

Exhibiting the radiance of Dubai using light

Kelly Clarke - Reporter / 15 January 2015

Artist uses light to transform hard built landscape of urban surroundings

As a teenager, London-based artist Nathaniel Rackowe remembers his first leap into the creative world of art. Contrary to the stereotypical easel and paint brush, Rackowe says his first tool of choice was a stack of old paving slabs.

“When my parents were remodelling our garden, I remember there being stacks of paving slabs lying around. I decided to start arranging them and stacking them into an outdoor installation. You could call it my first contemporary artwork,” he tell *Khaleej Times*.



Nathaniel Rackowe and his art installations using lights. He says about his latest exhibition, “I am drawn to the ability of light to transform the hard built landscape of our urban surroundings. The bitumen paintings shown are directly inspired by Dubai, starting with a series of photographs taken of the city in flux.” — Supplied photos

Now a celebrated artist with works on exhibit around the world including in the USA, Mexico, France and the UK, Rackowe says he was initially torn between pursuing a career in the sciences, writing, and art.

“Gradually I found myself spending more and more time being visually creative. At that point I knew I needed to pursue art, however maths and physics does feature in and contribute to my work,” he says, adding that writing tends to be useful when he is asked to communicate ideas.

After graduating with a Masters in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art in London in 2001, Rackowe says he knew at that point he wanted to turn his passion into a serious art career.

While concentrating on building his own personal portfolio in the early years following his graduation, he took a part time job in an architect’s office. But soon after he was able to quit his job, he says.

“I was happy to trade the security of a regular job for the chance to focus 100 per cent on my art.”

Now exhibiting his first major solo exhibition in the Middle East at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi Gallery in Al Quoz, he says the public's reaction to 'Radiant Trajectory' has been encouraging.

"It's been an incredibly positive reaction, the audience here seems very open and willing to engage with work they may not be familiar with."

Though Rackowe has shown some individual works at Art Dubai with his former London gallery, Bischoff Weiss, as well as works at Sikka Art Fair, he hopes this debut solo exhibition will be the start of things to come as a featured artist in the UAE.

"Hopefully I'll be back in Dubai soon for more projects and perhaps public works. I'm looking forward to being able to work more in the region."

Fascinating perception

Rackowe's latest exhibition at Lawrie Shabibi brings together different materials, which gallery curator Laura Egerton describes as 'sharing a fascination with the perception of light'.

So what inspired this particular set of works?

"This combines some older pieces with others made specifically for the exhibition. I am drawn to the ability of light to transform the hard built landscape of our urban surroundings. The bitumen (a type of tar) paintings shown are directly inspired by Dubai, starting with a series of photographs taken of the city in flux," he says.

Describing the exhibit in one sentence he says it's a mix of "light and structure that challenges the way we perceive the city around us."

A firm believer that inspiration can strike at any moment, Rackowe says he is at his most creative when wandering through a city, whether Dubai, London or "anywhere for that matter."

"But in terms of actually building the works, I like to work until late in my studio in east London," he says.

Using light as the anchor in this particular exhibition, Rackowe says most of his works tend to have a light element, but he doesn't specifically consider it to be any more significant than the other materials he uses, such as scaffolding poles, concrete blocks or glass.

Radiant Trajectory is on show at Lawrie Shabibi till March 5 and combines past and new work by the London-born artist. With his most recent pieces inspired by a visit Dubai, Rackowe often introduces personal experiences into his work.

"The starting point for works are very personal, but I seek to then find universal truths within them, conveying ideas that any audience with an experience of urban dwelling will understand," he says.

Currently working on a "really exciting" collaborative project with choreographer Angela Woodhouse, Rackowe says they are in the midst of developing a work that utilises a sculptural light installation that contains both dancers and audience.

With shows coming up in Denmark this year including a public installation in a forest, and a solo exhibition at Etage Projects in Copenhagen, he says he hopes to be back in Dubai soon for more projects.

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