

CROSSOVER
COLLECTING

New takes on Old Masters

Five artists describe how the ideas and techniques of the artists of the past have informed their work. By Cristina Ruiz

Toby Ziegler



Double take: Ziegler's *The Cripples*, 2012 (top); Bruegel's *The Cripples*, 1568



At first glance Toby Ziegler's new sculptures seem almost abstract. The lumpy forms loom out of the darkness of a Mayfair car park 14 storeys underground where they are on show this month in an exhibition organised by the Simon Lee gallery. Supported by wooden crutches, the works suggest heavy, injured creatures.

The first inspiration behind them, says the artist, was a 1568 painting by Bruegel, *The Cripples*, which shows five beggars, all of whom are missing limbs, huddled together in the street.

"It immediately made me think of a family photograph, which we always used to joke about because we look particularly dysfunctional in one way or another," Ziegler says.

The image by Bruegel resonated with the artist in other ways too. "I've been working for years on sculptures, like Classical ones, which have literally lost information or become fragmented – limbs have gone, faces have become eroded – and I'm interested in the way these works have been pieced back together in museums with metal rods and limbs almost like prosthetics."

It is the way that art changes meaning across the ages as it loses its original context or form and is then re-interpreted by different viewers at different times that fascinates Ziegler. Often his starting point is reproductions of historic works of art that he has found online.

One thing on the artist's mind while making these sculptures was photographs of mutilated men killed in combat that were posted online by US soldiers. "It was so easy to find these pictures of fragments of bodies strewn around... a lot of my work is to do with the availability of images today."

But, for Ziegler, looking at art is different. "Somehow [old] paintings don't have the same quickly digestible cultural reference points of a contemporary image... they appeal to me because they slow down the process of looking."

The artists who most fascinate him are "Bruegel and Velázquez and Piero della Francesca; they're all painters who, for some reason, I have to keep going back to."

The fragment of a fresco in the cycle of the "True Cross" in Arezzo by Della Francesca has inspired eight light boxes, which form the backdrop to Ziegler's current show and provide the only illumination in the car park. Ziegler has chosen a detail of horses' legs, which he has manipulated on the computer so the animals' limbs "become quite abstracted, like a forest".