

Who would have expected to be so surprised by joy in an unassuming Basel side street? At first, seen from a distance, Axel Haberstroh's installation at die Fensterkuration looks like a fence, a barrier, something that is designed to thwart interaction. Move closer though and something magical reveals itself. The rods aren't coldly metallic; they're carved out of wood. They're a little crooked, hewn by hands rather than by factory machines. On top of each is perched a raven. Are the birds keeping patrol? To me, they seem as if they're resting, enjoying the view. It would be easy to assume they've been crafted separately and then fastened to the poles; actually, Haberstroh – with masterly finesse – has carved them from the same branches. In the next window, what appears to be some kind of tripod, a rustic broom that's been fastened to the floor, turns out on closer expectation to be ... a headless giraffe. Why? Part of the pleasure is not knowing. Surely the answer is: why not? In both pieces, Haberstroh surprises us with scale and wit, jolts and tickles passers-by, gives us a much-needed freedom to laugh and to dream.

Sukhdev Sandhu