

# Art that rocks

An art exhibition with a difference awaits you  
at the Origins Centre...

**EXHIBITION**

**EXHIBITION:** *Considering Therianthropes* by Guy Thesen

**VENUE:** Origins Centre, Wits University, corner of Yale Road and Enoch Sontonga Avenue, Braamfontein, until July 18

**NATALIE BOSMAN**

ALTHOUGH the focus on San rock art is a new avenue for Guy Thesen, it's been a long time coming in that his artworks have always been inspired by nature and he has been exploring San rock art caves since he was a child.

"The inspiration came from some of the beautiful caves in the Klein Karoo," Thesen explains.

"It's a very rich archaeological area, and there are some very valuable cave sites. My father introduced me to the incredible detail in the area, and I have explored it all my life."

Thesen's exhibition *Considering Therianthropes*, which is currently on at Wits University's Origins Centre, consists of five bronze sculptures and 10 paintings.

As the title suggests, his focus is on therianthrope images, which depict the San shaman in a state of being half animal, half human.

"Therianthropes are very rare in South African rock art," the artist elaborates.

"Only around 5% of all South African rock art shows therianthropes, and of that there are a number of examples in the Klein Karoo area.

"What interested me is that this was imagery painted of the deepest trance a shaman can obtain; where the physical body seems to have transformed to become half

animal, half human."

His bronze sculptures depict stick-like San shamans in mid-trance, their bodies experiencing the sensations of weightlessness, elongation and dislocation that have been frequently documented.

"I'm excited by the idea of spiritual imagery on a wall being translated into 3D," Thesen says.

"I'm trying to give the dreamlike imagery that the shamans tried to capture form, meaning and shape.

"I also increased the size tremendously. If you enlarge something you can change the meaning of it a little," Thesen says.

"I'm taking a small painting tucked away in a cave somewhere and creating it almost on a human level. I'm almost showing the shaman as he would see himself."

Thesen's paintings, on the other hand, include documented translations from 19th century descendants of the San, and illuminate some aspects of the San people's spiritual belief systems for the viewer.

These water-based oil paintings boast the vivid colours typical to a trance experience, and they are painted onto glass, which represents the thin rock surface that the San believed separated the real, physical world from the spiritual world on the other side.

Thesen's exhibition is reason enough to visit the Centre, but while you're there take the opportunity to see "Karabo", the almost two-million-year-old female skeleton of *Australopithecus sediba*, the new species of hominid discovered in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, on display in celebration of the Soccer World Cup.

The Centre is open seven days a week from 9am-5pm. Entry is R35 per person, but on Sundays everyone pays R15 for entry to the Origins Centre and the exhibition (adults and children). Visit [www.origins.org.za](http://www.origins.org.za) for more info.

