

Beth Diane Armstrong on her first major solo exhibition



By Eugene Yiga

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Eugene Yiga speaks to 2017 Standard Bank Young Artist Beth Diane Armstrong. She recently presented *in perpetuum*, her first major solo exhibition from and the first cohesive body of work she's put together since 2011.

▣ *Where did your love for art begin?*

From the earliest age, I was making things. As far back as I can remember I was making little creatures out of anything I could find. From the tiniest little kid, on an almost daily basis, I was begging my mom to haul out all the art supplies so I could create. She was a nursery school teacher when I was young so she helped nurture those initial urges in me. I took art classes as an extra-mural throughout primary school and art was my favourite subject in high school. So I guess the answer is that it started from as early as I can remember.

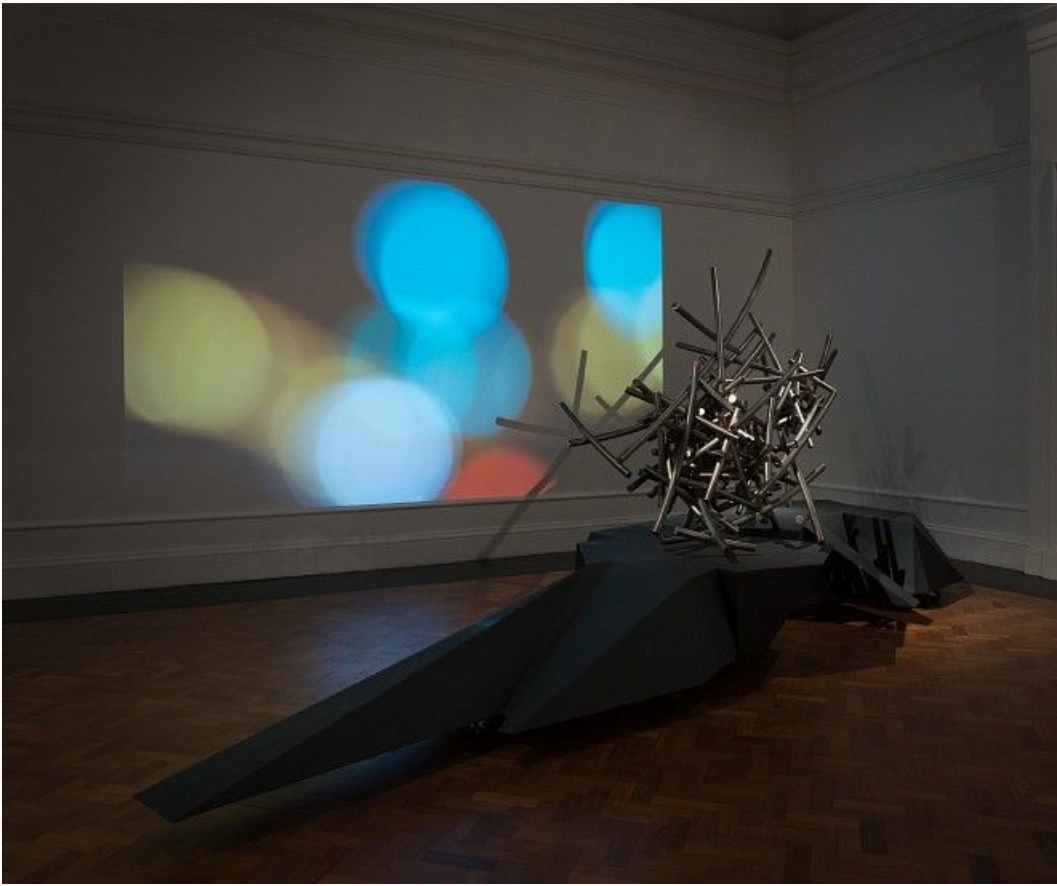


▣ *What made you decide to become an artist?*

It wasn't a hard decision. I think it was aided by both my parents being teachers and the kind of parents that encourage their children to follow their passions rather than something that perhaps they ought to do or something that would be more obviously lucrative or provide financial (or other) security. So I followed my passion.

▣ *What surprised you about your career when you began?*

Right from the beginning of my career, I have met kind people that have supported me in whatever way was within their desire and means. I have been surprised by people's desire to support me. Full-time art was the only option for me, after attempting to juggle a job and my art and not managing but full-time art would have been impossible without the support of a large list of generous people and institutions.



Desequilibrare, 2017

■ What do you do on a typical day?

Every day is so different, depending on what artwork I am busy with. That being said, I'm usually juggling a couple of works that are at various stages of production at a time so each day is similar in that it's a juggling act. My day to day is different now since being awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award than it was a few years back. My infrastructure has grown, by necessity, to facilitate the production of larger works and a larger quantity of work than I'm used to. My attention is divided now. There's also a lot of admin in the form of proposals, meetings, interviews, etc.



Essential Incompleteness, 2017

■ **What would someone find surprising about the work you do?**

The large number of calculations that go into almost every artwork. Behind the scenes of all my works is a lot of measuring, recording, labelling, calculation, ordering, numbering, scaling, etc. Besides the drawings, I can't think of a single work on the exhibition *in perpetuum* that doesn't have a large amount of calculation behind it. And even the drawings have a certain level of order to them – their titles which are on the back of the drawings are the date and exact time that I made the drawing.

■ **What do you love most about your work?**

Standing back and looking at a completed work and experiencing that strange bewilderment that I made that thing. A strange dissociated, bewildered and surprised feeling. Up until the moment of standing back I am caught up in the process-based details of it all the time; not just visually, but mentally and emotionally too, and then at some point I can separate myself and just see it.



Where are you

■ **What's most challenging about your work?**

The logistics and technicalities of dealing with larger steelworks can pose many challenges. Not just in the production of the works but also in the post-production; the transportation, installation, etc.

■ **What's been your most memorable career highlight so far?**

In 2013, I did a residency at NIROX Sculpture Park and founder Benji Liebmann afforded me the opportunity to make my first large-scale work – *Surface Weight*. The making of that artwork has been an untouchable and unrepeatable experience in my life on many levels; equally gruelling and exhilarating. It was the first time I physically exerted myself to that extent and the first time I made an object that exceeded the space of my physical body: a sculpture I could not move on my own; a sculpture that demanded I engage with it differently. There was a necessary sense of surrender and letting go of control. An added highlight to that personal experience was that Standard Bank bought this artwork for their permanent collection and it now stands in the Rosebank Building. It was affirming and encouraging that my first large-scale artwork found a home, especially because the experience of making it was so meaningful to me.



Surface Weight, 2013

▣ ***How do you hope to maintain and grow your creativity to reinvent yourself and keep things 'fresh'?***

First, I will continue learning about anything and everything that grabs my interest. I'm constantly researching and absorbing information about things that fascinate me and that stream of inquiry in direct or indirect ways maintains my growth. I aim to open up more spaces for myself where I can play and experiment more; where I can let go of the idea of the finished art object and be more daring. I need to cultivate large chunks of time again to be entirely alone for hours on end because that's where the magic happens for me, but I've also realised more recently that it helps to play with other people sometimes and so I aim to do more of that too. There are such powerful ideas that can come from shared energies.

in perpetuum is at the [Everard Read Gallery](#) in Cape Town until 28 November 2018.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneiyiga.com, follow @eugeneiyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneiyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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