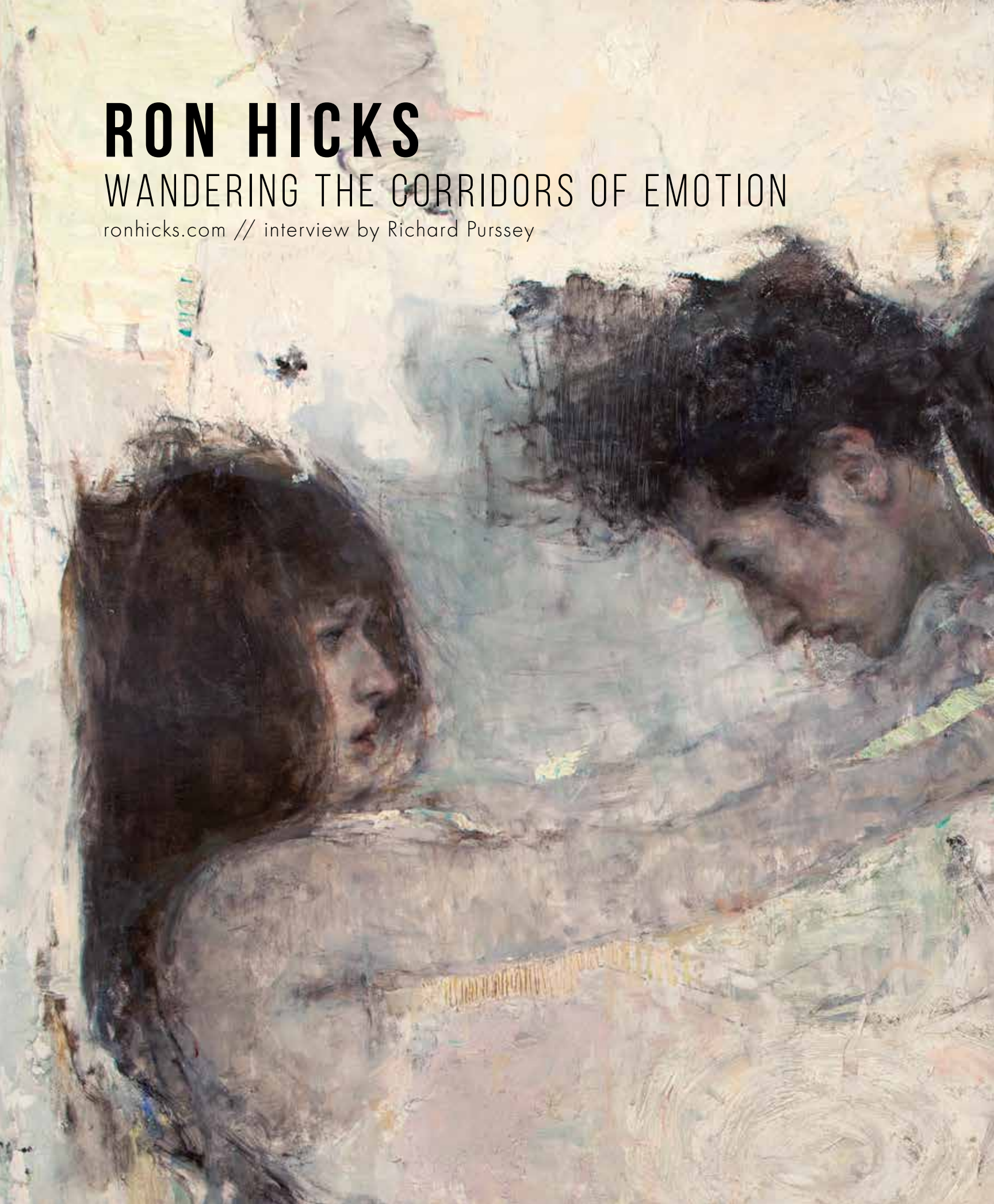


# RON HICKS

## WANDERING THE CORRIDORS OF EMOTION

ronhicks.com // interview by Richard Pursey







The two schools of art most often used to describe the work of American oil painter Ron Hicks are impressionism and realism, and perhaps it is appropriate that those two art movements are also the most difficult to pinpoint to a particular era. Yes, there are the formal definitions of those movements, both assigned to 19<sup>th</sup> century European artists, but even a cursory study of art – from the most ancient of cave paintings to contemporary street art – shows that the relation of the real, whether finely detailed or impressionistic, has been a common thread of artistic endeavour throughout history. While other movements have for periods of time become more fashionable or more subject to critical praise, this underlying artistic ethos has carried on regardless.

The reasons for this are many, but the strongest has always been the relatability of this form of art to the audience: the ability of the artwork to convey a sense of time, of place, and, most importantly, of emotion. It is when a skilled artist, using these techniques, captures a moment that tells a story to the viewer that adds life and depth far beyond the simple two-dimensional scene before them. These are the methods that

Ron Hicks has used to build a body of work over his almost three-decade career that makes him entirely deserving of the epithet modern master.

Using a muted palette, Ron does not rely on colour to tell the stories within his works. Rather, the focus of the viewer is always drawn to the figures themselves, their posture, their expressions, their relationship to each other. While skilful use of light and gentle backdrops set the scene for the play of humanity within, it is the figures that give us such an emotional draw, beckoning us into their story and sharing with us their emotion, their moment. We become more than merely an observer, we participate, empathise, and understand. This is art speaking the universal language of humanity.

The journey of every career artist is as different as the art they produce, with some wandering from style to style, dabbling in different mediums along the way. Ron has shown us the virtue of refining the skills and techniques used within his own chosen approach and using the resulting mastery to do that most difficult of things for an artist – to make us feel.

IT'S NO SECRET TO THOSE THAT HAVE READ MY ARTICLES IN BEAUTIFUL BIZARRE THAT FIGURATIVE WORKS IN OILS ARE PERHAPS MY ARTISTIC SWEET SPOT. A COMMON THEME AMONGST THE FIGURATIVE ARTISTS THAT I HAVE INTERVIEWED IS THE DIFFICULTY IN GAINING RECOGNITION FROM GALLERIES FOR THIS GENRE AND MEDIUM; WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Interesting question. This topic has come up in quite a few conversations I've had over the years with collectors, artists, and galleries alike, each of them having their own take on the subject. It's surprising to me how different the responses



have been so this may be a broad way to answer the question but, here goes. I'd have to say it starts with galleries and collectors – the collectors being the most important factor. Most galleries have a specific direction, core group of collectors, or market they serve. Most galleries look for artists to satisfy the market. I think some artists have difficulty gaining recognition because they are not serving that market. Again, I say this is in a broad way because there are probably just as many galleries out there that are not solely looking to satisfy a specific market, so they fill their galleries with art that feeds their soul, and this is their contribution to the world.

My experience has been different. I work in oils, and most of my work has a figurative feel to it, even in my more recent body of work that has some abstract and non-objective passages as a part of the dialogue. This genre of work has served me well, particularly with the galleries that represent me across the country and abroad. For this, I truly feel blessed. I still have to go back to some of my earlier thoughts, though. I'm pretty sure the galleries I have worked or started with would not have contacted me if they felt the work didn't speak to them or their collectors. This really goes for any gallery and any style or genre of art.

**left**  
*Tale Of Two Liz's*, 2019  
Oil on linen on panel, 32" x 39.75"

**right**  
*Resilience*, 2018  
Oil on linen on panel, 40" x 20"

**opposite page**  
*The Covering*, 2017  
Oil on panel, 48" x 48"

**previous spread**  
*Yearning*, 2018  
Oil on board, 48" x 55.5"



"I COULD NOT IMAGINE A  
WORLD IN WHICH I DIDN'T  
HAVE A CREATIVE OUTLET OR  
THE FREEDOM TO EXPRESS  
MYSELF CREATIVELY"

WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST MEMORIES OF ART, BOTH OUTSIDE INSPIRATIONS AND SELF-CREATIVE? WAS THIS ENCOURAGED DURING YOUR EARLY YEARS?

I started drawing when I was four years old, so I've always been a creative person. I'd draw neighbours and friends for kicks. However, my earliest memories of art started with my mother. Not only was she a phenomenal artist, naturally, but because of her artistic talent, she was my greatest influencer. She encouraged me and guided me early in my path. Also, a number of teachers during my elementary years and through high school were very encouraging and were responsible for positioning me to receive several awards, which ultimately led to me being awarded a full scholarship to art school upon graduation.

YOUR EDUCATION IN THE ARTS, IN THE 1980S, AND THE EARLY PART OF YOUR CAREER IN THE 90S, COULD BE SAID TO BE THE PEAK OF THE CONCEPTUAL MOVEMENT IN THE FINE ART WORLD. HOW WAS YOUR PREFERENCE FOR IMPRESSIONIST WORKS, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON TECHNIQUE AND CLARITY OF SUBJECT MATTER, TAUGHT AND ACCEPTED?

Early in my career I was fascinated with and influenced (to some degree) by many of the movements throughout history, Impressionism being one of them. Impressionism, as a technique, wasn't taught as a part of the curriculum when I was in college. This movement, as others, was introduced to me in art history classes. What stood out to me at first, with my untrained eye and limited knowledge, was the freedom in the application of paint and use of colour. I became more intrigued after I discovered what many of the impressionists and post-impressionists were trying to achieve. I didn't have a desire to follow exactly what they were doing, but what I took from that movement fit in with some of my early thoughts that "*there has to be something*



*more to creating art than just transferring information from one place and placing it in another". There should be something else, perhaps something passionate, emotional, or at the very least, statement-based. Work that speaks, work that moves.*

**GIVEN THAT EARLIER (AND WE HOPE NOW DISAPPEARING!) FOCUS ON A SINGLE GENRE OF PAINTING, WHEN WAS THE MOMENT THAT YOU FELT THAT YOUR WORK WOULD BE ABLE TO SUSTAIN A CAREER AS A FULL-TIME ARTIST?**

I never gave much thought to focusing solely on a single genre of painting. As a matter of fact, I've tried to focus more on seeing my compositions more abstractly. Not in the sense of abstract painting or abstract expressionism, but rather simply allowing myself the freedom to express. How liberating would it be to create from the *'whatever happens, happens'* point of view?



**left**  
*Conscious Conscience*, 2019  
Oil on panel, 48" x 55.5"

**right**  
*Rhapsody*, 2021  
Oil on panel, 40" x 30"

**opposite page, left**  
*Paradoxical Propensities*, 2019  
Oil on panel, 56.5" x 37.5"

**opposite page, right**  
*Here And Now*, 2019  
Oil on panel, 48" x 40"



The moment I felt I'd be able to sustain a career as a full-time artist came after two events that happened in close proximity. The first was when I was approached by one of the first galleries showing my work with a proposition to quit my full-time job. They offered to pay me whether I sold a painting or not. I guess they had more confidence in selling my work than I did at the time! I've painted full-time ever since. Shortly after that, I was approached by a gallery in New York. By then, I knew I'd made the right decision.

**HOW HAS THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A PERSON OF COLOUR PAINTING IN A FIELD HISTORICALLY DOMINATED BY OLD (AND WHITE) MASTERS AFFECTED THE THEMES OF YOUR WORKS?**

Finding your footing as an artist can be difficult, no matter what colour you are. I'd be lying if I told you I haven't had challenges at times during the course of my career being a Black man. I am an artist who is Black. I believe my work has been accepted by a broad, diverse group of people of many colours and nationalities. The themes, subject matter, and direction of my paintings have

also been broad and representative of who we are collectively. I've always painted what I've connected with from a life and humanitarian perspective. Humanity has been on my mind a lot lately. I believe art is a vehicle that crosses all boundaries — race, colour, ethnicity, religion, age, language, and anything else that has been polarising.

**YOUR STRONG BRUSHWORK, WHERE THE TEXTURE AND SHAPE OF THE OILS ON THE CANVAS ENHANCES THE MASTERFUL USE OF LIGHT AND SHADE INHERENT IN THE WORKS THEMSELVES, MAKES PLACEMENT AND THE LIGHTING OF THOSE WORKS ESSENTIAL. DO YOU FEEL THAT GALLERIES, AND PERHAPS EVEN THOSE WHO PURCHASE YOUR ART, PAY ENOUGH CONSIDERATION TO THIS?**

I have had conversations with collectors as well as galleries stating that sometimes the photos of the work online or in publications don't do the painting(s) justice and that when they see the work in person, I've been told, there's visual delight. I will say this, I do see the balance of the application of paint is a big part of my artistic language. I love finding visual harmony with physical and painted texture. Essentially, thick paint to thin, transparent passages to opaque application, etc.



**THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS HAVE BEEN AN UNPRECEDENTED TIME FOR ALL OF US. WITH ARTISTS TRYING TO PROMOTE AND SELL THEIR WORK WHEN OFTEN THE PUBLIC WILL ONLY SEE THAT WORK ON A COMPUTER OR MOBILE PHONE SCREEN WHERE SCALE AND DETAIL IS OFTEN ABSENT, HOW HAVE YOU MANAGED TO STAY CONNECTED TO GALLERIES AND COLLECTORS?**

Most of my sales are through the galleries that represent my work. At the beginning of the COVID era, my galleries worked very hard at keeping in contact with collectors, finding ways to show the work virtually when things shut down. All of the galleries who represent me have had

**left**  
*This And Nothing More*, 2020  
Oil on panel, 24" x 18"

**right**  
*Contiguous Causation*, 2019  
Oil on linen on panel, 57.5" x 37.25"

**opposite page**  
*Precept Of Perception*, 2021  
Oil on birch panel, 30" x 30"





success working in the virtual environment prior to COVID, so it wasn't much of a stretch when it became the only way to engage. I assumed things would drastically change but so far it seems we haven't skipped a beat. As a matter of fact, sales have been better. Many of my fellow artist friends have had a similar experience, as well. Perhaps having more of a captive audience, as a result of COVID, had something to do with it.

IF I HAD TO PICK A SINGLE THEME CONVEYED BY YOUR WORKS, THE FIRST THING THAT SPRINGS TO MIND WOULD BE EMOTION. HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT CONVEYING SUCH AN EPHEMERAL, SUBJECTIVE FEELING TO YOUR PAINTINGS?

I think you hit the nail on the head. Prior to having a formal art class, all of my works were created from an emotional standpoint. It wasn't until the latter part of



high school and in art school, where there was an emphasis on the technical aspects of painting such as proportions, accurate drawing, and so on. After a few years of doing this, I came to the conclusion that while these fundamentals are some of the most important things I needed as a beginning artist, there has to be more to painting than just that. I started to go back to my beginnings and explore how to get more of my emotional self involved in my work. I view painting much like a conductor conducting an orchestra. The conductor is responsible for all of the instruments essentially at his command. S/he unifies the orchestra, sets the tempo, and shapes the sound of the ensemble. I feel as though I have a similar responsibility; that is to bring emotional harmony to my work with all of the tools I have at my disposal. Physically, intuitively, and emotionally. As of late, I've adopted a "call and response" way of painting. I start with abstract dialogue and allow the painting to

**this page**  
*Passionate Ruminations*, 2018  
Oil on linen on panel, 40" x 30"

**opposite page, left**  
*Fluer*, 2019  
Oil on panel, 57.5" x 37.25"

**opposite page, top right**  
*Mandarin*, 2018  
Oil on linen on panel, 20" x 20"

**opposite page, bottom right**  
*Enigmatic*, 2020  
Oil on birch panel, 12" x 12"

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tell me where to go. I do know there will be a figurative aspect to the work, but I don't know what, where, or how it will reveal itself.

SO NOW YOU ARE A FULL-TIME ARTIST, SHARING YOUR CREATIVE THOUGHTS, DRIVE, AND WORKS WITH THE WORLD. IS IT EVERYTHING YOU IMAGINED IT WOULD BE? WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO YOURSELF AS A YOUNG ARTIST STARTING ON THIS JOURNEY TO HELP YOU AVOID PITFALLS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS ALONG THE WAY?

This journey has been all that I thought it would be and more. I could not imagine a world in which I didn't have a creative outlet or the freedom to express myself creatively. When I did have a job outside of art, all I thought about was getting back to my studio to create. I may have said this before but early on, I decided I would create regardless of whether I sold the work or not.

I'd say some of the most important things one should consider is to understand who you are. Why do you want to create art? Is it for monetary gain or is it due to a deep desire to create, no matter what? Check your motivation. I can't tell you how many times I've come across individuals who would like advice on what to paint to sell. Paint your truth. It's more important to seek your truth which can be a difficult thing to do. In my opinion, there's no separation from "You" and who you are as an artist, *if you are creating as a true artist.*

**EXHIBITIONS:**

SOLO - May 2022  
Bonner David Galleries, Scottsdale, AZ, USA

SOLO - July 2022  
Arcadia Contemporary, New York, NY, USA

SOLO - September 2022  
Gallery 1261, Denver, CO, USA



"THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING MORE TO CREATING ART THAN JUST TRANSFERRING INFORMATION FROM ONE PLACE AND PLACING IT IN ANOTHER"