



VITAMIN-D DEFICIENCY.
Acrylic on Canvas,
36" x 38"

Art & Beyond Interview WITH DONALD RIZZO

by Justin Hoffman

Donald Rizzo is an American artist who has described his technique as Abstract Verism – art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather uses shapes, forms, colors, and textures to achieve effect, and uses a style of portraiture that is hyperrealistic, emphasizing that every wrinkle and flaw be present. For him, every painting is a fragment of his self-portrait, and he aims to hide nothing. In 2014 Rizzo had four solo shows: *Life Rebuilt: A Journey Into and Out of the Depths of Despair*; *Gay Life: Fiction, Fantasy or Actuality*; *Shades of Purple*; and *Community: A Collection of Portraits*. He currently has pieces in galleries in Florida and California.

Q. What is your artistic goal?

A. To create Art. Edgar Degas said, “Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.” I say that Art is the activity that occurs in the space that exists between a viewer’s eyes and the object I have created. It is the interaction between the collective experiences in your brain as you process the way I have chosen to express the collective experiences in my brain. It is only when this exchange takes place that my work becomes Art. When I see the moment of realization as people experience my work, after spending over 100 hours in my head, when I see their eyes light up – that is priceless. It is in that moment when my work truly becomes Art.

Q. Can you describe your perfect situation for creating?

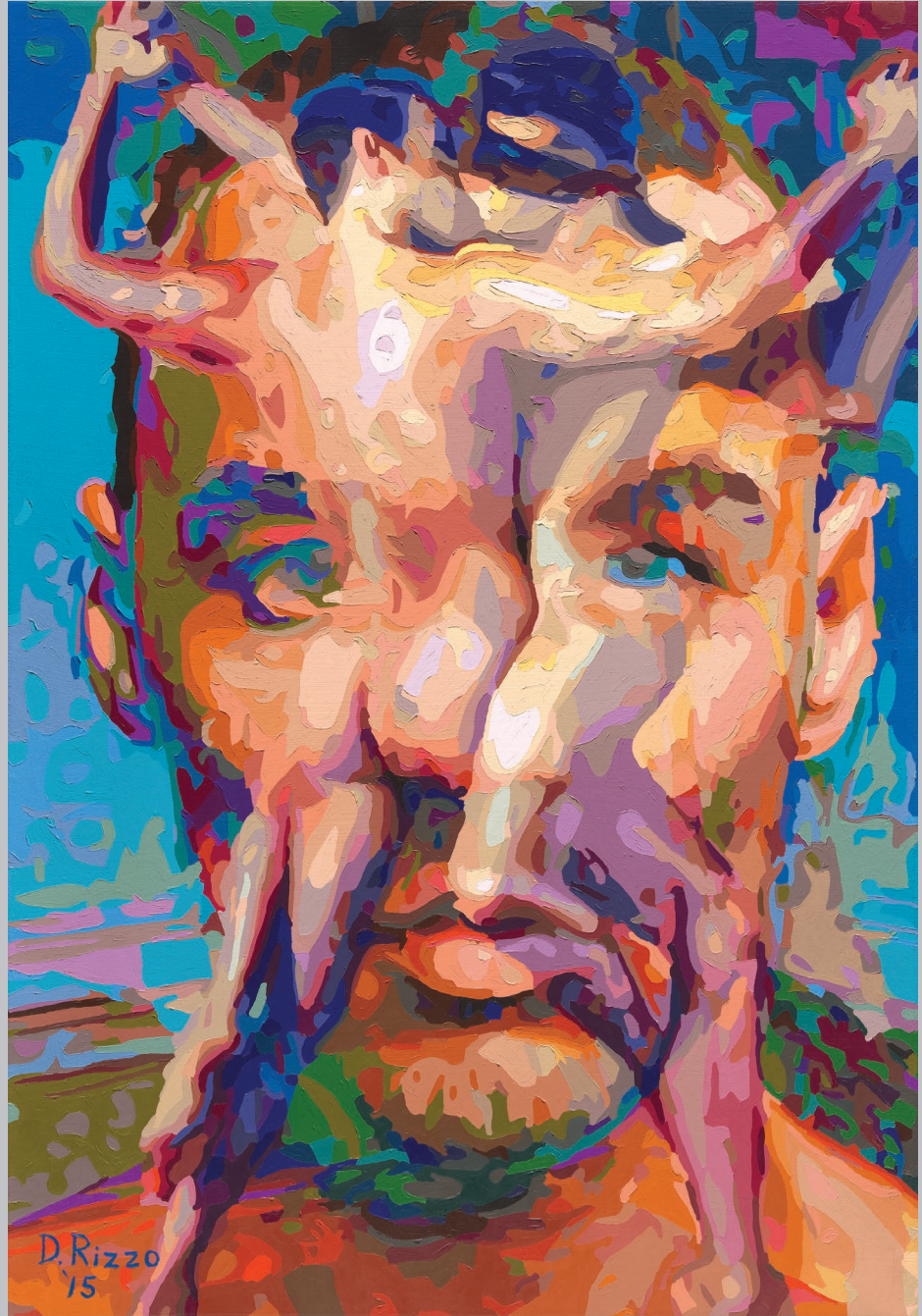
A. Unfortunately, I would say that the perfect situations have been during difficult or dark moments of my life. I have experience with severe depression and psychotic symptoms. I came to realize that the visual and audio hallucinations I was experiencing were actually my sub-conscious mind attempting to communicate with my conscious mind. My two minds

best communicate during these difficult and dark moments of my life. I’m not sure if my subconscious mind is yelling or if my conscious mind is more intently listening, but whatever the case, it is in these moments that I more clearly comprehend the message. In this way, I believe my art uses the viewer’s conscious and subconscious mind.

Q. What role has art training had in your work?

A. I took some painting classes at San Francisco City College with James Torlakson. I started exploring painting during my psychosis to understand the visual hallucinations I was experiencing. I had no concept of color mixing, but had a vision of where I wanted to go and just needed to develop the skills. The first assignment in this class was a color chart; this was my eureka moment. I started to understand color mixing, color temperature, and how these affect perceived depth in a painting. As I began to develop my own process I asked James if I could try something different in class, and he was very encouraging. At one point I asked him how one paints glass as it is seen through a window. He responded, “Paint what you see, not what you think you see.” I have been painting what I see ever since.

DANCE OF A RELATIONSHIP.
Acrylic on Canvas,
36" x 52"



Q. Can you describe the process of "fragmenting" a vision – which then becomes the artwork?

A. Fragmenting is a journey with an unknown destination. I start with an image that speaks to me, although I can't say why it speaks to me; it is a feeling. Then I look for a second image that has a shape pattern that could work with the first image. With my *Ambiguous Delusions*, I am creating two paintings: one that can be viewed from afar and the second that can be viewed up close. Each has to have sound design principles, which becomes a factor when selecting the second image. I then adjust the color and color temperature in the images so that in the viewer's eye parts of the image move forward and others recede. Multiple coats of paint achieve texture. It is important to remember that when a viewer looks at a painting they

are seeing reflected light. The smoother the painting the more direct the reflection, and the more textured the more scattered the light. My paintings are comprised of individual fragments of color, which the viewer compiles into something recognizable in their mind. The further the viewer is from the painting, the more mixing, and the closer they are the less mixing. At some point during this journey I hear my subconscious and comprehend the destination. Each viewer will use their own life experiences and background to hear their subconscious and adjust to their own destination. With each painting these destinations may be different for the viewers and I, yet we have all traveled the same path.

<http://donald-rizzo.com>