



# MIND MIX

HASLIN ISMAIL

## POST-HUMAN HORROR AND DISENCHANTMENT IN HASLIN'S MINDMIX

This new series of Haslin's recent work again highlights the intensity of his visual perception and the dynamics of his highly complicated image making. As in many of his previous endeavours, this body of work also applies meticulous rendering and dense arrangement of a plethora of personal images and references as well as other meaning-loaded elements, a technique that has embodied the signature style and aesthetic sensibility of his artistic practice. These drawings and collages on canvas are largely laden with private signifiers and symbolisms, always done in detailing, rhythming, patterning and multi-layering approaches. Although his artworks often appear way too chaotic and crowded as to their arrangement and composition, their intended meanings and messages are clear enough to some extent, though still open to various interpretations and readings.



As stated by Haslin himself, the title for this latest series is basically inspired by a sociological and psychological sci-fi novel titled *Mindmix* written by Leo P. Kelley and first published in 1972. What has mainly directed his attention to this book is the tagline printed on its cover: "They gave him another man's brain and forced him to live in a stranger's nightmare." The other truly fascinating aspect of this book lies in its surrealist cover illustration that aptly captures its main theme and storyline as foreshadowed by the tagline. This cover illustration comes in several versions: the 1972 edition portrays a human head populated by a multitude of alien personalities; the 1973 edition, created by Chris Foss, depicts the profile of a fragmented mechanised human head with its interior seemingly engulfed in fire; and the 1974 edition reveals a human head full of multi-coloured wires and computer circuitry.

The hybridity of man and machine and the reality of post-human condition, in addition to a host of humanistic ideas and values arising from these phenomena, have provided much of the key points of entry for the artist to compose many of his best-known artworks. Since his first foray into the local art scene in 2003, Haslin has produced numerous drawings, paintings, artist's books, comic books, book and paper sculptures, and mixed-media installations, sometimes peppered with scientific and medical imagery, which draw their inspiration from these elements and subjects. Exploring not only the fusion but also interconnectedness between human, machine and environment, his art depicts nightmarish dreamscapes filled with strange architectures and dystopian landscapes, at times inhabited by surrealist man-machine figures and forms.

As explained by the artist, this new series of work reflects his personal feelings about some issues critical and injurious to our contemporary life and living. These include the everlasting wars and conflicts between nations, tribes, ethnicities, superpowers, and people of different faiths, the constant bombardment of technologies on today's human beings, the presence of greedy and power-hungry leaders, and the impending catastrophe and doomsday caused by our own hands. These works vividly reveal the artist's thoughts concerning a range of haphazard situations that are eroding our humanity and, eventually, capable of destroying mankind and the entire world.

Very much influenced by cyborgian images and post-apocalyptic scenes in fantasy and sci-fi popular culture, Haslin's artworks raise, to a significant degree, some philosophical queries concerning the notions of human subjectivity, personhood and self in a world that is becoming more and more characterised by a mediatised and technologised culture. He is convinced that such cultural phenomenon could lead to the disembodiment of human beings, their existence and their life experiences. He also believes that this would consequently result in a wholesale displacement of human elemental values, ideals and beliefs. From this perspective, we can generally say that his art has profound relevance to the discourse on post humanism.

One interesting thing that I could observe in Haslin's art in general is his portrayal, or rather his critique, of the disenchantment of modern life. His depiction of the institutional, cultural and social force of disenchantment is perhaps not quite different from



**Mindmix** | 57 x 77cm  
Pencil on Paper | 2014

that expressed by Max Weber. Modern world has undoubtedly become another “great enchanted garden” for some people. However, modern sciences and advanced technologies, in various fields from sociology to medicine and telecommunication, have caused human experience and interaction to be simply functional and utilitarian, impersonal and cold, distant and aloof. By robbing life of its mystery and depth, and denying human beings of their individuality and humanity, modernism, with its high emphasis on scientism and industrialism, have made the lives of many people become mechanised and dehumanised, their inherent traditions and paradigms demystified and desacralised, their realities and identities digitised and virtualised. Even if they might have become more empowered and enabled to do their own will, more interconnected and interlinked to be in the flux of things, present-day human beings are increasingly becoming like cyborgs. These “theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism”, as defined by Donna Haraway in her essay “A Cyborg Manifesto”, often lack a clear-cut identity, history, mythology.

In our techno-scientific and hyper networked society, electronic representations of the human body in the cybernetic communication system, with their hyper visible and hyper simultaneous forms, for instance, have to some extent rendered human beings post-human and trans-humanist. Human identities in today’s digital world have been simulated so hyper realistically that they become more real than real. It is tremendously difficult to differentiate the real self from the imaginary self. This has left us more vulnerable to meaninglessness and futility, soullessness and self-artificiality. Like Pete Bratton, the protagonist in the *Mindmix* novel, everyday we are engaging with a multiplicity of our own avatars, alter egos and doppelgangers. But can we clearly identify which one truly represents our authentic self, the real essence of who we are? Without doing this, it would be extremely hard for us to save ourselves from this post-human psychological horror and disenchantment.

NUR HANIM KHAIRUDDIN



**Vomit** | 160 x 400cm  
Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas | 2014



**The Divine Invasion** | 183 x 153cm  
Mixed media on canvas | 2014



**The Bicentennial Man** | 213 x 153cm  
Acrylic and oil on canvas | 2014



**Robot and Empire** | 153 x 213cm  
Acrylic and oil on canvas | 2014



Away & Beyond | 214 x 183cm  
Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas | 2014



Lost World | 183 x 153cm  
Mixed media on canvas | 2014



Patterns of Chaos | 183 x 305cm  
Mixed media on canvas | 2014



Crouching Down Inside a Deep Ravine | 153 x 197cm  
Mixed media on canvas | 2014

## BIOGRAPHY



### HASLIN ISMAIL

Haslin Ismail presents us with moody, dark and sometimes violent works that represent a certain vibrancy and freshness in the local artistic and cultural domain. Haslin Ismail graduated with a B.A (Hons) in Fine Art from University Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in 2007. His second solo exhibition, Transfiguration, was held at G13 Gallery in 2013. Haslin was awarded the Major Award for Young Contemporary organized by BLSN. Haslin Ismail has been actively participating in group exhibitions since 2000, with some of his recent group exhibition include: Southeast Asia Platform, Art Stage Singapore (2014), Young Guns (2013), 20@13 (2013), Sekaki (2013), Destiny Young Group Show (2013), Kembara Jiwa / Conception in Reconciliation (2012) and Drawing a Distance (2012). He was awarded Grand Prize for In-Print: Contemporary British Art from the Paragon Press held at the National Art Gallery in 2006, Grand Prize for Bakat Muda Sezaman at National Art Gallery in 2010, and Malaysian Artist for the Malaysia-Australia Visual Arts Residency in Rimbun Dahan (2011). Haslin Ismail now lives and works in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



**Cities in Flight** | 61 x 21cm  
Pencil on Paper | 2014

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