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'NOO-NOO SERIES'

Offloading your waste need not be painful

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BLACK Friday didn't divide people. Nevertheless this American imported consumerist tradition, where prices are slashed after Thanksgiving to ignite a shopping frenzy, did prompt some discussion if not a few public rejections of it in South Africa last week. This isn't surprising in country where privilege remains a hot potato and extreme poverty a growing problem. Mindless consumerism carries extra baggage here. Not only psychic or political baggage but as the artist Mark Rautenbach discovered physical too.

Like many eco-green-friendly driven Capetonians, Rautenbach had sought to do his bit by recycling his waste. No doubt his glass, plastic and paper waste found its way to recycling depots. Despite this, he was still left with excess waste that couldn't be processed as it didn't neatly fall into any of these categories - think of textile matter, tins, batteries, the list goes on. This weighed on him greatly - it was the barrier to completely clearing his consumerist conscience. His solution was to remake his waste, recycle or repurpose it you could say into art.

On the face of it there is nothing novel to this approach. Artists on the continent are known for working with waste materials. The wide-held perception in the West is that they do so because they don't have access to traditional materials or art education. If you look a little closer at the work of those artists, like El Antasui, the Ghanian who creates fantastic glimmering carpets from bottle tops, disused materials are chosen because they carry political weight as they embody relations between the West and Africa. In transforming bottle tops from liquor bottles made by a European company into art for Europeans to consume, Antasui reverses the relationship and the historically established 'trade' route between the two continents.

Rautenbach's art, currently showing at Ebony/Curated's *What's the Matter?* group exhibition, is also concerned with 'trade' but given his privilege and position in society he is more interested in how he is complicit and how to overcome this - can it be?

In this way his art is centered on confronting privilege and the result is unexpected, though, of course, you do have to ask: what could be result of this form of self-reflexivity?

The abstract sculptures made from his



'WHAT'S THE MATTER': Mark Rautenbach turns his 'unprocessable' waste into abstract sculptures dubbed *Noo-Noos*.

pieces are glued onto laminated corrugated cardboard; deconstructed boxes from a recycling depot one block from my studio."

Form, colour and the compositional or physical relationship between these abstract forms made from Rautenbach's waste guide his process, which is why the end result is so visually compelling. In this way the act of confronting privilege becomes a constructive process rather than a destructive one as something beautiful emerges from it. This justifies doing it and continuing with it.

held tightly in place and concealed from the naked eye. Nevertheless they are on display and via all the devices, like the stands and glass cloches covering them, they invite our gaze and are created for it. It is a wonderful contradiction.

The *Noo-noo* series on show at Ebony/Curated's *What's the Matter?*, which includes work by artists also working with waste materials such as Patrick Bongoy and Francois Knoetze, is complemented by an extraordinary installation by Rautenbach poetically titled

waste are visually compelling and are displayed under glass cloches.

They are interesting 'specimens' for sure; colourful shapes bound by threads into works that Rautenbach dubs Noo-Noos.

"A noonoo is an affectionate South African term for an insect/creature," says Rautenbach.

His process of transformation involves simply compressing his waste into shapes that are then tightly bound by different salvaged threads from a haberdasher store. Almost everything surrounding, propping up the Noo-noos consists of salvaged material.

"Their stands are made from pieces of linoleum, which have been shaped by the sea, and wash up on Moullie point Beach. These

There is a great political message literally bound to these Noo-noos, however, these 'specimens' aren't simply a manifestation of confronting privilege. He thinks of his waste as representing all the uncomfortable emotions and compulsions that are hard to process.

"Like jealousy or greed; you have to confront them, but where do you put them, how do you reconcile with them?" he asks

Investing his art with these 'unwanted' emotions and compulsions is liberating.

"I give them over to other people to deal with," he says, laughing.

Bound tightly by threads there is a sense that these feelings and conditions he is releasing into the world are repressed – literally

Sound of One Wing Flapping. It presents layers of suspended torn materials (waste products). It is a visually complex work that has to be seen - a bit like Rautenbach's installation of butterflies made from burnt materials that adorn a wall at the newly opened Short-market Club.

Rautenbach is an artist worth keeping an eye on; he has gone a little under the radar, as has the Ebony/Curated Gallery, which has produced a very tightly curated and interesting show. They may only be a small gallery but curatorially speaking they are punching their weight above some of the larger galleries at the moment.

● *Rautenbach shows at Ebony/Curated's What's the Matter? until December 23*