

THE SOCIAL AND HUMAN CONDITION:

Internal and external realities

Clay, traditionally a medium for decoration, and historically tied with positive emotions and pleasant experiences, becomes in this, the largest section, a tool for revealing artists' complex emotional reactions to negative aspects of the social condition. It is, for want of a better term, the existential section – for in it, artists reveal personal turmoil as they try to resolve inner conflicts, attempt to deal with issues relating to health and ageing, and endeavour to fathom the infinite complexities of meaningful relationships.

Clay for them is the tablet upon which they 'write large' their innermost feelings as they attempt to wrestle with finding a rational and nurturing existence in what is perceived as a world perfused with postmodern angst. The questions asked are the ones asked for centuries: Who am I? What am I? How do I function in this world? In other words, what is a meaningful existence in the twenty-first century?

There are ample reasons for such questioning; major issues confront us on a daily basis: overpopulation, a pervasive gun culture, technology run amok, the loss of privacy, the degradation of family values, the dumbing down of educational standards, and religious fanaticism – all loom large as the 116 artists in this section lay bare, and attempt to deal with, their emotional reactions to what they perceive as a world desperately in need of repair.

MEGUMI NAITOH I have combined an interest in traditional mosaics, especially from the Roman era, and in current digital print media to produce these mosaics of pixilated images. The image is a digitally manipulated photograph screen-printed with four colour-separated half-tone screens and six colours of underglazes onto thousands of handmade tiles. I arrange them in a grid formation in the same way as pixels are laid out in a digital photo.

Just as Romans depicted their daily life and mythology in their mosaics, my work portrays my invented mythology that deals with our contemporary life. For this juxtaposition, my imaginative narratives are triggered by the impact of fast-advancing technology in our daily life. Events such as power-grid blackouts and the failure of system servers remind us of our heavy reliance on technology and our vulnerability when the system fails. The imagery that I generate focuses on the relationship between the human condition and technology in a comical and sarcastic way. Do we control technology or does technology control us? The characters are trapped inside a computer, fighting to find a way out of the green electronic landscape of the circuit board. Some are losing the battle. By bitmapping the figures and trapping them on a circuit board, I am trying to create the feeling of technology's overwhelming control of our lives.

MEGUMI NAITOH (USA), Hannah, from Bitmapped Character series, 2004.

