

## REBECCA HASTINGS – ARTIST IN FOCUS

Eleanor Megna, May Space Online, May 2021

Rebecca Hastings' work ultimately deals in dichotomy as the driver of fear and unease. These contrasts – light and darkness, human and non-human, power and vulnerability, realism and surrealism, visible and invisible – dominate Rebecca's paintings and highlights possibilities for the viewer of not knowing what lurks beneath the surface by enforcing a sense of ominous foreboding.

In the earlier bodies of work *Disquiet* (2013) and *The Other Mother* (2014), Rebecca's technically perfect stark hyper-realism is paired with the fantastical and the surreal. Dramatically lit scenes bring to mind the traditions we are familiar with – the Baroque and Dutch masters – yet paired with their clinical and brightly coloured surfaces, these works become disconcerting through the simple act of a covered face, dark staring eyes or familiar, yet here, dangerous objects (birds, scorpions, flowers, buttons).

“The Uncanny or the Unheimlich refers to a sensation of unease or disquiet that is experienced when something familiar is presented to us in an unfamiliar way. This sensation, the otherness that occupies that small space between the real and the unreal, comfort and discomfort. This is the place that I find myself always returning within the work.”

– REBECCA HASTINGS, 2021



Rebecca Hastings *Approaching the hour between dog and wolf I*, 2016, oil on board, 49 x 49cm

“The pictures that I make are fundamentally about anxiety. Once this was just about my own personal anxieties in that role as a parent, but now I think that I’m responding more to our shared existential anxiety.”

– REBECCA HASTINGS, 2021

This eeriness out of the everyday is borne of Rebecca’s fascination and concern with the post-human condition, a branch of philosophical thought originating from science fiction – among many other areas – that explores where a person or entity exists in a state beyond the body. Rebecca’s work conceives what it is to be human in the 21st century, and to what future eras may hold. Rebecca acknowledges and explores contemporary anxieties, feelings of solastalgia through environmental collapse, the rise of digital technology, and bio-engineering.



Rebecca Hastings *Bird Brain*, 2014, oil on board, 70 x 70cm



Rebecca Hastings *Sucker II*, 2014, oil on board, 70 x 70cm



Rebecca Hastings *Disquiet I (The Jumper)*, 2013, oil on board, 10 x 100cm



Rebecca Hastings *Disquiet V (The Hands)*, 2013, oil on board, 70 x 70 cm



Rebecca Hastings *Sucker I*, 2014, oil on board, 70 x 70 cm



Rebecca Hastings *We went for a walk in the Uncanny Valley*, 2016, oil on board, 60 x 60 cm

By 2018, Rebecca's works have shifted, moving from dark interiors and moody outlooks to a brightly lit nowhere. Blank blue backdrops with a floating heavenly Christ child figure is juxtaposed with a blank dissociative and clinical stare through thick, oversized sunglasses. Once again it is the art historical tropes that familiarise us with the scene; a halo, raised open palms revealing stigmata-like dots. And yet, the longer we stare, the more that reveals itself to us as uncomfortable. What once was a halo becomes a flat, two-dimensional disc. The robes become less like that of a religious preacher and turn into a nondescript and scientific uniform. The stigmata become balls of pollen, and the child's perfection reveals itself as a charlatan.



Rebecca Hastings, *The Eternal Youths I, III and II* 2018, oil on board, 120 x 120cm each

Questions begin to arise, who is the child, what are they offering to us, and what do these religious-like symbols show us about their reality and the world that they inhabit? Where exactly are we, and is this a conceivable time yet to come?

The image of the child plays an integral role in Rebecca's work, with her own children posing as the subjects. Casting your eye over the several bodies of work Rebecca has produced over the years, the focus and themes morph – advancing endlessly alongside the growth of her children. This is an intensely personal aspect to her works – the homely, the familial – that simultaneously speak to some of the greatest problems of our times.

In Rebecca's earlier series, she comes to terms with and attempts to subvert the pressures and romanticised ideal of motherhood in modern society.

The child possesses an all encompassing power and agency in these images – confronting us head on – despite their age and experience. Rebecca features in several self portraits during the same period, often dressed in brightly coloured smocks, a jester or entertainer at the whim of her charges. The contradiction between childhood innocence and knowing – and the discomfort that arises from

this peculiar imbalance of power between child subject and adult viewer – speaks honestly to the pressures and expectations of motherhood.

“When I first left art school my practice was focused on maternal ambivalence. I was getting used to this role as a new mother and it was with dismay that I realised what the reality was. You know, this relentless struggle to meet a set of impossible standards that have been thrust upon me by society.

The work that came from that period was about pushing back against those ideas and subverting that romantic ideal.”

– REBECCA HASTINGS, 2021



Rebecca Hastings *The Onesie*, 2014, oil on board, 100 x 100cm.

Finalist, Archibald Prize 2014, Art Gallery of NSW.

Rebecca's 2020 series, *Two minutes to midnight* operates under the cover of darkness once more, except the child's play and imaginative games are here transformed into an active and violent power. The nowhere places and the indoor settings of earlier work are done away with. We are instead presented with a familiar suburban outlook with neat hedgerows and official yellow road lines. The child intersects the orderliness, now grown tall and presented in full, she is armed against an unseen foe. In response to the 2019 global climate strikes led by Greta Thunberg, these adolescents are seen to be active agents of change, utilising their previously only inferred power. The socio-political aspects of Rebecca's work cannot be ignored, with their overt apocalyptic and popular-culture references – from the Doomsday Clock, *Blade Runner*, William Gibson and cyberpunk to climate change, apathy, and what it means to be human. Rebecca's works engage in an honest way with the psychological forces at play from anxiety and external forces.