

"My art is obnoxious, queer and necessary," says Cape Town emerging artist Githan Coopoo



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Visual artists across the globe, and specifically in Africa, have over the years reimagined their African identity, creating narratives that include all facets of life. Historically, sexuality, queerness, and gender expression were seen as 'un-African'. While it is still illegal to be LGBTQ+ in many African countries, there is a growing visibility of LGBTQ+ identities in the creative arts, pushing conversations that in the past were seen as taboo, but for self-taught jewellery designer and sculptor Githan Coopoo, he describes his art as obnoxious, queer and necessary.



Self-taught jewellery designer and sculptor Githan Coopoo. Image supplied

Coopoo, an emerging artist from Cape Town, is exhibiting at the 10th Investec Cape Town Art Fair taking place from 17-19 February at the Cape Town International Conference Centre. Coopoo uses clay to make statement pieces that speak to his lived experience as a queer South African of Indian descent who happens to adore all things bright and beautiful.

Growing up, Coopoo says, "I remember as a child always having an interest in building and making. When alone, wooden building blocks, Lego and colouring books were always firm favourites. I did, however, devote the majority of my free time as a child to drawing - this was always the most exciting prospect to me: pictures, maps, cards for all occasions. This was when I was at my most content.

At present, Coopoo sees his work as an insular conversation with himself, shared very publicly with others - to the extent of being performative. "I'm a very open person. I also use the physical act of making as a grounding tool; a process which makes me feel engaged with myself and thus in tune with the various conversations going on in my mind. In a way, making sculptures helps me to keep up with myself" he adds.

Originally focused on volume, opulence and fragility, Coopoo's clay jewellery has been shown at Fashion Weeks internationally, including New York, Paris, Nigeria and Russia. In 2022, Coopoo was recognised by the British Fashion Council in their New Wave: Creatives awards category. This category includes a list of the most innovative and inspiring young creative talents from around the world.



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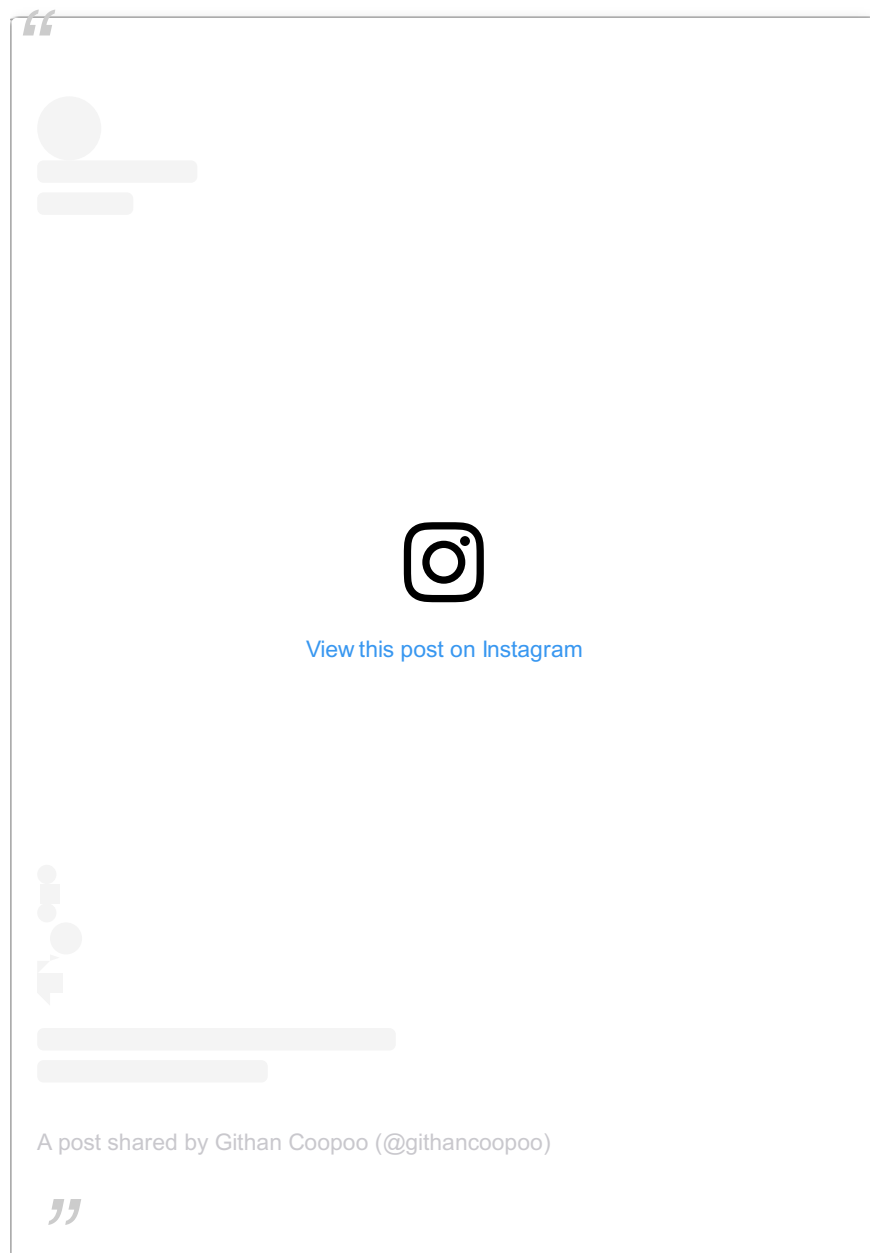
Expanding upon his practice, recent years have seen the production of larger-scale works, best described as false ceramics. These works have predominantly taken the form of tiles, vases and handbags which use text to communicate simple but pointed messages of a queer tonality that span from sarcastic to intimate in timbre.

The majority of visual artists have a message they want to share with the world. For Coopoo, his message is "Practice more radical empathy, and in doing so welcome joy into your life. Be grateful you are imperfect, and then notice life is never laughing at you but inviting you to laugh with it."

On the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the South African art landscape, Coopoo says "There is little to no representation of Coloured, Brown and Asian artists in this country. In the polarising binary of White and Black artists, the three aforementioned communities, which I am culturally attached to, are forgotten and uninvested in by comparison. I'd also like to see the industry here take the initiative to engage actively with and develop foundational support for artists with disabilities".

For the upcoming Investec Cape Town Art Fair's Tomorrows/Today Section, Cape Town artist Githan Coopoo will showcase

a collection of his immediately recognisable amphora-styled vessels, in a series titled *Unrealistic Expectations*. Each of the clay forms will display unique texts and various sentiments that reflect upon the titular trope of the show: the unrealistic expectations, phases and states of queer intimacy and desire.



Coopoo is represented exclusively in South Africa by Everard Read Gallery. From time to time you can find the sale of small print editions, miscellaneous small pieces and his jewellery on Instagram - [@githancoopoo](#).

For this emerging artist, his dream for the future is "to be able to make art and have there be an interest in it till I die."

Catch Githan Coopoo at his solo booth with Everard Read at the 2023 Investec Cape Town Art Fair's Tomorrows/Today section.

The 10th Investec Cape Town Art Fair will run from Friday, 17 February to Sunday, 19 February 2023 at the Cape Town International Conference Centre from 11am to 7pm.

Tickets can be purchased via the Webtickets link on www.investeccapetownartfair.co.za.

For more information visit www.investeccapetownartfair.co.za or follow Investec Cape Town Art Fair on [Twitter](#), Instagram [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). Hashtag #ICTAF

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