



Trevor Good

Allel 4 by Peles Empire, Jesmonite, paper and pigment, 2014



Untitled by Jessica Mein, graphite and hemp on wood, 2016



Dirty by Gregor Hildebrandt, video tape on canvas, 2014

# The materiality of surface

A selection of abstract works invites viewers to experience textures, colours and their construction

By JYOTI KALSI  
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In today's world we are constantly interacting with screens, which are surfaces that act as interfaces to access digital ephemera. These surfaces lead us into a world which is a simulation of reality, or a construction of perceived reality. The latest exhibition at Carbon 12, *Surface as Interface as Surface*, puts the focus back on the materiality of a surface and a sensory experience of it.

Through a range of carefully selected abstract, conceptual works by artists from around the world, the show invites viewers to experience the materials, textures, colours and construction of the works as a part of the concept, and to contemplate the idea that every surface is an interface and every interface is a surface. The show features new works by the gallery's artists André Butzer, Bernhard Buhmann and Ralf Ziervogel along with works by Gregor Hildebrandt, Peles Empire, Jessica Mein, Thomas Arnolds and Mohammed Kazem.

"We wanted to present intimate work that deals with the surface in terms of structure, process and in-



Untitled by André Butzer, tempera on paper, 2013

attention. The works in this show are conceptual, but with a strong visual aesthetic based on the element of handcrafting," Nadine Knotzer, founding partner of the gallery says.

The artists have used a variety of

materials that are an important part of the narrative.

German artist Hildebrandt has created patterns that are full of movement and energy in works titled *Dirty* and *Dancing* by gluing together

scratched video tapes of the film *Dirty Dancing* on his canvasses.

Kazem, who trained as an oud player, is well-known for his *Scratches* series in which he makes scratches on white paper to simulate sound waves as a visual representation of music. The Emirati artist has added a new dimension to his work in this show by colouring the paper with acrylic paint. The works of both artists take us back to the analogue, capturing echoes from the past and preserving memories for the future.

Dubai-based Brazilian artist Mein plays with the physical aspects of surface and structure, and the architecture of the canvas itself in her abstract compositions constructed from layers of graphite, hemp and wood. The organic surfaces become interfaces for discovering the materials used by artists and the stories they tell.

Artist duo Peles Empire spent a lot of time taking photographs of various surfaces in a palace in Romania. The two women artists have used Jesmonite, pigment and their photographs to recreate the look and feel of the marble walls and flooring of the palace in their three-dimensional mixed media works from the *Allel* series.

The surface is also a key element of

the narrative in the paintings of German artists Butzer, Arnolds and Ziervogel, and Austrian artist Buhmann.

Butzer's monochromatic, minimalist, abstract tempera paintings on paper represent a visual reduction to point zero. In Buhmann's oil painting, his well-known imaginary characters – the Pretenders – are replaced by abstract, geometric forms in soft pastel shades. By using several layers of paint on untreated canvas, the artist has transformed the surface into an interface that draws viewers into a lyrical, romantic world.

Arnolds expresses himself through simple lines and circles as well as subtle textures on the surface of his abstract paintings. As always, Ziervogel challenges the limits of abstraction and perception because only a very close look at the geometric shapes he has drawn in ink on his gesso-primed canvasses reveals that the lines are actually composed of handwritten words expressing a variety of moods, feelings and thoughts.

■ Jyoti Kalsi is an arts-enthusiast based in Dubai.

■ *Surface as Interface as Surface* will run at Carbon 12, Al Quoz, until July 15.

## Empty spaces

Dubai-based Indian artist Mukesh Shah is showcasing a series of multimedia works in his first solo exhibition in the city, *In Between*. The title of the show references the Japanese concept of *Ma*, which is the pure and essential void between things or the emptiness that is full of possibilities, such as the silence between the notes that makes the music. Through the repetitive lines and geometric shapes in his abstract, monochromatic compositions, the artist draws attention to what lies in between, offering viewers empty spaces for deeper introspection.

Shah was born in Aden, Yemen, educated at Eton and Cambridge in the UK, and moved to Dubai three years ago. He has no formal training in art, but he believes that has helped him to work with freedom in developing his own visual language. He prefers earthy colours and uses simple materials such as paper, cardboard, gauze and string to add texture and an organic feel to his work.

"My practice is an innate response to change and the narratives that impact me. But in a noisy world bombarded with myriad narratives and media images, nothing lingers on, and a personal story has a minimal and short-term impact. Abstraction thus becomes relevant because it goes beyond individual narratives towards the universal. Also, if you look at anything figurative long enough, it starts to dissolve into abstraction. I want to explore that space where figuration dissolves into abstraction. Through compositions that have a geometric structure with space, repetition, and chance as keynotes, I try to dwell in an abstract space that is contemplative and detached, but also human and compassionate. My work is introspective, and for me the process of making the work is important in itself. I use various materials to add tactile texture and physicality to the work," he says.

In most of his works, Shah has used repetitive lines and geometric shapes to explore what lies in between, such as the pause between words, life between birth and death, or the moment between the previous one and the next. But in a series of ink and acrylic prints, he has played with shapes that allude to doors. "We do not know how many doors we pass through as we move from one space to another in our lives, just as we are unaware of passing from one moment to another. Doors are a wonderful expression of *Ma* or a negative space that is defined by the emptiness surrounding the physicality," he says.

—Jyoti Kalsi

*In Between* will run at XVA Gallery in the Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood, Bur Dubai, until July 5.



Pete Maloney

Untitled by Mukesh Shah, mixed media on canvas, 2016