

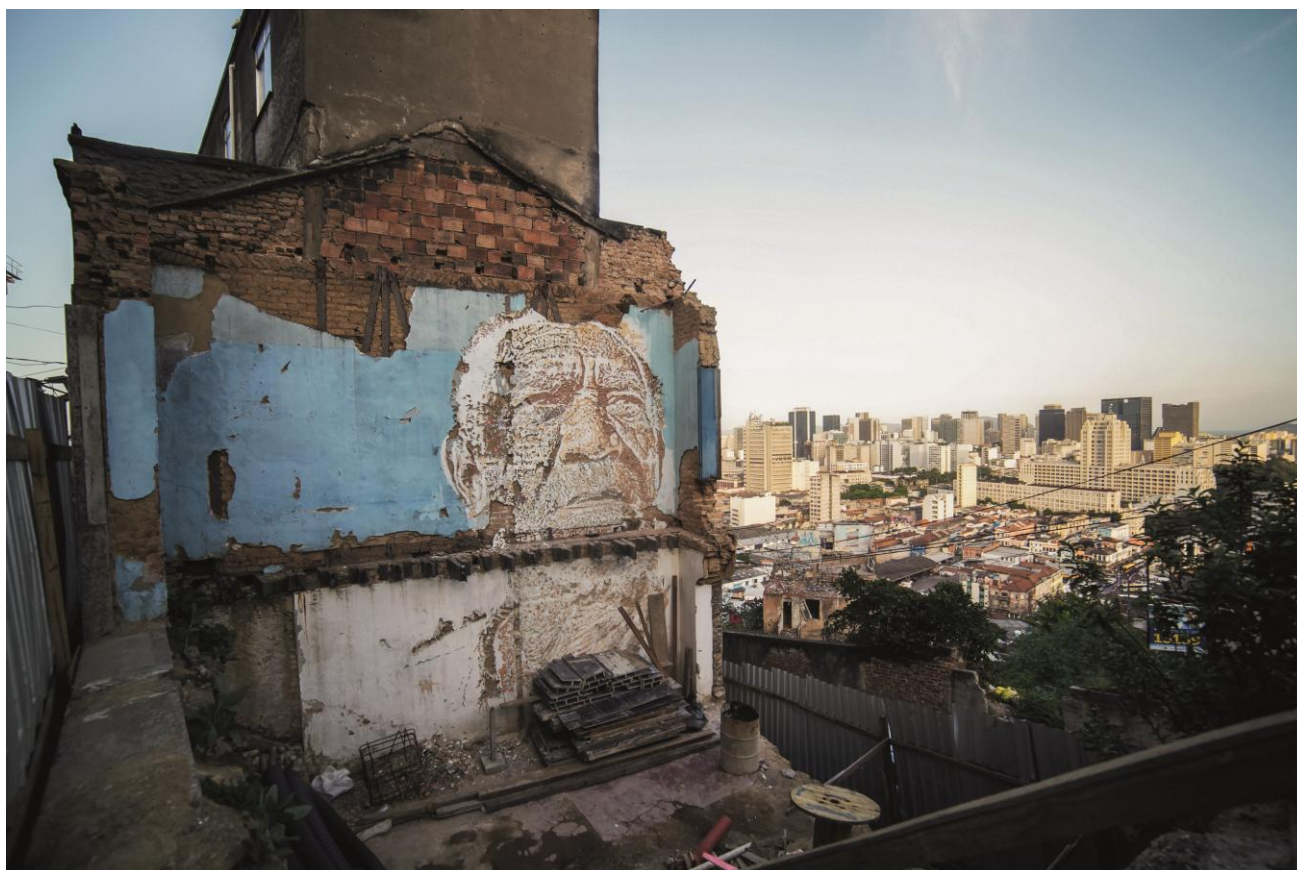
visual arts / public space

VHILS

19 May > 29 July 2018

with the galerie Danysz

8€ full rate/5€ reduced rate/3€ member rate

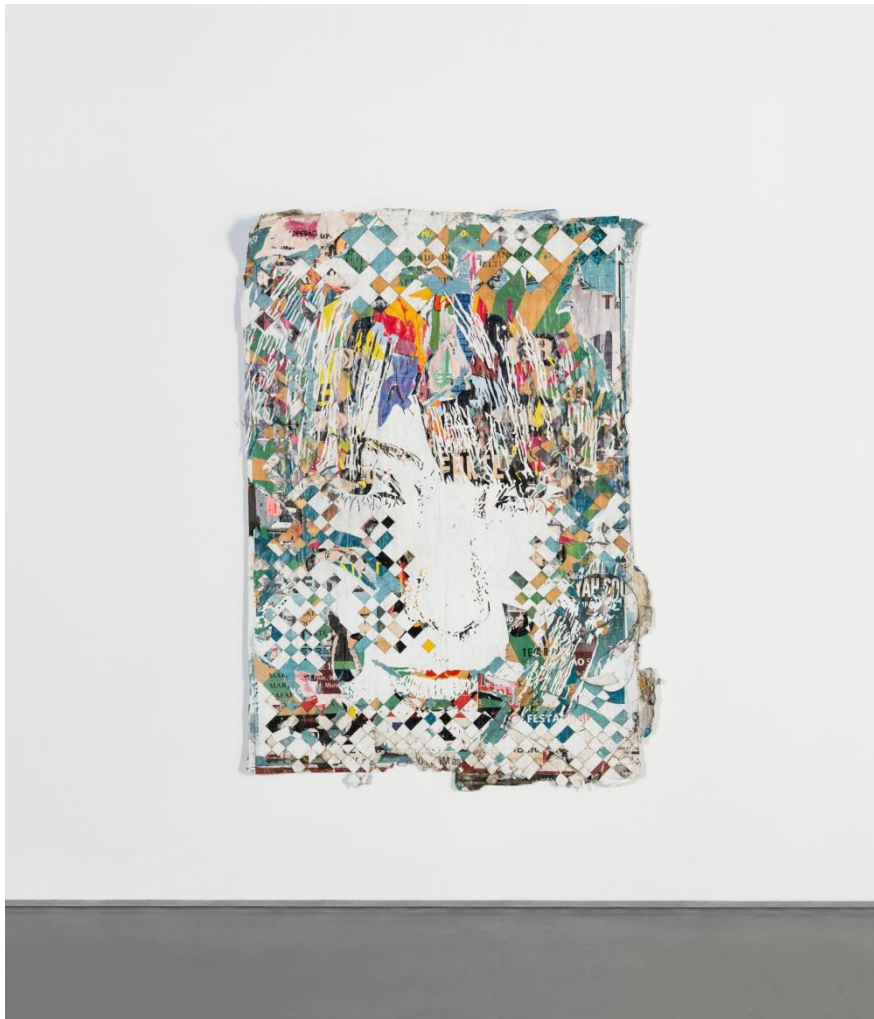


Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012) © João Pedro Moreira – courtesy Danysz gallery

At once discreet and striking, often gigantic, Vhils' artworks represent anonymous faces, carved on different materials or on the very walls. Renowned and exhibited worldwide, the Portuguese artist is stopping over, at the invitation of José-Manuel Gonçalves, at the CENTQUATRE-PARIS. An occasion for this urban explorer to present to the Parisian public a global view of his work but also to meet once again a city and its inhabitants.

While Vhils' work has been the object of large international exhibitions, it is however the first time that an exhibition on this scale is presented in France, at the CENTQUATRE-PARIS.

Vhils, whose real name is Alexandre Farto, started painting graffiti at the age of 13. During the 1980s and 1990s, Seixal, the industrial suburb of Lisbon where he grew up in, had undergone an intensive development process that profoundly affected the city. Reflecting these changes, the city's walls had witnessed the superimposition of political murals, advertising posters, graffiti and other media, each expressing its own ideas and ideologies. Searching for a new approach that could interact with what the city had to offer, Vhils shifted his practice from graffiti to one that carved into these surfaces directly, using them as a new medium. Based on the stencil technique, the young artist started to carve shapes and lines, from which faces and the walls' past emerged. From then on, he was to carve his giant figures around the world, from his native Lisbon (where he still lives today) to distant locations such as São Paulo, Los Angeles, Sydney or Hong Kong.



Sobreposição Series 2 (2014) © Bruno Lopes - courtesy Danysz gallery

For this exhibition, over fifteen artworks will be displayed throughout the CENTQUATRE-PARIS. To better grasp the artist's world, the visitor will discover in each room a different technique: carved wooden doors, layers of carved posters, acid-burnt prints, engraved metal plates, or stunning polystyrene sculptures. Attacked with a chisel, rotary hammer drill or acid, the sculpted surfaces nevertheless give off a certain gentleness, like an invitation to dialogue by way of artistic creation. Countering the risk of homogenisation and withdrawal into oneself, his invitation to inhabit our cities will certainly resonate with the public of Paris, a European metropolis in full development.

Creating a bond

« Crossing paths with one of Vhils' sculpted portraits is a different experience each time. The faces that are created move, changing according to the light, depending on the angle from which one sees them. The Parisians can experiment this with the ones sculpted in the Necker Hospital in the 15th arrondissement: depending on the pavement on which one is, shadows form, the weather also influences the face's mood. « Each work is different; you never know what you are going to get when you start carving. Some materials are more porous than others and let humidity in. »

What is striking is the fragility. The reversed stencil seems so precarious, ephemeral, like most of the walls on which he intervenes. It is these bonds, these bridges that Vhils looks to consolidate. Echoes of his childhood that separate him from other graffiti artists, of Lisbon's rehabilitations boosted by European credits that then flowed into the country... »

Jérôme Badie, Next Libération



Lisbonne, Portugal (2014) © Alexander Silva - courtesy Danysz gallery

Artistic approach and technique

Walls are his favourite medium. After the «Carnation Revolution» in 1974, walls became in a way witnesses to the evolution of Portuguese cities. Each wall tells the story of a given place. With the development into a consumerist society, these walls became covered in advertising posters, then graffiti, followed by new layers of posters, and so on. Vhils is interested in walls brimming with history, yet neglected. Instead of adding extra layers to the walls, the artist decided to «remove in order to reveal...». With his *Scratching the Surface* project, Vhils carves the portraits of anonymous people onto the walls of the city, thus giving back value to these neglected and abandoned walls.

Before starting the bas-relief carving process, the artist traces out his portraits with paint. With the help of chisels, rotary hammer drills and other tools, Vhils starts to scratch the surface of the wall, successively revealing the different layers that constitute it. The approach may seem abrupt and violent at first but according to Vhils the result gains in poetry and expressivity – little by little, a portrait is revealed. Different expressions and emotions emanate from these portraits that express how the inhabitants feel the city. The interplay of light and shade accentuates the depth of these faces. With this work, the artist therefore gives an identity to the wall. His artworks show the close relationship between the city and its dwellers – how a city shapes its inhabitants and how the inhabitants sculpt a city.

However, his work is not limited to walls. The artist explores and experiments with other techniques and mediums such as carved wooden doors, acid-burnt screen prints, portraits carved out of polystyrene blocks and sculpted advertising posters salvaged from city streets. All of his artworks share a common point: that of showing the reciprocal influences between a city and its inhabitants.



Untwine, Series 2 © Bruno Lopes – courtesy Danysz gallery

Biography

Portuguese visual artist Alexandre Farto aka Vhils (born in 1987) has developed a unique visual language based on the removal of the surface layers of walls and other media with non-conventional tools and techniques, establishing symbolic reflections on identity, the relationship of interdependence between people and the surrounding environment, and life in contemporary urban societies, as well as the impact of development, the passage of time, and material transformation. Having begun to interact with the urban environment through the practice of graffiti in the early 2000s, Vhils has been hailed as one of the most innovative artists of his generation. His poignant, poetic portraits chiselled into flaking walls can be seen adorning cityscapes around the world. Based on his aesthetics of vandalism, Vhils destroys as a means to create. He carves, cuts, drills, etches and blasts his way through the layers of materials. Yet, like an archaeologist, he removes in order to expose, bringing to light the beauty that lies trapped beneath the surface of things.

Since 2005, he has presented his work in over 30 countries around the world in solo and group exhibitions, site-specific art interventions, artistic events and projects in various contexts – from working with communities in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, to collaborations with reputed artistic and museological institutions such as the EDP Foundation (Lisbon), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Barbican Centre (London), CAFA Art Museum (Beijing), or the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (San Diego), among others. An avid experimentalist, besides his groundbreaking bas-relief carving technique – which forms the basis of the *Scratching the Surface* project –, Vhils has been developing his personal aesthetics in a plurality of media: from stencil painting to metal etching, from pyrotechnic explosions and video to sculptural installations. He has also directed several music videos, short films, and one stage production.

Vhils works with Danysz gallery for many years and his work is represented in several public and private collections in various countries.

He presently divides his time between Lisbon and Hong Kong.



VHILS is represented by the Danysz gallery

DANYSZ

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The CENTQUATRE-PARIS

5 rue Curial 75019 PARIS

M° Riquet (ligne 7)

Informations and ticket office www.104.fr

01 53 35 50 00

The CENTQUATRE-PARIS is open
From Tuesday to Friday from 12 p.m. to

7 p.m.

On weekends from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Closed on Mondays

(Late openings on programme nights)

MAIRIE DE PARIS 

The CENTQUATRE-PARIS is an artistic establishment of the City of Paris