



all yours

James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series 2016-2017 Ray Hughes Digital Story

Interviewee: Ray Hughes
Interviewer: Glenn Barkley
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Legend: Glenn Barkley (GB)
Ray Hughes (RH)

GB: I'm here with Ray Hughes at Hughes Gallery.

And Ray, you opened your first gallery in Brisbane, when you were 22 in 1969. Can you fill in those 22 years until you got to the gallery?

RH: Chermside Primary School. Which incidentally was the first school I was appointed to as a school teacher. The high school was Wavell High and I was part of the second intake into that school.

GB: And can you tell me about your parent's shop?

RH: My folks had owned a couple of corner grocery shops and when I was born they were still running a grocery shop at Kelvin Grove. And I look back on two things that helped form what I look at. One was *Little Golden Books* and the other thing was just looking at packaging in the grocery shop. So when I opened, first *Gallery 1 Eleven* and then *Ray Hughes Gallery*, I used the same typeface whenever we used *Ray Hughes Gallery*. I didn't understand the concept of branding but it just made sense.

GB: I've read that you went to a show at the Queensland Art Gallery...

RH: It was the Caselli Richards Prize. Cliff Hughes' '*Waterfront Broom*', which the Queensland Gallery ended up buying. Lloyd Rees '*Drama in the Valley*' was in that show. Fred Williams I think there was a '*Sapling Forest*' in that. It was in the old giraffe house on Gregory Terrace, the Old Museum.

The Johnstone Gallery was about a twenty-minute drive from the Teacher's College. I'd jump in the Volkswagen and go over and just look at the Johnstone Gallery.

GB: When you say 'look at the gallery' Ray, were you talking not just the pictures but the gallery as a whole?

RH: The concept of a gallery, yeah.

Brian Johnstone was from Adelaide. I never had a conversation with him until I opened the gallery and he was supportive all the way through. It's hard to explain, but when you first get a taste of this thing, this elusive thing that's art. You kind of want it wherever it is. Like I was

out and on the road driving anywhere if you heard there was something on. Having the desire, and knowing how, just to look at things.

I slowly got to know Jon Molvig. After I opened the gallery, he used to drop in. He would talk about ideas that he was having. For me, it was one of those *real* artists actually wanted to come and talk to me. I think that probably got me through the first year and a half. What I managed to do for a number of artists in the time that I ran a gallery; I had no concept in the early days that that could be done.

GB: And tell me Ray, who did you show? What were you showing?

RH: Either out of Brisbane; Roy Churcher, Merv Moriarty. Frank Wallace, Max Hutchinson and canny Coventry running Central Street, all committed to having shows in the gallery.

GB: How did the gallery go? Did you sell much artwork?

RH: There were no backers. I made the living from the gallery from selling pictures.

GB: Can you tell me about when you met Bill Robinson?

RH: Well he was a lecturer at Teacher's College when I went through Teacher's College. The first show we had were kind of Bonnards and that was Bill's entry into On-Broadway exhibitions.

GB: Ray, if we can just go back again to another artist who I think it's important to talk about is Bob MacPherson and also the IMA.

RH: I'd rented a house up the street so I asked him did he want a room in it? And so he took... took that on and that's where he painted the first big paintings.

The IMA, first of all, I had quite good relations with the Visual Arts Board and I put it on Leon Paroissien to fund this Institute of Modern Art. And he said 'Yeah we'll give you five grand'.

GB: [laughs] Those were the days.

RH: Those were the days. We said if the federal government would give us five grand, we'll go and get Bjelke-Petersen to give us five grand. And he gave them five grand and that's where the IMA started.

GB: The gallery itself from Gallery 1 Eleven had become the Ray Hughes Gallery when?

RH: I was forced to seize running a gallery in a house in Paddington in '72, because that was against council planning. So we moved around the corner to a block of terrace shops and I rented one and then a second and then a third and then we bought the lot.

GB: So Ray tell us about your move to Sydney and why you moved?

RH: Rudy Komon died in 1982 and I rang Brisbane to find out what's going on in the gallery. And they said 'Gwen Frolich rang and said the Komon pictures are for sale'.

GB: So what did the list look like Ray? It looked pretty good?

RH: The list looked pretty damn good. Olsens, bit of Whiteley, a lot of Charlie Blackman, Dickersons, Fred Williams. By the end of the second day, we'd done the deal.

GB: And then what did you think? I've got all this stock so I may as well move to Sydney?

RH: Well it was all in Sydney anyway and I had Komon Gallery to work out of and a lot of it was stored in that building there and that's when I bought this.

GB: A quote of yours I read in an interview with *7:30 Report* and I think it's this really amazing, simple statement that sometimes people in the art world forget, but I know that you haven't. And I just wanted to read it to you and what you said was 'I want to be amazed'. And I'm just wondering, do you still want to be amazed?

RH: Have a look in this room we're sitting in. You know, that Han dynasty pigsty next to a Furlonger painting he did in China, and the greens are the same. Things keep pushing your buttons. If you're not amazed!

GB: You know you pointed out that thing with the Han dynasty bowl and the Furlonger and I've never noticed but that sort of power of your eye and your sort of ability to bring things together is like, quite compelling and unique. That's something that not many other art dealers, let alone curators, can do.

RH: I said at the beginning; you just look. You know, whether it's Day Dawn fruit packets or Bob MacPherson drawings. You know there's enough of the same and different. So it kind of keeps you scratching your head and knowing that somewhere you'll get some feed out of it.

GB: I agree. Thanks, Ray.

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