection of hand-forged metal furniture and sculpture ripple with a primal energy, captured in the hammered marks and archetypal forms that define his oeuvre. *Implement* will be on show at Southern Guild from 24 May until 17 July 2019.

Conrad is a deeply philosophical artist who has long immersed himself in the history of human evolution and anthropology. His work is extremely labour-intensive, necessitating a physicality through which he channels his subconscious. He often doesn't know what his forms will be until he starts working with the material and using his hands. In the process of cutting, pressing, heating, hammering and stretching metal, he discovers an archetypal language that calls to mind ancient art forms.

"I see this as a distinctly African and non-European, element of my work. African-made pieces often live in two worlds; one of ritual, meaning and tradition, and another of decoration and function, and I feel that my pieces are a lot like that as well. I see them as symbolic ceremonial objects, with a meaning that is perhaps more dominant than the function, or ultimately becomes that way," he says.

Conrad draws a correlation between his process and what drove the earliest tool-makers throughout our ancestors' history. "It is the pursuit of beauty through technology that has driven our evolution as humans. That beauty that we pursue is actually an engineering choice, intuitively made," he says.

For the artist, beauty and relevance go hand in hand. "Relevance is that embodied beauty – it is the only reservoir of permanent value. Today's society has lost the ability to perceive value," he says.

Tools hold deep resonance in the study of evolution because they are evidence of *Homo sapiens'* ability to think symbolically, which became our main evolutionary advantage.

"As soon as we started making them, we began changing existentially. We attributed value to the tools we made; we embellished and refined them. We made all these intuitive decisions

around function, and this knowledge passed from one generation to the next. The result, over time, is that our desire to make beautiful things has become innate,” Conrad says.

His sculptural practice has developed in parallel with his work as a maker of utilitarian implements such as knives, pans and blacksmithing tools. His massive studio at The Bijou, an old Art Deco cinema in Observatory, houses a vast collection of tools and machines, many of them historic, such as a 400-year-old anvil salvaged from a scrap yard.

Some of these implements will form part of an installation recreating aspects of the artist’s studio inside the gallery. In addition, running alongside *Implement* at Southern Guild will be an off-site programme of studio tours and VIP events at the artist’s forge.

Conrad studied sculpture in the 1980s and worked in the art and restoration field in London. Drawn to blacksmithing by his interest in the discipline of doing a ‘craft’, he opened his forge workshop in Cape Town in 1991. He established himself as an accomplished blacksmith, which facilitated his return to, and rediscovery of, the expressive potential that comes from forging materials of steel and copper into sculpture. He has exhibited his collectible work with Southern Guild since 2013, when he was included in the influential *Heavy Metal* exhibition at the Bronze Age Foundry in Woodstock.

Conrad has shown to international audiences at design fairs such as Design Miami/ Basel, Design Days Dubai and Collective 1 in New York. He is responsible for many major public and private commissions, with his work appearing at Ellerman House, the Fan Walk and the Cape Quarter, all in Cape Town; at Tokara Wine Farm in Stellenbosch; and in private residences in the US and Switzerland.

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For hi-res images, interview requests and any media enquiries, please email Kelly Berman at kelly@theguildgroup.co.za

About Southern Guild

Southern Guild has spearheaded the high-end design category in Africa, propelling its artist-designers to make spirited, challenging and complex work. Since being founded in 2008 as the sole gallery representing locally made limited-edition design, Southern Guild has birthed a new category for artists and designers in South Africa. Founders Trevyn and Julian McGowan are embedded in the South African cultural landscape and play integral roles in guiding, advising and mentoring designers.

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