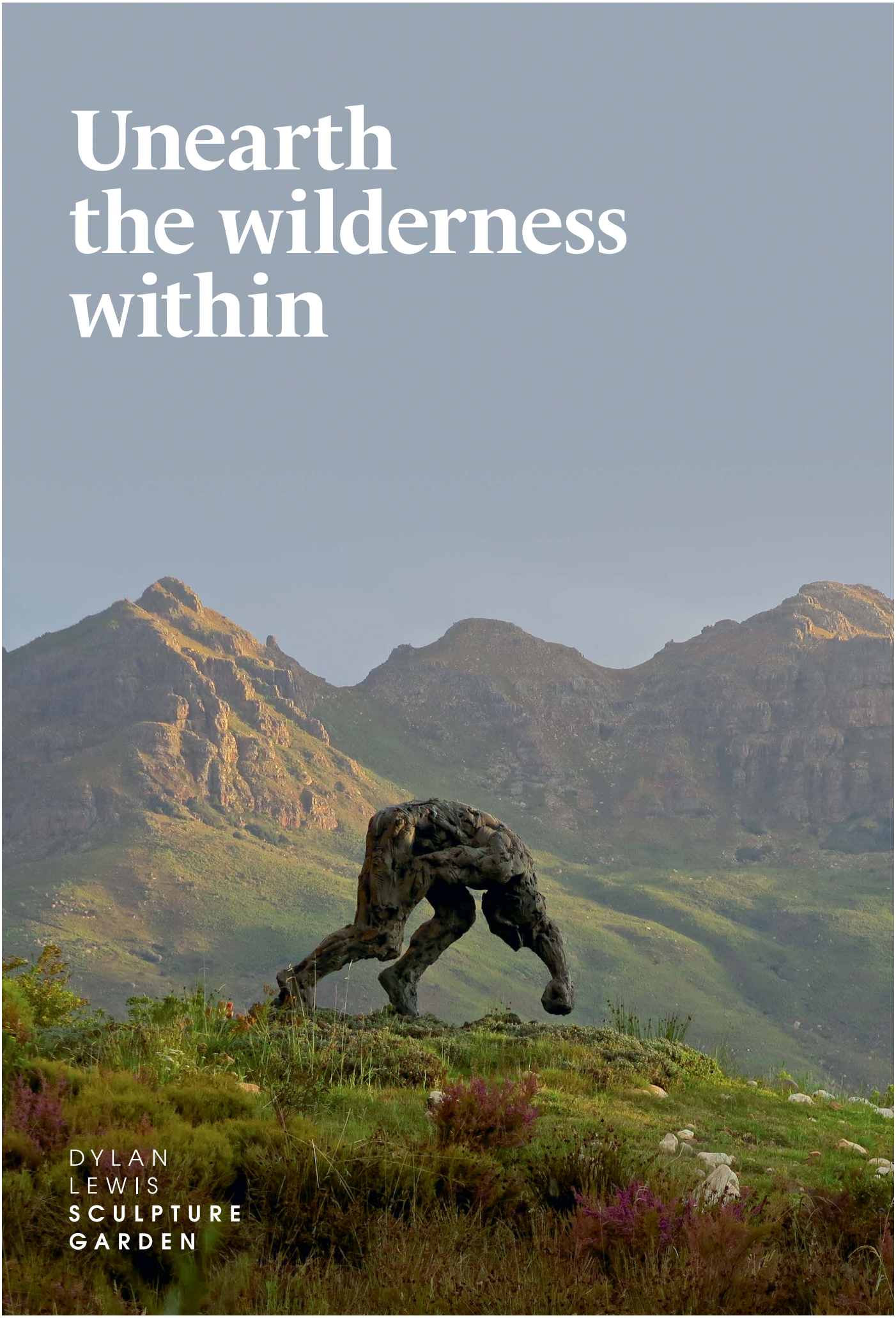
# Unearth the wilderness within



DYLAN
LEWIS
**SCULPTURE**
**GARDEN**

# ABOUT THE GARDEN

Located between two worlds, one wild and one tamed, the Dylan Lewis Sculpture Garden borders the manicured suburbs of Stellenbosch and a rugged mountain wilderness where leopard still roam. In this garden of private myth, the artist explores the Jungian notion of 'the wilderness within'. More than sixty sculptures constituting a comprehensive record of his artistic development thus far have been carefully sited along four kilometres of paths.

The project began in 2009 when Dylan hired an excavator and began creating the contours of what would become a seven-hectare sculpture garden. During almost two years of earthworks, the artist shaped a disused tract of flat farmland into dynamic hills, valleys and water features. In fact, the garden could be considered his largest sculpture to date.

The planting is focused on indigenous plants, particularly fynbos, incorporating many buchu species, and ericas, of which a large selection of unusual varieties has been sourced from Kirstenbosch. The garden's four sources of water include a natural perennial spring, a seasonal mountain river, as well as borehole and agricultural water.

Dylan has grouped the sculptures within the garden not as a response to a conscious plan but rather, as he describes it, through a process that unfolded intuitively over many years, in which certain sculptures seemed to 'gather' into distinct areas.

## RECOMMENDED WALKING ROUTE

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We encourage you to take the path in the sequence shown on the map. In so doing, you will experience the full impact of the garden. Dylan has laid out the paths over many years with great attention to detail, carefully considering every bend and contour. He recommends visitors walk a specific route and direction in order to approach elevated sites and sunken hollows as he personally envisions, while passing sculptures in such a way that their sense of movement is enhanced within a dynamic landscape that both conceals and reveals.

This route is two kilometres long and will take approximately 45 minutes.

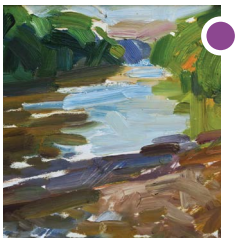



MOUNTAIN RIVER
ALOE GARDEN
PEPPER TREE GROVE
POPLAR GROVE
FIELD
LAKE
HEATHER HILL
STUDIO POND
WETLAND
SPRING
MAIN LAWN
OLD STUDIO
COTTAGE
GROTTO
PAVILION
MAIN GATE
FIRE CIRCLE
AMPHITHEATRE
GRAVEL COURTYARD
OLD STORE ROOM
GARDEN ENTRANCE
UPPER TERRACES
S
W
E
N
SCULPTURE KEY
PAINTINGS
BIRDS
AFRICAN ANIMALS
BIG CATS
LEOPARD FRAGMENTS
HUMAN TORSOS
EARLY FEMALE FIGURES
SHAMANIC FEMALE FIGURES
SHAMANIC MALE FIGURES
MONUMENTAL FRAGMENTS
RECENT SCULPTURE

## SCULPTURE GROUPING

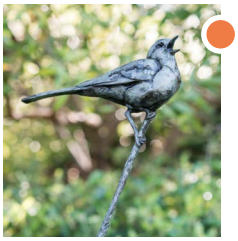
How are Dylan's early bird images connected to the giant broken fragmented forms, or his landscape paintings to the skull-masked male shamanic figures? A Jungian idea may be helpful: as we become more self-aware, the imagery in our dreams changes, from impersonal natural forces – such as volcanoes and storms – as metaphors for feelings, to animal and finally human imagery as we integrate disowned aspects of ourselves into our conscious life.

To some extent, Dylan's work has followed a similar trajectory, from first childhood drawings of stormy seas and landscapes, to his vital paintings of the African wilderness, to bird and later animal sculptures, which in turn became half-human-half-animal, and finally fully human. Where animals were once the artist's vehicle to express intense emotion, the human figure is now his focus. Says Dylan, 'The cats held sexuality, violence and power at a time when I couldn't.' With this in mind, the sequence of sculptures in the garden may be seen as illustrating the artist's journey towards self-acceptance and non-judgement.



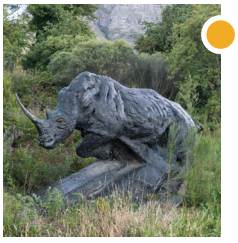
### 1. INTOXICATED WITH LIGHT PAINTINGS

Raised in an artistic family, Dylan first explored painting as his chosen medium. He worked directly from life, setting up his easel outdoors to capture the heat, dust and raw sensuality of the African wilderness. With their strong impasto brushstrokes, these paintings suggest that Dylan was already sculpting in paint. Notably devoid of humans, these landscapes reflect wild, free spaces within the artist's psyche as well as the literal spaces in which he sought refuge.



### 2. EMBLEMS OF FREEDOM BIRDS

Dylan's father, Robin Lewis, was a successful sculptor of primarily the bird form. Initially Dylan preferred painting and drawing to sculpture, but the tragedy of Robin's premature death changed the young artist's trajectory forever: within weeks, he found himself in his father's studio, attempting to sculpt birds. His earliest works were heavily influenced by Robin's style. To Dylan, birds were symbols of freedom as he subconsciously sought refuge from an emotionally inhibiting upbringing.



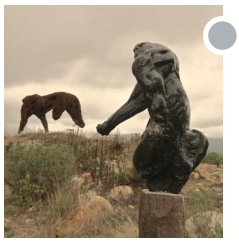
### 3. PRIMAL WILDERNESS AFRICAN ANIMALS

Soon after starting his career as an artist, Dylan left Cape Town to live and work in the game reserves of Southern Africa. Immersed in the wilderness areas he loved, he painted and sculpted the wild animals that surrounded him daily, including buffalo and rhino. To him, these mighty beasts represented the power of an untamed wilderness. Dylan was searching for a personal animal symbol separate from his father's, and Africa's big cats eventually took this role.



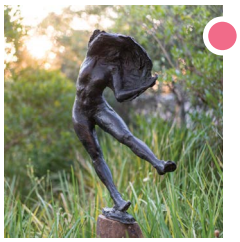
### 4. WILD SYMBOLS BIG CATS

The leopard became Dylan's primary totem animal as he spent many years sketching wild and captive leopards. Other big cats followed: cheetah, lion, tiger. The surfaces of his sculptures became more abstracted as Dylan explored the underlying muscular and emotional tension that imbued these predators with presence. Literal symbols of wilderness, Dylan's cats also came to unconsciously express raw power, sensuality, sexuality and the capacity for violence within himself – emotions not easily expressed in his life then as a member of a conservative religious community.



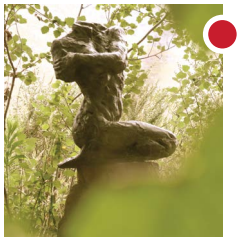
### 5. BREAKING APART FRAGMENTED LEOPARD TORSOS

Dylan dissected lion and leopard carcasses in order to gain a greater understanding of cat anatomy and express movement and power in a vital way. During dissections, he was struck by the vulnerability of the predators' flesh, and the similarity between cat and human anatomy, highlighting the ambiguity between humans and animals. At a deeper level, these fragmented, sometimes brutal works were symbolic of a necessary disintegration of the artist's belief systems that no longer served him.



### 6. FORBIDDEN FORMS EARLY FEMALE FIGURES

After ten years of sculpting animals, Dylan's focus shifted to the human form, reflecting his increasing interest in the wilderness within the human psyche. The dissolution of his conservative religious belief system allowed an exploration of the naked human form, hitherto taboo. It is almost impossible to link these smooth, gentle, virginal images to Dylan's animals unless you look closer, to the subtly chiselled backgrounds from which these early figures emerge, representing the emerging wild landscapes his psyche.



### 7. BEAUTY IN BROKENNESS FRAGMENTED HUMAN TORSOS

The torso has long fascinated Dylan as being symbolic of the beauty to be found in brokenness. He prefers to express visceral, primal emotion through the body rather than the face. The strong influence of landscape forms, of rocks and twisted tree trunks, is evident in these works. Additional influences include the unfinished works of Michelangelo and Rodin's torsos. Dylan has explored the fragmented form at an ever-increasing scale, culminating in monumental human and animal torsos.



### 8. DARK NATURE FEMALE SHAMANIC FIGURES

Surrendering now to a sense of urgency, Dylan's quest to express the human-animal interface took form in dramatic feminine shamanic figures. All that was solitary, wild and winged, vulnerable and untamed in him began to emerge. The raw sensuality of his female sculptures included animal elements such as sharp, deadly claws and horns. These reflected the artist's increasing acceptance of his own feelings of sensuality, sexuality and freedom.

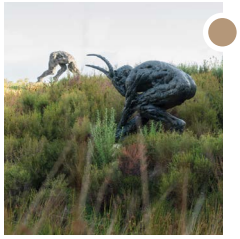
## THE ARTIST'S INSPIRATION

'Nature is a "church with no dogma" that connects me to my authentic, untamed inner nature.'

Dylan Lewis's sculpture is primarily an outlet for emotion. His fascination with wilderness began during his upbringing in a religious fundamentalist family. Today, his interest lies in the path of non-judgement, which he describes as 'the burning point between tameness and wildness, between devil and God, between human and animal, that is both paradox and crucifixion.' Nature has come to symbolise this for him. 'Unlike humans,' he notes, 'plants, birds, animals, clouds, rivers and oceans have no opinion of me; they are utterly indifferent to my existence. There is both a horror and a tremendous freedom in this realisation.' Viewing nature as a 'church with no dogma', in the words of poet and psychologist Ian McCallum, Dylan says, 'it is a place that connects me to my authentic, untamed inner nature.'

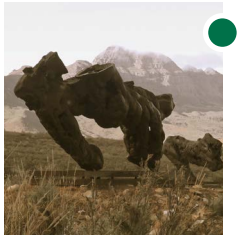
Humans have progressively colonised Earth's wild places, and though our lifestyles may have improved, this has brought an accompanying shadow, in his view: the widespread ecological destruction of our planetary home, and the psychological trauma as we become increasingly disconnected from nature. Similarly we are born "wild", but must censor these aspects of ourselves in order to live in social groupings. We risk dying psychologically, Dylan believes, if we become alienated from the authentic wild self.

For the artist, inner peace and authentic vitality lie in learning to live with this paradox. Many of his sculptures, and indeed the garden itself, express this as a physical and visual balance around a centre point.



### 9. RISING MASCULINITY
### MALE SHAMANIC FIGURES

These figures heralded Dylan's internal shift from an overly strong attunement to the feminine to a healing reconnection with masculinity. The naked male body became a canvas for explosive animal energy. Tormented poses express the vital internal battle between wildness and tameness. Ritualistic animal skull masks both conceal and reveal a wild self, while hinting at the psychological death awaiting us if we are unable to find ways of expressing our wild, intuitive, authentic nature while passing through the different phases of life.



### 10. A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS
### MONUMENTAL FRAGMENTS

Begun in 2014, these sculptures are the realisation of Dylan's decade-long dream to work on a large scale. Made from acrylic plaster embedded with iron or black pigment, they reflect the power and beauty of decay, and the notion that the gifts we bring to the world may often originate in the broken parts of our lives. Visually disturbing, they are a monumental reminder of the indestructibility of the wild in us all, a tribute to Earth's fragmented wild areas, and a call to put them together again meaningfully.



### 11. INTEGRATING THE UNTAMED
### RECENT SCULPTURE

Most recently, Dylan has continued his exploration of the untamed in a series of sculpture 'sketches'. Emotions originally projected onto landscape and animal forms have become increasingly integrated into the artist's psyche. Isolated shamanic figures have transitioned into figure groupings, both masculine and feminine. In some there is an intimate stillness, in others a wild eroticism, while others depict grief and power struggles: their nakedness expresses raw, unrestrained emotion.





## ABOUT DYLAN LEWIS

Dylan Lewis was born in 1964 and raised in an artistic family in South Africa. His father was an accomplished sculptor, his mother and his grandmother were painters, and two great-grandfathers were an architect and cabinetmaker respectively. Dylan initially followed in the family tradition, beginning his career as a painter, but later turned to sculpture. Widely recognised as one of the world's foremost sculptors of the animal form, he initially focused on the big cats; in recent years, he has used the human figure to explore our relationship with our inner wilderness. His international career spans two decades and includes exhibitions in Paris, Sydney, Toronto, Houston and San Francisco, as well as numerous one-man exhibitions in London, where he is among the few living artists to have held solo auctions at Christie's in London.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