

# James Barron Art



## *Roscoe Hall: Thoughts from the Black Belt*

Opens September 27, 2023



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# Roscoe Hall: *Thoughts from the Black Belt* Opens September 27, 2023

“A day trip to the Talladega National Forest at a hunting cabin provided by the Alabama Game and Fish department really left me thinking. I started these pieces midday in complete silence, with thoughts of the world I’m leading and often hiding from... I took that time embrace my fears of developing a stronger grip on my voice in my art practice, in my family, and in my vices.

Thoughts from the Black Belt aren’t as sad as they used to be. Full of progression through education, but always has an array of silence. It often feels like the rest of the world will never hear or see about the slow ways of change.”

Roscoe Hall



ROSCOE HALL

74th & Union, 2023

acrylic, joy, sativa, oil, pastel, the fear of trying something new,  
Supertramps greatest hits, and love on wood panel  
15 x 20 inches (38.1 x 50.8 cm)

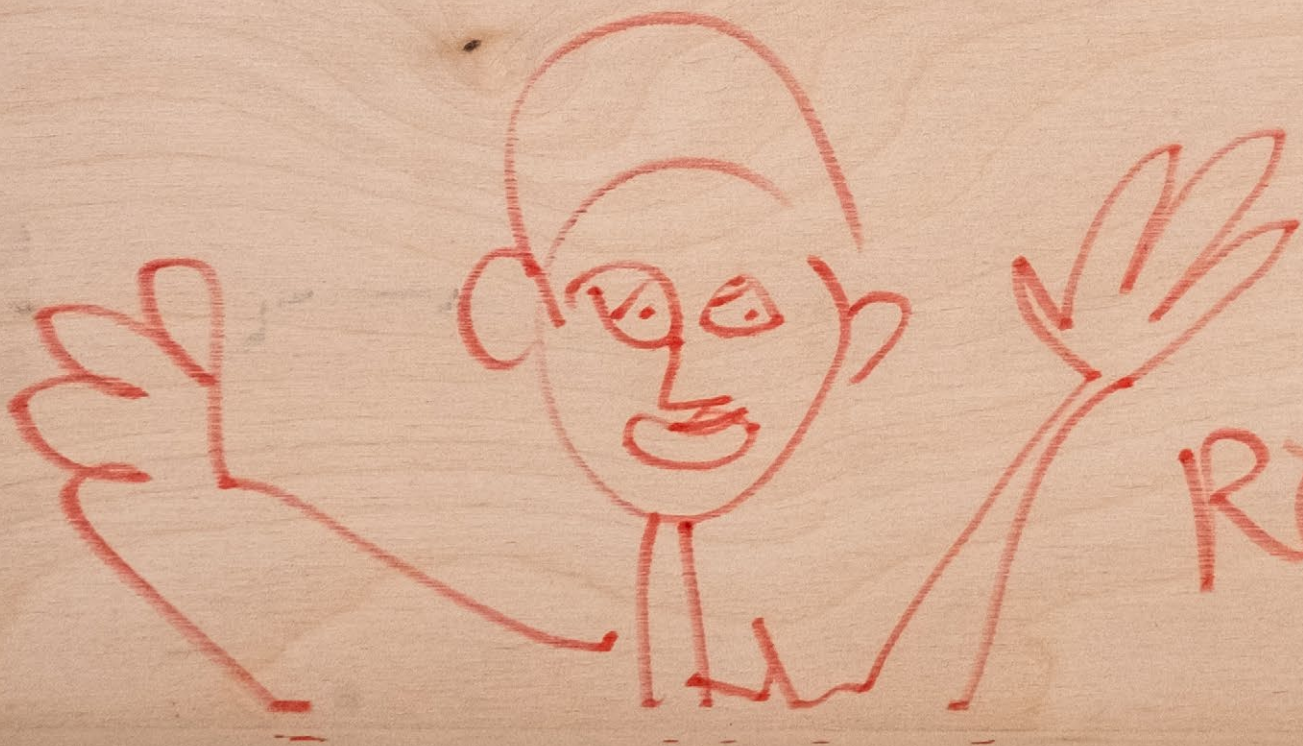


74<sup>th</sup> + UNION

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ACRYLIC, JOY, SATIVA, OIL,  
PASTEL, the Fear of trying something  
new, SUPER TRAMPS greatest hits, and  
love on wood panel.

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ROSCOF  
202



ROSCOE HALL

*If I Were a King*, 2023

acrylic, oil, denim, Adidas insoles, cotton, smiling white figuring shit out,  
at least 2 beers, a few puffs of indica, and love on a wood panel  
15 x 15 inches (38.1 x 38.1 cm)

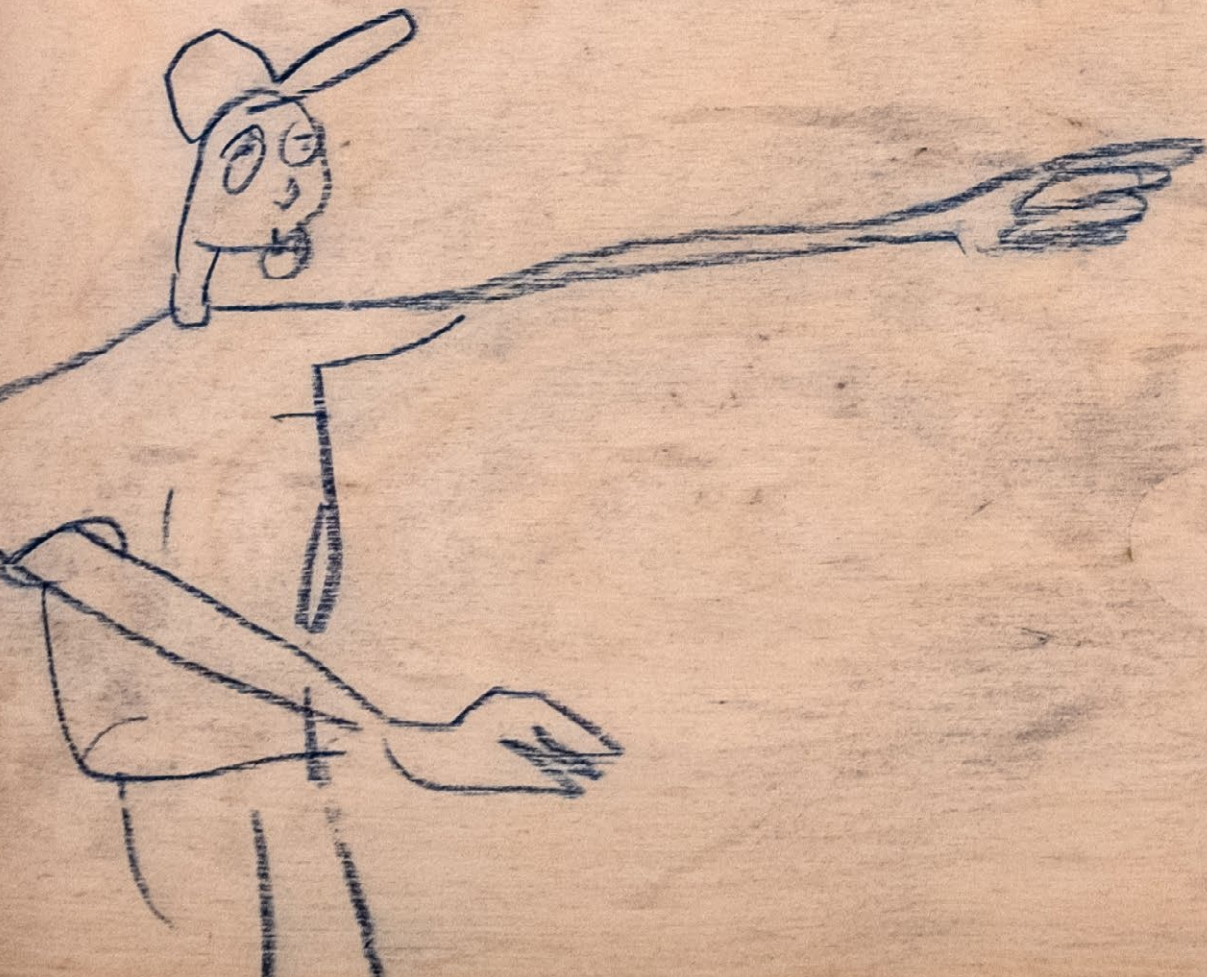


# IF I WERE A KING

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ACRYLIC, OIL, DENIM, ADIDAS INSOLES, COTTON,  
SMILING WHILE FIGURING SHIT OUT, AT LEAST  
2 BEERS, A FEW PUFFS OF INDICA AND LOVE  
ON A WOOD PANEL

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ROSCOE A





ROSCOE HALL

*Burn to the Bone*, 2023

acrylic, ink, oil, sativa, denim, green curry with crispy shallots,  
pastel, burlap, Sonic Youth, confusion, thoughts still on Ferguson

16 x 16 inches (40.6 x 40.6 cm)



LYLIC, INK, OIL, SATIVA, DENIM, ZIGONAS  
KEEP CURRY - / CRISPY SHALLOWS, PASTEL,  
AL YOUTH, CONFUSION I THUS ARE STILL ON

"BURN TO THE  
BANK

202

3/10/2014  
HAY \* / FENHUSON, MO  
QUIKTRIP INCIDENT

ROSCUE H

ROSCOE HALL

*I Can't Tell*, 2023

acrylic, oil, oil pastel, traditional methods in my style, Prince's *Ballad of Dorothy Parker*, indica edible, saffron, and love on canvas

10 x 10 inches (25.4 x 25.4 cm)





“Restraint is what you get noticed for: how far you go, and how well you can cut it off... I kind of feel like it shouldn’t ever be done. But I understand the process of letting go.”

Roscoe Hall

ROSCOE HALL

*Fall into November, 2023*

acrylic, burlap, double impossible burger, oak coals, ink, dealing with  
school shootings, cucumber gin & tonic, and love on canvas

12 x 16 inches (30.5 x 40.6 cm)



“It’s no wonder that [Hall’s] paintings’ highly textured surfaces are chunked with media, including paper towels—a nod to his barbecue upbringing. And it could well be the chef in him that includes miscellaneous creative ‘ingredients’ in his lists of mediums—Hennessy, sativa, ‘brandy’s newsiest album’ and ‘lots of love’ get cited, right alongside ‘acrylic, ink, charcoal, pastels.’ It’s all in there.”

Terri Provencal, *Patron Magazine*





ROSCOE HALL

*We Outside*, 2023

acrylic paint, Hickory charcoal, tumeric, dehydrated yams, cotton swab, oil  
pastel, indica hybrid, Firehose's Flyin' the Flannel, at least two discussions  
of change within the food industry, a theme of want, love, and canvas  
16 x 16 inches (40.6 x 40.6 cm)







# Interview / Roscoe Hall

August 2022

**James Barron:** Besides your career as a chef, you've also trained in photography and art history. How did you arrive at painting?

**Roscoe Hall:** I went to undergrad [for photography] and took Painting 101 classes. I started painting right around the time I started cooking, in 1996. It was a way to calm down from the kitchen. The practice of it was soothing. It really became therapy.

**JB:** You record your experience for each painting through the medium, listing the 'ingredients': wine, music, etc. Can you talk about that?

**RH:** I'm attracted to food and culinary artistry, because you eat with your eyes first. When it comes to something as processed as painting, I try to incorporate what I have been trained to do in the kitchen, from that white plate to a white canvas. I'm addicted to texture. I can't handle anything being flat. It has to be built up, slightly three dimensional, in order to affect me, and the viewer. When I add salt and pepper to my pieces, I know I have to season things before I can start cooking. And then there's a finishing touch, which is the outline of my figurative work.

**JB:** How does it feel for you when you pile on material, when you pile on more paint? Do you have the images in mind already when you're laying down the texture, or do you let the texture guide you?

**RH:** It is orgasmic. When I rip off jeans or cut my chef coats off me, the viewer gets real-time action. I don't have the imagery in mind at all yet. When I sit back and focus on building figures around the texture, that's where the technique comes in. The texture profile is so emotional. I laugh, because I never thought I was such an emotional person. But even if I didn't talk and you looked at my work, you can see so much emotion.

**JB:** It's the idea of improvisation and riffing: starting out, and going back to a theme. Going further, and coming back to a theme. Punching it home, right?

**RH:** Yes, and knowing how to have restraint. I'm taught that every day in the kitchen, and I teach people that, too. Restraint is what you get noticed for: how far you go, and how well you can cut it off. I love that part. I don't like it at the same time, because it's a lot quicker, and I feel like I'm cheating when I'm done. I kind of feel like it shouldn't ever be done. But I understand the process of letting go.

**JB:** It's also about your state of mind as you're painting the painting. My father was a huge opera and symphony goer. Sometimes he would read in a review the paper that lambasted Mahler or whoever, and he'd say, "It would really be helpful if we knew what happened. Maybe he was driving, got into an accident on the way to the opera, and he'd had a fight with his wife, and he took it out on this perfect Mahler symphony!" I'm thinking about that with you: you're giving us the mindset of how you go into the studio.

**RH:** That's a very important thing, because I paint when I get off work. Chefs have very long days, from 8 in the morning until 10 pm. If I'm trying to calm down from a long day, you're about to get everything that has bothered me all day at work, taking care of my children, and thinking about everyday world issues; things I often bottle up. This current body of work expresses the numbness I've felt these past months. It's been hard to take a deep breath and deal with everyday pressures: trying to make sure I guide my family in the right way on top of guiding myself. I'm tapping into my personal history. I've never really done that with painting. I've told stories about black history, but now I'm talking about myself, the people I grew up around, and what I saw. Within black culture, we can find humor from the worst possible things.

**JB:** You're giving us a window into the black experience in America.

**RH:** My job as a chef is to make people feel comfortable and at ease. It's really hard to gain respect in the chef world, let alone the art world. It's easier to be an African American in the art world than the culinary world. Though within the visual arts, we're just now getting noticed, getting our work in big collectors' homes, and creating work that addresses the artistic process as well as the black experience.



ROSCOE AUL

2023

I'm in an interracial marriage, and I tell my wife all the time that she needs to accept that things are going to be a bit more complicated for her. Meaning she has to walk as a black person now as well. Sometimes I don't tell people I'm married to white woman, just to get in the door of a black business or to talk to a powerful black person because I know they're going to judge me. For her, it's kind of a blessing and a curse. She's looked at as a more "diverse person," but from a black woman's perspective, she's critiqued really, really hard. It's hard to numb yourself when you know you're going to be judged as soon as you walk out the door. I can't go to a black church being all weird, with tattoos, talking about the last meal I had in Copenhagen and sea urchin, and then punk rock shit, and be respected in the black community...not yet at least.

**JB:** Let's talk about the prison bars in your paintings. Are they both literal and metaphorical?

**RH:** Absolutely. The bars show restrictions. In between those bars, you get little lights and glimpses of what could be the future: How could I have changed this? Those bars mean so much. I think we're all behind bars. We're all trapped in thoughts. Jail is all around me. I hire prisoners to work in most kitchens. I hear stories. You can't help but wonder what goes on in that cell. They see the same people every day. Those bars protect, in a literal sense of killing your own and not being killed by others. At the same time, alienation is really big in prisons. So the bars protect you at some times; other times, not so much. In the literal sense, those bars are telling the story of what's to come and what will happen.

**JB:** I hope that when somebody is behind the bars, literally and figuratively, they see a little sliver of sky: a goal to keep moving towards. In some of the paintings, there are some gaps in the bars, or a hand reaching through.

**RH:** Right, and I express that through color, too. I use cobalt teal a lot. In the Southeast, people paint it on corners, just like they place horseshoes on corners, in their businesses or homes. It's a color of protection and progress. That's the change and the hope.

**JB:** Can you talk about the mosaic quality in your work?

**RH:** When they turn into that mosaic feel, especially from a distance but also up close, you feel the pain. You see its story. It's a map. I paint everything in numbers, not like paint by numbers, but I do everything in odds. If you see five colors of pink, you're gonna see five of this, five of that, five of that, and it just keeps going and it builds. Underneath, we're all alive. People think humans

are just sitting, but really there's so much movement within us. The colors are flourishing constantly. You can see so much in a turn of the head. I'm creating more motion, even when they're standing still.

**JB:** I often think that an artist can be like pitcher, and a gallery can almost be like a catcher. You're giving them a target: Here's the mitt. But it can also be controversial for white people to show and sell a black artist's work. Scott, Mary Shelton, if you could talk about that?

**Scott Miller:** I think it's twofold, James. You're talking about a white person showing a black artist's work, but you're also talking about a gallery in Birmingham, Alabama showing a black person's work. There's a history here. That's why it's even more important for us to be able to show Roscoe's work, and to let him tell his story. If we don't do that, we're not doing our job.

**Mary Shelton:** Roscoe has a story that he wants to tell, and he has the agency to tell it. I'm glad to be working with Scott, to provide a venue for Roscoe to tell his story. We're not pulling it out of him. It's coming from a genuine place.

**RH:** Oh, absolutely. It's really honest. I don't know any other way to be. If you look at folk art, especially in Birmingham, the exploration of the African American experience — call it the diaspora, if you want — is a graceful thing. It's very fluid. For you to carry on a Southern tradition through contemporary art and allow someone to share their life story is a very modern thing.

**SM:** Roscoe and I were sitting in his studio, and Roscoe had just finished a portrait of the former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger. Roscoe was saying, "I don't know if I should show this. We're taking it to the Dallas Art Fair, right where all of this happened." I said, "If you're going to show Guyger, why don't you do a portrait of Botham Jean that will show across the booth?" That story needed to be told, and Roscoe needed to tell it. The response that we got in Dallas was quite interesting; not only did we hear from people who knew Jean — co-workers, friends, neighbors — about what a great human being he was, but Roscoe also heard from police officers who went through this case with Guyger, how it affected her, and how it affects them as police officers. We would only ever encourage Roscoe to tell that story.

**JB:** You've mentioned government promises before, which I understand relates to the red balloon in the new paintings.

**RH:** The red balloon represents beauty, even research and freedom. I saw a documentary about the government dropping packages of food from parachutes, which to me looked like red balloons. They dropped them in the fields and each one weighed about 400 pounds. Villagers in Sudan would fight over them, because it was a rare opportunity to get food. Some of the pallets would hit people in the head and kill them, and people would kill each other to food from the pallets, which they would sell or use feed their families, or to pay for medical treatment. I immediately put that in the paintings as a red balloon. Everyone's waiting to be told what's next. When I say government promises, I'm thinking of waiting to be told what's about to happen, waiting to be told how to live. That's what those red balloons are.

**JB:** Tell me what it was like for you being the son of a Black Panther. What was your childhood like?

**RH:** My parents moved to Chicago from California, so my father got a taste of the Black Panthers there. He was in Soul Train, too. When he moved to Chicago, he got a completely different version of the Black Panthers. Midwestern fights for progression of freedom were a bit more intense than in Berkeley and Oakland. They were allowed to carry guns in Berkeley and Oakland. If you did that in Chicago, nobody looked at it as militant. My dad was a listener of Fred Hampton. I grew up with a poster of Fred Hampton in my room, and my dad would take us by the BPP headquarters/Hampton's apartment just to see it.



I got to see the tail end of the Black Panthers and Black Pride, right when the crack epidemic hit. What I saw was the Gil Scott-Heron version. A lot of those guys came home from Vietnam. They had just gotten their soul sucked out of them, and they started abusing drugs. I saw my dad's friends — who were once very powerful dashiki-wearing dudes — kicking knowledge on the street corners, still doing it while really high. My experience looking at drug addicts was that you still respect your elders. They weren't junkies to me, and they still knew a lot of shit. They still opened the doors for me. Even though they were crazy and whacked out, there wasn't an offensive motive behind them. They were just making sure I knew where I came from.

My mom hated that shit. She didn't want any of that Black Panther stuff in the household. She didn't like the way they treated women. She thought they were aggressive. She worked at a daycare center that Jesse Jackson owned. My dad hated Jesse Jackson, because Jesse Jackson was not about the militant aspect of it. He was on that Southern shit like MLK. But my mom was an MLK person, and my dad was a Fred Hampton, Malcolm X person.

When we moved to Birmingham, I learned more about what the Panthers were about as far as education, food, and family standards. That's what stuck with me. It's only been recently that I've understood the power of revolt within a militant group: noticing that words are stronger than the fight. Consistent chants by thousands across nations can eventually get the right message across. Fighting for safety by taking action on the rules that were given. You shoot us, we can't shoot you, but we can get shit poppin' with chants, music and resistance. I enjoy that. Having a Black Panther influenced-father really shaped me. I say things I never thought I would say that sound kind of educated, but they're often very militant! [laughs] I have to watch that.

**JB:** Who are the artists you think about?

**RH:** For this show, I was thinking of Nari Ward and Francis Bacon. I found out recently he was a chef, which is funny. Ernst Kirchner, Käthe Kollwitz. I met this guy in Texas recently named Willehad Eilers, from Germany. His idea of perspective has really influenced me. Juana Valdes does these amazing folds, with incredible texture, using ceramics that I adore. Velasquez, because of eye direction within his figures. They give a glimpse into a person, and almost alert the viewer on what to look for. From Velasquez you can move quickly to Francis Bacon: distortion through the process of development. He was a wild line cook with talent in many areas. It's very intriguing, the intensity behind his process of scraping away, then building from scratch. Music is also a massive influence, especially Reggae for this show.

Education

- 2003 BFA Photography, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA
- 2008 MA Art History, Savannah College of Art & Design, Savannah, GA

Selected Exhibitions

- 2023 The University of Alabama Gallery, Tuscaloosa, AL (solo)
- 2022 *Roscoe Hall: Government Promises*, James Barron Art, South Kent, CT (solo)  
*Works on Paper*, Scott Miller Projects, Birmingham, AL (solo)  
*Alabama Triennial*, Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts, Birmingham, AL
- 2021 *Jerusalem Heights*, Scott Miller Projects, Birmingham, AL (solo)  
*Roll With It: Merrick Adams, Rafael Baron, William Bradley, Roscoe Hall, Erin LeAnn Mitchell*,  
Scott Miller Projects, Birmingham, AL  
*Recent Acquisitions to the AEIVA Permanent Collection*, Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts,  
Birmingham, AL  
*Angola: Works In Response*, Lowe Mill Gallery, Huntsville, AL
- 2020 *A La Carte: A Visual Exploration of our Relationship with Food*, Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts,  
Birmingham, AL
- 2018 *I2XU: Mixtape Series*, Lowe Mill Gallery, Huntsville, AL
- 2017 *SMILE*, Jaybird Gallery, Birmingham, AL
- 2016 *Shift*, curated by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, A Birmingham Museum of Art initiative, Birmingham, AL 2015  
*Punk As Food*, Phoenix Building, Birmingham, AL
- 2012 *Time is Wastin*, Graeter Art Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2010 *Big*, Goodfoot Lounge, Portland, OR
- 2009 *Stakes Is High*, P:EAR Gallery, Portland, OR  
*KIN FOLK*, Goodfoot Lounge, Portland, OR
- 2009 *Manor of Art and Milepost 5*, Studios, Portland, OR
- 2008 *Them*, Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, Savannah, GA

Permanent Collection

Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts (AEIVA), Birmingham, AL

Selected Bibliography

- 2021 Terri Provencal, "Art Souls of the South," *Patron Magazine*
- 2020 Shauna Stuart, "From 'Top Chef' to solo art exhibition," *The Birmingham News & AL.com*  
Summer Guffey, "Roscoe Hall's new Jerusalem Heights art exhibit opens today," *Bham Now*

Publications

- 2021 *A la carte: A Visual Exploration of Our Relationship with Food*, Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts,  
Birmingham, AL (featured as artist and contributing chef)

Awards and Grants

- 2022 Peter S. Reed Foundation Grant for Painting