



Joe Russell, shown in his studio near Kerrville, does not consider himself a spokesman for representational painters of natural scenes, but as a successful practitioner of the art, he states his case very well.

Joe Russell

INTERVIEWED BY GENE BALL

Ball: What word or phrase would best describe the kind of art work you do?

Russell: I would say "representational."

Ball: What media do you work with?

Russell: I work almost entirely in oils. Once in a great while I'll work with acrylics, but oil is so completely suited to my temperament that I stick with it.

Ball: What kind of work did you do before you became a full-time painter?

Russell: Commercial art, I was associated with a studio in Austin for six years, and moved from there to College Station where I was with the A & H Press holding a position titled "artist typographer" for nine years before I made the break.

Ball: How did you get interested in commercial art?

Russell: Well, as long as I can remember

I've been interested in art, and it just worked out that an opportunity in the commercial end of it appeared in 1941.

Ball: What about the transition from commercial art to full-time painting? What was the turning point?

Russell: About the time I started commercial art, I had begun painting in my spare time. When I moved to College Station I started painting a little bit more, and it just slowly evolved. The last year before moving to Kerrville, I was working for a printing plant half-time and painting half-time.

Ball: How did the openings come as far as becoming a full-time painter-art show, galleries, private sales?

Russell: I didn't go through art shows, I sold to individuals, but most of it was through galleries, in Wimberly and then in Houston. They were my primary

outlets when I started painting full time.

Ball: Were there any specific, identifiable "breaks"?

Russell: No, there really weren't. It was just a long, slow process. The main thing, I think, for anybody is to paint... and paint and paint, and let the public see the work because sales are going to be in direct proportion to publicity—whatever form the publicity is in.

Ball: How long did it take you to reach an acceptable level of technical proficiency in your painting?

Russell: I once heard a friend of mine, referring to oil painting, say that it would take a hundred paintings to get to where you were reasonably proficient, and, he's probably right. It had so happened that I hit a hundred just when I started selling.

Ball: What did you do with the first hundred?

Russell: Oh, they've scattered around. I gave a lot of them away to friends and relatives and so forth. I'd like to get them all back.

Ball: Do you consider the vital first step to be technical mastery of the medium you are going to use?

Russell: It certainly is important, I suppose it would be the first step, but mastery of the medium is not the difficult thing. It is not even really the main thing, I suppose. The effect is what we're looking for, however it's done. Pro-



bull's head, oil.



"Time of Hunger", 1962 oil.

foundly with the medium is helping this along, but it's a combination of that and other things.

Ball: Do you'd advise people to paint a hundred and throw them away and then start?

Russell: They'd probably be glad if they did.

Ball: Would you say that, at this point, most of your paintings are successful?

Russell: I would like very much to be real, real happy with everything I do. It is rare when that happens. I think that's true with most artists.

Ball: What do you think your paintings reveal about you?

Russell: To tell the truth, I really have no idea. I wish I did sometimes.

Ball: What kind of response would you like for your paintings to elicit from a viewer?

Russell: I suppose I would like for them to feel the way I feel about a subject. The beauty of nature, the immensity. The solitude, I really don't know how to put it into words.

Ball: If it's a visual experience there's no way that you can reduce it to mere words?

Russell: Art is an emotional experience, period. I just want the viewer to respond with the same emotion that I felt when I saw the scene or began painting it. To me, nature is a creation of God—perfect in its activity. This is what I would like to portray, but I never can.

Ball: There are people who would say that your type of representational work doesn't have a lot of depth or meaning