



Welcome to hyper-reality

Words Farah Shanti

Michael Najjar's data streaming vision

Michael Najjar believes that mankind could be poised on the brink of a major transformation by means of the so-called GRIN technologies (Genetics, Robotics, Information, and Nano-technologies). He is convinced that these technologies will lead to a fundamental transformation in the human body, transformations which direct us to man's eternal challenge: immortality. Najjar has said that "The desire to take control of human evolution is linked to a very ancient notion in humanity... Man has always searched for ways to overcome death." So how will this German-born artist show mankind where their future selves are headed? Does reality inspire him to meet this challenge?

This 41-year-old Lebanese-German artist pushes the limits of photography. It all started, he says, when he had a 'revelation' after his first scandalous black-and-white photo report in a German newspaper shocked people. He then decided to bring the photography media to a new level, one which he calls "hybrid photography," meaning digitally-altered images, through which he hopes to show the "magic circle encompassing the human and the image."

In his first exhibition in the Middle East, Najjar's "Netropolis" will be showing at the International Design Forum (IDF) in Dubai, a show which he worked on from 2002 to 2006. Najjar wanted to show the impact of technology in the cities of Berlin, Dubai, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, Mexico City, New York, Paris, Beijing, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Tokyo. "My thoughts are constantly turning around the idea of technology and its impact on social structures today." "Netropolis", then, deals with the future development of mega cities all around the world, cities which "have become a material embodiment of information." But how does technology's social structure affect mankind?

Since the human body has not changed in the past 30,000 years, Najjar believes that our tremendously evolving world will force the human body to "be transformed to adapt to the speed of these data highways in order to survive." But he doesn't think immortality is the goal humanity should work for. "Death is a very important part of human life... I think we are moving towards immortality, but that this is not really desirable." He is not, as evident from his art work, against innovation in technology; he foresees an evolution of technology entering the human body, which he very much supports. "I could create much more if I live in a virtual world, if I wasn't restricted and bound by limitations of the real world." The real world, though, does inspire him: "Rio de Janeiro is the most inspiring city to me, Tokyo is way ahead of the technological and urban development, Havana is a time capsule where information flows are restricted and controlled," he says of three of his favorite cities.

The cities that are shown in the exhibition are those which inspire him. "When I am developing a new concept, I am looking which spot in the world is the best place to observe the societal transformations I am looking for. Then I go there to get inspired to realize my work." Enter his world, and you enter a hyper-reality that just may be your future reality.