

PURE HUMAN EXPRESSION

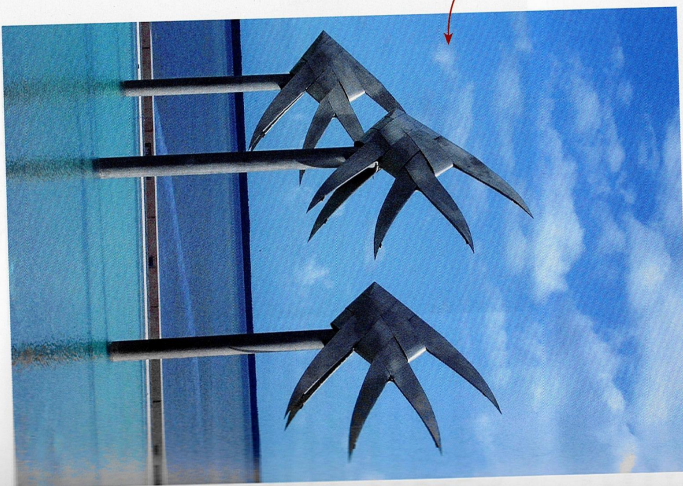
The Torres Island artist, Brian Robinson, explains the motivations that inspire him and why there is a story in his artworks.

TEXT: ONG CHIN HUAT
PHOTOGRAPHY: LAW SOD HWEE & BRIAN ROBINSON

Three mythical figures are rendered in various poses, holding fishing paraphernalia. With a reverse print, the graphic lines that delineate the outline of their bodies appear strong and severe, as swirls of leaf and verdant jungle motifs cover the background. All in all, this innocent appears like what one would expect of a native and traditional artwork. But when one's gaze shifts to the right, something disjointed and unsettling disrupts this somewhat utilitarian depiction — the rear-end of a sports car is set hard against one of the

Brian Robinson's fish sculpture and fountain at the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon in Australia.

fishermen, his attention is diverted from his cast nets as he looks at the sports car with curiosity. But it isn't just any old sports car: it's a Lamborghini. Such is how Brian Robinson likes to depict his art. In this case, a limited-edition Innocent, titled *3 Fishermen and a Lamborghini 2012*, was born out of his birthplace and the juxtaposition of the contemporary and traditional. "That piece came from the wharf culture, which is scattered all over the Torres Straits where I come from," he says. "I created it at a time when I



was looking at classical poses from Greek mythology, as well as researching architecture and the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. People wonder why there's a Lamborghini in the background... I thought I would add something different to show my humorous side. I like to add in bits and pieces like that to throw the viewer askew; it's something unexpected," says Robinson, who was in Malaysia recently for the opening of his solo exhibition, *Zenadh Kes: Art is Life*, at Shahi Ganendra Fine Art in Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

Robinson says he was born with a pencil in his hand, having been artistically inclined since he was a little boy. "When I was younger, I would draw not just on paper but also on the walls all over our house," Robinson says with a twinkle in his eye. This crayon wall graffiti soon gave way to spray paint and other forms of medium. Robinson hails from Waiben, more commonly known as Thunsky Island, in the Torres Straits, which lies between Australia and Papua New Guinea. With its own distinct customs and language, derived mainly from a mixture of Australian, Papua New Guinea and aboriginal heritage, Robinson is heavily influenced by this confluence of cultures and this is reflected in his work.

"Being an artist, I am inspired by everything I see, taste and touch," he says. "A large part of this exhibition came from a solo exhibition I had in Cairns, Australia, called *Men and Gods*, which was inspired by the relationship between heaven and earth. God-like figures as well as men, and that 'in-between realm' people speak about when they refer to past ancestors and forefathers."

It's hardly surprising that such a theme has emerged in his current work — growing up a Roman Catholic, Robinson draws inspiration from his religion as well as references from his ancestral heritage.

The fact that Robinson is a big storyteller at heart also plays into his art work. "I love a strong narrative and try to incorporate that element into my work," says Robinson, whose exhibition consists entirely of limited edition prints made up of lithographs, linocuts and etchings. "My work is not just aesthetically pleasing, but there is also a strong story and meaning behind all my art... Whether it is fictitious or not, that's up to the viewer to decipher."

With his artwork found in such prestigious establishments as the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane and the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, in addition to his etchings and linocuts, his sculptures can be seen in public spaces, such as his fish pieces in the Cairns Esplanade Lagoon.

Robinson believes that being a good artist is more than just having a strong grasp of the basics of drawing and drafting; he also needs a strong commitment towards the practice of creating art. "You need to see the creation of art work as a job. It's literally my job to create art. I wake up every day and work in my studio from morning to the next day." He incorporates art and creative flair into everything he does, be it cooking or daily domestic chores. "As an artist, I am very in touch with my feelings and emotions. You have to be

highly sensitive and push your creative expressions."

On a macro scale, Robinson sees art as the foundation for every culture that ever existed in the world. "If you look at times of hardship throughout history, that was when a lot of the most exciting art was produced. It's pure human expression that has produced the most meaningful art." ☺

Brian Robinson's Zenadh Kes: Art is Life is on show until 1 September at Shahi Ganendra Fine Art, Malaysia. For further information, please visit shahiganendra.com

THIS PAGE
Robinson says that there is always a story behind his art: (from top) August 23 1898; they spread their wings and began to fly; and a Lamborghini.

