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Majak Bredell is an Artist with a Mission

MARCH 3, 2020 ~ DEBEERNECESSITIES



Majak Bredell – 1983 study

Majak Bredell is one of those artists whose exhibitions feel like an adventure you're undertaking as she maps out the journey you're embarking on. DIANE DE BEER tells some of her story:



Majak Bredell – Self portrait 1995

Majak Bredell's upcoming exhibition(s), **MAJAK BREDELL: THE NEW YORK YEARS: 1981-2003**, is a case in point. Not being someone who believes in keeping it simple, it is a curated collaboration between the Association of Arts Pretoria and the Pretoria Art Museum suggested by the association's director Pieter van Heerden.

When you can, go big, is what Majak does well and because of the scope, she was thrilled about the collaboration.

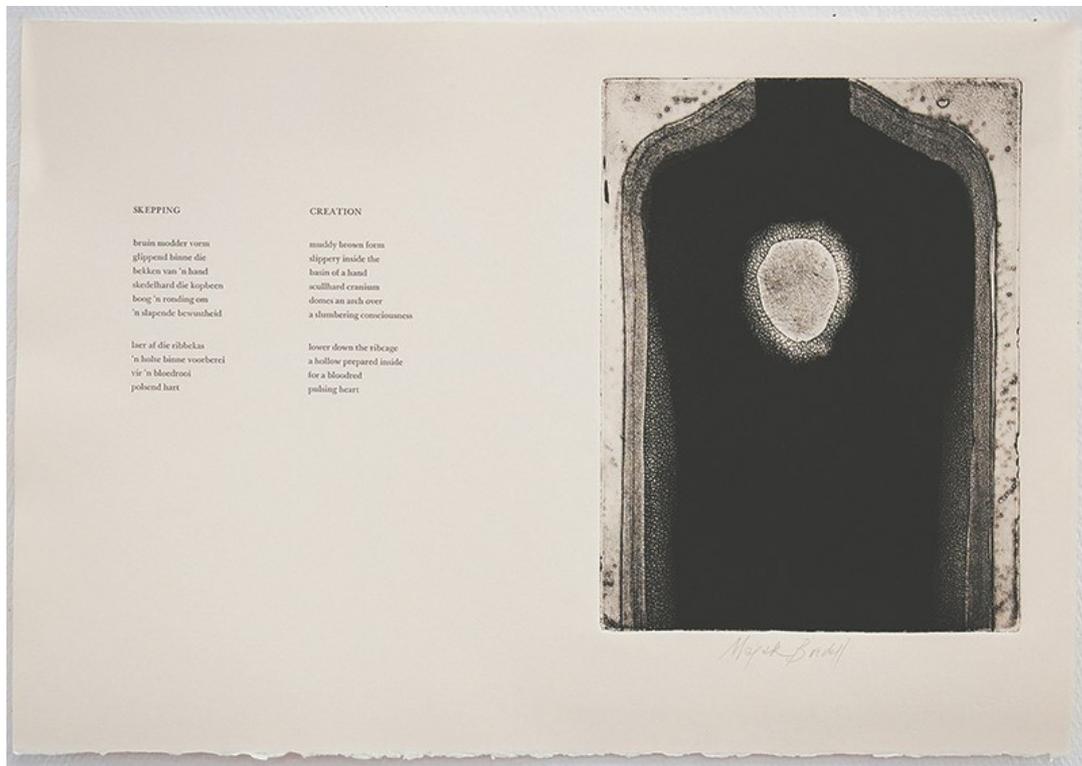
The two part retrospective overview in the two galleries is accompanied by a full-colour catalogue that includes an essay by the curator, Prof. Elfriede Dreyer.

Looking back at her life, when Majak emigrated to New York in 1981 with her husband and two young children, she embarked on a journey that would lead her “from the confines of a traditional marriage on to the riches this world-city had to offer a searching artist.”



Gesture drawings

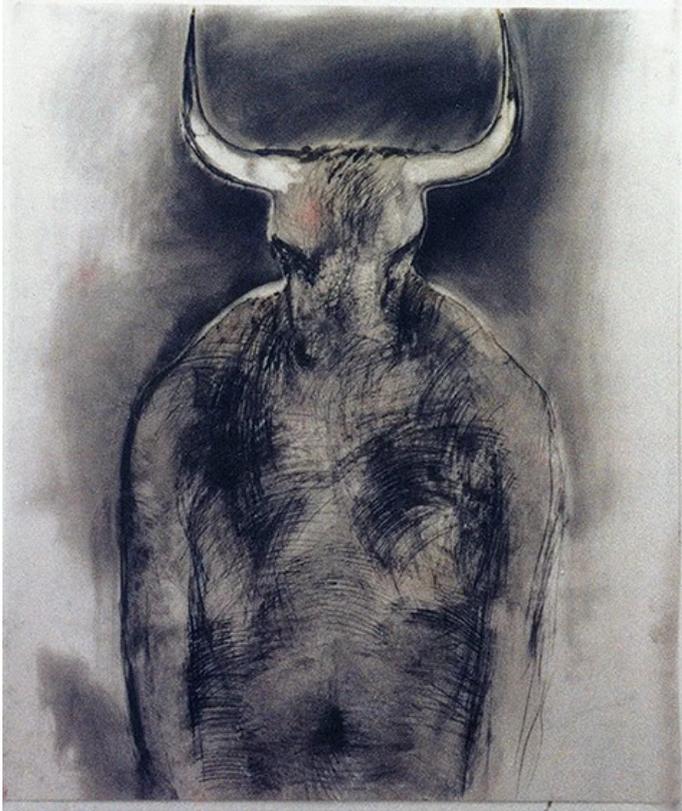
The works on show at both the venues cover a period of 22 years that follow the trajectory of the artist's initial confrontations with issues of belonging and dis-belonging as the chasm between her mother country and her adopted home were mediated in both image and poetry. Several artist's books with images and bilingual poems resulted from this.



A page from *Mother Passage* which has been framed for the exhibition.

The Association's showcase is an introduction together with a book titled *Mother Passage*, which includes 20 etchings and 20 bilingual poems, all of which she had framed so that it can be viewed in a particular way in the gallery.

The Pretoria Art Gallery covers similar themes and it was helpful to have a curator like Prof Dreyer who could pull things together. "There are so many works," says Majak, "we could only use half of all the actual pieces."



(<https://debeernecessities.com/majak-bredell->

[minotaur/](#))



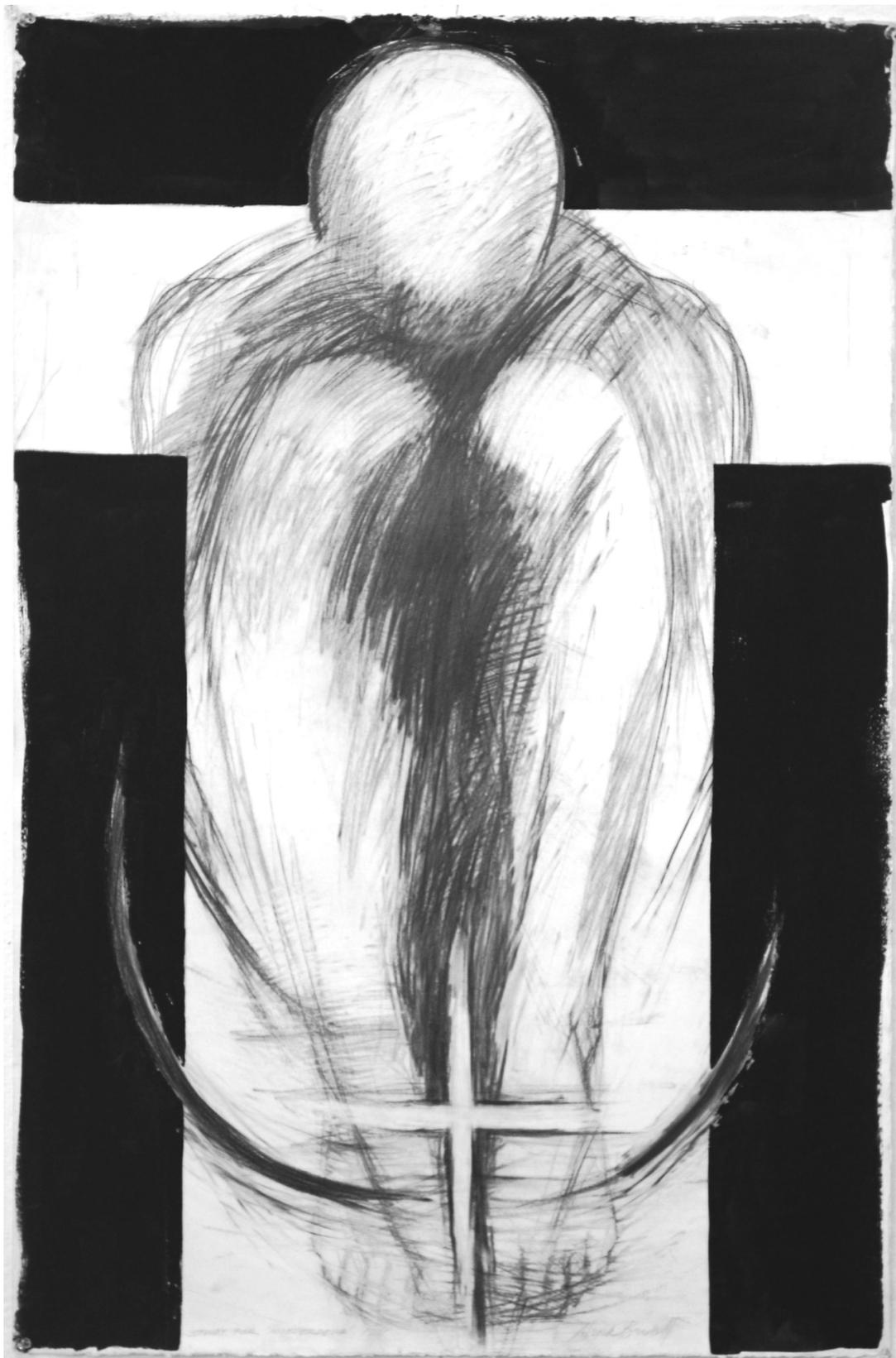
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[fearsome-figure/](#))

She also has a slideshow of all her workbooks and sketches and she was still crossing fingers (at the time of our chat) that she could achieve it technically – so that it could run on a loop. “It’s been put together in no particular order, no narrative, so that people can start watching at any point,” she says and it will take 33 minutes. Nothing is left to chance. She also has text cards throughout her exhibition to guide the viewer. “I’m covering a big arc,” she acknowledges.

This is an artist who very early on in her career knew that she didn’t want to use her art to make a living. “My lifeline couldn’t be diluted,” she says earnestly. She wanted no compromises. Instead she made a living as a graphic artist, something which has also stood her in good stead because she can

self-publish her amazing catalogue for example.



Majak Bredell – Study for Mother Passage

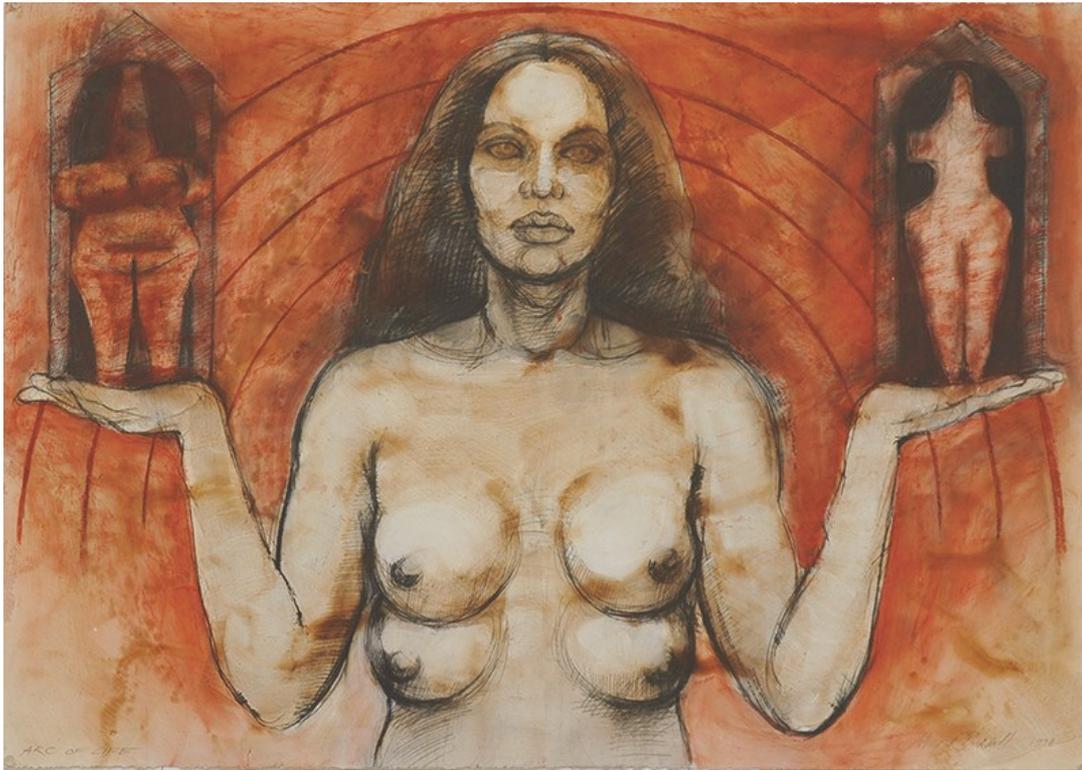
Bredell states in that catalogue accompanying the exhibitions:

“Through art-making I quarreled with the legacy and unyielding demands of the patriarchal Calvinism that shaped my childhood in the 1950s South Africa. This journey, accompanied by Jungian therapy and much reading, eventually led me to a gender shift in the image of the sacred,

culminating in my resurrection of ancient notions of the great mother, goddess, the sacred female.

“In this process, I imagined an embodied reflection of those parts of being that had been marginalized or rejected by western monotheism’s misogyny and its casting of the sexual female body into the abyss of so-called original sin. During my sojourn in that great city, art-making remained my passion despite limited exhibition opportunities.

“Longing for my mother country and the loss of a South African identity eventually precipitated my return to South Africa after a hiatus of almost 23 years. By which time my identity had shifted to include my New York identity that I wore like a second skin — a double identity I wear to this day.”

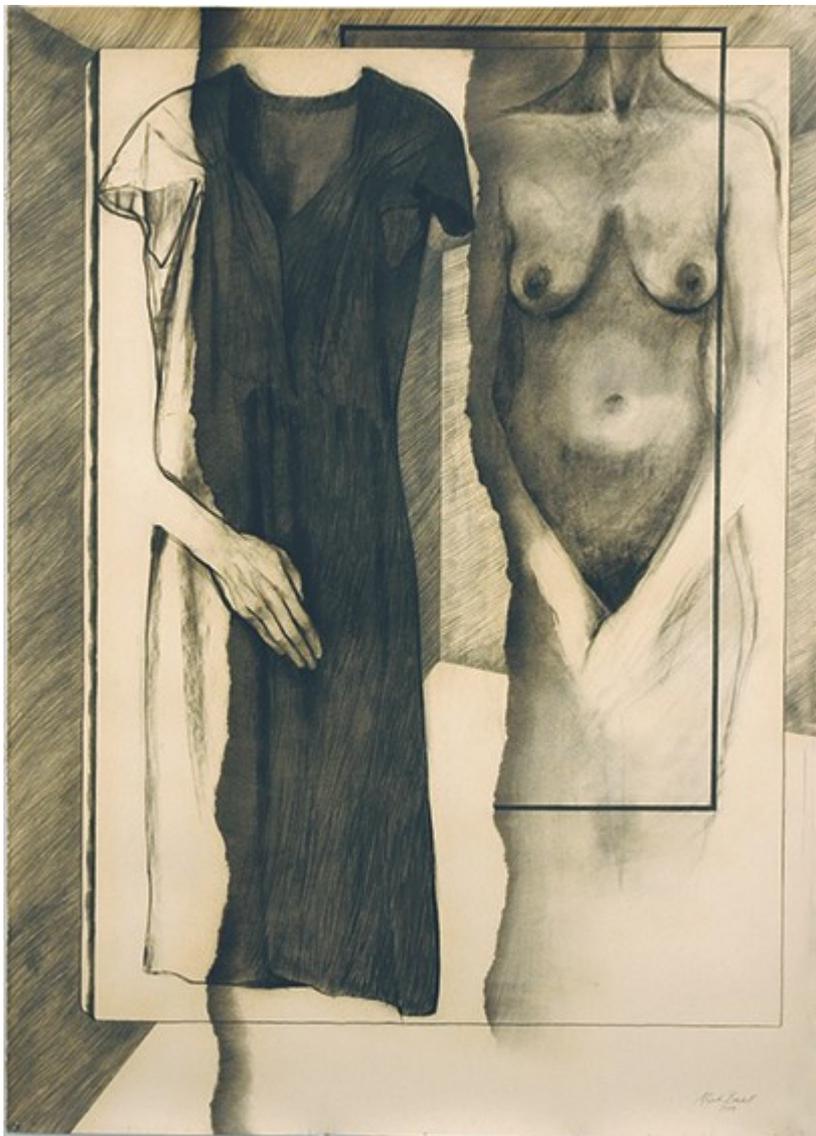


1998 Arc of Life

Since her return to South Africa, the themes developed in New York were further elaborated and exhibited: 2009: *Alter Images: The Black Madonna & Sisters*; 2013: *Roll Call*: a vindication of the lives and bodies that were destroyed during the centuries-long European witch persecutions; 2016: *Codex Magdalene+*: towards a new iconography and re-imaging the mythology and legends of Mary Magdalene; and her current works in progress, *Earth/Body*, that explore dialogues between the human body and the body of the earth.

And underlying all of her work is her quest to emphasise why the gender of God has done such damage to women’s bodies and a sense of self. “I was highly influenced by the writing of the spiritual feminists,” and she rattles off a slew of names as well as the website www.feminismandreligion.com (<http://www.feminismandreligion.com>) for anyone interested.

Do yourself a favour. Set aside a day, or perhaps two mornings or afternoons to break it up. Visit both exhibitions and do them thoroughly. It will be like reading an extraordinary book by a remarkable woman sharing her soulful story.



A favourite dress – layers of being. Graphite and charcoal on Arches cover paper

Details of the Pretoria exhibitions:

1: — an introduction to the work

Opening: Friday 6 March 2020 at 7pm

THE ASSOCIATION OF ARTS PRETORIA

173 Mackie Street

Nieuw Muckleneuk, Pretoria

Opening speaker: Dr Avitha Sooful

Walkabout by the artist: Wednesday 11 March 2020 at 12 noon

Closing: Wednesday 25 March 2020 at 3pm

2: — the comprehensive exhibition

Opening: Saturday 14 March 2020 at 11 am

THE PRETORIA ART MUSEUM
cnr Francis Baard and Wessels Streets
Arcadia Park, Pretoria

Opening speaker: Prof. Elfriede Dreyer

Walkabout by the artist: Tuesday 24 March 2020 at 11 am.

Closing: Sunday 14 June 2020

Bredell's book, **SACRED SCARS**, will be introduced at the Association of Arts Pretoria at both the opening and at the walkabout. The artist researched and compiled images that represent humankind's embodied relationship to the sacred female in art and artefacts dating from pre-history to the early modern period.

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