

THE UNSEEN BOND



M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i

Exhibition catalogue by

M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i

U N S E E N 2026 B O N D

An Exploration of form and an Unseen Bond

M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i



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U N S E E N B O N D

In the unseen bond, martin desiderati transforms seed forms into bodies of memory and care, using pareidolia to reveal the invisible bond between childhood, nurture and the woman (Malerato) who raised him.



Fig 1
Martin Desiderati
Ceramic Seed Pod 1,
Detail, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Stoneware
30 x 30 cm

U N S E E N B O N D

Pareidolia is a psychological phenomenon where the human brain interprets random or vague visual or auditory patterns as something familiar and meaningful, especially faces.

The Unseen Bond is rooted in the memory of Malerato, my *Grootmaak-Ma, but it reaches beyond one personal story. It is about recognising the often unseen labour of women who raise, carry, teach, protect and love children into adulthood. Through three different mediums namely ceramics, graphite drawings and sculpture, I use memory to explore nurture and care as something that shapes us deeply, even when it is not formally recognised or publicly visible.

The work moves through pareidolia, botanical forms, seed pods, and fragments of nature, allowing familiar shapes and memories to emerge from organic forms. The ceramic seed forms speak of growth, origin and the quiet beginnings of attachment. The ceramic seed forms speak of growth, origin and the quiet beginnings of attachment.

The graphite drawings preserve moments of observation and memory, while the fragmented mother-and-child sculpture gives physical form to the act of carrying, holding and protecting.

Its yellow powder-coated surface introduces warmth, visibility and presence into a body that is deliberately broken and reconstructed.

Together, these works form a visual language of care, memory and belonging. They suggest that some of the most important relationships in our lives are not defined by blood, title or public recognition, but by repeated acts of tenderness and responsibility. Like seeds planted quietly, these bonds take root over time and continue to shape us long after childhood has passed.

* Grootmaak-Ma: a Woman who helped raised us.

The Unseen Bond is ultimately an act of recognition. It is a way of giving form to the love, labour and presence of someone whose influence remains deeply embedded in who I am.



Fig 2
Nicholas Hlobo, Untitled, 2020
(from Sit - on or stand up and be counted)
30 x 18 x 20 cm; 20 x 23 x 21 cm
Ceramics



Fig 3
John Skotnis
Mythology Idols and Archetype, 1986
bronze, mounted on a wooden base
height: 42cm,
including base

INTRODUCTION



Fig 4
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pod I and II, 2026
The Unseen Bond
ABS, Nylon Polymer 3D Print
30 x 30 cm

U N S E E N B O N D



M O T H E R & C H I L D

Earthware & Oxide

M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i ⁷

UNSEEN BOND



Fig 5
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods I and II, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Ceramics
30 x 30 cm



UNSEEN BOND



MOTHER & CHILD

Earthware & Oxide

The mother-and-child forms represent the emotional centre of The Unseen Bond. Working with earthenware allowed me to return to a material that is connected to the earth itself — a substance shaped through touch, pressure, patience and transformation. Clay carries a sense of origin; it begins as something raw and formless, yet through human interaction it becomes an object that holds memory and meaning. This connection between earth and human experience reflects the way care shapes a person over time.

Through hand-building techniques, the forms were gradually constructed, allowing the material to retain evidence of the making process. The imperfections, marks and variations within the surface are not removed, because they become part of the story of the work. They represent the traces left by time, experience and the unseen labour involved in nurturing another person.

Oxides were introduced to emphasise depth, ageing and connection to the earth. Rather than creating a perfect surface, the oxide treatment allows the material to reveal layers and contrasts, suggesting that memory itself is never completely smooth or fixed. It contains fragments, impressions and emotional traces.

The mother-and-child relationship within these ceramic forms is not only a representation of a physical connection, but a symbol of protection, carrying and belonging. The work reflects the invisible acts of love that often happen quietly — the daily gestures that shape a child's identity but are rarely acknowledged. Through clay, the unseen becomes something tangible.

U N S E E N B O N D

Abstract ceramic seed forms use
pareidolia,
organic shape and
material presence to suggest
growth, origin and the quiet forma-
tion of emotional attachment.



MEMORY PODS

Fired earth & Acrylic Epoxy



Fig 6
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods, I & II, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Fired Earth, Acrylic Resin and
pigment
30 x 30 cm and 28 cm x 25 cm



MEMORY PODS

Fired earth & Acrylic Epoxy

The memory pods developed from the idea that memories, like seeds, contain the possibility of growth. These forms explore the relationship between nature, attachment and the way experiences are stored within us. The seed pod became an important symbol because it represents beginnings, potential and the quiet process of transformation. Like the unseen bond between a child and the person who raises them, a seed develops beneath the surface before its presence becomes visible.

The pods were created using terracotta powder combined with acrylic epoxy resin. This process allowed me to combine the physical connection of earth with the transparency and preservation qualities of resin. The terracotta introduces a direct relationship with soil, origin and the natural world, while the epoxy creates a sense of preservation — as if moments of memory have been suspended and protected over time.

Through this combination of materials, the pods become both organic and constructed. They appear as fragments of nature, yet they are carefully formed objects that represent remembered experiences. The process reflects the way memories are created: some parts remain clear and visible, while others become fragmented, altered or partially hidden.

Connected to the concept of pareidolia, the forms encourage the viewer to recognise familiar shapes within abstract organic structures. The viewer completes the meaning through their own experiences and memories. The memory pods therefore become containers of personal and collective remembrance, suggesting that even the smallest moments of care can become deeply rooted parts of who we become.

U N S E E N B O N D



Fig 7
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Fired Earth, Acrylic Resin
and pigment
28 x 30 cm



Fig 8
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Fired Earth, Acrylic Resin
and pigment
30 x 30 cm



Fig 9
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Fired Earth, Acrylic Resin
and pigment
40 x 35 cm



Fig 10
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Fired Earth, Acrylic Resin
and pigment
28 x 25 cm



Fig 11
Martin Desiderati
Seed Pods, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Fired Earth, Acrylic Resin
and pigment
40 x 35 cm

Abstract ceramic seed forms use
pareidolia,
organic shape and
material presence to suggest
growth, origin and the quiet forma-
tion of emotional attachment.



NATURE ELEMENTS

Graphite drawings

M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i



Fig 12
Martin Desiderati
Seed I, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Graphite Drawing
841 x 594 cm



NATURE ELEMENTS

Graphite drawings

The graphite drawings form a visual archive of observation, nature and memory. Through realistic representation, I focus attention on small elements that are often overlooked — botanical forms, seeds and fragments from the natural environment. These drawings are connected to the idea of pareidolia, where familiar images and meanings emerge from ordinary forms. A seed, flower or natural object can become more than itself; it can become a trigger for memory, emotion and personal interpretation.

Graphite was chosen because of its intimate and reflective qualities. The slow process of building tone, texture and detail through layering mirrors the way memories develop over time. Each mark becomes a record of attention and patience, similar to the repeated acts of care that form the foundation of The Unseen Bond.

The realism within these works creates a contrast with the abstract ceramic and sculptural forms. While the sculptures explore memory through fragmented shapes and symbolism, the drawings preserve moments with clarity and observation. They create a bridge between what is seen and what is felt.

By focusing on natural elements, the drawings connect the personal story of Malerato with a broader human experience. Nature becomes a metaphor for growth, resilience and continuity. Like seeds carried through generations, memories and acts of care continue beyond the moment in which they were created. The drawings therefore become quiet reminders that the smallest details can hold the deepest emotional significance.

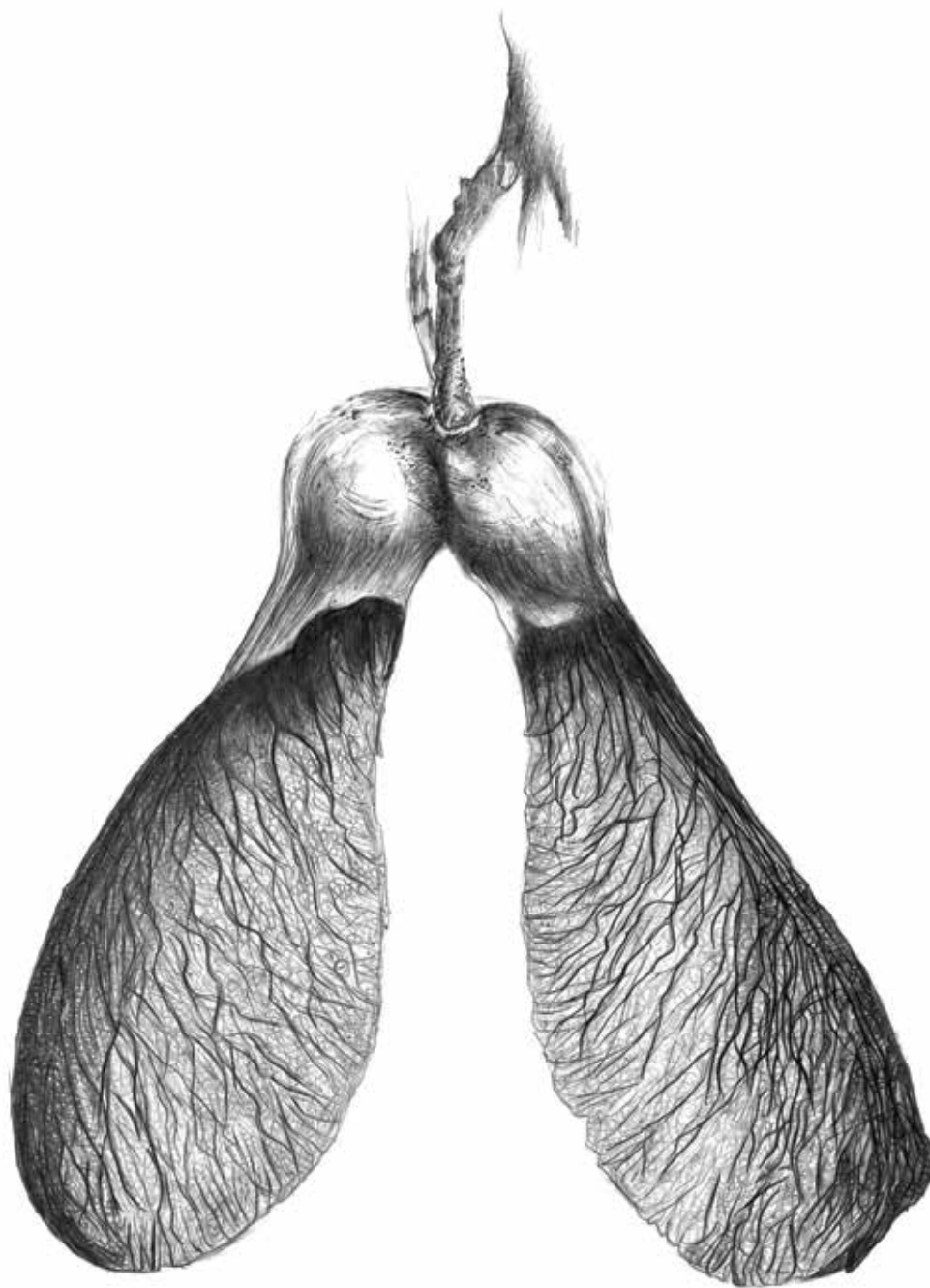


Fig 13
Martin Desiderati
Seed II, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Graphite Drawing
841 x 594 cm

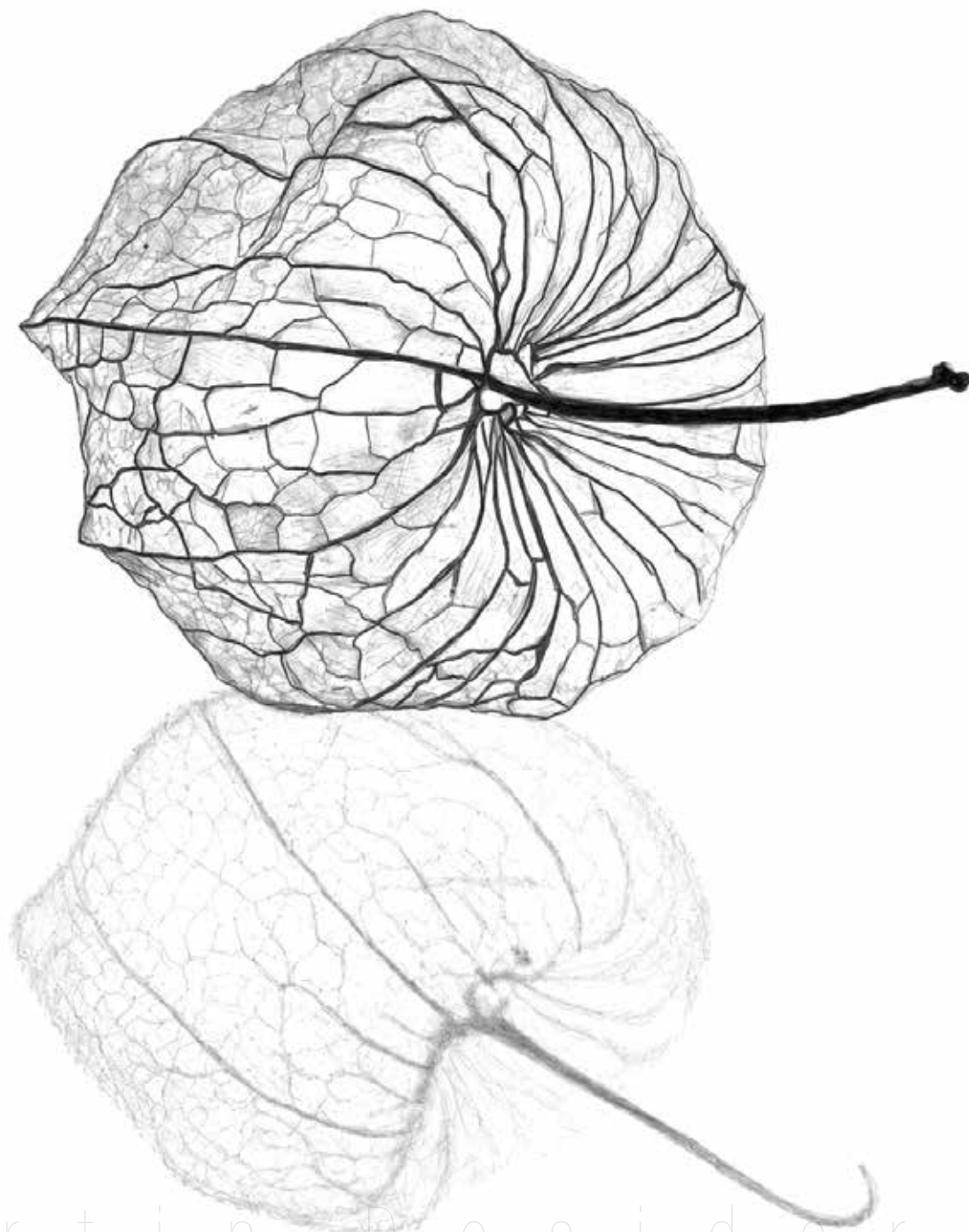
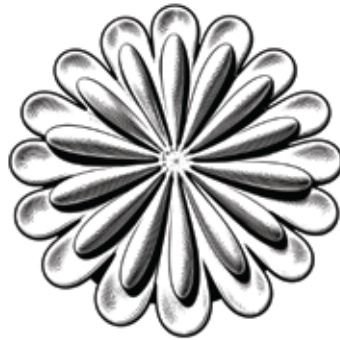


Fig 14
Martin Desiderati
Seed III, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Graphite Drawing
841 x 594 cm



Fig 15
Martin Desiderati
Seed IV, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Graphite Drawing
841 x 594 cm

THE UNSEEN BOND



Malerato

A Symbol of love - an Unseen Bond

Martin Desiderati



Fig 18
Martin Desiderati
Malerato, 2026
The Unseen Bond
Metal, Powder coated
595 x 1890 cm



E E N O N D



Malerato

A Symbol of love - an Unseen Bond

The large fragmented steel sculpture, Malerato, represents the physical manifestation of the unseen bond explored throughout the project. Created from steel fragments and finished with a yellow powder-coated surface, the work transforms industrial material into a symbol of warmth, care and emotional presence. Steel is traditionally associated with strength, structure and permanence, while the yellow surface introduces a sense of visibility, light and human connection.

The fragmented construction of the sculpture reflects the complexity of memory and identity. Rather than presenting a complete and idealised figure, the broken and reconstructed form acknowledges that our understanding of love, family and belonging is often created from fragments of experiences. These fragments come together to form something meaningful, much like memories that continue shaping us throughout life.

The mother-and-child relationship is suggested through the gesture of carrying and holding. The sculpture gives physical form to an emotional connection that cannot be measured or easily explained. It represents the presence of someone whose influence remains, even when they are no longer physically present.

The yellow powder coating creates a visual contrast against the fragmented steel structure. It brings warmth and recognition to a form that could otherwise appear cold or industrial. Through this transformation, the sculpture becomes a statement about making invisible care visible.

Malerato is ultimately a tribute to the people whose love and labour shape our lives quietly. It represents the unseen bonds that remain embedded within us and connections that continue to exist long after childhood has passed.

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The Weight of Care

The large fragmented steel mother-and-child form, finished in yellow powder coating, gives physical weight and visibility to the acts of carrying, protecting and holding that sit at the heart of The Unseen Bond.

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B I O G R A P H Y

Martin Desiderati was born in 1974 and is a mixed Italian South African artist who lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. His artistic practice is deeply rooted in his lifelong fascination with pareidolia, the human tendency to see forms, figures and meaning within ordinary objects, surfaces and visual fragments.

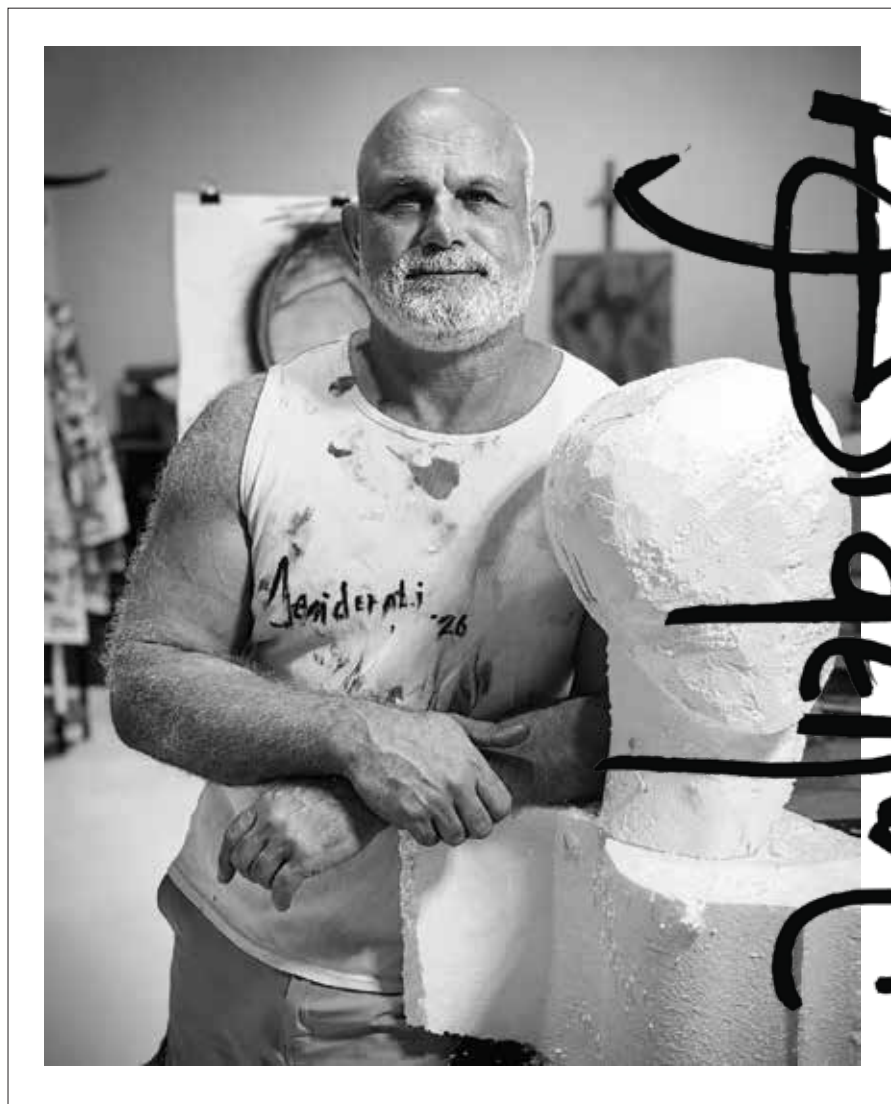
Desiderati's work explores memory, identity, emotional attachment and the unseen connections that shape human experience. His current body of work, *The Unseen Bond*, investigates the powerful relationship between the artist and the woman who raised him. Through drawing, sculpture and material transformation, he uses pareidolia as both a visual strategy and conceptual framework to reveal hidden emotional narratives.

He is currently completing his degree in Visual Arts through UNISA, where his practice has developed into a more focused investigation of personal memory, symbolic form and contemporary South African art language. His work moves between raw material presence and refined contemporary finishes, allowing the visible object to carry invisible histories of care, loss, protection and belonging.

Desiderati has participated in several exhibitions, including his most recent exhibition at Desiderati Gallery earlier this year. In 2026, he will present his exhibition *Pareidolia: The Unseen Bond* at B-Art Gallery, continuing his exploration of how ordinary forms can hold extraordinary emotional meaning.

His practice is personal, intuitive and conceptually driven, inviting viewers to look beyond the surface and discover the quiet bonds that are often felt more deeply than they are seen.

M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i



Desiderati

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THE UNSEEN BOND

An Exploration of form and an Unseen Bond



In the unseen bond, Martin Desiderati transforms seed forms into bodies of memory and care, using pareidolia to reveal the invisible bonds between childhood, nurture and the woman who help raise children across the world.

In the unseen bond, Martin Desiderati transforms seed forms into bodies



of memory and care, using pareidolia to reveal the invisible bonds



between childhood, nurture and the women who help raise children across the world



THE UNSEEN BOND

MARTIN DESIDERATI



M a r t i n D e s i d e r a t i 31

THE UNSEEN BOND



Some bonds
are not seen,
but always
felt.

MARTIN DESIDERATI