

Gone Viral (2015) – Ruzzeki Haris

Real Wild Child – Ruzzeki Harris Gone Viral.

*“...too many people in high places who are stone-cold dead.”* — Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*

He is back, this ‘wild child’ in his fourth solo, *Gone Viral*, after a successful showing of third solo, *Point Blank* in Singapore last year. The word viral, ‘of the nature of, caused by, or relating to a virus or viruses’ blows the Warhol-attributed quote “In the future, everyone will have their 15 minutes of fame” to smithereens – this lover of Dali and Magritte plans to stay a lot longer than that.

And why wouldn’t he love Dali and Magritte? Why wouldn’t anyone? Ruzzeki Harris’ outlandish riddle paintings unconsciously refer to Magritte’s works touching political embroilment especially, with the resounding effect of course, of his own convictions.

*“My artwork takes a critical view of social, political and popular culture issues. In these paintings, I deconstruct the dreams of humanity in a satirical way, with fairy tales, lullabies and history that are part of our childhood and adult culture. Having engaged subjects as diverse as street art, fashion, and independent music has been a huge influence in my processes; they reproduce familiar visual signs, arranging them into fresh and conceptually layered pieces. Sometimes these themes are combined into installations that feature fancy domestic objects, juxtaposed with whimsical objects, and sometimes embellished with stencilled text. My works establishes a dream-like, pop-surreal quality, suggests notions of chaos and the frantic, and formally unifies the disparate objects in each one. The texts provide clues to content and interpretation”* the artist muses.

*Gone Viral* explores the artist’s Pop Surrealism leanings even deeper, penetrating and venomous works which reveal the artist’s barely concealed disdain for conformity, as seen in *Heartless Intellectuals* and *Leka*. Are intellectuals heartless? I think so, they’re complete

lunatics. Ruzzeki's latest offering is a kind of 'rage against the machine', the phrase incidentally, coined by the heavy-metal rock, hip-hop, alternate rock band infamous for both their fuming libretti and political activism, and Rage Against the Machine, named after the band's ramshackle, often-uncooperative van sums up Ruzzeki's works – he thrashes them into existence, or none existence, depending on how one epitomises them.

2008' Gravitare is a journey to flesh out the intricate and changing milieu of relationships – *Bagai Bulan di Pagar Bintang*, *Try Me...I Can Transform*, *The Archangel*, *Vaporized By the Moon*, *I'm Coming to you My Love* and *I'm a Volcano* feature the deceptively miserable denim-clad protagonist of nervous energy in half playful, half portent attitudes; in each painting the central character looks about ready to implode; and he does. Ruzzeki's skills of drawing the human anatomy is on full display here, each brush stroke deeply contemplated to reveal the severity of each situation.

DICTUM, his 2011 show *I keep going back to* – his apocalyptic *Armageddon*, set against furious skies; an icy-blue all-knowing eye glaring down in celestial rage at the two acidic Rodin-esque figures contemplating their own awaiting doom was just...JUST. And of course there was his version of *Darth Vader*; brought to life into this living-nightmare we call our world. Worthy mentions include the *Cujo-trained Rottweilers/ Pit bulls*, *dead-infants-turned-poltergeists*, skulls with lollipops for orbs, and the carmine toy-robot thingamajig decreeing a sinister sounding "YEAY..!!" mimic the seemingly drug-addled, glassy eyed look one gets after too much television and listening to ear-splitting music.

Ruzzeki's inner turmoils makes an unabashed showing in 2014' *Point Blank–On the Air*, *Two Faced*, *Apple (Just Take My Money)* *Save Your Ammo Before Someone Gets Killed*, *Think Twice*, *I'm Not a keyboard Warrior*, *Pura-Pura* and *Death by Oil* speak of injuries, plagues, of scrambled madness and human predicaments, and his growing frustration over how things currently are.

Pop Surrealism, or Lowbrow, or lowbrow art, defines an anti-establishment visual art crusade that took its roots in the latter 70s in Los Angeles, California. This anti-elitist art movement with its artistic pedigrees in underground comix, punk music, and hot-rod cultures of the street has produced many names we recognise today, including cat-obsessed Anthony Ausgang, the gothic-crazed Esao Andrews and the Emmy Award winning background painter of My Life as a Teenage Robot Seonna Hong.

There's some winning literature available on Pop Surrealism, one in particular by Seattle's Roq la Rue Gallery founder Kirsten Anderson. "Pop Surrealism: The Rise of Underground Art" opens with a bracing essay, "Dumbing Down to Da Vinci" by Robert Williams:-

*"For some time now, many talented and imaginative artists have had to make do with participating in the near arts – art without sanction. This might change. These denigrated forms of expression do have the seminal characteristics of becoming the primary arts. The modern use of cartoon imagery is a good example. Always encumbered with the stigma of humour, the abstract use of the cartoon in the future might not leave anybody laughing. That brings me to the conclusion that lowbrow art is, if nothing else, an honest celebration of runaway human thought processes".*

Throughout the time spent writing this essay, revisiting the artist's past exhibitions and this current one, the Australian rock and roll songs composed by Johnny Greenan, Johnny O'Keefe, and Dave Owens, inspired by an Italian wedding gone rogue; (would love to see how he would interpret on his canvases, a sedate, formal reception metamorphosing into a thing incredibly appalling) released via album Shakin' at the Stadium in July 1958 and covered extensively over the years by Jerry Lee Lewis, Status Quo, Everlife, Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, Glamour Camp, Marshall Crenshaw, Brian Setzer, Teenage Head, Albert Lee and Wakefield and Christopher Otcasek, The Wild One went viral inside my head: -

Well I'm-a just outta school, like I'm real real cool

Gotta shake, gotta jive

Got the message that I gotta be alive, I'm a wild one

Ooh yay I'm a wild one

Oo-oo-oo baby, gonna break loose, I'm gonna keep her movin' wild

I'm gonna keep her shakin' baby, I'm a real wild child

The artist's 'coolness', while tortured, is never overdone.

An alumna of UiTM, (Universiti Teknologi MARA class of 2007) and finalist in the 2009 Malaysian Emerging Artist Award, Ruzzeki Prior solo appearances include Gravitare in 2008, DICTUM in 2011, and Point Blank in 2014. Some of his group shows comprise Dazed in Mazes in 2009, and the 2012 Wei-Ling Gallery offering, Precious Little Pieces, miniature works The Hairdresser, 'Penin' Lalat and The Itchy Sucker solidifies the artist's expressionist instincts. Back at the same gallery a year later, his 9 Months, Photoprint of baby scan in the group show Measuring Love shows his 'softer' side – a proud (then) father-to-be-in-a romantic/patriarchal reflective mood. Ruzzeki's artist residencies include the MalihomAiR, Penang and NAFAS in Jogjakarta, Indonesia.

Gone Viral are tough, misanthropic works with a twist of the macabre; they beg a drawn-out mental war, an engagement of meltdowns, 'snapshots of the intolerable' spawned from an artist beautifully-burdened with a rapacious, boundless imagination.

Go viral. Please.

Sarah NH Vogeler

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