Matt Hunt

b.1967

Bachelor of Fine Arts: The Quay School of Fine Arts, Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic

Around the time this work was painted, I visited Matt Hunt's studio. Amongst the visual overload I noted the placement of reproductions of works by William Blake and Colin McCahon, facing each other on opposite walls. Nearby were shelves groaning under piles of magazines, comics, Star Wars annuals, boxes of clippings, crates full of third or fourth-hand vinyl and video.

Hunt's visual world has a rare quality of hermetic completeness. He is creating his own 'cosmology'. This quality of internal consistency is the result of an eccentric imagination hospitable to conspiracy theory and religion. His is an imagination fuelled by obsessive and insatiable accumulation of images: the artist as hunter and collector of connections and meanings from popular culture, art history, the Bible and elsewhere. Hence the groaning shelves.

But he does not simply quote or appropriate these sources. Only after a rigorous process of sifting (much is rejected), editing and montage are they incorporated into his imagery through the act of drawing. Hunt has recently started working on a larger scale and, in assembling his compositions, experimenting with digital cut-and-paste techniques to ever more grotesque effect. At the time of writing, he is populating the infernal regions of a huge *Last Judgement* painting with demons that give Hieronymus Bosch a run for his money.

Hunt's is a time-consuming practice, but one that pays healthy dividends in the final image. No matter how weird the symbolic concoction, we are convinced by the seriousness of the artist's vision – we know he means it. Levitating angels stand shoulder-to-shoulder with superheroes (Star Sister!) as vile demons conspire with Nazis, corporate fascists and sinister circuit boards to do the bidding of the False Prophet. Hotrods and electric guitars – symbols of creativity – are wielded in an epic clash between good and evil, that features a cast of symbolic heavy hitters: the Demons of Sloth, The Angel of Cubism, Satan's Envy Airforce, The Elect Angels of Diligence and so on.

In *Ace Hurt And The Angel Of Cubism* Hunt depicts his alter-ego, Ace Hurt, truth-seeker and musician. (Hunt also dons this persona when he performs with the band, 'Cortina', his pop culture vehicle.) Ace is in the company of the Angel of Cubism. They contemplate a curious tableau of the Permian Era. At first glance it could be taken for a diorama in an old-fashioned natural history museum, depicting prehistoric flora and fauna. The scene also evokes the Garden of Eden (complete with serpent and benign crepuscular light). But all is not well in Paradise. A time-travelling spaceship, bearing Nazi insignia, hovers overhead as a meeting takes place between a Nazi and the False Prophet's envoy.

Hunt's little painting has considerable charm. It is lovingly painted, with elements of Trecento 'Primitivism' (particularly in the way the mountains are treated) and comic book illustration (speech balloons are deployed in a manner not dissimilar to Colin McCahon's *Crucifixion According To St Mark*, a key work on Hunt's playlist). But beneath the charm lurks the unsettling message that evil pervades time as well as space. We cannot be too vigilant!

Gerald Barnett

Galleries and museums:

www.govettbrewster.com

www.rayhughesgallery.com

YouTube:

The Gravy – Matt Hunt

Web search:

William Blake

Colin McCahon

Trecento

Matt Hunt | *Ace Hurt And The Angel Of Cubism* | 2006 | Oil on board | 324x223mm