

100 GENERATIONS OF SOIL

LOUIS OLIVIER

Sing not because you have answers, but because you have a song

AFRICAN PROVERB

The inspiration for *100 Generations of Soil* is rooted in the notion of genetic memory. Working on the premise that humankind has a commonality of origin, Louis Olivier excavated below the surface of the object and artefact to uncover the fundamental elements of that which links us to the past and which has potential to tie us to the future. Inspired by African art, Olivier follows what he terms “the African way” – an inspiration which profoundly influences him as a person, craftsman and artist. Stimulated by the idea of a village craftsman he embarked on an artistic journey that led him to a “dualistic practise” of using modern tools to connect with those who came before him - to find what he calls a “primitive resonance”. He draws from African sculptural forms including functional objects such as the doorposts of East Africa and West African masks that once decontextualised from their ritual ceremonies, are often reduced to mere artefact.

At the heart of Olivier’s praxis is the human figure. In his work he aims to re-interpret the figure. He strips the form of unnecessary details. By searching for symbols that relate to memory and experience, his figures depict not so much outward resemblance or the known, but rather mystic memory and embodiment. Like the art that inspired him, his sculptures and drawings allude to emotional states which in turn invoke qualities like strength, vulnerability, honesty and humility. The works may resemble warriors, sentinels with purpose, the mad man, the desolate tribe.

Olivier is not only a sculptor, but also a bronze foundry man. He remains with his work from inception to completion. In this way his practice links him to the artisans who came before him. He felt that the preparation and creation of the *100 Generations of Soil* exhibition had him, “walking in their shoes”.

In essence *100 Generations of Soil* is an exploration of being skinless; questioning that which is beyond nudity. It is a quest that goes deep into the recesses of pre-memory in order to find that place of naked honesty where the commonality of all humankind is shamelessly acknowledged.