

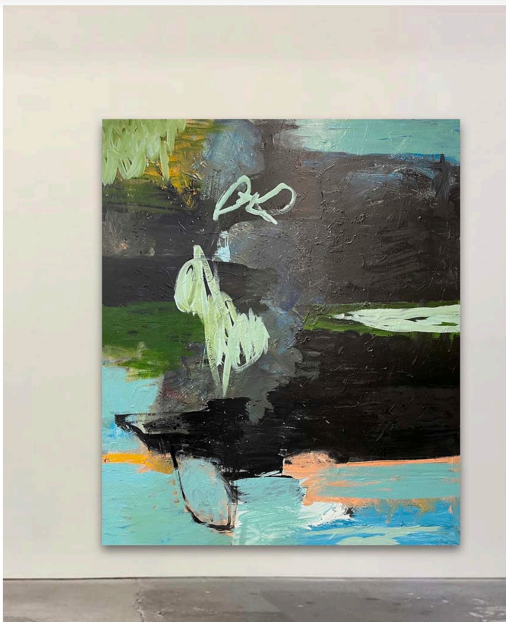
The painters' painter

I was reading a very interesting article about the art collecting world. Galleries and collectors bidding at monopolistic auction houses on their own artworks. Auction houses offering loans so bidders could afford to bid high and collectors only buying privately but selling via highly publicised auctions to boost the value of their private collections.

On September 15, 2008, English artist Damien Hirst was one of the first artists to take his work directly to an auction house netting \$200 million in sales ensuring the celebrity of the artist's brand. It was an unprecedented incursion by an auction house into the primary market.

Sotheby's produced a three-volume catalogue that cost approximately \$240,000 to produce and put on a party for 1,500 guests, who ate foie gras wrapped in gold leaf.

The Hirst auction, which the artist had dubbed "Beautiful Inside My Head Forever", exceeded all expectations becoming the most expensive single-artist auction ever.

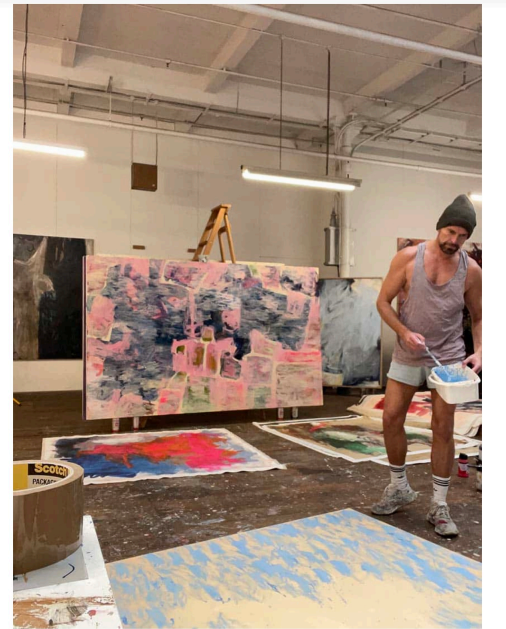


At the dawn of a global recession, and the actual morning of the sale, Lehman Brothers announced it was closing its doors with more than \$600 billion in debt, the largest bankruptcy in US history and the beginning of a financial crisis that would cause unemployment to top 200 million for the first time in history, wiping out \$16 trillion in American wealth. Hirst walked away with \$172 million.

I used to be a real fan of Hirst's work and really enjoyed "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living", an artwork created in 1991 of a preserved tiger shark submerged in formaldehyde in a glass-panel display case. To come face-to-face with something that is dead, something that, were it living, could end your own life, is very thought-provoking. The work is both stunning, shocking and one cannot help but look with confused emotions. Is it beautiful? Horrific? Should I be sad a life form is dead or glad there is one less man killer? Hirst's most recent works to me feel cynical and almost on purpose irritatingly bad paintings, never living up to his past achievement.

If I was an art collector, I would be buying up Ian Rayer-Smith. Not just for the profit potential but for the quality, the visual harmony that his works demonstrate. It is as if De Kooning and Rothko had a spiritual love child that outgrew both of their work.

At aged 36, Rayer-Smith found himself propelled into a completely different career change from entrepreneur to a full-time artist. He completed a degree in visual arts and has since seen a dramatic trajectory into the art world.



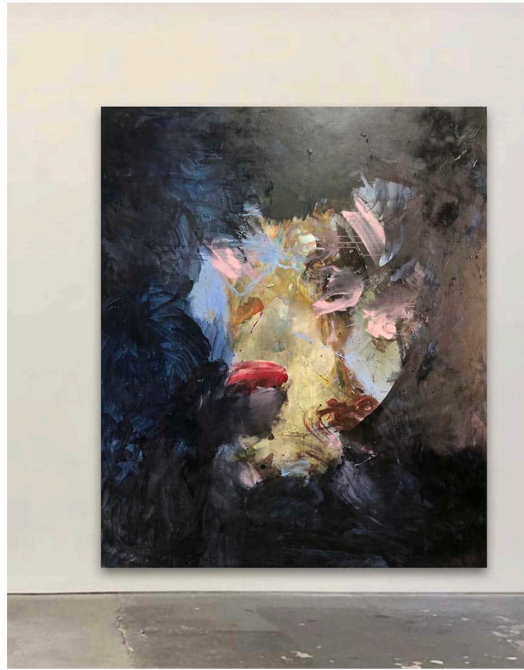
Rayer-Smith's paintings have a visceral yet emotional quality as if painting history cumulated, to this point, action from the great Abstract Expressionists, with Turner-esque paint qualities and Renaissance sense of light and emotionally charged drama. Rayer-Smith is the peak of the painters' painter, a purist, painting for painting's sake.

"In a world preoccupied with technology, there is something remarkable about painting. It connects us back to man's earliest and most elemental forms of self-expression."

I am not interested in painting something that already exists. My pressing urge is to use paint to explore new forms which will ultimately carry emotional weight. I try not to recreate an image. Instead, I may use it as a reference point by which to move from one painting to the next.

I am influenced by the Abstract Expressionists – for their emotional rawness and mark making, and also by the Renaissance – for composition, light and movement. Onto these I layer influences from contemporary culture and my own personal experience. I aim to instil a classical feel into my work whilst finding new visual paths, with the result hopefully being an exploration of the purpose of painting itself.

I think of my paintings as posing a series of questions rather than providing overt statements or narrative pointers towards any clear kind of answer. There would be no joy or satisfaction in doing that. Instead, the process is more about showing my search for something which, maybe, I hope I'll never find."



Painting, in its essence, is about emotion. In painting, we transcend language. It may have been our very first method of conceptual communication, perhaps even before words that limited our understanding to a few commonly understood sounds, lacking in nuance, carrying with them the rules of language and comprehension. Painting gives us something else, something we simply cannot put into words.

"What the market may demand today may be very different to what it demanded ten years ago, and that is for the best. I do not think of my art in terms of branding. That would stifle creativity and lead to being formulaic, which is the enemy of innovation. Evolution is fundamentally necessary if we are to thrive, and I need my work to go in whichever direction it takes me."

Ian Rayer-Smith

Perhaps we will enter into an age of a mature art market, with collectors appreciating once again the mastery of contemporary work without the brash cynicism of narcissistic branding, where once again the art itself triumphs over the artist.

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