

Artist's latest project has sole

The man known as Mø puts a distinctive touch on new Nikes

By JILL SPITZHASS
The Tribune

At first glance, Mø's maze-like art appears to be a sophisticated version of the doodling done on junior high Pee-Chee folders.

But look again at what is actually a single, hand-drawn, uninterrupted, non-

'Labyrinthine Projections'

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday, through Nov. 2

Where: Genuine Imitation Gallery, 328 N.W. Broadway, Room 116, 503-241-3189

Cost: Free

and passionate language is pure Mø, the Portland artist who's one-of-a-kind art form is earning him global exposure.

In addition to his current gallery show of portraits, Mø's original design will adorn Nike's latest Air Force One sneaker, one of three in a series done by select artists. His work will also be fea-



Mø creates art stylistically based on the Etch-A-Sketch. A drawing takes him around two hours to complete, and he says he must finish it in one sitting, as his portraits are created from a single line.

TRIBUNE PHOTO: SARA GETTYS

tured on the eagerly awaited Air Jordan XX shoe.

Like many great artistic endeavors, this one was borne out of a love affair gone wrong.

"I was obsessing over an ex-fiancee — which my therapist told me to do. He said: 'Knock yourself out. Your brain will eventually get tired of it.' So I drew her portrait while looking at a photo, and the result was this," says the 38-year-old Mø. This would be his first work in the

drawing style he calls Labyrinthine Projections.

Flying high

Mø, who's known outside of artistic circles as Mø Morales, studied mechanical engineering before becoming an aviation electronics specialist in the U.S. Air Force. He is working on trademarking his secret technique, which re-creates the graphic appeal of his favorite childhood toy, the Etch-A-Sketch.

The laser-cut design on the Air Force One shoe features an image of a brain on the toe of one shoe, while a heart tops the other toe.

"The brain symbolizes thought, and

the heart represents emotion," says Mø, a student of Jungian philosophy. "I'm interested in exploring the contrast of dark and light human qualities, and how those traits balance each other."

That balance is evident in the text etched into the earth-hued leather wrapping around the shoe's sole; the prose begins on one shoe and ends on the other.

The main body of the sneaker is equally ornate, a fact that the Los Angeles native hopes will inspire wearers to consider the design at a distance closer than the end of their leg.

"I'm a communicator, so my job's not done if someone doesn't understand it," Mø says.

Mike likes Mø

Not one to rest on his convoluted laurels, Mø is poised to take the Labyrinthine Projection technique into 3-D. He was recently commissioned to create a sculpture of basketball great Michael Jordan by the man himself.

"Jordan was at the Nike campus, where he saw a portrait that I'd done of him," Mø says. "He asked if I thought I could do the same thing in a sculpture, using light projected through the layers. I'm working on it now."

Taking on several projects at once is nothing new for the single Mø, who refers to his work as a recording engineer as a "discrete yet parallel career" that took root in Los Angeles in the late '90s.

After mixing tracks for the likes of Kraftwerk, P. Diddy and the Northwest's own Scribe Machine, Mø was ready to carve out a niche in the industry.

"I'd heard that there was a growing post-production market here," he says of his motivation to make Portland home.

While he's now putting most of his energy into his artwork, Mø is keeping a hand in music. He's currently producing an album for the Eugene-based band Pellet Gun.

The fact that he's cutting an exceptionally wide career swath doesn't faze Mø, who claims to flourish on less than five hours sleep per night.

"My father always says to me, 'Pick something and focus,'" he says. "I have picked something — it's ubiquity."

Nike's new Air Force One tennis shoe gets some additional flair courtesy of Mø.

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