Deceptive appearances
A Ralf Ziervoge drawing and Rui Chafes’s black, shadowy sculptures

Look beyond the obvious

Rui Chafes’s sculptures and Ralf Ziervoge’s drawings urge viewers to contemplate the contradictions, complexities and ironies of modern life

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W
ell-known Portuguese sculp-
tor Rui Chafes works with steel.
But despite the industrial ma-
terial and processes he uses, his black,
shadowy sculptures convey a feeling of
lightness. On the other hand, German
artist Ralf Ziervoge’s drawings are com-
posed of deliberate, barely visible lines,
but embedded within them is the weight of
intense emotions. Their joint exhibition
Black Rainbow invites viewers to think
about the contradictions, complexities
and ironies of modern life.

Ziervoge’s previous work featured figurative drawings on paper, depicting
scapes of graphic brutality and violence.
The simple monochromatic drawings of
geometric shapes on canvas in his latest
series look very different. But a closer
look with a magnifying glass reveals that
the explosion of fine lines on his canvases
are in fact composed of tiny handwritten
words expressing aggression, thus pre-
senting a verbalised version of the visuals
in his earlier work.

The words hidden within the lines re-
late to various obsessive behaviours that
speak about the fragility of the human
mind, the inner turmoil hidden behind
our calm exteriors and our desperate at-
ttempts to stay sane when confronted by
the real and virtual worlds.

In a set of paintings, titled Kophobia, Zi-
ervoge references the fictional charac-
ter’s obsessive hatred for Spiderman with
words such as “I will kill you” and “I will
rip you apart” repeated over and over in
the lines.

In the Eskimolied series the lines on
gesso-primed canvas in some paint-
ings appear like tracks in the snow. The
lines.

Ralf Ziervoge’s iPad-sized drawings on
paper, called Eskimolied (Mare), are
filled with frantic thumbprints and palm
prints. They resemble the screen of a
much-used iPad, commenting on our
obsession and frustration with modern
gadgets and “being connected”.

Chafes also plays with words in his
work. “The words in the titles of my
sculptures trigger images, thoughts and
memories through which viewers can re-
late to them,” he says.

All the sculptures in this show are in-
spired by icons from various artistic fields.
Inferno XXX is inspired by Italian mas-
tor Botticelli’s work. The wall-mounted
piece featuring a cascade of wavy black
steel strips references the flowing, curly
hair of the women in Botticelli’s paint-
ings. But when viewed upside down it ap-
ppears like the rising flames in the artist’s
illustrations for Dante’s Inferno.

The Dream of Giorgio de Chirico is a
work from a series inspired by the work
and words of the metaphysical artist.
Suspended from the ceiling, the nebulous
sculpture represents an abstract portrait
of the artist, referencing the mannequin
heads Chirico painted in the 1920s. Simi-
larly, Tati is a poetic, abstracted tribute
to French director Jacques Tati. The form
resembles the humorous gesticulations
of Tati’s alter-ego ‘Monsieur Hulot’, but
his presence is suggested merely by what
looks like a balloon or perhaps a soap
buble being blown.

“Chirico was a painter of impos-
seable shadows. I have stolen his ideas
and words to create these mysterious
floating forms. And in Tati, you see not
him, but his absence. This sculpture is a
‘monument to absence’. I use iron and
steel because they are materials con-
ected with modern times and are all
around us in different forms. I like the
idea that iron comes from the Earth and
is forged with fire, and has a complex
history ranging from its use in agricul-
tural tools that feed people to weapons
that kill. But although I use this hard,
heavy industrial material, my aim is to
create works that evoke the fragility of
a bubble, a shadow like quality and a
feeling of floating. I always cover the
shiny steel with a final coat of matte
black or grey to create that shadowy
effect. These are not objects, but ide-
as that are catalysts for thoughts and
memories,” he says.

Painting with light

Emerging Emirati artist Matha Demithan is presenting a series of experimen-
tal installations and new media works in her latest show, Mutajadid, curated
by Dr Alexandra MacGilp. The artist is known for her scanography portraits,
where she uses an A4 flatbed scanner to record the surface of figures and
objects, which she puts together to create poetic, layered images of graceful
floating figures.

“I see this technique as a way of painting with light. The multiple layers of
construction and deconstruction in these portraits are a contrast to our pre-
vailing Instagram culture. And I want to invite viewers to project their own
memories and associations on my fantasy figures,” she says.

The artist has experimented with new techniques and subjects in this show,
and is presenting projections, installations, a video and transfers on cloth. Her
subjects are usually her friends and family. But in the new series, her focus is
on birds and garments. In some works she has used a video camera to photo-
graph the contours of a falcon’s body, presenting the feathers, leather hood
and scally feet of a bird that is a part of Emirati culture in an abstract, unrecognis-
able form.

The inspiration from Emirati culture is also visible in her “portraits” of tra-
titional garments. These include her cousin’s childhood dresses from the 1980s
and her mother’s burqa. Representing their owners, these garments carry
memories and traces of personal and cultural history.

“The multiple layers in my portraits reflect the fact that there are multiple
identities within us, and there is no one true identity. I try to capture a sub-
ject’s personality and appearance, but it is impossible to ever truly represent
them,” she says.

Mutajadid will run at Tashkeel until February 27.