



Mystic night as beautiful as day: ROCKY HAWKINS



by Cheri Jolene Dupres



# FINE ART

## INTERNATIONAL

# COLLECTOR

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### mystic night as beautiful as day

Artist Rocky Hawkins explores the emotions of the ancient American Indians in their quest for power over the unknown in his compelling impressionistic works.

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*Happy Holidays*



**U**nder cover of darkness, the mystery of life takes on shadowy portent. The challenge of survival unmasks the innermost frailties in the strongest of men.

Power turns to gold in the eyes of all who face treacherous uncertainty, and at the edge of the alchemist's cauldron, gazing raptly into the swirling golden mass is Rocky Hawkins, an artist who becomes the primal wonder of ancient Native America on canvas in his expression of the Indians' greatest challenge, how to attain power over the unknown.

"I have experienced many things in life that other people haven't," said Hawkins, "as a logger and faller, which is very dangerous work, and when my wife died and I was left with two children. I've gotten to touch death and the spiritual side of life a little closer than maybe others have. If you go to the deep emotions in my paintings, that's what I'm trying to get across.

## Hawkins believes he has the soul of an Indian.

"I'm trying to paint the Indians' emotions, which is pretty hard to do because we don't really live around those people. They're gone. It's a little bit different than painting landscapes or storytelling art. In my works you can't point to historical landmarks and say the Indians were traveling through this region, etc. The viewer is called upon to come up with his own imagination. It opens one up to be more vulnerable at times.

"If I can get you interested in my Indian paintings, to participate in this Indianess, as I call it, you will see life's gifts from another perspective. What I believe in is the way the Indians saw their environment. You don't have to believe in their religious philosophy of life, just share it a little bit. Other than 'Dances With Wolves,' Indians have always been portrayed in a one-faceted way—as warriors and hunters. I've tried to paint their emotions as they went on the buffalo hunt thinking, 'My family needs food or it will starve.'

"What is this work about?" he asked, and then answered, "It is being close to a person's spirit, the mystical side no one wants to deal with. Ordinarily we don't want to be emersed in the darker side of life, but I'm not afraid to paint blackness and deep purples. I don't have to paint just bright and white, and because of that it evokes a lot of emotions. It kind of stirs things up. When people see my paintings they experience an emotional surge of energy, and whether it's good or bad they get the chance to experience their own feelings. I want them to use that."

Hawkins believes he has the soul of an Indian, and it is this "oneness" with the Indian consciousness which comes across in his art. "There are probably some abstract feelings in there," he said. "I want these paintings to be non-objective. There are things in my work that aren't totally clear, and there's a reason for that. If you were to go to a window at midnight and see someone identifiable running past slowly, the next day you could tell people what you saw and you could go about your day. But if the person running wasn't clearly

identifiable and he was dragging a deep blue cloth, you'd think about it the next day. You couldn't get rid of the experience, the mystery of it.

"There are tons of artists making a living painting total realism, and we could go around and around about that; a pretty picture is a pretty picture. But I love to express my own emotions about the mysterious.

"The Indians were faced with the fear of survival, then when the white man came they had to survive against him as nomadic peoples. Those things are always in the back of my mind. I don't try to push the 'Custer's Last Stand' thing. Indians had a developed culture and I think we could use part of that today. When we go to Europe we see different styles and customs and kind of think, 'I wish we had that back home,' but we also wish they had some of our lifestyle. It's the same thing.

"Charlie Russell and Remington tried to paint the Indians as they lived. Rocky

Hawkins also tries to paint them as they were back then, but with feelings we can relate to today. The abstract expressionism is put in there spontaneously. You're seeing

my guts when I paint this kind of painting. I could frost it up and do some tricks and fool you, but I'm trying to be honest with my feelings. I'm not going to do a trick by trying to outdo a camera. That would be untrue to my occupation and I would rather give it up."

The question 'What if?' plays heavily in Hawkins' work, his paintings leading the onlooker on an inner emotional adventure back through eons of time to the quick of man's most primitive experiences—moments which had to have happened in some conscious form but were never recorded.

In the work *Fear of the Cross*, he recounts, "With all the different graphic shapes in the world I was thinking how unique it must have been to come upon a new shape like the cross for the first time. When Christianity came into the American Indians' lives they had to experience the white man's god, the symbol of which was the cross. In this painting one Indian has gathered many cross symbols together when another Indian comes upon him, seeing a cross for the first time. It's kind of like 'I had a spaceship land in my yard last night and you should see the chairs they left.' The Indian facing us sees the front of the other whose back is adorned with crosses, and the viewer must imagine that if his back is covered with crosses how many must the other Indian be seeing on his front?"

"In those days Indians didn't even have the thing called 'a pan,' but they use to take the bottoms of the white man's pans which were no longer good and flatten them into earrings. They were constantly using different shapes to make their lives more unique and artistic—they'd recycle things. Their idea was not to be wasteful, which brings us to the work *Salvage Warrior*.

"*Salvage Warrior* is totally abstract, and though it comes out of the past it relates to the present. This warrior is collecting many objects from life, and instead of having a neat face he wears a hood which is unique to him. The Indians thought the white man just never did things right and they had to adjust them a bit to make





**WOOD CARRIERS**

1991, 48" x 60", tempera



I try at times to portray the tenderness  
and loving qualities of the Indian...



### FIRE TALKERS

1991, 9" x 13-1/2", oil

them work out. They were very adept at changing and adapting. The chiefs were involved in collecting metal medallions, etc. and the combination of all their 'things' really looked neat.

"Today we can go into a store and put together great outfits, but other people like the Indians didn't go into stores and they could still put together great looks. The wickedness of the warrior in this work had to have the black background. If you'll notice there is a piece of paper cut out of a magazine and it's kind of placed on his elbow which is turned backward. It doesn't make any sense, and yet it does. One color reflects another and they work together to make a form. If I just painted a warrior standing there and you could see everything on him from head to toe you would get tired of him."

The work *Unseen Energy* shows how the Indian faced the mysterious unknown more bravely through the use of make-up. "When you dress up for Halloween," Hawkins said, "you can be scary and brave by hiding behind make-up. The warrior did the same thing. In fact, other people could judge him by how awesomely he was painted—it was sometimes very sexy for women—and he could intimidate whomever he talked to by the way he was painted for the day. When you first see this Indian you kind of feel like, 'I don't know about this warrior,' but eventually you realize that if you take off the paint he would just be a regular guy."

Two women pack wood up a hill in the painting *Woodcarriers*. "There are so many ways to do a job," Hawkins said, "but truthfully, as long as the job gets done it doesn't matter which way. We forget in life that we are all individuals and insist that ours is the only way. The woman in front has all her wood stacked up uniformly and neat, and the woman in the back has her

pack very abstract and disorderly, and yet the job's going to be done. As people we should recognize that and not try to force others to do things our way. We should especially listen to our children."

*Identified Darkness* is another painting based on duality—a two-part work the first of which Hawkins said, "showed a close-up of a horse in darkness and unclear—totally in confusion." In *Identified Darkness*, he said, "you can see the horse and rider closer up, with the stripes, etc. In life it's like that. Sometimes things are clear and other times they get so blurry you have to pick out one little thing and keep it in focus, then things take on order. This image is scary and unknown, but when you've identified it you've accomplished something."

His paintings, he said, are not all based on the "haunting, scary side," however. "I try at times to portray the tenderness and loving qualities of the Indian, and in the painting *Fire Talkers* it's a bunch of women just talking in a circle. They have togetherness and a neat feeling. It's wonderful to know that your friends are out there and you can go and talk to them—kind of sentimental. I think the Indians were just human beings like you and me in that they were trying to do their thing in life."

As an artist Hawkins does his thing with elan. "A lot of times I start a painting and it just paints itself," Hawkins said. "When I start I have a goal, but sometimes that will change depending on what the colors and shapes predict as I see them. It's kind of dealing with my emotions at the time, combined with the different textures and brushstrokes and colors. Dark colors sometimes excite me more than light colors. I can honestly say I've never done drugs in my life; I don't smoke or drink. What I get high over is my own feelings



about the paintings. It's really kind of exciting to see them evolve. There isn't one of my works I wouldn't be happy to buy back.

"Ennis, Montana, where I live is really a small Old Western town. When you walk into the Hole in the Wall gallery where my paintings hang you first see the traditional Western things and then all of a sudden mine, and they're abstract. You don't expect it.

"I have to give the Hole in the Wall credit for being the type of gallery in this realistic painting area which had the foresight to accept an artist who paints Indians in an abstract way. There are many galleries who would have been afraid to take that first step, but they did and it's worked. I've already had two one-man shows and they've really been successful. We'll have another one starting June 28 where people will not only see the painting but a real Indian lodge set up.

"The Indians used their environment as an artform. They walked in harmony with the animals, the trees, etc. That's what I'm trying to do in my works. They're kind of like secret dreams; only when I tell you do you find out about them. It is kind of on the dark side, but not in any way evil. I find the dark side can be very beautiful—for example night and day. Realistically night is just as beautiful—as day. I find it beautiful just as I find shadows and darkness in paintings beautiful—deep purple, deep blue. Basically there is a lot of beauty in the deep things in life." ■

*Editor's Notes: Hawkins' works range in price from \$350 to \$12,500.*



All photos courtesy of Hole in the Wall Art Gallery / Ennis, Montana

**Realistically night is just  
as beautiful as day...**

## Nuit mystique aussi belle que le jour: Rocky Hawkins

Résumé par Micheline Patel

Rocky Hawkins se définit lui-même comme "un artiste qui peint les Indiens de manière abstraite." Convaincu qu'il possède l'âme d'un Indien, Hawkins essaie de peindre les émotions des Indiens, qui craignaient pour leur vie, et leur côté mystique dans leur quête du pouvoir sur l'inconnu.

Hawkins ne veut pas que ses peintures soient objectives, et si certaines choses ne paraissent pas tout à fait claires dans ses tableaux, c'est parce qu'il aime exprimer ses émotions dans le mystère plutôt que dans le réalisme total, sans avoir peur d'utiliser des couleurs profondes et sombres, qui l'excitent plus que les couleurs claires. "Si j'arrive à vous intéresser à mes peintures d'Indiens, à vous faire participer à cette 'expérience indienne,'" dit-il, "vous verrez les dons de la vie d'une autre perspective."

Les oeuvres de Rocky Hawkins se vendent entre \$ 350. et \$ 12,500.

## Mystische Nächte, schön wie der Tag: Rocky Hawkins

Deutschsprachige Zusammenfassung:  
Andreas Aebi

Der Maler Rocky Hawkins glaubt, dass in ihm die Seele eines uralten Indianers weilt, und dass dieses "Einssein" mit dem Indianischen Bewusstsein in seinen Arbeiten zum Ausdruck kommt. "Es gibt wahrscheinlich auch einige abstrakte Gefühle dabei," meint er. "Ich will, dass diese Bilder ungegenständlich sind. ... Es gibt haufenweise Maler, die sich einen Lebensunterhalt durch das Malen eines totalen Realismus erarbeiten ... aber ich drücke meine Gefühle lieber aus durch das, was für uns geheimnisvoll ist."

Über seine Motive meint er: "Ich bemühe mich darum, der Gefühlswelt der Indianer Ausdruck zu geben. Meistens haben wir wenig Interesse daran, uns in die dunkleren Gefilde des Lebens zu vertiefen, aber ich fürchte mich nicht, Schwärze und dunkles Violett zu malen." Seine Arbeiten widerspiegeln das grösste Bemühen des Indianers, Macht über das Unbekannte zu gewinnen. "Wenn ich den Beobachter dazu bringen kann, Interesse an meinen Indianermalereien zu finden und an diesem, wie ich es nenne, "Indianersein," teilnimmt, so wird er das Geschenk des Lebens in einer anderen Perspektive sehen lernen.

Die Arbeiten Hawkins sind von US\$ 350.- bis US\$ 12'500.-erhältlich.

### FEAR OF THE CROSS

1991, 24" x 30", oil