

art & design

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN ART, ARCHITECTURE, INTERIOR DECORATION AND DESIGN

PRIMAL *instinct*

SYDNEY SCULPTOR
DION HORSTMANS USES
NATURE AS HIS GUIDE.

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Dion Horstmans works on
Nexus VI, a collaborative piece
for fashion label Jac + Jack.
Behind him are Hectic Electric
#12 (left) and Hectic Electric #1.



LEFT: Horstmans' *Polar Vortex* series features on the rear wall of the studio's meeting room. BELOW: hard at work on a piece. BOTTOM, FROM LEFT: African tribal art rests above a seated figure from his *Roly Poly Men* series; the sculptor's workbench is home to a range of panels drawn directly from tribal motifs and patterns, plus shields and yam masks collected from trips to Papua New Guinea; a painting from the *Roly Poly* series towers over curios gathered from his many travels.



"I FLIP BETWEEN WORKING ON THE GEOMETRIC FORMS AND THIS OTHER BODY OF WORK, WHICH I CALL FUTURE PRIMITIVE"



Sculptor Dion Horstmans' admission that he's terrible at maths is surprising considering the similarity his abstract works bear to the geometries of fractal architecture. And though he cites as an influence American architect and inventor Buckminster Fuller — a forefather of the genre who popularised related ideas such as the geodesic dome and the biosphere — Horstmans' own practice is explicitly inexact. Created without the help of a computer or even a ruler, his sculptures spring from instinct. "I have this really good understanding of balance and space," he says.

The connection to fractal geometry doesn't stop there. Its basis on the recursive patterns of nature — with smaller parts mirroring a greater whole — can also be found in tribal art, where repetitive geometric or fluid shapes are used to symbolise the world around us. As it happens, Horstmans grew up in New Zealand and the Cook Islands, where Maori and Polynesian art is a part of everyday life. "I was surrounded by tribal motifs the whole time: diamonds and triangles; really bright colours like red, black and white," he says.

Horstmans bases his steel tube sculptures on these kinds of cellular shapes, expanding outwards until he feels they're finished: pure of form and free of premeditated design, they embody something of our implicit understanding of our environment. "These shapes are drawn from a really primal place," he explains. "They're not from a computer. They're just

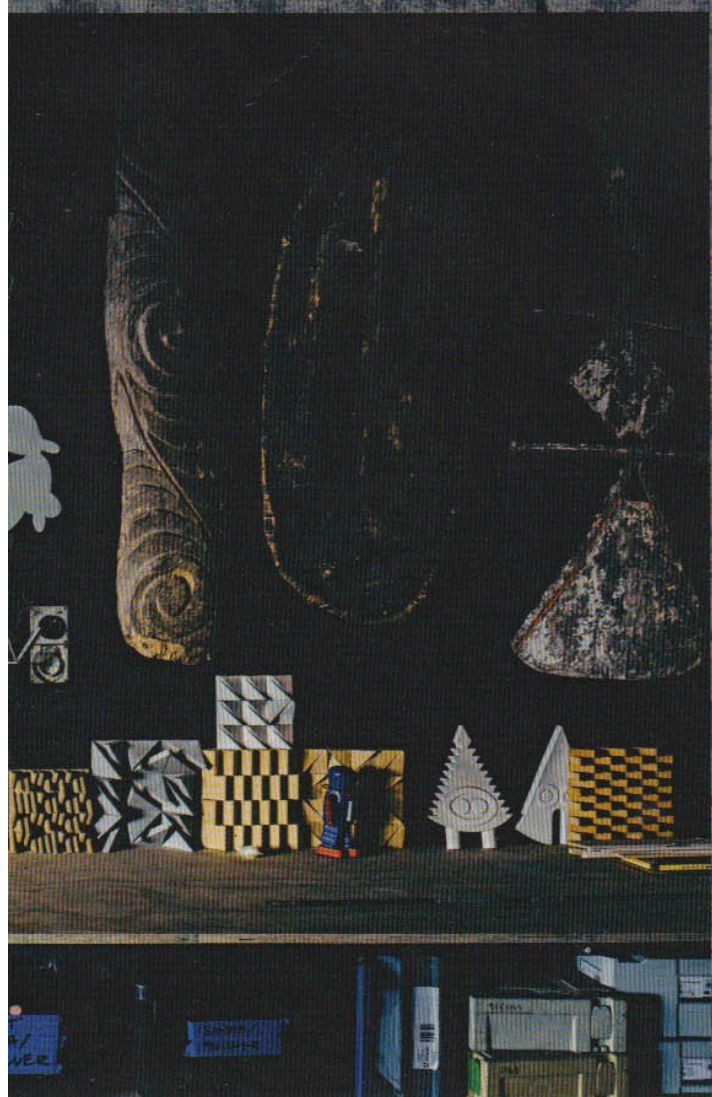
really primal shapes found throughout nature — whether it's a palm frond, feathers, scales on a fish or coral. My practice is drawn from that, and then scaling it up and simplifying."

If 'cells' form the basis of his creative process — in this case meaning smaller steel shapes that fit together to make a larger piece — the rest relies on the sculptor's use of light. Horstmans literally shines a light on the component structures to create shadows, which are then incorporated into the piece, giving the finished sculptures a sense of movement and depth.

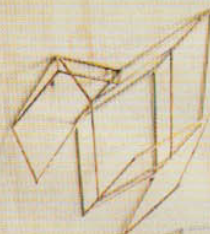
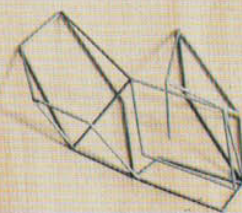
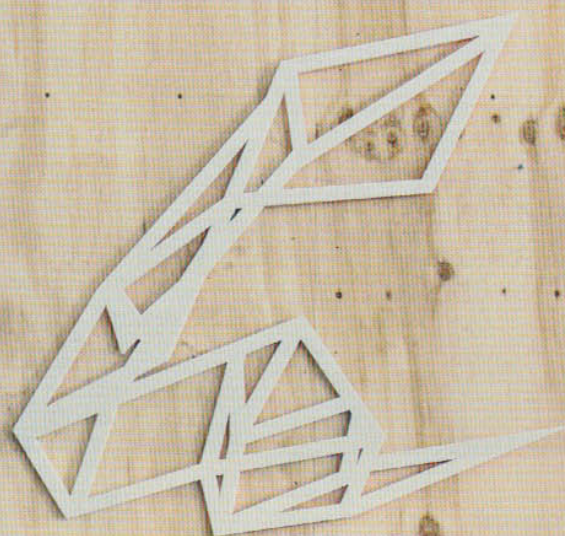
"I start with a couple of those cells, shine a light through them, draw the shadow onto a benchtop one-dimensionally, and then build it three-dimensionally," he explains. "The lower the light goes, the longer the shadow — everything's projected."

Along with the steel tube works, Horstmans also exhibits a distinctly different style of sculpture — one he first experimented with when he began to explore the medium in the mid '90s. With an equally 'primitive' perspective, the series is rendered in brutal, knobby forms that are — quite believably — inspired by creatures seen in nightmares.

"I went to Papua New Guinea on a trip and when I got back I just started making these shapes out of clay and fibreglass and getting them bronze-cast," he explains. "They're creatures that would chase me in my dreams as a kid. Now I flip back between working on the geometric forms and this other body of work, which I call Future Primitive." >



HORSTMANS' AMBITION SEEMS AS BOUNDLESS AS THOSE INFINITE GEOMETRIC COMBINATIONS



< Sitting in Horstmans' studio in Sydney's Marrickville, it's clear his inclination towards balanced, beautiful objects prevails against those nightmarish forms. Powder-coated steel sculptures zig-zag up the walls, overlooking benches bearing angular sketches and embryonic fragments of future works. Horstmans points out a couple of recent commissions scattered around the space, including the abstract Christmas trees he created with stylist Megan Morton for Space Furniture.

Having worked as a sculptor for almost 19 years — he started out in the prop department of *The Matrix* — Horstmans has now expanded his practice to include large-scale public artworks and architecture, like the jet fighter-inspired *Supersonic* at Melbourne's Docklands. Visibly excited at the prospect of creating even bigger works, his ambition seems as boundless as those infinite geometric combinations. "I want to make bridges; I want to do big, big stuff," he enthuses. In fact, Horstmans is already in talks with an Australian architecture firm about designing a bridge to be built in Shenzhen, China, next year — a feat that will be his largest achievement to date.

See Horstmans' works in *Sculpture 2015* at Sydney's Brenda May Gallery, 28 January–14 February. His solo show, *Elektromont*, opens at Melbourne's Flinders Lane Gallery on 24 February; brendamaygallery.com.au; flg.com.au. VL

CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: *Hectic Electric* #14, *Polar Vortex* #1, #2 and #3 and *Hectic Electric* #15 provide the backdrop to a leather armchair bought by Horstmans at auction.

