



JENNY NIJENHUIS

playing by the rules

solo exhibition

21.05.22 - 12.07.22

the firestation, rosebank

Sculptor and installation artist Jenny Nijenhuis highlights issues of isolation, vulnerability, manipulation, and gender in her latest exhibition *Playing by the Rules*.

The exhibition consists of seven half life-size bronze sculptures of children and one installation piece spelling out the words "MORE OR LESS" in over-sized blue and pink wooden toy blocks.

A deliberate shift in scale makes the play blocks bigger than the children and conveys that this is a constructed reality. The bronzes have specific postures and regalia which tell individual stories about what is being represented.

Continuing an exploration of identity through figurative sculpture her observations draw on how you come to accept who you are or rather who you have identified with being and how this is influenced by upbringing.

Playing by the Rules looks at how children are typecast into gender roles that impose behaviour depending on whether the child is a girl or a boy. Nijenhuis points out that we are exposed to perspectives and experiences which tell us that boys and men are more, and that girls and women are less.

Hence pejorative sayings such as doing things "like a girl" or "be a man" or "mommy's boy" or "daddy's girl". The underlying message being that to truly be a man you should not in any way be like a girl because doing something like a girl is just not good enough. These are some of the titles of the works.

Her practice questions beliefs which lead to stereotypical behaviour patterns. Belief systems which keep us trapped in binary opposition and acts which cast us in conformity or complacency and result in lonely crowds and the radical absence of freedom.

Nijenhuis reflects on the possibility of (for a moment) throwing out the rules. All those conditioned ways of being accepted by you and me, and everyone, in some form or another, as undeniable truth. Truths so deep and passed on to us with so much love, and belief and unquestioned acceptance that we perpetuate a cycle of limitation.

A cycle we are taught we MUST adhere to based on the roles believed to be intrinsic to our born identity.

A cycle so containing that we slowly, lesson by lesson, learn to give up on our own knowing and accept that maybe what we are being told is true - and through the immense force of the accepted rule, we succumb.

We become contained, we stop believing that we can do anything, we don't believe in ourselves, and we live in fear. Fear passed on through our families, our religions, our schools, our culture, our governments, and eventually ourselves.

She asks, "what happens though when you have a gut knowing that what you're being told is undisputable – IS NOT?"

"And yet you still feel powerless in the face of it all."

"I remember looking at the world around me as a little girl and thinking how crazy it seemed, that things were somehow not quite right with the world and in the way we live. I still feel this way, the difference now is that I believe myself and I feel I have it within me to create change."

For Nijenhuis an overarching objective in her practice is to point out connections between imposed behaviour and violence. She says that violence comes from what boys learn about what it means to "be a man" and what girls learn about what it means "to be a woman".

Some works are clear in what they depict, like the piece titled "Be a Man" which presents a four-year-old little boy in boxing gloves with the top of his head transforming into a mouse. The sculpture represents how boys are taught to be a man or mouse, not to be sissies, they are taught to suppress their emotions and that they must fight to be strong, to be a man.

The work titled "Sit Like a Lady" depicts a little girl of the same age sitting with her legs open and her hands under her skirt. Girls are told how they should behave in order to be a lady and not do anything which might be seen as evocative. Girls are taught to suppress their sexuality and become disconnected and inaccessible.

Other works are less straight forward and even have conflicting ideas in what is being represented.

Nijenhuis' has deliberately used bronze, an alloy of copper with lesser amounts of zinc, tin, or lead. Bronze is durable and expensive; it is difficult to destroy and has a long history as the medium of choice in monumental public sculpture. Public sculpture is most often constructed to reinforce dominant ideology, it is politicised, and usually carries a message which is intrinsically violent by what it excludes or represents. Look at who or what is being represented and what it stands for.

Bronze has a lasting permanence, both in the properties of the material itself and in what is conveyed through the material which says that this is an important thing. Nijenhuis uses bronze with the intention of bringing some of these apparently inherent conventions into play by representing young children in the style of monumental public sculpture to represent stereotypical rules.

Replaying a seminal theme, the artist aims to show us how our hostile, divided and sometimes deadlocked society could be unbuttoned.

Jenny Nijenhuis was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1969 and obtained her BAFA from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1993.

Having worked in corporate marketing and running her own communications agency until 2018, she returned to her art practice part-time in 2012 working in sculpture and installation.

Years spent in communications combined with an on-going drive to understand human identity and how this is influenced by religious, political, and societal dogma, has led to her current artistic exploration.

Nijenhuis was invited to Cornell University in New York in 2019 to present the Keynote address at an event on the empowerment of women around the world. Nijenhuis is a finalist in the 2017 Sasol New Signatures art competition.

In 2016 Nijenhuis created SA's Dirty Laundry, an installation bringing awareness to the issue of rape in South Africa by hanging 3600 pairs of used panties on washing lines across the streets of Johannesburg. Nijenhuis co-curated her first group show at SoMa Art + Space titled The Things We Do for Love as part of this artistic intervention. In 2015 Nijenhuis was a PPC Imaginarium finalist and a Lovell Tranyr Art Trophy finalist in 2014.

Nijenhuis has participated in various group exhibitions in South Africa and her sculpture has been bought by private collectors through galleries and directly.



Be A Man
2022
Bronze
52cm x 19cm x 10cm
Edition 1 of 10

R 46 000-00







Daddy's Little Girl
2022
Bronze
45cm x 15cm x 14cm
Edition 2 of 10

R 41 075-00







Fly Girl
2022
Bronze
54cm x 16cm x 38cm
Edition 2 of 10

R 73 930-00







Fly Boy
2021
Bronze
50cm x 21.5cm x 14.5cm
Edition 1 of 10

R 46 000-00







Like A Girl
2021
Bronze
50cm x 21.5cm x 14.5cm
Edition 1 of 10

R 41 075-00







Mommy's Little Boy
2021
Bronze
50cm x 17cm x 13cm
Edition 1 of 10

R 41 075-00







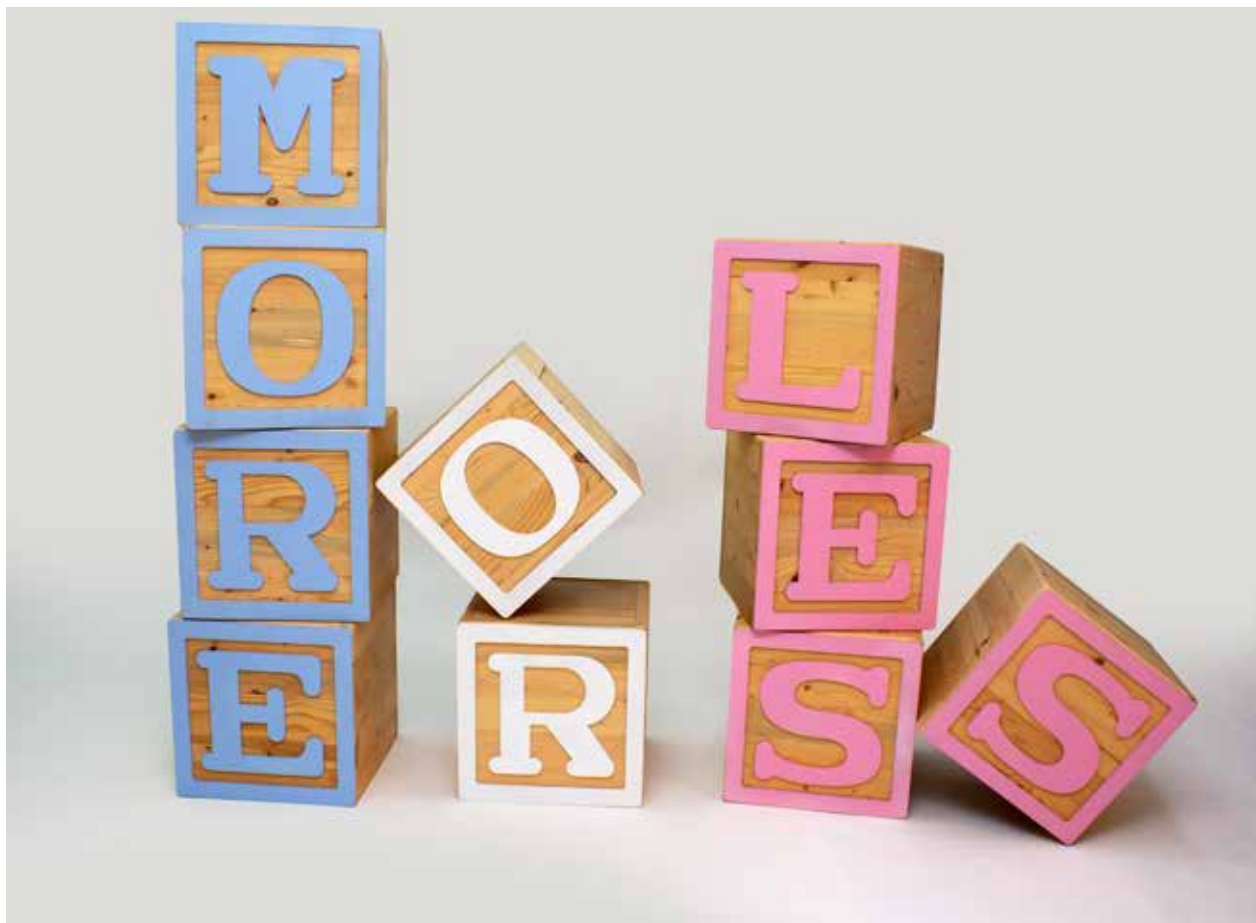
Sit Like a Lady
2022
Bronze
30cm x 25cm x 20cm
Edition 1 of 10

R 41 075-00









More or Less

2022

Wood, laser cut MDF, paint and sealer

40cm x 40cm x 41.5cm x 10 blocks

R 44 085-00



Plinths are optional and available for each work

Large white pedestal

R 1 955-00

Wooden block base

R 805-00

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