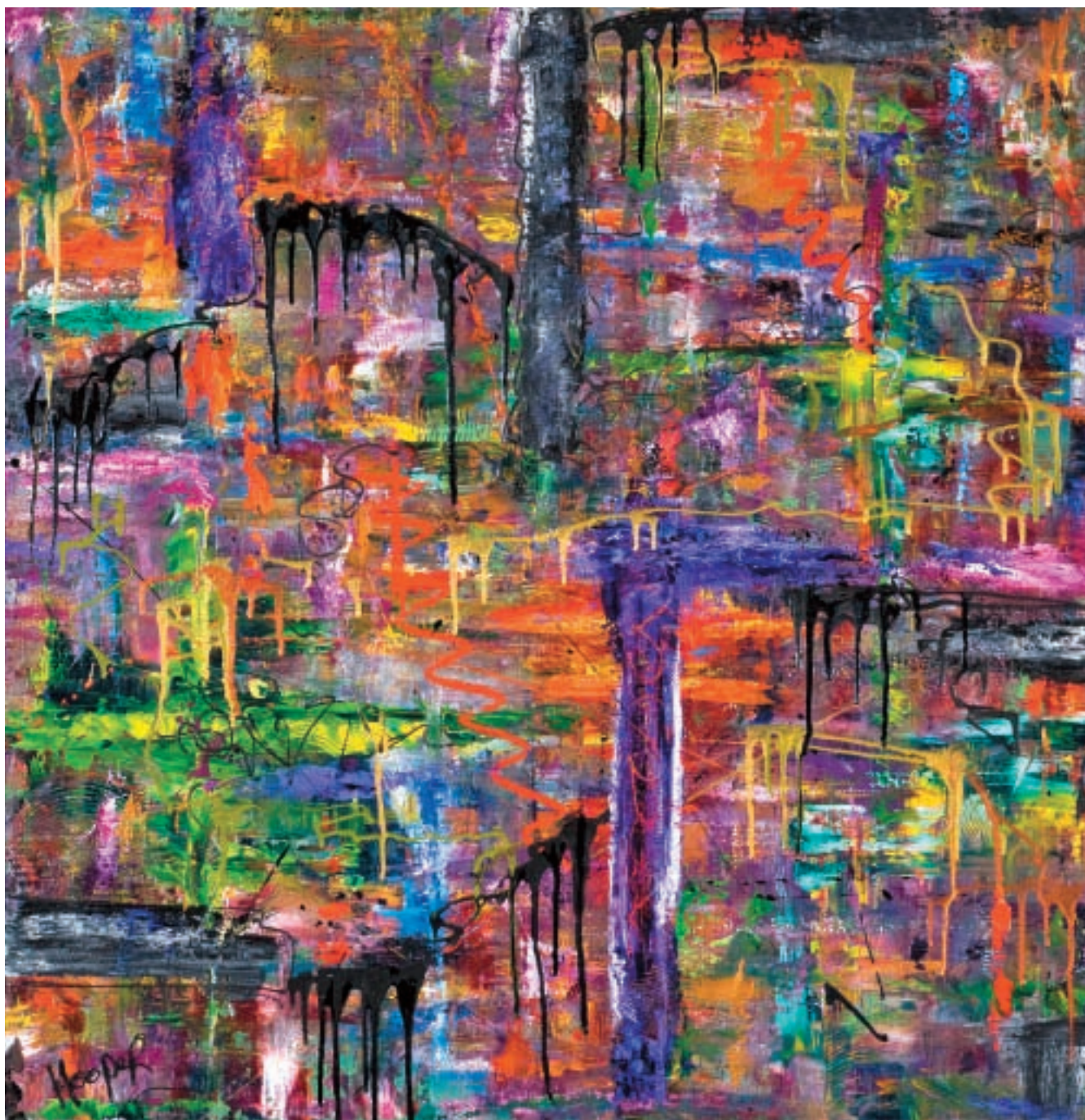


Rob Hooper - *A Study in Contrasts*



"EGO BUSTER"

Abstract artist Rob Hooper is like a spinning coin, with two different sides that coexist in symbiotic currency and a compressed energy that produces vibrant paintings that fairly jump off the canvas.

Hooper was influenced by having spent his youth traveling between family in two countries and in two very different areas, culture-rich Montréal during the winter and the bucolic landscape of Vermont during the summer.

Today, he lives in South Surrey, BC, where the ocean and city are both nearby. This exposure to different life-styles and environments stimulates his creative side. "As long as I can remember, I've always had an artist's frame of mind," says Hooper. "Even when I was a kid, I was a mad doodler."

Until ten years ago, Hooper also lived a double life. His business career with a large American company in sales and marketing supported his wife and two children, but required extensive traveling for almost seven years. Hooper made the most of his time and fed his artistic hunger by scouring museums and galleries around the world. He was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with work and being away from his family when a single moment changed his life.

"I was visiting the National Gallery of London when I had an epiphany," says Hooper. "I was face-to-face with a tiny Cezanne. It was nondescript and dark: a painting of a country road. But standing there, as close as I did, I could see all the other colours under the surface of the painting. Peepholes of intense colour were shining through. It was then that I knew exactly how he did it, and that I could do it too."

The experience was intensely emotional for Hooper, who returned home with a fire inside. "As soon as I got home, I bought paints and canvases and started painting." With his creative side unleashed, Hooper soon became a prolific painter. In three short years, he produced 900 paintings. "I have an emotional need to paint and express myself. Painting calms me and exhilarates me at the same time," he says.



"THE MISSION"

Hooper never received professional training, he is completely self-taught. "It's been an intense learning experience. I am extremely curious about art and technique and read many books to learn as much as I can," he says. Hooper's learning process continues to this day, as does his avid curiosity for other artists' work and their styles.

When we meet, before Hooper shows me his latest abstracts, he leads me around the Jenkins Showler Gallery in White Rock, admiring the calm landscapes of Toni Onley; the textured, colourful work of Chrissandra Neustaedter and the immensely vibrant paintings of Toller Cranston. His face lights up in pleasure of the talent of his contemporaries. Hooper's style has developed in the last ten years, from highly graphic, symbolic pieces to the multi-nuanced abstracts of today.

Hooper's biggest artistic influences are Wassily Kandinsky and Jackson Pollock. Like Pollock, Hooper lays his canvas on the floor and works at it from different perspectives, moving around it and painting quickly, plying wet paint on wet paint. It's a challenging process. If he works the paint too

much, it becomes like mud.

"Lately, I've been re-reading Concerning the Spiritual in Art by the great abstract painter Kandinsky. His ideal was to move the spectator to be affected by the colours of his work and break down the barriers between music and painting. He painted music! His work moves me emotionally the way a great piece of music does."

This is the effect that Hooper would like to share with his audience. Music is essentially the glue that binds his two opposing sides, the practical and the expressive. "I paint to music. Mostly jazz, but also classical and rock," says Hooper, whose painting process is very expressive and organic. "Colours are the most important elements in my work. They're like the notes in a piece of music," he says.

As Hooper shows me some of his latest paintings, Muddy Waters plays on the gallery speakers and enhances the experience. Each painting is multi-layered and a feast for the senses. From the square grid-like pattern that forms a base, to the swirls and scrapes of opposing colours to the final spray of paint that completes each piece; his



"EARTHLY MAP"

work showcases peepholes of colours, much like the Cézanne that changed his life.

Abstracts became a natural direction for him. "I find freedom in the realm of the abstract," says Hooper. He starts with a coarse canvas and loads the paints on all at once, manipulating them, creating new colours and leaving others pure. "It requires a lot of action," he says of his technique. "I have to know when to pull back or add more paint." Each section triggers an emotional response in Hooper, who paints in acrylic using brushes, blades, a palette knife and even his fingers to create his unique style.

"I love contrasts and how colours play off of one another," says Hooper. He shows me *Liquid Reflection*, a bold piece that explodes with energy, in tones of reds, oranges and bolts of emerald green. *Reflections of a Summer Night* evoke the sultry mood of a river, shimmering from the heat of the sun. My favourite piece is displayed in the men's bathroom of the gallery, but even the fluorescent light can't take away from its beauty. *Sea Dream* is a large canvas,

done in rich jewel tones. Green is the dominant colour, while rich purples streak through the piece. I can hear a song in my mind, a saxophone playing. Later I realize what *Sea Dream* reminds me of. Mardi Gras in New Orleans. The richness of the city, the jazz in a dark club and the vibrant colours. Hooper's paintings do indeed transcend the canvas and break the barrier between art and music. **I**

Ingrid C. King

Represented by the following galleries: Jenkins Showler, White Rock, British Columbia; D'or Corporate Art Consultants, Vancouver, British Columbia; Painted Planet Artspace; Memphis, Tennessee; Attic Gallery, Portland, Oregon.