

Heart and Soal

Artist uses found objects to challenge notions of texture and form

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What sort of training have you received and how important do you think it is to seek training, in terms of learning first principles and refining technique?

Chris Soal I studied a Bachelors of Art in Fine Arts (Hons) at the University of Witwatersrand, and before that I took Fine Art and History of Art as subjects to Matric when I was at St John's College.

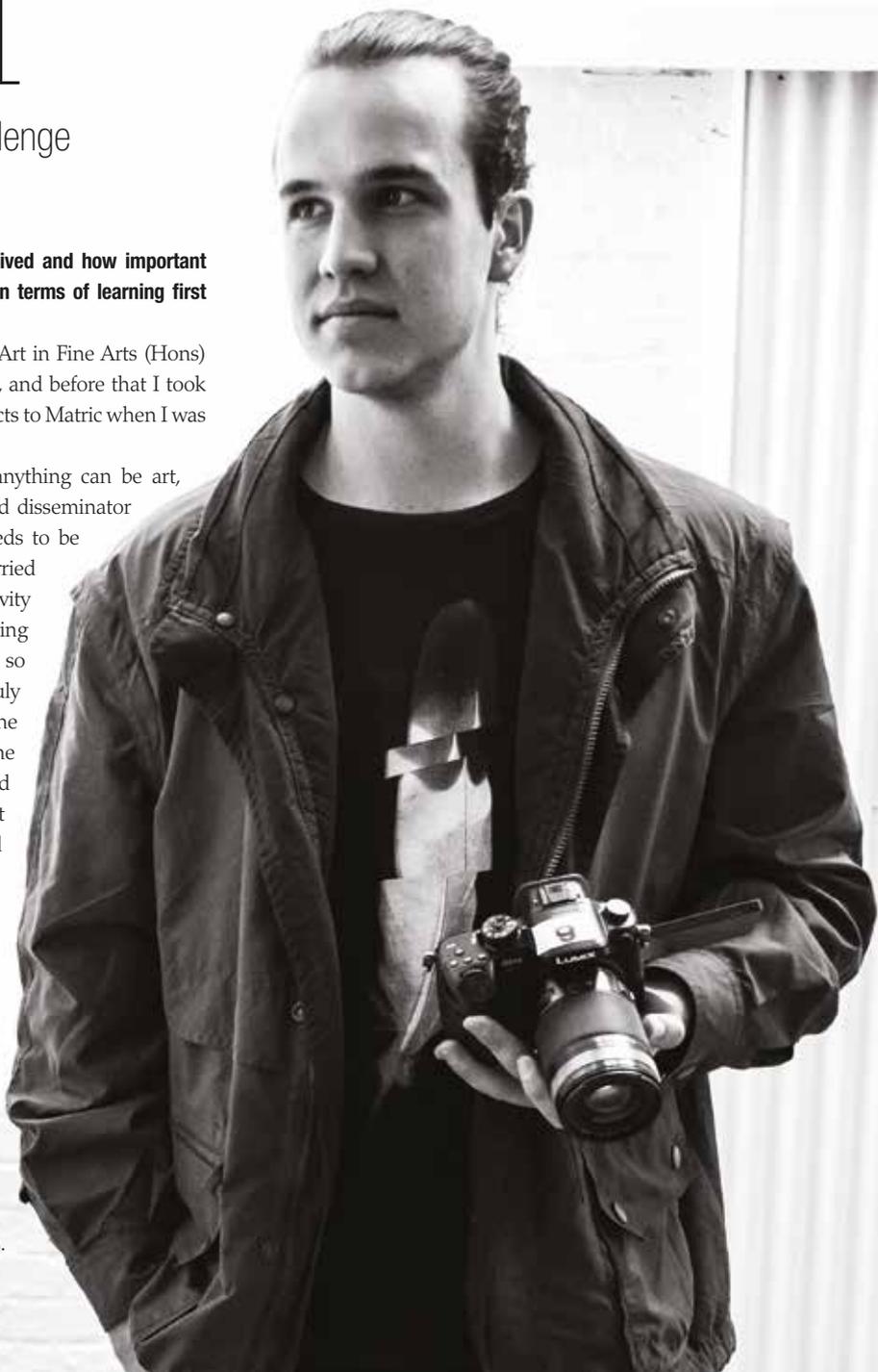
I think that in a world where anything can be art, the role of the artist as creator and disseminator of meaning is something that needs to be carefully studied so that it is carried out responsibly and with sensitivity and understanding. An understanding of the histories of art is important so that the art we make today is truly 'contemporary'. For this to be the case, we must also be aware of the context in which we make and exhibit art. These are things that don't necessarily have to be learned from an academic institution, as we know them currently, but are factors that any artist hoping to be relevant in the world today must seriously consider.

As an artist working formally and conceptually, I repurpose mundane, mass-produced objects to create my art. A certain level of technical know-how was required and is something that I learned over the years working in various workshops.

In this regard, I work more as an engineer or an architect, where I am constantly problem-solving in order to find the most refined possible solution.

What is your principal medium, and why did you choose it?

I might be described as a sculptor in the way that my work engages space in three dimensions. However, I seldom cast objects in the way a traditional sculptor might. Rather, I use ordinary, everyday objects. I find that in using 'found objects', I am able to comment on the day and age in which we live, as well as tapping into the histories and concepts embedded in the objects we utilise on a daily basis.



Describe the techniques you use most? How complicated are your methods, and why is each step necessary?

Since the art I make is not traditional, in the sense that it can't be categorised in the way Western art history has categorised the various disciplines, the techniques and methods I employ are unusual in the way that they are seldom 'artsy'.

I have a studio that looks and operates more like a handyman's workshop. Much of my time is spent sourcing the best materials to work with and then testing out how things work together. There is a lot of technical know-how in the processes and I spend a lot of time consulting experts and engineers on new possibilities for glues, structural stability and production.

In terms of techniques, I am developing my own visual language in the way I work with the materials. Working with beer bottle tops and toothpicks there is a 'repetition of the singular', where by multiplying the individual, recognisable object, the texture and form of the plural is different from what the viewer expects and the work gains aesthetic and artistic value. This is not a technique I employ as a visual gimmick, though, but something that emerged from my own artistic engagement with materials.

What technological tools do you use in your work?

As a student I began to plan many artworks on a sketch pad on my phone, as I didn't have a laptop with Photoshop and the like. I prefer to work in this mobile manner, combining images, notes and drawings on a phone app. This way of working helps to generate ideas, but to actually make the art I have to get hands-on and experiment.

The more my career advances and I begin taking on bigger projects such as outdoor sculptures, the more I have gravitated towards collaborating with designers, engineers



and people who are technologically savvy and who can lend their expertise to my processes. Collaboration is key in a world where there is so much specialisation.

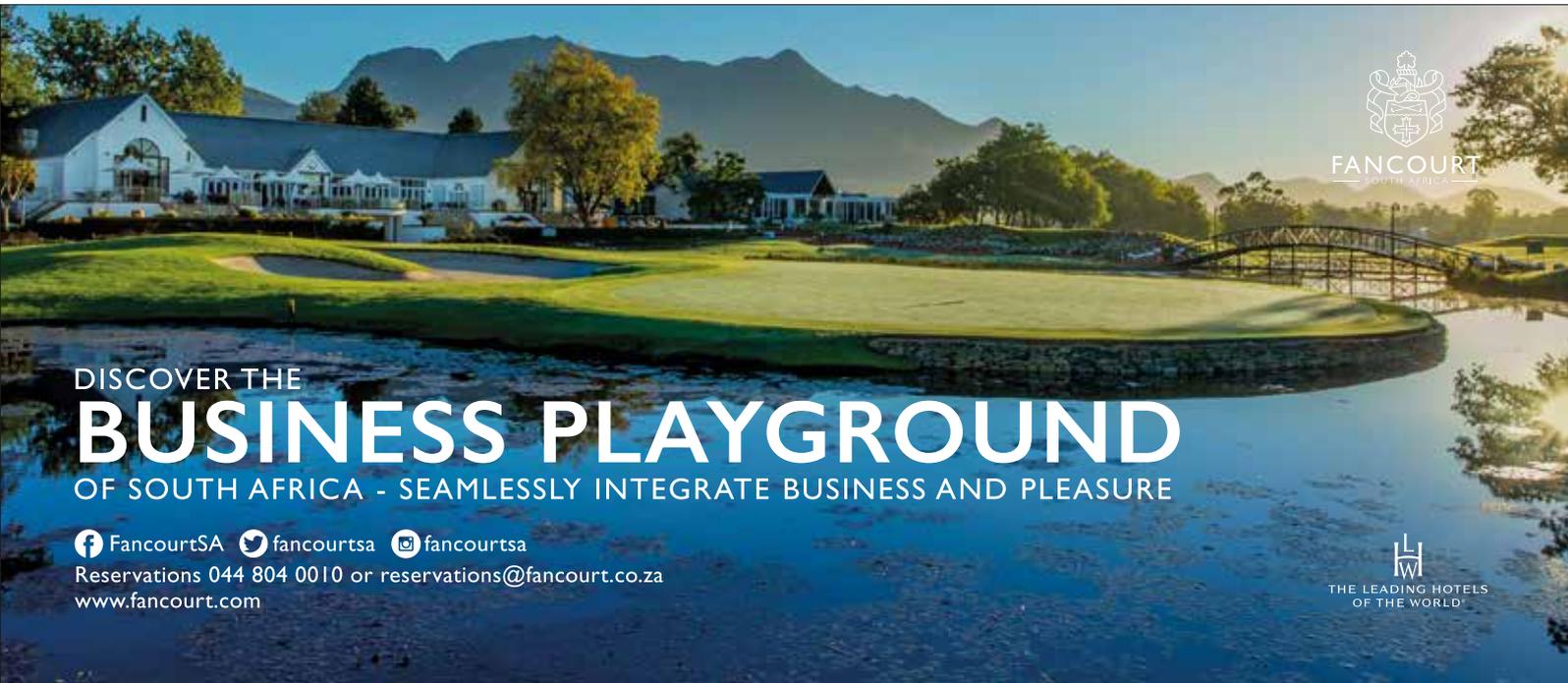
Chris Soal's sculptures incorporate everyday objects.

Why do you create? What are your stated goals in producing art?

I create because for me, art represents freedom. In our postmodern world, the arts in particular are one of the last realms of possibility for change and engaging what people think and believe.

I work in such a way that I want people to look at my art and then re-enter the world looking at it afresh. I once, perhaps naively, said, "If I can change the way people value bottle tops or toothpicks then perhaps they can change the way they value other people."

Text | Bruce Dennill Photography | Supplied



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