

THE CULTURAL ENTREPRENEUR

Artist Jonathan Freemantle comes across as the quintessential British gentleman, but he's actually South African-born – and he's added entrepreneurship and cultural activism to his portfolio

With almost mathematical precision, Freemantle's created work that absorbs and challenges audiences. The trailblazer, who left Cape Town for almost-always-icy Edinburgh, Scotland, has exhibited worldwide, created a business called Zwart, founded the Edinburgh International Fashion Festival (EIFF) and managed to be a husband and a dad to his two children.



Yet he shies away from labels. "I don't really see myself as either a businessman or an artist. I suppose technically I'm both, but I'm more interested in direct experience of the enhanced reality of now. As an artist, I'm a storyteller and alchemist. As a businessman, I'm a communicator, a motivator and a lover of people," he says, adding that he isn't commercially driven, although "bigger projects might just have bigger numbers".

From his acclaimed *Divina Proportione* series, where art and maths truly meet, to his online publication www.jrnl.co.za (compiled with his brother Matthew) and the very recent EIFF (which was held in August this year), Freemantle's never been busier. The festival had the likes of designers Kostas Murkudis and Amanda Harlech involved in talks, shows and exhibitions. Asked how he fits all these commitments in with family time, he says simply: "They permeate and illuminate everything."

His creative passion was kindled during adolescence. "I started as a 17-year-old arriving alone in London to begin my training in fine art," he says – and he's remained engrossed in it ever since. He married his wife Anna, who was modelling in London, at the age of 21 and started a curating business with her, first called Noir but later renamed Zwart, where they put together art concepts and "created environments we'd have liked to be in ourselves".

When he realised there was a gap in Edinburgh to create a platform where visual art, fashion, film and music would converge, the EIFF was born. "It's curated like a dinner party, a gathering of wonderful people interacting and sharing with each other, just with a global reach," he says. "We're beginning work on similar festivals in Istanbul, Turkey and Cape Town. Everyone in my team is an artist, so it's all joy."

The EIFF intends to focus on the intellectual, rather than the superficial side of fashion – an aim which stems directly from Freemantle's belief that the greatest revolution in the world at present is inner change and a shifting of both utilitarian and aesthetic definitions.

In October he also held an exhibition at Edinburgh's Summerhall art venue with sculptor Frode Bolhuis. The event marked the inauguration of his gallery, a global collective which also has physical space in Cape Town. And, as if he hasn't enough to do, a dance/film/music project with a collective including choreographer Hannah Loewenthal is on the cards.

This is one man whose vision is never far from his grasp. **DM**

• For more on Freemantle, visit: <http://jonathanfreemantle.com>