

# Artsmith - SMITH Studio's Amy Ellenbogen on curating, 2016 and Marsi van de Heuvel

 By [Maroefah Smith](#)

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The word 'smith' is often used as a suffix indicating a person skilled in creating something with a specific material (think blacksmith, locksmith).

In 2015, Amy Ellenbogen and Candace Marshall-Smith decided that SMITH should become synonymous with the growing art scene in Cape Town.

Ellenbogen, a creative with a degree in art history, and Marshall-Smith, a chartered accountant, decided to combine their individual skills and expertise to create an art gallery with the aim of making art accessible and growing the South African art world.

We spoke to Ellenbogen, the gallery's curator, about the past year, the allure of Van de Heuvel's work and the state of art in SA.



Amy Ellenbogen and Candace Marshall-Smith

■ **Ceremony is Marsi van de Heuvel's second solo exhibition at the gallery, what attracts you to her work?**

Marsi has great discipline in her process, which leads to a very unique outcome. Within her abstract work we are able to see an unexpected result that instantly allows for an emotional response. The works themselves take up a large amount of time and require repetitive line work, which acts as a meditation of sorts for Marsi. When you look at this new body of work there is a definite celebration of colour and space and the transformative healing power of nature.

■ **Why should we see it?**

Not only are the works extraordinary in themselves due to the skill and technique that Marsi has applied but they are also a simple celebration of nature and have honoured our environment. This work appeals to all ages and backgrounds.



First Thursdays at SMITH Studio

### ■ What are some of the challenges you face?

There are always great challenges within an industry that offers great reward. Remaining true to helping emerging artists while maintaining a sustainable business is a challenge. We are constantly trying to balance a wide, varied and exciting programme, which entails taking risks.

### ■ What's the state of art in Cape Town?

I think the industry is thriving here in Cape Town. There are new galleries opening and the Zeitz MOCAA Museum will add great value. There are interesting initiatives like 'First Thursday' where galleries extend their opening hours into the evening on the first Thursday of every month and '1k' where established artists sell purpose-made work for R1,000 for an hour only on a particular evening. The founders of the First Thursday event have also created 'Museum Night' which is a cultural experience that sees multiple museums within the city keeping their doors open into the evening and offering free admission to the public.



Ceremony by Marsi van de Heuvel

## ■ What's missing in the South African art world?

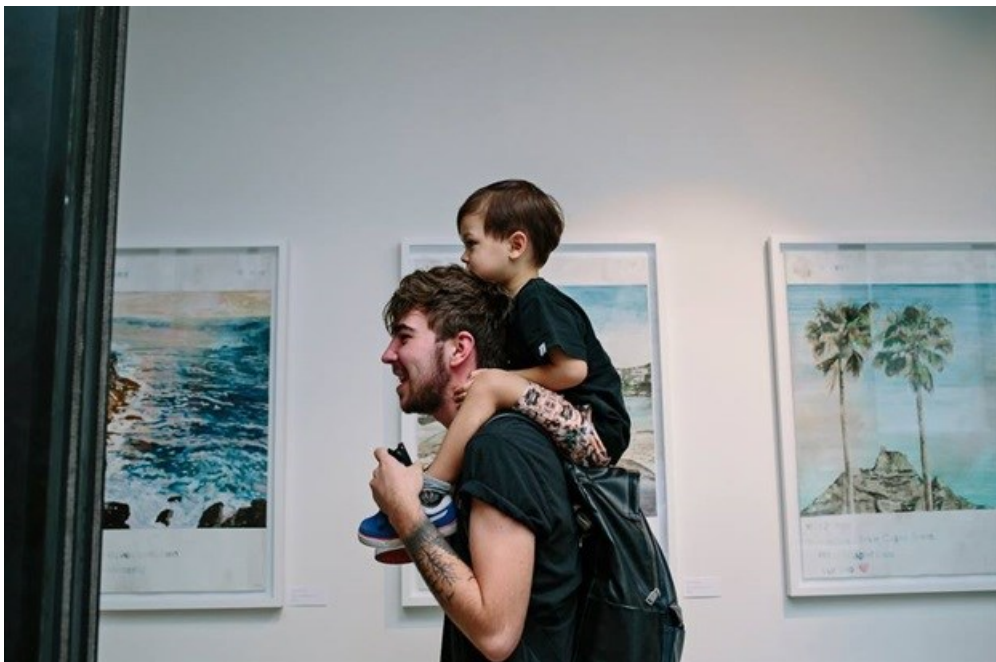
The art industry could benefit from increased government funding or other art specific funding from corporates. There are so many talented artists who don't make it as full-time artists due to the large barriers to entry that exist as a result of a lack of resources. There are organisations like VANSa and the National Arts Council of South Africa but they barely scratch the surface sadly.

## ■ What's the potential of art in this country?

Being a relatively underdeveloped industry there is much room for growth. With new museums opening and an active change in syllabus within the tertiary education system around the country, we feel that art will play an active role in shifting people's mindsets and facilitating positive change. There is strong interest in African art worldwide and international auction houses like Bonhams, etc. are all reporting enormous prices fetched for African art at auction. There are also lots of Africans buying African art as a result of the strong growth of African economies and the rising wealth of the middle class.

## ■ How important is it for young people to get involved in the arts?

Art plays a vital role in children's development and allows for much-needed freedom through expression. It is imperative that young people create art and engage with art on their journeys to adulthood. On the other side of the coin are young collectors who will go on to become the large collectors of tomorrow.



## ■ What's been some of the highlights for SMITH Studio this year?

We thoroughly enjoyed the Cape Town Art Fair, which took place in February, and are grateful that a world-class fair like CTAF is taking place in our city each year. We have just returned from our first international art fair (Also Known as Africa - AKAA) which took place in Paris. We found it inspiring and our presence there provided an important platform to engage with the international market and connect with international buyers. Ultimately it's always a highlight watching a young artist being given an opportunity and seeing them excel as a result.

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Curator Amy Ellenbogen and Director Candace Marshall-Smith, looking good after the long trip from South Africa. #akaaartfair

*A photo posted by SMITH Studio Fine Art Gallery (@smithstudioc) on Nov 10, 2016 at 4:42am PST*

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#### ■ What are some of your plans for next year?

Our programme is looking varied and exciting; we will be turning our sights to photography and allowing for new sculptural injections through group shows. We will be presenting solo exhibitions by Gabrielle Raaff, Elize Vossstätter, Banele Khoze. Grace Cross and Dale Lawrence. As far as fairs go, we are looking forward to the Cape Town Art Fair in February 2016.

#### ■ What are the main things you're looking for when curating an exhibition?

We are always looking for work that resonates with us and that we can respond to with our heads and hearts. Imagination that creates unique voices is such a joy to engage with and it remains a key part of curating. When artists are able to challenge people's thoughts and views and cause them to leave the gallery inspired, then we feel we have done our job.

#### ■ What words of advice would you give someone wanting to make it in the art world, in either the creating or curating side of the industry?

Be brave. The art industry requires grit and resilience.

#### ■ If you could get any artist (living or dead) to showcase their work at SMITH Studio who would it be?

Hands down Donald Judd.



Works by Donald Dunn

Marsi van den Heuvel's *Ceremony* is on at SMITH Studio until 21 January 2017, go check it out at 56 Church Street in Cape Town.

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