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SMITH is excited to present Stephen Allwright's 3rd solo exhibition with the gallery titled *Broken Face Soliloquies*, following 2018's *Fluid* and 2017's *Inclusions*. The presentation continues in Allwright's signature style of bold lines and pattern making. In this notably distilled presentation, with a focus on larger format works, each work contains a single figure engaged in a heightened domestic scene. Allwright's quotidian observations are loaded with personal symbolism which creates a new visual language through which he communicates.

Allwright is primarily a self-portrait artist who unearths inner turbulence through his drawing practice. Allwright's figures bend and twist, disregarding traditional gendered forms, thereby challenging notions of hyper-masculinity. They are vast in nature and undefinable. Embedded in the space between each line is a thought, a feeling, a fear.

Allwright works from a small structure with a corrugated iron roof in Barrydale. Entering his studio is akin to entering the recesses of his mind. Versions of the Artist peer at you from the walls; each a preoccupation come to life. The starting point for Allwright is usually his face and body, however during the process of drawing underlying intimacies are unfurled. The end result renders something intimate, but separate from the self.

"When I emerge from my studio after being surrounded by the portraits I see my reflection in a large window of the adjoining house and I barely recognise it as myself. It is as if I am simultaneously both the reflection in the glass and the pictures, but also neither of them", Allwright explains.

Allwright's work exists somewhere between the self-congratulatory and self-deprecating. He wrestles with self-portraiture being an indulgent practice, while feeling the self is the most authentic starting point to express the shared human experience. Abnormally large and small hands render many of Allwright's figures clumsy and useless. There is an outward manifestation of the psyche and a rebellion against societal expectations.

“These seemingly deformed limbs and bent bodies are necessary for that picture to exist. If the hands were not large, that picture wouldn’t exist. The idea is that the picture itself leads the process and that the outcome is dependent on the demands of the drawing”, he explains.

This idea that drawing exists before the Artist is what makes Allwright’s works inverted self-portraits. He is a reflection of each of his creations. Of this he says, “I like the idea of sand paintings disappearing in the wind. I imagined that in this case when the picture is finished the Artist disappears in the wind.”

At the core of Allwright’s practice is the drawn line. He gravitates towards ink, graphite and watercolours because of the immediacy of these mediums. He often starts with a definitive line, but will deviate from the initial idea in favour of allowing his mind to wonder. He embeds this indecision and process of making the work into the lines and patterned areas. Over days it becomes more clear what will emerge from the fragments.

“I suppose the almost binary starkness of a dark line on paper may come across as a potentially violent act, but I see it as a joyful act. A decision. It is in a sense an affirmation or distillation of a what was previously a mere notion. The repetitive patterns additionally offer an archive of thoughts I have while making them”, he says.

*Broken Face Soliloquies* grapples with that which has changed and which has stayed constant. The natural aging process changes our bodies and how we physically move through the world. Joints ache and eyes become weary. Over the same time we collect memories and phobias along the way which too change how we navigate mental and physical space. What stays constant? *Broken face soliloquies* questions where the self exists in between the physical and mental baggage, and engages the part of the Artist that has stayed constant throughout metaphysical spaces.

In the process of making these works, Allwright probed the dimensions and parameters of this “constant”. Allwright imagines that the part of him that stays constant exists outside of himself and acts as a sort of emissary at best, and alter-ego at worst.

“I imagined that in this body of work I was trying to assassinate myself but in reality it was merely the case of grappling with how to speak, albeit visually, about how my thoughts and preoccupations were washing over me,” says Allwright.

*Broken Face soliloquies* ultimately uncovers an openness that exists outside of the corporeal self, and questions our relationships with the essence of existence and memory. While the works start as self-portraits, through the process of making it diverges into a multiplicity of thought.

*Broken Face Soliloquies* runs from 20 February until 20 March 2020. For press enquiries and to request further material, please contact Jana Terblanche at [jana@smithstudio.co.za](mailto:jana@smithstudio.co.za).

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## Allwright, Stephen

Stephen John Allwright was born in Prince Albert in the Great Karoo in 1969. He received a Bachelor of Social Science (economics and politics) degree from the University of Cape Town with honours in Economics. Stephen is a self-taught artist and has been practising since 1998. He currently lives and works in Barrydale.

Allwright began painting in earnest after leaving Cape Town to spend two years in near complete isolation in Die Hel, a remote village in the Swartberg Mountains near his birthplace, Prince Albert. Since then he has been prolific, and has exhibited at the Tyburn Gallery in London and at SMITH in Cape Town.

In 2017, SMITH had the distinct pleasure of exhibiting over 60 works by the exceptional fine artist. Now living and working in Barrydale with his wife and young son, Allwright has refined an uncompromisingly honest and unmistakable style that is at times erotic and even violent but more often heart wrenchingly tender. The work is a form of self-portraiture, although inverted: with the unfolding image as his guide, Allwright attempts to distill and decipher his impulsive responses to the manifest world by creating what he calls “an emblematic shorthand”.

“I usually meditate on a particular idea that has interested me while I walk with my dogs. The sound of my footfalls, my breathing and the dogs’ panting creates a rhythm that I try to include in a work. The degree to which I can achieve ‘accuracy’ through this process - including the context in which the process is played out - is reflected in the ability of said work to become a satisfactory repository, and thus a trigger, of a particular state of mind.”

For subject material, Allwright looks no further than his immediate vicinity. There is his own body, that of his wife, his dogs and the odd acquaintance who might cross his path. These figures are contorted, combined, mutated and gently abstracted to either harmonious or

jarring effect. “I inevitably insinuate myself into this process and become integrated within the emerging forms.”

Allwright works principally in ink, most often black on paper or Fabriano. There are other media frequently in Allwright’s studio - watercolour, pencil and tea among them - but his absorption with ink is profound and prodigious. “It feels quite close to the familiar physical act of writing. Also, I find the smell and the ritual in preparing to use it comforting.”

Seeking a more fluid means of working, Allwright customises the nibs of his pens to hold and deliver more ink than they are intended to, which permits him to achieve lengthier lines in one movement. He often holds his breath while completing a line.

“Ink forces me to commit to a particular drawing. A single sweep of the pen encompasses a distinct passage from one point to another. I have been using pen and ink predominately of late because the practice of making pictures in this medium has filtered into the way I allow a thought or emotion to emerge in my mind.”

#### Solo Exhibitions

2020 *Broken Face Soliloquies*, SMITH, Cape Town

2018 *Fluid*, SMITH, Cape Town

2017 *Inclusions*, SMITH, Cape Town

2015 *Broken English*, Tyburn Gallery, London.

#### Group Shows

2019 *Rendezvous II*, SMITH, Cape Town

2019 *Emphatic Wispers*, SMITH, Cape Town

2018 *Close Encounters*, SMITH, Cape Town

2017 *Salad*, SMITH, Cape Town

2017 *Out of Nowhere*, SMITH, Cape Town

2015 *Joint show with Wilhelm Saayman*, Luvey ‘n Rose, Cape Town

## Art Fairs

2020 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, SMITH, Cape Town

2019 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, SMITH, Cape Town

2018 FNB Joburg Art Fair, SMITH, Johannesburg

2018 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, SMITH, Cape Town

2017 FNB Joburg Art Fair, SMITH, Johannesburg

2015 'That Art Fair', Cape Town.

2013 Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town.



Stephen Allwright

**Broken face soliloquy**, 2020

Graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

134 x 105 cm

42,000.00 ZAR





Stephen Allwright

**Fan and Flowers**, 2020

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

135 x 125 cm

42,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Lamp and smoking figure, 2020**

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

135 x 109 cm

42,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Receiver with suspenders, 2020**

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

137 x 107 cm

42,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Dark portrait**, 2020

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

132 x 122 cm

44,000.00 ZAR

All prices exclude VAT



Stephen Allwright

**Fishbowl interior**, 2020

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

135 x 124 cm

42,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Vest, Stockings and Coir Mat, 2020**

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

137 x 121 cm

42,000.00 ZAR





Stephen Allwright

**To do with hands**, 2020

Ink and watercolour on Fabriano paper

79 x 59 cm

20,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright  
**Fan and proteas**, 2019  
Graphite on Fabriano  
55 x 76 cm  
17,500.00 ZAR





Stephen Allwright

**Flower tattoo**, 2020

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

92 x 68 cm

22,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Faux rapture**, 2020

Graphite and watercolour on Fabriano paper

79 x 60 cm

19,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Dressing with bed**, 2019

Graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

51 x 36 cm

15,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Small hand self-portrait, 2019**

Ink and watercolour on Canson paper

43 x 33 cm

Unframed

13,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Large hand self-portrait, 2019**

Graphite and watercolour on Fabriano paper

30 x 34 cm

10,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Coir mat couple with fan**, 2019

Ink, graphite and watercolour on Canson paper

31 x 28 cm

9,000.00 ZAR





Stephen Allwright

**X**, 2019

Watercolour on paper

23 x 34 cm

8,000.00 ZAR



Stephen Allwright

**Dressing with fan**, 2019

Ink, watercolour and graphite on Canson paper

36 x 28 cm

10,000.00 ZAR





Stephen Allwright

**Floral vest**, 2019

Graphite and watercolour on Fabriano paper,

49 x 26 cm

13,000.00 ZAR

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