

IQWEQWE BY MADODA FANI

An Exploration of Pattern and Movement

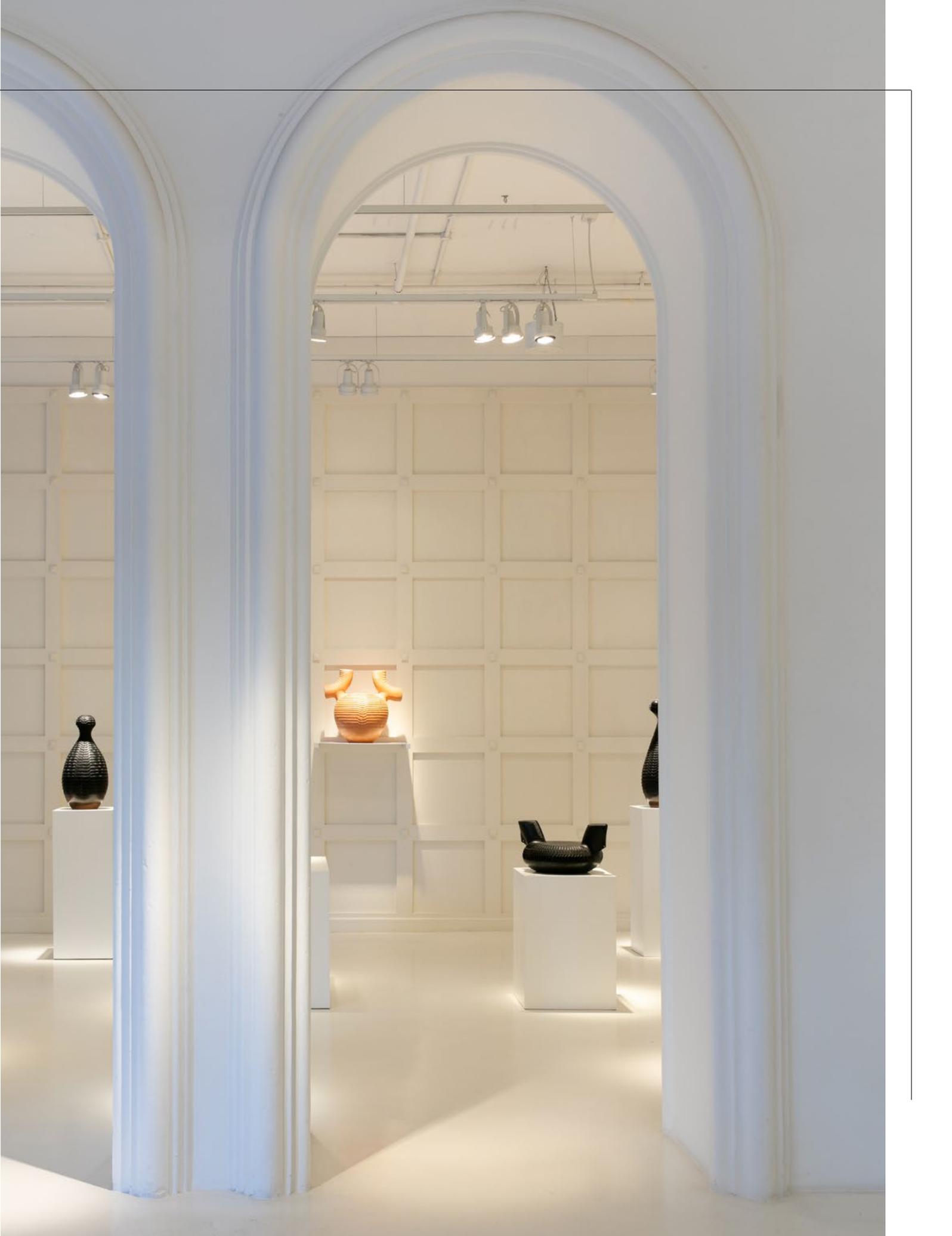
Southern Guild presents a new collection of carved ceramics by Madoda Fani, titled iQweqwe. The patterned incisions that have defined Fani's work to date become an all-encompassing 'skin' in this series of 12 hand-coiled works.



Fani Madoda's latest show's isiXhosa title can be translated as "crust", referring to insect exoskeletons, a central fascination for the artist. Fani's work is gaining significant international attention with a recent acquisition by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the United States earlier this year.

The iQweqwe collection features both functional and sculptural works, in which Fani explores unusual new forms, including vessels with tall, conical lids; a bowl supported by a large, four-legged stand; a two-handled pot; and an oval canister. Their contours are articulated by concentric lines carved into the clay, finished with detailed markings and studded protrusions, whose repetition lends the surfaces a mesmerising rhythm.

Veering from his usual blackened finish, Fani has left three of the pieces in their original terracotta state, signifying a kind of "stripping back" and returning to one's roots - much like an insect shedding its skin. This purity of form and earthy colour



gives the works an ancient, artefact-like feel. Combined with their pronounced armour-like exteriors, they appear concurrently timeless and futuristic.

Growth and the natural progression of things are recurring themes in Fani's work. He likens creating a piece to that of pregnancy: a process of varied phases of development and change, before the birth of the final, fully-formed product that is then named. Fani rarely plans his pieces, beginning with a loose idea and then surrendering to the clay, allowing it to lead him: "I let my work take me where it wants to go," he says.

His evolution as an artist has brought him full circle, seeing him return to one of his original inspirations - insects - only this time, instead of painting them, he is now moulding and carving them

from clay. "The work that I'm doing now, is more of a revisiting of that old work, except now I'm using different materials," he explains. The medium of ceramic yields other surprising characteristics: when gently tapped, the works produce a similar sound to that of a shell or exoskeleton being tapped.

COLLABORATION WITH BMW

The illusion of movement in Fani's iQweqwe collection becomes a larger-than-life reality in a custom-designed car wrap, that the artist collaborated on, with BMW South Africa. He adapted his signature incised patterns into line drawings that are applied as a two-layered wrap to the body of a BMW X7. The iridescent sheen of the car echoes that of an insect carapace, against which

Fani's intricate patterns come alive.

"It's exciting to see my work take on a different form and to collaborate with such a recognised brand like BMW. The fact that the car is going to be driven around Cape Town means that people who are not familiar with my ceramics will now be able to see my work," explains Fani.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1975, Fani grew up in Gugulethu township in Cape Town and studied graphic design at Sivuyile College. To earn money to further his studies, he worked as a ceramic painter in a pottery studio for over eight years, during which his love for ceramics was born. Over time, he developed a unique style and started producing his own





pieces. When asked, “why clay?”, he simply answers: “Clay chose me. I did not choose it.”

In 2000, his work was selected for the Salon Internationale de l’Artisanat de Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. There he met acclaimed ceramicist Simon Masilo, who introduced him to traditional smoke-firing. A decade later, he moved to Johannesburg and began to deepen his craft under Masilo’s guidance, and then later at the Kim Sacks School of



Ceramics. He learned how to burnish clay with a stone from Jabu Nala, the daughter of legendary Zulu beer-pot maker Nesta Nala, and mastered smoke-firing techniques under the guidance of Nic Sithole. He credits all these artists as significant influences in his development as a ceramicist.

Although he uses traditional techniques, Fani’s curvaceous, coiled forms and hand-carved embellishments are entirely distinct. He works on a large scale, building organic-shaped vessels whose smooth surfaces are punctuated by intricate, repetitive patterns that give them a scaled, insect-like appearance. He enjoys challenging himself, often branching out to experiment with different shapes and forms, yet always maintaining that signature patterning that has become the essence of his distinctive work.

“When you perfect a form, you tend to fall in love with it, creating it over and over. One needs to force oneself to move away from that, something I try my best to do,” says Fani. “My signature is always there, though. Certain things may change, but you’ll always be able to recognise it’s a Madoda Fani piece.” His work with Southern Guild recently

has seen him branch out into furniture, carved wood and bronze sculpture, a challenge he relished.

Southern Guild has exhibited his work at Design Miami, at The Salon Art + Design in New York, and at the Christie’s London annual design auction. Fani has joined residency programmes in Argentina (2009) and France (2013), received first prize at the 2016 Ceramics Southern Africa Exhibition, as well as the Ndebele Milling & Mining Premier Award at the 2015 G&W Mineral Resources Ceramics SA Gauteng Regional Exhibition. In 2021, the Philadelphia Museum of Art acquired one of Fani’s functional ceramic pieces, iTafile III.

For more information, visit www.southernguild.co.za. 

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