

Chris Thiel began to consider the possibility that someone or something was observing her while at high school.

It is, of course, an ancient fear. Older than ancient. The unease that rises from a sense of being unwillingly or unwittingly watched enabled us to evolve, it has enabled almost every creature to evolve and without it we're easy prey.

Many of the books Thiel read as part of her school curriculum related to ideas of being watched or observed and given her religious background the role of God in her life as an all-seeing entity also cannot be dismissed.

Indeed, the exhibition title *13:12*, a collection of paintings by both Thiel and Patty Chehade, references a line from the King James Bible which speaks of seeing "through the glass, darkly".

"It was unsettling and it's a feeling that has stayed with me, to some extent, my entire life," Thiel said.

"It actually changes your behaviour and it makes you a little bit anxious all the time because you feel you're being watched or that you're on show...there's security in being private but that obviously changes when you think someone is hearing what you're saying or watching what you're doing."

"There's always been that thought that someone else knows your thoughts even before you do."

Her body of work for *13:12* was created after reading *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

All painted on uniformly sized square canvases, Thiel sees the series as a storyboard of her private reading experience: a translation of her imagination into something visually tangible – and public.

The date of the exhibition's opening is also worth noting – a day after what would have been the 90th birthday of the late Stanley Kubric. The cinema great heavily influenced the work shown in *13:12*, with both Thiel and Chehade referencing the aesthetic of Kubric's 1968 cultural treasure *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

The extensive use of red in several works by both artists mirrors Kubric's use throughout the film.

Already long established as a colour of alarm, red's power was harnessed and unleashed by Kubric in 1968, backdropping the unbearable tension that mounted as the astronauts' mission to Jupiter fell apart. Of course, the foreboding and unforgettable

monotone voice of the ship's artificial intelligence unit HAL-9000 was also matched visually by the red glow of its single eye.

Similarly, Chehade and Thiel also seek to communicate a sense of silent apprehension.

Characters hidden behind masks and veils, a pair of crossed un-worn gloves, a smoked cigarette about to be extinguished underfoot: there lies an unspoken narrative that is left to the viewer to imagine and play out.

But while Thiel's work focuses on the outside looking in, Chehade's interest lies internally.

Even before she attended medical school Chehade was fascinated by the psyche of others. It's little surprise then that her paintings in *13:12* examine the way we present ourselves to the outside world. Chehade was particularly taken by Oscar Wilde's observation that when given a mask, one "will tell you the truth".

"The masks for me are more about others; other people might present themselves in a particular way and will only show as much as they want to show," she said.

"It's about that mask that we all carry to portray either who we think we are, or perhaps hide who we know we are. It's not about who's watching, it's more about how the person is trying to present themselves."

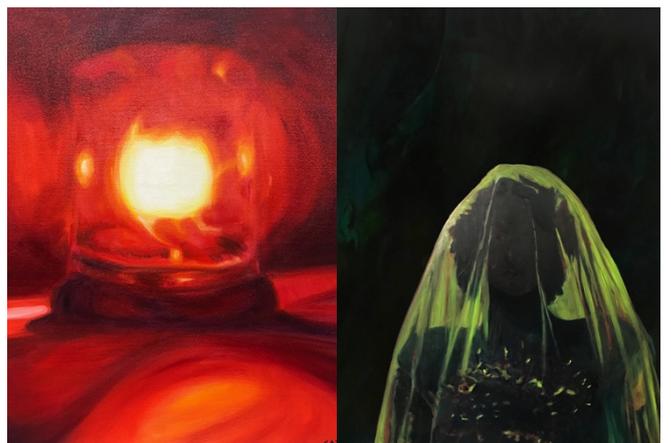


Image Left to right: Chris Thiel, *Siren*, Oil on canvas. Patty Chehade, *Veil*, Oil on canvas

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Harry Thring is an Australian-born artist (b. 1986) who started his career as a writer. He is currently based in Hamburg, Germany, where he is completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Hochschule Für Bildende Künste (HFBK).