



This profile was written for and published by an online arts publication focused on up-and-coming Australian artists. It was intended to be both artist profile and provide strong educational background to a general audience.

ANGONY RISING

What do you get when you cross primitive style with higher vision? The work of Melbourne native artist Angony is a possible result. The artist was in town recently and sat down to talk.

He explained that his life and art are focused on understanding the beauty of the everyday. He works mostly with acrylics because this type of paint reflects his wishes to remain flexible while also give him the ability and incentive to work quickly. In his paintings, he tries to capture a sense of human emotion in the everyday – the pain, joy, stresses, and challenges.

“The majority of my paintings aren’t planned, it’s just a matter of persisting until something of interest transpires,” he says.

Working without planning, his paintings reflect a lack of censorship of emotions, giving them a raw power.

Because he works quickly and doesn’t spend much time pre-envisioning each painting, Angony says he doesn’t have any of the complaints against acrylics that many serious artists express – particularly regarding the short dry-time. Instead, he revels in the speed the paints impose on him as he allows an image to come to life for him.

“I use acrylic paints because they are versatile, available in many shades, blend well, and can be mixed with glazes or pastes for different effects. As I work fairly quickly, they are more suited to my style,” he says.

Australia is home to artists of all kinds, making it difficult for the individual to make his own mark. Strong cultural awareness also makes gaining attention difficult, so Angony’s success reveals his skill and his resolve within his field. His art is popular because of the way that he reveals his experience through the bold figures and forms of primitive art.

Primitive art is an artistic approach that suggests the underlying elements of human emotions can be deeply expressed through the colors and lines of the work more than the symbols and forms found in the image (Hughes, 1991). In other words, the colors used and the way the lines interact express deep human emotion more than the pictures created or any intentional symbols depicted. Primitive artists try to get straight to the emotional content by de-emphasizing focus on the image and channeling the emotional experience of the moment in their art. They feel this approach enables them to speak through cultural and social differences of interpretation between societies to reach a universal connection.

This concept is expressed by Jean Francois Lyotard in his 1984 book *The Postmodern Condition*. In this book, Lyotard describes the creative process as an attempt “to make visible that there is something which can be conceived, and which can neither be seen nor made visible.” The primitive artist is trying to remove the intellectual element from the expression to gain a more direct expression of this something.

This element is most often referred to as the sublime. For many artists, such as Angony, this sublime element is recaptured to the highest degree through the sense of wonder and imagination typically found through the focus on ‘primitive’ geometric forms.

The movement toward primitive art was started by Pablo Picasso. As artists concentrated on the essence of the experience of the art and its creation instead of the symbolic form, they discovered that emotions were generally felt the same universally even when technical elements such as symbols, shapes, or colors were understood differently across cultures (Delahunt, 2007). This meant that the process of triggering an emotional response could be approached in the same way through art even though the forms might need to be changed.

Angony, like many others, has discovered that some form of recognizable shape is generally preferred by the modern audience. He looks to others such as Jean Michel Basquiat or Jean Dubuffet for inspiration.

Basquiat was a well-recognized neo-expressionist artist who gained his start as a graffiti artist in New York (Chiappini, 2005).

Dubuffet introduced the term ‘art brut’ to refer to art produced by non-professional artists working outside of the boundaries of aesthetic norms. He often used these as inspiration for his own pieces (Dubuffet, 1993).

Like Picasso, Angony looks to the artwork of children for inspiration, but his subjects are far from childlike.

In paintings such as “An Uphill Battle,” the colors are subdued and generally monochromatic within the red spectrum. This gives the painting a sense of energy and life in its relation to the vital element blood, but the darker tones indicate older blood, deep emotion, pain, and hardship.

Within the painting is the shape of a very small hill angling into the image from the bottom center and leaning toward the right-hand side. The word ‘give’ in capital letters is scratched into the paint near the top of the hill. Paralleling the angle of the hill and extending a bit above it is a very long, very thin arm. This arm enters the painting from the bottom left corner and ends in an open hand with curled fingers just above the word ‘give’. Just above the halfway point on the left-hand side of the painting is the face of a man, nearly the same color as the background, with a gleaming white, downward-angled eye and a mouth full of equally white teeth. This face could be smiling as easily as it could be gritting its teeth in anger, disgust, or pain.

Thus, although the painting is highly primitive in its images, it expresses a great deal regarding the pain and need of the indigenous peoples of Australia living within the modern world. Whether the figure is attempting to climb the hill or is holding out a hand for donations is as much a matter of interpretation as the expression on the man's face.

Not all of Angony's paintings center on such serious topics. "Beach Babe," for example, offers a simple view of the backside of a woman with particular emphasis given to her bottom.

"Painting for me is probably similar to people who love reading ... it's a great escape in which time has no relevance and when I can allow my emotions and impressions of life free expression," Angony says. "To hold a roof up is not the only purpose of walls, paintings give life to any scene and, like a good song, can change your entire outlook."

While Angony is busy painting images intended to tell us about his feelings, we, as audience, cannot help but respond and gain a better sense of Angony. We are given a chance to become familiar with the person, understand what is important to him, feel some of his pain and struggle, and celebrate his joy. As a result, we become connected, through his art, to his soul. This is, after all, Angony's goal.

Resources used in this profile

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