

# William Russell Walker

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## Artist Statement

Robert Hughes wrote that Goya was, in an existential sense, the last Old Master and the first Modernist.<sup>1</sup> This is an insight to which I agree, as much as I believe that Goya was also the finest blend of Realist and Romantic painter, classifications not yet realized for the first and very new for the latter. He was an artist in the purest sense. For I believe, as artists, we are set on a path that should chronicle, dissect, and question our lives from a human perspective, both motives and actions.



I am an artist, not by choice but by birth. There was no other path for me to follow for it is the fabric of my being. I look at all of us who walk this world and see one constant that we will never escape...that human nature is the same today as it was yesterday and will remain so tomorrow. I paint to reflect *our* nature...that very nature that allows us to give money to a stranger in need, only to return to work and back-stab a fellow employee simply to climb higher; to be led by seductions while we cast aside conscience; a nature so arrogant that it leads us to believe we have achieved such self enlightenment we gladly gamble our souls. The irony for us all is that we are capable of wonderful and complex creations and yet are so utterly simple at our core. We all hunger to be loved, respected, cherished...remembered. My path as an artist is to remind us all that, while human we may be, we have within us the capacity to be so much more...that life is a series of choices, pathways, and voices we listen to...and that we *all* create our own legacy.

In my paintings, I have questioned human frailties found in religion, seduction, greed, egotism, immortality. I have shed the clutter of backgrounds in order to ground my figures in spaces, not lacking environment but rather finding envelopment. I give to the viewer a raw but evocative portrait. In some, I have painted Biblical characters stripped from their historical context and presented with frailties as great and subtle as that facing our contemporary lives today. I shed iconography and religious imagery, allowing everyone to enter regardless of beliefs. In my paintings, I opened the question - "If I were in similar circumstances, what would *I* do?" I painted Pontius Pilate, not as some tyrannical villain, but as a normal man weighing a pivotal decision. I painted the flagellation of Christ with a figure not bound by rope or chain, but in willing subjection. In an 8' x 10' Lion's Den work, I presented the figure of Daniel, not as a man devoid of fear, but as one overcome by the natural instinct of fright, totally unaware of what God was doing in his midst. Currently, I am focused on works which bring into question the rationale of using limited knowledge as the basis upon which to gamble an eternal soul.

I walk with one foot in Realism, the other as a Romantic. I do not readily fit into either classification as a whole. Rather I consider myself a humanist painter...someone who portrays the inner struggles we all go through in our journey on this earth. For me, as an artist, it is *the measure of man* that is worthy of exploring. I can find no loftier goal than to present the naked truth of who we are, with a whisper of who we can become.

<sup>1</sup>Hughes, Robert. *Goya*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 2004.