



In pursuit of the whole truth,  
**Christine Grové** talks to Angus Taylor  
who creates art that not only moves but  
reflects a raw reality back at you >

# BECOMING GROUNDED



Standing in front of a sculpture created by Angus Taylor often has you staring for lengthy periods at a time. Somehow, there is a silent dialogue between you and the sculpture, a flowing narrative that seems to radiate out of the silent figure. Taylor is not a complicated man with complex philosophies except for one – to pursue personal truth, as opposed to a karaoke culture of building on theory upon theory.

“The human condition has been my primary focus in subject matter, within an attempt to understand our origin, our hardwired programming, the context in which we exist, from the individual to group dynamics. I have made several bodies of work focusing on different aspects of our being.”

Reflected in his latest “earth” works is this journey of discovery. Instead of bronze or steel, Taylor has played with the idea of rammed earth – soil that has been pounded into a mould to become so compacted and dense to stand on its own. “I started using the actual material as a conveyor of meaning, not necessarily the manipulation of the material – it is the material itself,” says Angus.

In the recent “Dislodged” exhibition at the University of Johannesburg, Taylor displayed his rammed earth works. “Die Omdop van Doodsekerheid” (The Inside-Out of Being Dead Sure) is the positive dimensions of a grave. In front of it stands “Gegronde” (Grounded) a huge figure made of layers of rammed earth. “Aangrensend” (Adjacent) has an extremely large figure lying in the corner of the room, facing the wall. All of these play with the idea of perception being dislodged and uprooted, conveying layers of understanding and growth – a grounded truth.

The earth is a metaphor for ‘groundedness’, and as soon as you lift it out, it becomes ‘ungrounded’. After returning from four months in Britain, Canada and Belgium – where all the roads are tarred and lawns are manicured – Taylor missed the dust, dry grass and red soil of the open spaces of South Africa, so he started creating with these elements, to commemorate these notions of being >

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rooted and uprooted, truths and untruths. Taylor often speaks of the binary – the combination of two opposites – the contrast of order and disorder, continuity and discontinuity, Dionysus and Apollo, having both of them together like a character in a movie, not 100 percent good and not 100 percent bad. "So in an artwork, if you overmanipulate the material and you bring it together perfectly and it's all polished and perfect, to me it's a lie."

Taylor's work is about contesting a monument and completely breaking down mankind's obsession with order and ruling. It's about creating an anti-monument and being able to perceive humans as being flawed, both orderly and disorderly at the same time. "I am trying to tell the whole, unmanipulated truth. It is not propaganda, it is perhaps realising the duality of all life and getting real with simply what is," Taylor says.

One of Taylor's main focuses is public art and taking a sculpture off the plinth. "Having it flat on the ground, surrounded by people, inviting children to climb on – it tickles your imagination – whereas if you have it in a museum, it becomes inaccessible and over-intellectualised, and that's when we just lose audiences." A perfect example of this is when Taylor took part in "Site Specific", where he and a selection of other artists were given only four days to produce a site-specific public artwork in Plettenberg Bay. Staying true to his love of different materials and the human figure, Taylor constructed large figures made of sticks, mounted above the water:

With a vast majority of contemporary art being too conceptual, elitist and inaccessible to the average viewer, and in academia, where art has turned inward and is speaking, in a big way, only to other art. In some cases art has become so far removed, intellectually, to being so irrelevant to anything else other than art itself.

"Art became threatened by all the other forms of entertainment and turned inward. With vehicles of mass production being able to create far more beautiful items than those handmade, art started speaking to other art. It has become this intellectual, conceptual game, where if you don't get it then you're stupid and if you don't get the theory then you're not informed enough. But the theory has gone so far that even if you study it for years, you can still stand in front of it and think, what the hell am I doing?"

"My father always said that a good writer is someone who can convey a great concept in a language that everyone can understand and a poor writer is someone who conveys a mundane concept in a language that no one can understand – and I find a lot of art today, is in the latter." Taylor strongly believes that art needs to have a first level of accessibility in order for the viewer to be drawn in, which is why so much of his work is figurative and always has a strong and intriguing narrative.

Visit [www.angustaylor.co.za](http://www.angustaylor.co.za) for more information on Angus. ♡

