

MIER

“Go ahead, light a fire: Thomas Wachholz invites viewers to be the spark of this art show”

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By Sharon Mizota

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Installation view of Thomas Wachholz's "Strike Gently" at Mier gallery, which invites viewers to strike a match against the panels. (Sharon Mizota)

There isn't much to look at in German artist Thomas Wachholz's exhibition at Mier gallery. Opposite walls of the narrow gallery are lined with rectangular panels. On the right row, they are painted in a pattern of tiny red dots; on the left, in a solid rusty red.

The Cologne, Germany, artist didn't create this imagery; his viewers did. The red paint isn't really paint, but Wachholz's own formulation of the phosphorous coating found on the edges of matchboxes. Upon entering the exhibition, titled "Strike Gently," each viewer receives a box of matches, which they can light by striking against the panels. Many artists invite audience participation; not many ask them to start a fire.

The visual result, which will continue to evolve over the course of the exhibition, is merely the evidence. The work focuses our attention instead on the flame, that brief, startling moment when it flares to life and sputters out almost as quickly. It's a literalization of what art can do, whether it evokes a simple glint of recognition or a blaze of passion. Wachholz provides the right chemistry to let it burn.