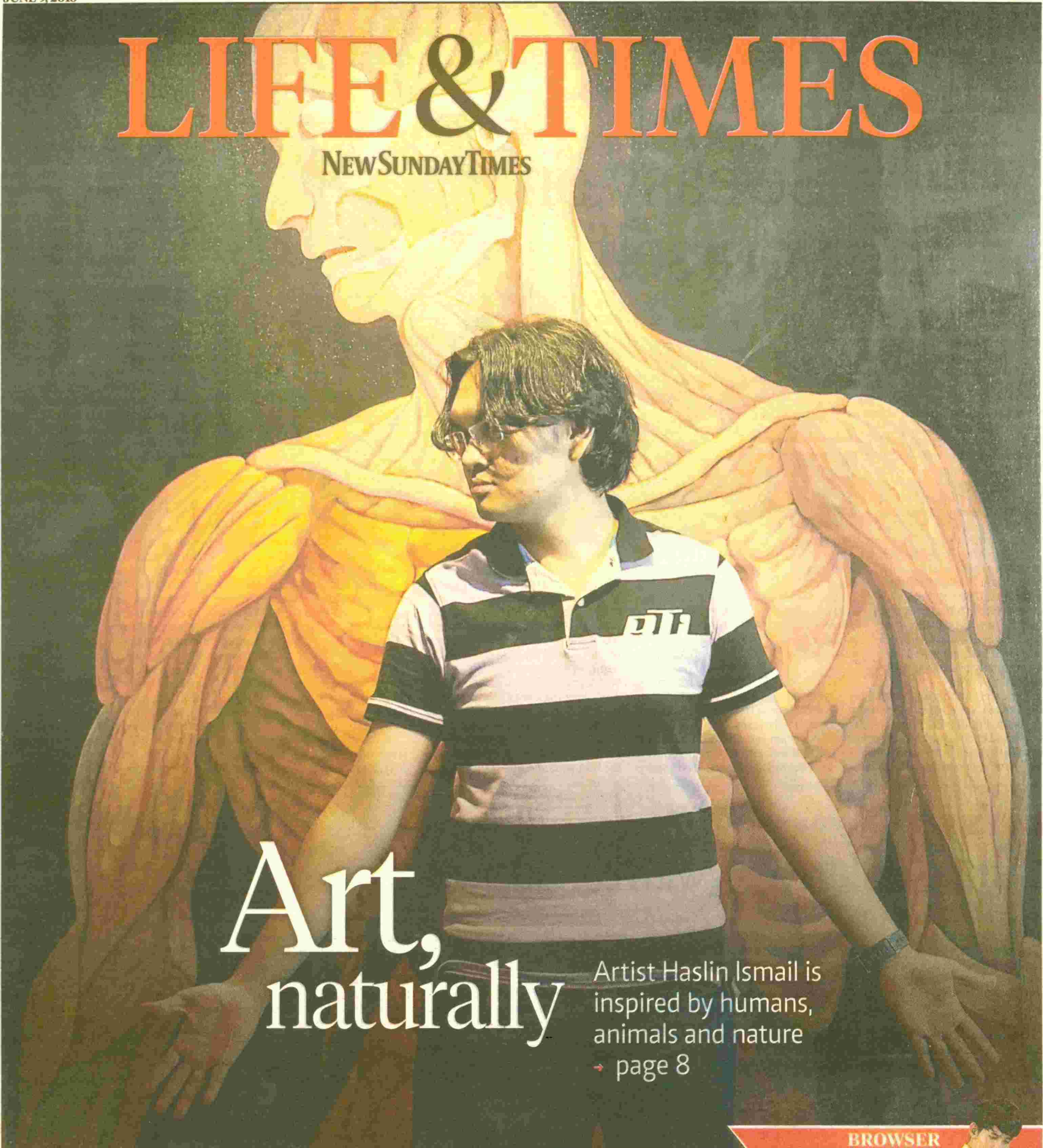


JUNE 9, 2013

LIFE & TIMES

NEW SUNDAY TIMES



Art, naturally

Artist Haslin Ismail is inspired by humans, animals and nature
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BROWSER

GRIEVING
FOR YOUR
PET

→ FAMILY PAGES 6 & 7

THE DIRECTOR
BEHIND HANG TUAH

→ HERITAGE PAGES 10 & 11

Electrifying
TVXQ

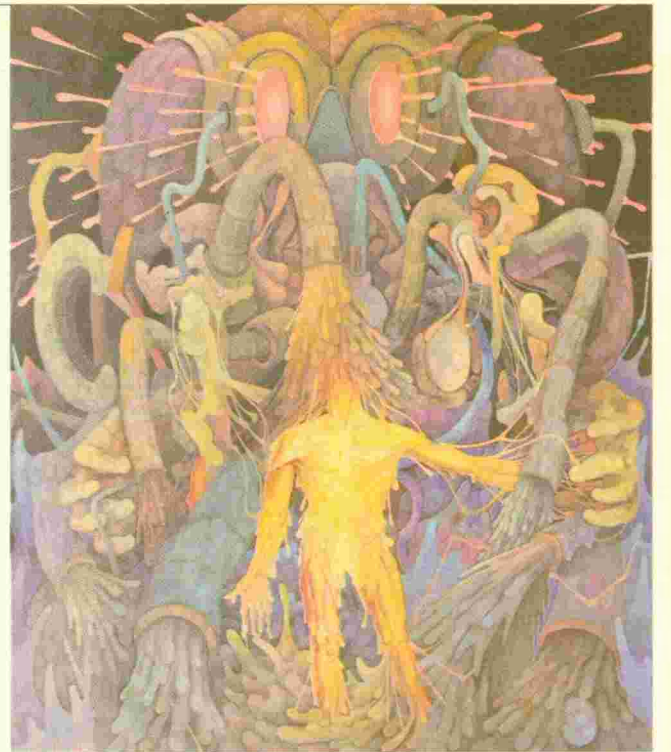
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LIFE&TIMES ART



Transfiguration



Hypogeum



Haslin's art reflects his life

Light on the dark side

Artist Haslin Ismail's canvas always begins with black, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

TAKE art that is deeply embedded in the realm of fantasy and add to it the fact the artist does not observe any formal or theoretical boundaries.

This is art by Haslin Ismail, 29. The way he tells his story and describes his work in an exhibition titled *Transfiguration* at G13 Gallery, Kelana Jaya, it is obvious that his art reflects what's happening in his life.

The graduate of Universiti Teknologi Mara from Muar, Johor, says: "I didn't always know what I wanted to do. When I was in Form 5, I read many newspapers and realised that some people were choosing to be artists.

"When I was small, my brother, Hasrin, was already an artist. I used to collect comics and I loved to draw. Hasrin used to criticise my work and said my drawing was *buruk*. Even if he didn't ask me, I would draw again... to make my drawings better."

At that time, Haslin used nothing more than Luna colour pencils to create his artwork. "I used to give

away all my work to visitors. They appreciated my drawings. Most of the time, I drew comics and characters like Power Rangers, Ultraman and Transformers," he said, with a small smile. "In comics, nothing is impossible. Everyone's a hero."

The frown which follows is a sign of the angst of growing up. In clipped tones and a speech that's peppered with Bahasa Malaysia, he says: "Growing up, I found art to be a form of therapy. My personality is *susah nak bercakap* atau *bergaul* (unsociable). So drawing became like my friend. In school, English and History, *I tak pandai* (not clever). My teacher was very strict and used to scold me. I was a victim. I was embarrassed. I didn't want to tell my parents. So I started to draw. It was like my diary. A monologue."

By the time he graduated from university, Haslin's work had a distinctive hardness to them. "I came from a totally dark place. Totally gothic. I felt like that character in *Star Wars*, Darth Vader — turning from someone good to someone really bad," he said, explaining that it was his sadness at the time that touched a chord.

"This was because I felt I had nothing. Even though I had a family and all, when I graduated, I was excited about being an artist. But I had no money, no car, no girlfriend," he says.

Having explained where he's come from, Haslin then starts to explain where he's come to. "During this time, I didn't go out a lot. I



Queen

stayed in the studio. Drawing was my close friend. So was my collection of books — non-fiction books on trees and animals. As I read the books, I was studying movement and I found inspiration. I like to observe things. I choose flowers because of the dominant colours in them. Like orchids. The colours are vibrant," he says.

Without pausing, he adds: "I like the connection between humans, animals and nature. During my dark periods, this connection with nature did not exist. I couldn't see it."

A quick comparison between his works as a child (especially the one called *Dragon Ball*) and his works today, reveal an interesting detail: In all, the background is black. Haslin says: "My philosophy is to start with dark. Foreground image is always light. I start with a black canvas."

He points to three of his favourite pieces in this exhibition. The first, *Hypogeum*, stands at close to 220cm and is acrylic on jute. "What do you think it is?" he asks me.

He gives a feeble explanation that it might depict the mystery of crea-

tion with a diplomatic "interesting".

"Actually, it's a self-portrait. The word hypogeum I read in a book by Alex Grey, a visionary artist who is interested in the human anatomy, spiritualistic and psychic issues. I like the *semangat dalamannamsia* (man's inner spirit). Those two pink things at the back are my eyes. They're pink because human eyes aren't always white. White is on the surface, but pink on the inside. That's me in the middle, but I've hidden my face."

With *Transfiguration*, Haslin says: "Observe a machine. It's something

concrete. Some engines can destroy as they have both negative and positive. Let's take a television set. It's a gadget but it can give negative feedback. Even if you stay in the house and watch television all the time, it's possible for you to be influenced by all the negative things you see. The painting starts with geometric, becomes biomorphic and completely organic."

He becomes philosophical and says: "In Islam, everything — every one of God's creation — has spirit. Like Leonardo da Vinci. He always started with humans and related it to nature."

To illustrate, he says: "Even in architecture. Look at the Olympic Stadium in Beijing. The inspiration for it came from nature. It's like a *sarang burung* (bird's nest)."

He glances around the room and his demeanour becomes soft when his gaze falls upon a much smaller painting, *Queen*, which is only 120cm tall. Haslin says it was done for his wife, Deyanna Deraman.

"Without woman, man cannot be a better person. A woman has more power than Power Rangers." He then whips out his handphone and shows me photos of his baby, Dzalia Aisha. Sighing contentedly, he concludes: "I think I cannot be a good artist without my wife and daughter."

What:

Transfiguration, solo exhibition by Haslin Ismail.

When: June 8-30. From 11am to 5pm (closed on public holidays)

Where: G13 Gallery, G13, Ground Floor, Block B, Kelana Square, Jalan SS7/26, 47301 Kelana Jaya, Selangor. (Behind Paradigm Mall)

Website: www.g13gallery.com