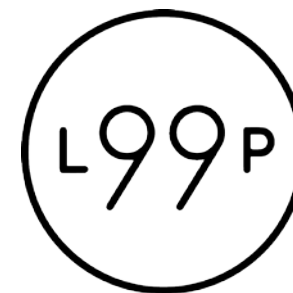




ADRIAAN DIEDERICKS

CHRISTENED SHIPS





**99 LOOP Gallery**

*99 Loop St | Cape Town | 8001*

*[www.99loop.co.za](http://www.99loop.co.za)*

## ALLEGORICAL WEIGHT: ADRIAAN DIEDERICKS’S CHRISTENED SHIPS

*Christened Ships* is a particularly significant body of work in sculptor’s Adriaan Diedericks’s greater oeuvre, because it marks the point where the artist’s inclination towards mythologizing reaches a new level of sophistication and really comes into its own. The motif of men and ships cropped up occasionally in Diedericks’s prior work – *Figurehead Disposition I* from 2013 for instance – but here it is fleshed out through the course of an entire exhibition to generate an incisive reflection on masculinity, colonial/patriarchal drives, and stoic resilience.

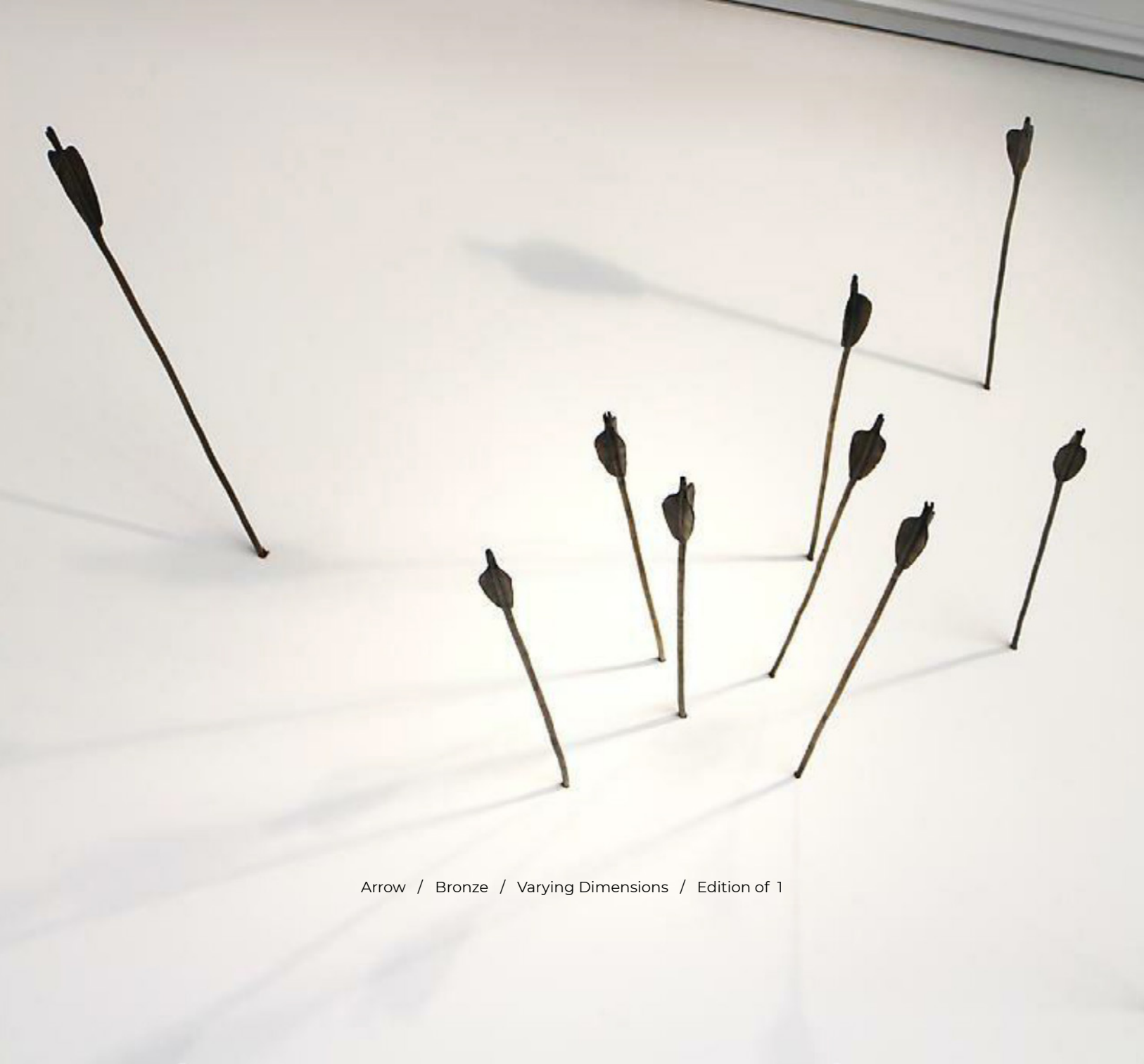
What makes Diedericks’s approach to generating internal mythology particularly successful is his use of allegory, akin to the definition offered by American postmodernist art critic Craig Owens. Viewing the fundamental impulses of postmodern allegory as “a conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present”, Owens suggests that:

Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete – an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin...Here the works of man are reabsorbed into the landscape, ruins

stand for history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay; a progressive distancing from origin.

Diedericks’s work is allegorical qua-Owens in the sense that it adopts the imagery and stylistic mannerism of, primarily, Greek classical sculpture with the intent of locating fresh and reinvigorating ways of reading these works in the contemporary moment. It is these signs and symbols that contribute to an accumulated sense of internal mythology in Diedericks’s work, where a sculpture such as *Corpus* simultaneously conveys ideas of Christ/crucifixion, South Africa’s fraught history of colonialism, and Portuguese myths of *Adamastor* (which incidentally incorporated a similar act of allegorising Greek mythology on the part of Luís de Camões).

This is an idea that the title of this body of work very astutely expresses through the double meaning of *Christened Ships*. Conventionally, the idea of christening a ship would relate to a launching ceremony, where one might break a bottle of champagne over the bow (for instance). In a work such as *Corpus* however, there is an obvious “Christ-ening” of the ships



Arrow / Bronze / Varying Dimensions / Edition of 1

through the parallels between Diedericks’s nude male figure affixed to a mast, and Christ upon the cross.

The point here, I think, is to emphasize the irrevocable connection between colonial and missionary expansion in Africa, and the fraught legacies that this history has left upon the present. Which is of course not to say that the works are an attack on religion, but rather to highlight a parallel legacy of misuse in the name of oppression and domination (lest we forget, apartheid was supposedly in line with a warped distortion of religious doctrine).

Narratives of progress, exploration, and heroism frequently have a flipside of oppressive power dynamics and exploitation. To an extent, this underbelly is what Diedericks is alluding to in the *Burdened Man* sculptures, depicting a group of male figures carrying an overturned boat.

While there is often a sense of exhilaration and possibility in Diedericks’s human/ship entities, the ships just as frequently represent something that binds, burdens and outright punishes his figures. *Exhale*, a precursor to this

body of work from 2016, captures both of these contradictory traits within the some sculpture.

In the infamous soliloquy from Act III of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the Danish prince pondered whether “‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them.” Without delving too far into its source implications, the key point of Hamlet’s heady monologue was to lament the difficulty in locating the correct course of action when one is torn between continuing to adversely suffer under something or to risk taking action at great cost.

This dilemma taps directly into the themes of torment and stoicism which recur throughout this body of work, and Diedericks in fact quite literally renders the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” in an installation of a flurry of bronze arrow shafts, each simply entitled Arrow. Recalling the work of an artist such as Sanell Aggenbach, these arrows shower the gallery space, a visual manifestation of the perpetual adversity to which a figure like the one in Diedericks’s *Oblivion* has already succumbed.

That these themes in Diedericks’s work are simultaneously timeless and Sisyphean, and rooted in a specific past and present is what accounts for their allegorical nature. Walter Benjamin once described the idea of allegory as the ‘face of death’ (*facies hippocratica*); an idea fully encompassed and personified by the companion bronzes *Transfiguration* and *Transfiguration (Bust)*.

According to Benjamin:

In allegory, the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, had been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death’s head.

The stern countenance of the *Transfiguration* works perfectly encapsulates this exact sense of petrification as the figures’ weathered forms seemingly fossilise into the wooden bow of a ship. Reprising the themes of *Corpus*, Diedericks again contrasts Christ imagery with

the ships. Rather than radiance however, the transfiguration here serves to emphasize the artist’s metaphorical connection between ships and the deplorable impulses that entwine patriarchy, colonialism and oppression.

If this all seems too weighty and Nietzschean, Diedericks offers a wonderful moment of relief in the aptly titled *Huh*. Seemingly depicting a man surrendering to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in a despondent “I give up!” gesture, *Huh* is quite possibly one of the burdened men, suddenly relieved of his load (*Adamastor*’s winds may have ‘relocated’ his fellow burdened men and their boat moments earlier). One of the strongest qualities of Adriaan Diedericks’s exhibitions are the contrasts, be they of scale, formal resolution or, in this case, tone. While being a comparatively humble work, *Huh* functions in a similar way to Eric Idle’s famous musical conclusion to Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, an astute tonic to the allegorical weight which infuses the rest of *Christened Ships*.





Transfiguration (Bust) / Bronze on Granite / 590 x 310 x 400 mm / Edition of 8



Burdened Man I (Maquette) / Bronze on Granite / 180 x 850 x 300 mm / Edition of 12





Oblivion (Maquette) / Bronze on Granite / 400 x 330 x 235 mm / Edition of 12





Burdened Man II (Maquette) / Bronze on Granite / 150 x 110 x 280 mm / Edition of 12

Oblivion / Bronze / 1320 x 600 x 600 mm / Edition of 12







Burdened Man I (Large) / Bronze / 680 x 1160 x 400 mm / Edition of 12





Ship I / Bronze on Granite / 350 x 400 x 110 mm / Edition of 1 / Each unique







Transfiguration / Bronze on Steel / 2200 x 1200 x 850 mm / Edition of 6



Truncated IV / Bronze / 340 x 220 x 120 mm / Edition of 12



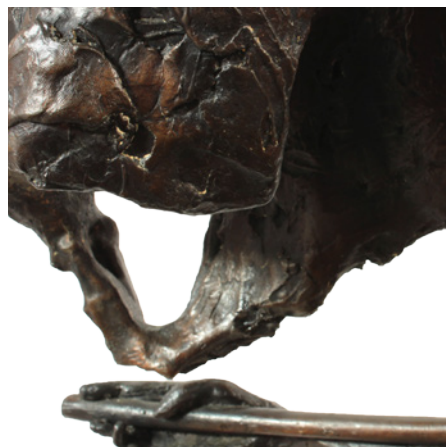
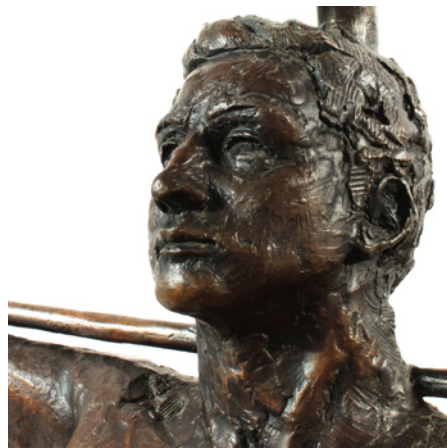


Transfiguration Obsolete / Bronze / 430 x 170 x 440 mm / Edition of 12



Upheld Conviction / Bronze on Crystal / 510 x 120 x 100 mm / Edition of 12





Corpus / Bronze on Steel / 1720 x 900 x 250 mm / Edition of 12





Floating Fragment / Bronze / 400 x 130 x 100 mm / Edition of 1

Tittle Tattle / Bronze / 80 x 30 x 40 mm / Edition of 1







Huh / Bronze on Granite / 515 x 440 x 140 mm / Edition of 12





Hideous Phantom of Unearthly Pallor I / Digital Photographic Print / 608 x 845 mm (Framed) / Edition of 5



Hideous Phantom of Unearthly Pallor II / Digital Photographic Print / 608 x 845 mm (Framed) / Edition of 5



# CIRRICULUM VITAE

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019	<i>Continuum, Art in the Yard Gallery, Franschhoek</i>
2017	<i>Perceptive Resonance, Art in the Yard Gallery, Franschhoek</i>
2017	<i>Christened Ships, Solo Exhibition, 99 LOOP Gallery, Cape Town</i>
2016	<i>Traveling Bodies, Rust and Vrede Gallery, Durbanville</i>
2015	<i>Seraph, Jan Royce Gallery, Cape Town</i>
2015	<i>Binne Buiteland, Gallery on Levisieur, Bloemfontein</i>
2015	<i>as is, so was, Grande Provence, Franschhoek</i>

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019	<i>Woordfees (L’acte Final Scene one: Louis &amp; Friends), GUS Gallery, Stellenbosch</i>
2018	<i>Cape Town Art Fair, 99 LOOP Gallery, Cape Town</i>
2017	<i>Best-of-4 Künstelersymposien, Villa Böhm, Germany</i>
2017	<i>Hermanus FynArts Festival Artist</i>
2016	<i>Beyond the Limit, St Lorient Rooftop Gallery, Pretoria</i>
2016	<i>Ledeganck Advocatenkantoor, Antwerp, Belgium</i>
2016	<i>Lords of Winter, Cavalli Gallery, Somerset West</i>
2016	<i>CANSA Exhibition, Arts Association of Pretoria</i>
2016	<i>KKNK (Huisgenoot Centenary Exhibition)</i>
2016	<i>Cape Town Art Fair, 99 LOOP Gallery, Cape Town</i>
2015	<i>1.99 Group Exhibition, 99 LOOP Gallery, Cape Town</i>
2015	<i>Winter, Everard Read, Cape Town</i>
2015	<i>Die Burger 100 Eeufees, Headoffice, [Selected works]</i>
2015	<i>BYOID, Knysna Fine Art, Knysna</i>
2015	<i>Fear&amp;Loss - The Industrial Karoo, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria</i>
2014	<i>Art Fair Cologne, L’Art Industriel Gallery, Germany</i>
2014	<i>Art Fair Strasbourg, L’Art Industriel Gallery, France</i>
2014	<i>Summer Season Exhibition, Everard Read Cape Town, Cape Town</i>
2013	<i>Cape Town Art Fair, Represented at EBONY/CURATED</i>

## SELECTED AUCTIONS

2019	<i>MAD Charity, Silapha Art Auction 2019, Somerset West</i>
2018	<i>MAD Charity, Phakama UK Benefit, London</i>
2018	<i>ABSA Champagne Festival Art Auction, Johannesburg</i>
2018	<i>Art Angels, Ellerman House, Bantry Bay</i>
2017	<i>Art Angels, Ellerman House, Bantry Bay</i>
2017	<i>MAD Charity, United Kingdom</i>
2017	<i>MAD Charity, Annual USA Golf Classic Auction, US</i>
2016	<i>MAD Charity, United Kingdom</i>
2016	<i>Art Angels, Ellerman House, Bantry Bay</i>
2016	<i>Chefs Who Share, Johannesburg</i>
2015	<i>Art Angels, Ellerman House, Bantry Bay</i>

## COLLECTIONS

2018	<i>Quoin Rock Wine Estate, Stellenbosch</i>
2018	<i>Bartinney Wine Estate, Stellenbosch</i>
2016	<i>NAC VIP Lounge, Lanseria Airport, [Launch 2017]</i>
2015	<i>Cavalli Wine &amp; Stud Farm, Somerset West</i>
2014	<i>Art Association of Pretoria, Pretoria</i>
2013	<i>PPC, Private Collection, Johannesburg</i>

## PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

*South Africa, England, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Australia, United States of America, Canada, Barbados*

## PUBLIC SCUTLPTURE EXHIBITIONS

2017	<i>The Man in the Stone, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany</i>
2017	<i>Torso I (Large), Art Fair Franschhoek</i>
2015	<i>Sculptures on the Cliffs, Hermanus</i>
2015	<i>Echo of Derogation l Neerhalende Weerklank, REFLECTIONS: Public Sculptures in Stellenbosch III</i>
2014	<i>I have to go see a man about a Horse, KOMSit: Stellenbosch Public Sculpture III</i>
2013	<i>Atilla (Ascending), Metalwork: Public Sculptures II, Jan Marais Park, Stellenbosch</i>

## COMPETITIONS

2014	<i>SASOL new signatures, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, [Finalist]</i>
2013	<i>PPC Young Concrete Sculpture Award Finalist, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria</i>
2013	<i>VULEKA, Merit recognition Award, Art B Gallery, Bellville</i>
2010	<i>SASOL new signatures; Finalist, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria</i>
2009	<i>US Kuns en Foto Kompetisi; Finalist, GUS Gallery, Stellenbosch</i>
2008	<i>Wes-Boland Eisteddfod, Best Work Trophy (High School), Show Grounds, Piketberg</i>

## OTHER EXPERIENCE

2013-2014	<i>Apprentice under Lionel Smit</i>
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## SELECTED RESIDENCIES

2017	<i>Internationales Künstlersymposium, Museum Villa Böhm, Germany</i>
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Catalogue published by Adriaan Diedericks Studios (Pty) Ltd.  
Cape Town, 2019

Catalogue design by Rayke Loftie-Eaton  
Photography and editing by Jaco Schroeder and Rayke Loftie-Eaton  
Text by Tim Leibbrandt

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