

First feature documentary about land art from the southern hemisphere nearing completion in Cape Town

Film about Stellenbosch artist Strijdom van der Merwe to be released early 2022

Cape Town, 25 November 2021

Cape Town-based CineSouth Studios this week revealed the first preview of its upcoming documentary feature film *Sculpting This Earth* with the release of a one-minute teaser trailer. Shot over a twelve-month period in a striking range of beautifully cinematic natural settings in southern Africa, the film showcases the work of land artist Strijdom van der Merwe.

Land art – involving the making of artworks in nature using mostly natural materials found on the site – has been around since the 1960s. Pioneered mainly in north America and Britain, it is today practised around the world.

Victor van Aswegen, CineSouth Studios CEO and director of *Sculpting This Earth*, sketches the background: “To date, worldwide, even though land art has been in existence for more than half a century, only a handful of documentary feature films have been made about it, all of these dealing with the work of artists in the northern hemisphere. Mostly fragile and ephemeral, far removed from population centres and the commercial art market, these are works of art that rely on photography or cinematography to connect with an audience. We were therefore excited by the prospect of undertaking this project of working with Strijdom to make *Sculpting This Earth*: not only will it be the latest contribution to a sparsely populated genre, but it will also be the first feature-length film about land art from the southern hemisphere, putting images of artworks that existed only fleetingly in uninhabited spaces in southern Africa in front of a global audience.”

Strijdom van der Merwe is prolific internationally, having made land art works on invitation in more than twenty countries, as diverse and far apart as Australia, Japan, Lithuania, Switzerland, Finland, Malta, Kenya, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United States. The title of the film references two books of images of his works, *Sculpting the Land* (published 2005) and *Sculpting the Earth* (2011). An aspect of the meaning of “this earth” in the film title is this southern African earth, as Strijdom makes land art internationally but the film shows him at work in the part of the world where he lives, where he is rooted, to which he has particular personal, emotional and artistic connections – and which also happens to be a land rich in ancient markings in the landscape left by its early human inhabitants.

The film shows Strijdom at work over four consecutive seasons, making land art works in remote and unspoilt settings in the vast open spaces of the southern African interior, using sticks, stones, leaves, rocks, grass, feathers, bamboo, water, and at times nothing more than the soil, sand and small stones on the ground – the earth itself.

Principal photography on the film started in the southern-hemisphere midsummer on 15 December 2020, in the Jonkershoek Valley outside the university town of Stellenbosch in South Africa's Cape winelands, and continued throughout all four seasons in the greater Stellenbosch area, with its fertile valleys and verdant forests, and including the surrounding Boland and the beaches of nearby Gordon's Bay.

Interspersed with the sequences shot in the Stellenbosch area, the film follows the artist as he travels to make artworks in increasingly distant locations in southern Africa. First, in the idyllic setting of Churchhaven on the pristine and peaceful Langebaan lagoon in the West Coast National Park. Second, further afield and in stark contrast, in the harsh, unforgiving landscape of the semi-arid Tankwa Karoo. And finally, at the ancient petroglyph site of Driekopseiland near Kimberley, almost a thousand kilometres inland, where some of the non-figurative rock engravings from a distant, pre-industrial culture have been dated by archaeologists at more than 2,500 years old.

The viewer experiences the visible change of seasons over the course of the year in which the film is shot, from the long, light-filled days of high summer to the shifting colours of autumn foliage, through winter's rest to the new leaves and wild flowers of springtime, and ending with the completion of the cycle in midsummer. At the same time, the audience has the opportunity to witness a body of creative work accumulating and being completed, made by the artist over the course of the year in which he turned sixty.

"Travelling with Strijdom for a year and getting to know all these beautiful locations, spending time with him to film striking artworks as they take shape in front of the camera, has been a privilege," says director Victor van Aswegen, who is also doing the cinematography, post-production and editing on the project. "What a joy to be able to share the images and sounds from all these places spread over the subcontinent with a global audience that will soon be able to experience, wherever they are in the world, compacted within one hundred minutes, what Strijdom and I experienced over the course of a year – and that only with extensive travelling, countless early morning starts and much carrying of heavy equipment over often rough terrain."

"What we are offering viewers, with a film set entirely outdoors and far away from the built environment, is a sense of reconnection to nature and the natural world at a time when many people globally feel cut off from nature, and there is a widespread and growing realisation that the natural world is under threat and in many places in rapid and terminal decline. And the art, made of materials known to people everywhere from their daily lives and surroundings, speaks a deeply universal human language, transcending all boundaries of country and culture, moving people with meaning and emotion, regardless of where they are on the planet."

Shooting on *Sculpting This Earth* will complete in December 2021, and the film is scheduled for international release in early 2022.

Sculpting This Earth teaser trailer:

www.vimeo.com/cinesouth/sculpting-this-earth-teaser-trailer

Sculpting This Earth official site:

www.sculptingthisearthfilm.com

Sculpting This Earth on Instagram:

www.instagram.com/sculptingthisearthfilm

Press enquiries: reception@cinesouthstudios.com

Assets: www.cinesouthstudios.com/press-room

Sculpting This Earth

Documentary feature film

South Africa

English

Colour

16:9 aspect ratio

Director: Victor van Aswegen

From CineSouth Studios, Cape Town

International release: early 2022 – date to be announced

About Strijdom van der Merwe:

Strijdom van der Merwe was born in 1961 and studied art in South Africa at the University of Stellenbosch, in the Netherlands at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Utrecht, in the Czech Republic at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, and in the United Kingdom at the Kent Institute of Art and Design in Canterbury. He works internationally and has made land art works in South Korea, Turkey, Belgium, France, Czech Republic, Namibia, Sweden, Lithuania, Japan, United States, Australia, Germany, Kenya, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Italy, Finland, Malta, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. Strijdom's many awards include a medal of honour from the South African Academy for Science and Art, a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, and a grant from the Prince Claus Fund.

www.strijdom.com

www.instagram.com/strijdomvandermerwe

www.strijdom.com/wp-content/uploads/Strijdom_van_der_Merwe_CV.pdf

About Victor van Aswegen:

Victor van Aswegen is a Cape Town-based filmmaker with a background in, successively, law, economics, development, finance, private equity, consultancy and business analytics. As filmmaker and founder-owner of CineSouth Studios, he now works principally as director and producer, and does the cinematography, post-production and editing on his films himself. His work to date has dealt with the nature of complex systems, the traumatic experience of people forcibly displaced by conflict and persecution, the parallel arcs of urbanisation and the human life cycle from childhood to parenthood, and an urban resilience stress event in the form of the 2017-2018 Cape Town water crisis. He has made two previous films about artists and their work: *Máquina do Mundo* (2017), a conversation with Paris-based artist Katja Gentric, and *Displaced* (2020), a retrospective of the oeuvre of South African artist Emma Willemse that is currently garnering laurels on the global film festival circuit.

www.cinesouthstudios.com/director

www.displaced-thefilm.com/#festivals

About CineSouth Studios:

Cape Town-based CineSouth Studios undertakes and delivers feature-length and larger-scale multiyear film projects. The films of the studio's founder-owner and director Victor van Aswegen engage the big-picture topics, at a time when these include some of the most consequential questions ever to confront humanity.

www.cinesouthstudios.com