



BRONWEN VAUGHAN-EVANS' latest collection, which she has been working on for the past year and half, is a series of portraits of people who inhabit her home and work environments, and explores the connections that she makes in her personal space.

Each portrait is exactly the same size as the human subject, and together the 20 portraits will be hung to form a cityscape. "The city is important, as our location makes us who we are," says Bronwen. Images from the physical location give clues to the subject's emotional make-up. Electrical power lines feature prominently

in one painting. "The woman in this painting is very bright," explains Bronwen, "And her synapses are going all the time." In another painting, two dogs fight. "The dog fighting itself is a metaphor for the struggle of becoming," says Bronwen. "It's not a negative thing at all."

Bronwen was classically trained and received her Masters of Arts in Fine Arts in 1995 from the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. She obtained her Diploma in Education in 1998 from the University of South Africa, and she now lectures senior Fine Art students at the Durban University of Technology. She works in modules, with two weeks of teaching and then three weeks off to do her own work. "It suits me," she says, "as I have a tendency to be reclusive and it forces me to interact. I think that my students teach me more than I teach them."

In her studio, Bronwen works a disciplined day, starting at 08h30 and finishing at 16h30, usually working on about three pieces at a time. "There's an idea that artists wait for inspiration," she says, "but if I had to wait I'd wait forever."

While doing her Masters, Bronwen started working on gesso ground, which is made from animal hide glue, oxide and chalk.

"Icon paintings were painted on gesso," says Bronwen. "The artists would do seven layers and each layer would be a prayer or a meditation to the saint being portrayed."

In her current work, she layers the gesso and creates the images by sanding with tiny pieces of sandpaper so that they appear from below. Most artists apply paint from the top, but Bronwen excavates the images hidden beneath the layers. She'll do about three layers of dark tones and two of white, as she has to create the grey by sanding layers off the white. Different types of sandpaper give different results, with a harsh grit going straight through to the black layer and fine sandpaper achieving a more subtle effect. Bronwen also paints back onto the surface.

Once she's finished sanding, she oils the board until it becomes saturated and the tones become more evident. The collection is monochromatic; the 20 portraits are one piece and work as a whole. In her next collection, Bronwen plans to experiment with the colour of the gesso. "It'll remain monochromatic," she says, "but it'll depend on the colour of the oxide." GH

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Bronwen's collection is showing from 5 – 29 June at Gallery Momo, 52 Seventh Avenue, Parktown North, 011 327 4436 and from 6 November – 4 December at Bank Gallery, 217 Florida Road, Durban, 031 312 6911.



Using layers of gesso and pieces of sandpaper, Bronwen Vaughan-Evans uncovers portraits of people in her life

