

# Re-APPEARANCES

An Essay by Robert Golden  
about the Exhibition

MARKING INJUSTICE  
A PAINTER'S WAY OF COPING  
by  
RICKY ROMAIN



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CONSIDER THESE PAINTED PEOPLE  
©Heather Fallows2015©  
the essay:  
RICKY IS CONCERNED  
by Robert Golden







LOST VOICES  
Panel 3



**C**onsider these painted people.

Within their pigment flesh atoms of star substance  
link paint to blood with rubescent genealogies,  
These are moon-men with mothers of pearl,  
denied the milk of love - like still born siblings,  
not comforted by the tender arms of trees or  
soothed by liminal shrouds of leaves.

The sky offers them no endless touch of blue,  
and the earth no special hollowing.

They are mute ventriloquists, tongue-tied troubadours,  
angels in fool's clothing.

They stand upon their canvas stage  
and proclaim their humanity with an epic language of lines.

Old scars scratch secret stigmata on their bony hands,  
thorns, battle-hymns, martyred truces,  
valiant pacts and brokered symmetries,  
haunt their remembering.

But no triumphant stars adorn their brethren-bodies,  
only the geometry of pockets, stuffed with the skeletons of dreams,



LOST VOICES, panel 7 - detail



and graven images of the dead, clenched by stiffened fingers,  
etched upon snow-textured overcoats,  
grid-locked ghost-photos, criss-crossing this way and that way  
Lines echoing lines, echoing lines,  
- a disturbing decoration.  
Standing in groups, they rewind the threads of comrade songs,  
and seem to sing with sibilant sensitivity,  
then bend to touch each other's breast, in search of a heart.  
Wearied with wandering, they people the whiteness with raven textures,  
their hopeless dignity mindful of arbitrary juxtapositions.  
Tiny seed-thoughts dispersed into time's dust,  
have taken root among their hollow veins  
connecting the myth of life to everything that is elemental,  
to undefinable spaces, unprejudiced by living shapes,  
to the first fossil breaths of mutating forms,  
to a twinkle in an amoeba's eye,  
to the first word, incubating in a stone.

*poem by Heather Fallows*



LOST VOICES, panel 6-detail

















LOST VOICES  
Panel 7



*“My earlier work was filled with  
colour and movement.  
Now I am joyed out.”*





**Ricky is concerned with feelings  
rather than current preoccupations with Things.  
His feelings, like bone splinters,  
wound as they possess him.**

**He uses the physical language of action – ‘to paint’ –  
to relieve him of the oppressive burden.**

**The modest things that count to him in his day-by-day life  
are tools and vital materials:  
canvas, gesso, brushes, pencils, oils, turpentine, Indian ink,  
charcoal and oil sticks.  
His richly illustrated notebooks  
dashed with swathes of colour  
lead to his austere painted canvases.**

**They lead in two ways.  
The first, by working through emotions, characters, ideas  
and perhaps a trope of colours or lines  
that may be recognised only as minor diversions,  
incapable of being exported to a large canvas.**

*continued*






**Perhaps they were tricks, a dark clown's diversions,  
only fragments of an emotion.**

**And then there are forms which whisper they are of substance,  
ready to stand amongst the other visitors who occupy his canvases.  
They shadow him,  
dark bodies that he momentarily embraces as he 'attacks the canvas'  
in a fury of actions  
tracing his emotions in marks,  
rubblings  
and scrappings  
until finally,  
the Disappeared  
- lost lovers, parents and children -  
re-appear as memories transformed,  
each and every one  
into a commemoration:  
dignified,  
trapped in paint,  
saddened for us all.**







*"I used to stare at the  
paintings of Rembrandt,  
loving the way he  
applied paint.  
But I asked, 'How  
on earth did he do that'?"*

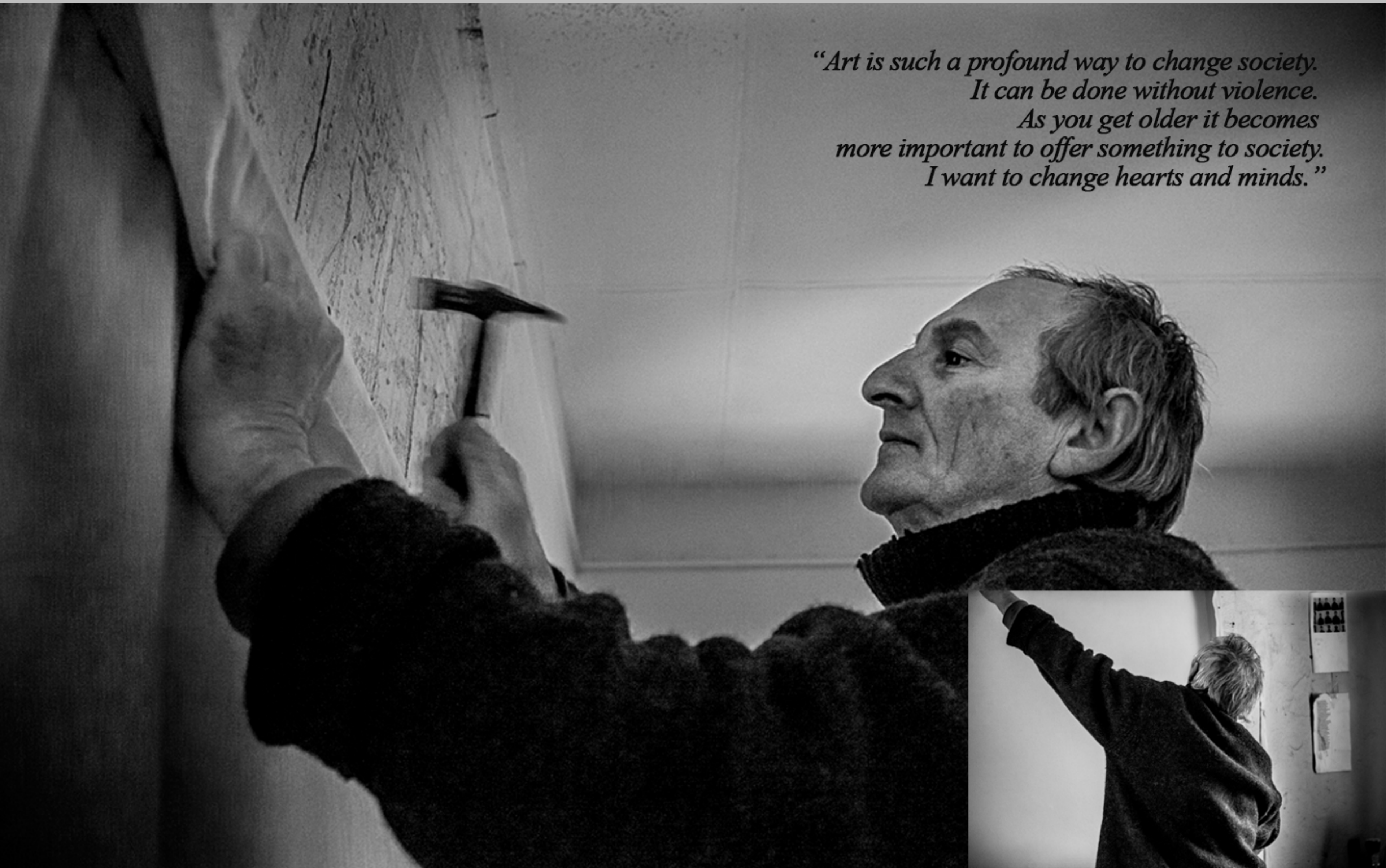




LOST VOICES  
Panel 6



*“Art is such a profound way to change society.  
It can be done without violence.  
As you get older it becomes  
more important to offer something to society.  
I want to change hearts and minds.”*





These paintings address the human condition  
stranded between being present and some un-foretold ending.  
Look at them, they are also particular  
in the way a hand caresses a face,  
the way a head drops to a chest,  
the way one person supports another,  
the way a mouth is drawn as if retreating from history.

These are moments of impending tragedy.  
People trapped in some indefinite time and place  
awaiting a passport,  
a ticket to freedom,  
a bureaucrat's or judge's or general's decision.

These characters wait as though it is a necessity.  
They are anguished but patient.  
If they would not wait  
they would not be in attendance for the painter's attention;  
they would have already disappeared.

They are in a suspension  
in which we, the viewers,  
know they are within a moment preserved.  
Our hope for their continual survival  
is as our futile hope that Juliette does not take the poison.

*continued*



LOST VOICES, panel 9 - detail




**Time in these paintings is elastic.  
It is frozen in a moment  
which implies it will last until judgement day  
while it is also,  
waiting for judgement,  
ticking away the moments,  
tenuous.**

**You can hear Mengele saying “left” to her  
(she will die),  
“right” to him,  
(he will live);  
you can hear the comrade saying  
“historical necessity deems  
you must sacrifice your children for the cause”;  
you can hear the politicians braying,  
“now we have a just war against terror”.**

**For all of human history this has been a universal condition.  
but for each individual it is a particular situation.  
One of the compelling elements of these paintings  
is how each character,  
depicted by the artist’s distinctive marks,  
is also particular.**





A dimly lit living room with a fireplace, bookshelves, and a couple sitting on a sofa. The room is filled with various objects, including books, vases, and framed pictures. The lighting is soft and warm, creating a cozy atmosphere. A woman in a blue sweater and a man in a dark jacket are sitting on a patterned sofa, looking towards the camera. The fireplace is in the center, with a mirror above it. To the left, there are bookshelves filled with books and other items. To the right, there is a large potted plant and a framed picture on the wall.

*“I look back and think there was a security I developed as an artist,  
but so much of this work came together when Heather and I came together...  
so the Muse spoke to me with a different voice.”*





*"I thought about death as a child.  
Ten years is a long time.  
A million years of nothing is harder to cope with."*





LOST VOICES  
Panel 5





*"I thought, the character has lost so many members of his family -brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, I asked, 'How can you come to terms with that?' Is it any wonder that people who have lost so many members of their families for so many generations can't resolves this? How do you let go?"*



**Look at them closely;  
they are like looking at the images of a documentary photographer.  
They are both still and yet kinetic,  
filled with an energy which vibrates within each character  
as they await their fate.**

**We, the viewers, stand outside of their plight,  
watching more than gaping or looking,  
perhaps wondering why we too are transfixed.**

**It is because Pol Pot, Pinochet, Milosevic,  
Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Mao  
and yes even Bush and Blair  
echo in our memories.**









*"The first part is putting down the gray marks.  
I look at the canvas. I see how high the figures will be.  
With the diluted ink I make arbitrary, abstract marks,  
which are the foundation  
for where the darker marks will go."*



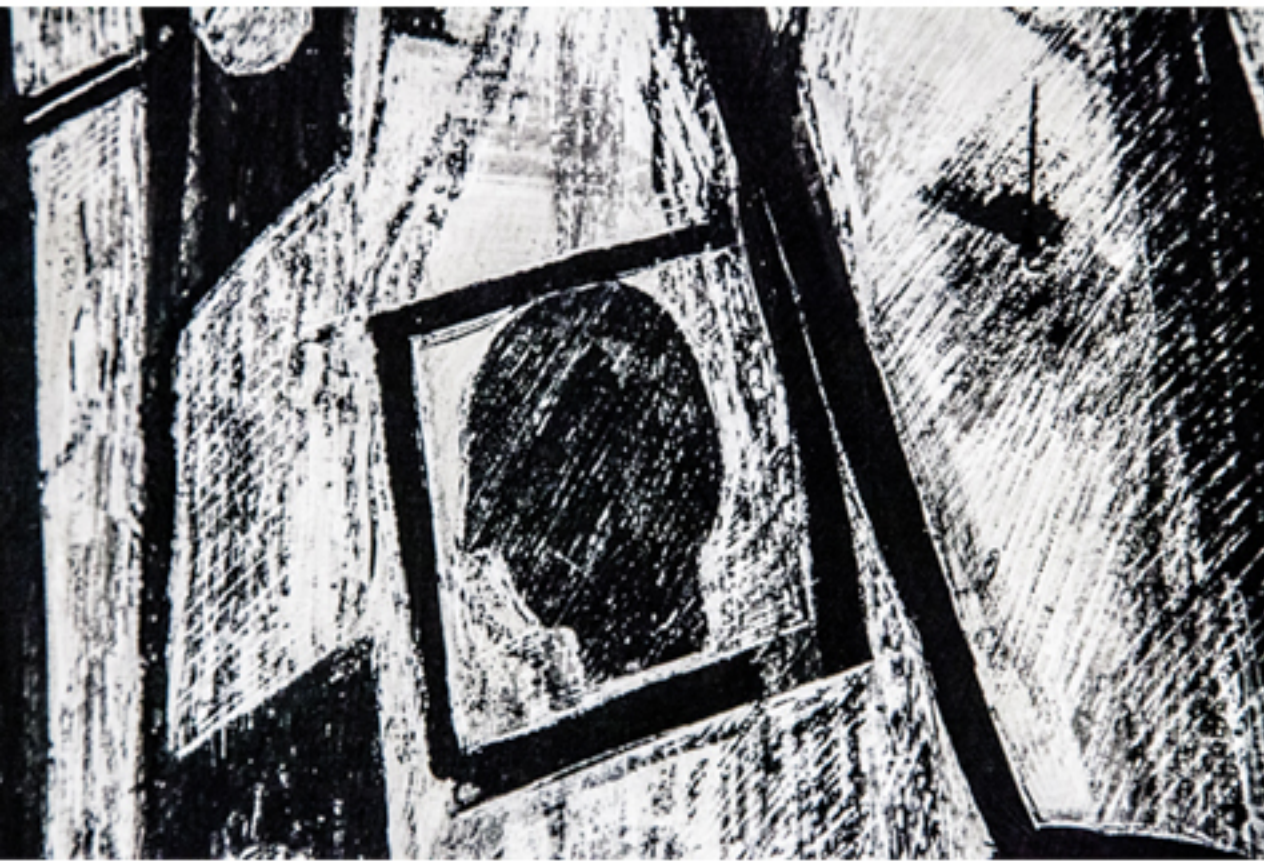




*"I need to work quickly  
because I want the gray ink  
to run with the black ink.  
And I have to work quickly  
because the gesso sucks in the ink.  
I don't think consciously about  
the composition.  
I follow the marks making groups -  
there's a family group here  
and another there.  
Behind there's a young person  
maybe staying or not -  
being or not being -  
departing or stuck."*



*"I have no control over the dripping paint.  
When I bung something on, I have no control.  
It denies my conscious mind.  
It does not allow me to get too figurative too early.  
My fascination for the abstract is then excited,  
this unknown.  
But I am a figurative painter."*

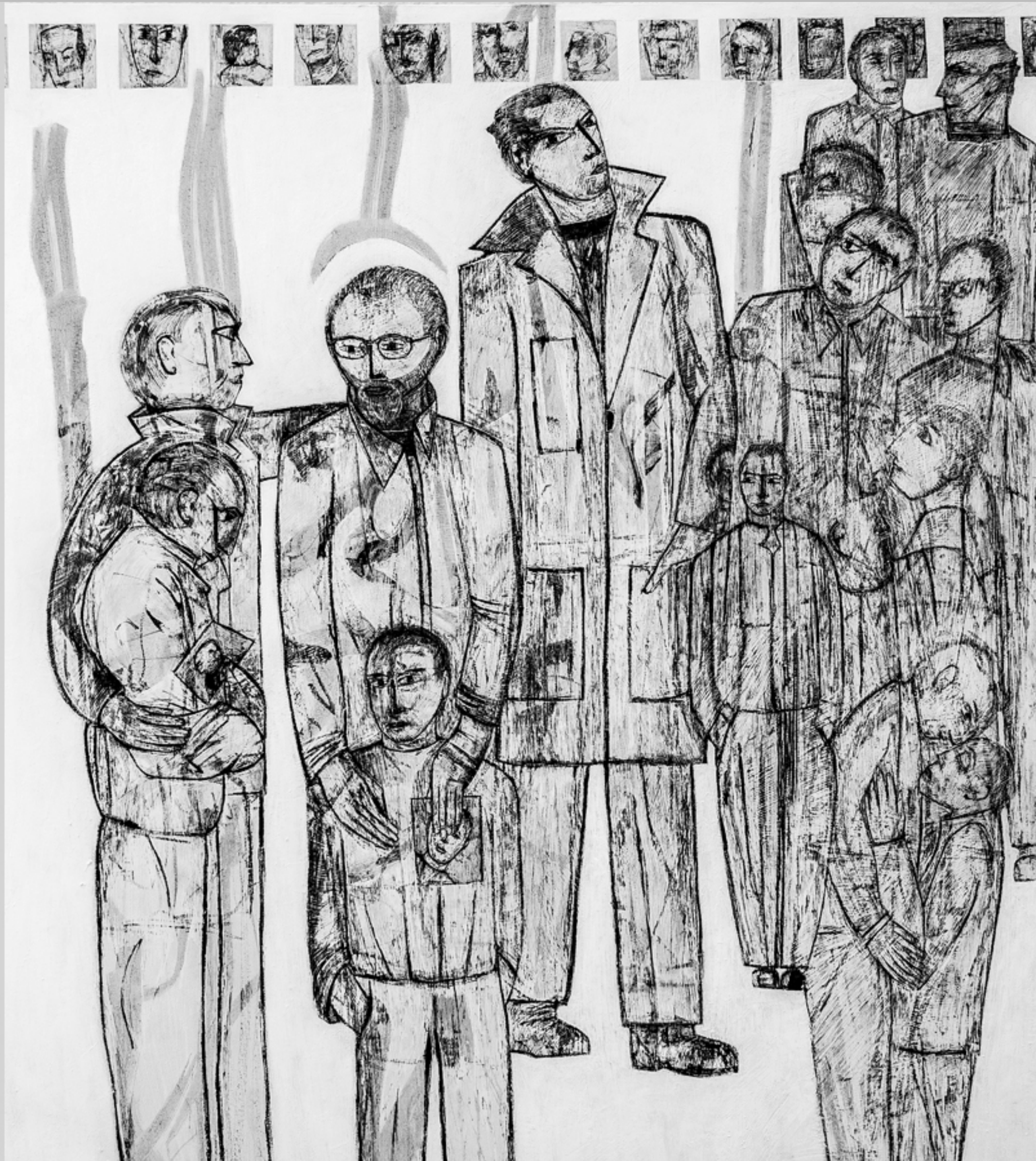






*"I am so much in the process at that early moment.  
When I am making those marks, I feel alive.  
and then I am exhausted and sit back  
and think, 'Where is this going to go?'"*





LOST VOICES, panel 9





*"For the magic of making marks  
and turning them into images,  
one offers one's DNA."*









Perhaps he could have been a writer  
or a scientist  
but for our good fortune  
he is a painter.

With all of the angst  
within each frame,  
they are also a love song  
to the innocent,  
the gentle,  
the kind hearted lover or parent,  
to the trusting child we all care for,  
and an invocation for us to remember  
that before we are white or black, red or brown,  
before we are Christian, Moslem or Jew,  
before we are straight or gay,  
bright or dull,  
we are human.

LOST VOICES, panel 8 - detail



**“We are not safe”,  
suggest the characters  
trapped within the frame’s edge.  
We are not safe.**

**These paintings are uncomfortable.  
What else could they be?  
Ricky continues to inquire,  
to persecute himself  
and to pester his art  
with unquiet questions  
at twice the age  
when most people  
surrender to the conventional ideas  
that surround all of us.**





**This is metaphysics  
(a philosophy of being)  
rather than description.**

**They are paintings which evoke pain in our psyche  
because they challenge who we are and what we allow,  
or what we turn away from.**

**In this way, the artist provides for us,  
what all fine art does,  
a memory of our humanity.**

**The painter represents,  
for our sanity and memory,  
his characters imagined loss.**


**The painter is the subjective witness  
of his character's deaths.**

**The painter binds our futility and anguish  
with his love.**

...







*My striving is towards every man,  
every woman.  
My individual eye  
becomes my universal eye  
and I try to paint from that space.  
I don't want them to be individual people.  
I hope it's not clichéd  
I have to let go of those thoughts.  
If I get too preoccupied, I can't work.*



## THE PAINTINGS IN THE EXHIBITION



Lost Voices, Panel 1



Lost Voices, Panel 2



Lost Voices, Panel 3



Lost Voices, Panel 4



Lost Voices, Panel 5



Lost Voices, Panel 6



Lost Voices, Panel 7



Lost Voices, Panel 8



Lost Voices, Panel 9



Lost Voices, Panel 10





Lost Voices, Panel 11



Lost Voices, Panel 12



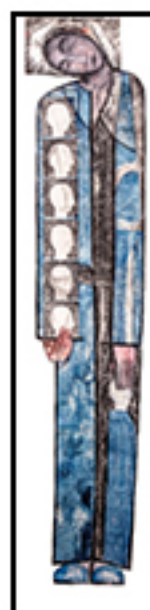
Lost Voices, Panel 13



Lost Voices, Panel 14



Lost Voices, Panel 15



Cut Out 1



Cut Out 2



Cut Out 3



Cut Out Targets



Un-named Cut Out



# THE PROCESS by Ricky Romain



## Building a stretcher.

I make my own stretchers for my canvases. I use 2"x1" timber from my local builder's yard - so I can walk to get it. When I build each frame I do not use a central bar to reinforce the 'square', so when I stretch the canvas the sides bow inwards. I really like this slightly curved shape - it is sometimes more pronounced than others.

## Stretching the canvas.

I begin on one side by tacking the canvas down. I prefer to use tacks to staples as they seem to hold the stretched canvas tighter for longer. Once one side is completed I turn the stretcher and canvas and tack the opposite side, then I continue to the third and fourth sides.

## Gesso and priming the canvas.

When the canvas is stretched on all four sides I apply a coat of water based primer. I allow the primer to dry for about twenty four hours. I then mix up the gesso. The gesso powder is added to an acrylic polymer, I keep adding handfuls of the gesso powder to the liquid polymer until I have a 'mix' which I think is the right consistency. I then apply the gesso 'mix' with a brush, fairly quickly,





before the whole mix ‘goes off’ (too thick to be able to apply easily). I have about forty five minutes to an hour before that happens. I then leave it to dry for twenty four hours, and when it is totally dry, I sand the whole surface until it is fairly smooth, and I am then ready to begin.

### Applying the ink.

The next step is applying the Indian ink in layers. I try to empty my mind for this process. I have a jar of Indian ink, diluted with water- the shade of grey depends on how much water is added.

I use this process to lay the foundations of the composition. While the grey is still wet, I work with the undiluted black Indian ink: this part starts to give more form to the initial compositional marks. I then study the marks I have made, and listen and search within the marks I have made to find the story that unfolds before me.

When the composition is in my mind, I wait for the ink to thoroughly dry (twenty four hours). Then I start scratching, sculpting away with my knives. When this process has defined the figurative relationships, I begin painting the flake white oil paint to obliterate the unwanted marks. This can take up to four layers.



# DIGGING INTO THE SUBCONSCIOUS by Heather Fallows



Panels created by using gesso as a base for a 'sgraffito' (or scratching) technique to scrape through layers of paint etc .

This method is a kind of excavation, a search for imagery that emerges by digging into the subconscious to discover representations of the faces of who I imagine to be 'the disappeared'. This process could be described as 'archaeological' and it in some way mirrors the action of relatives digging for the remains of loved ones who have been taken with no explanation.

The fact that people can 'disappear', if they have expressed criticism towards brutal regimes, is the extreme end of a spectrum of indifference that allows the rich and powerful to consider those without power and wealth as 'worthless'.

Recently, in the UK, we seem to have collectively agreed we can no longer 'afford' to support the vulnerable, to help the handicapped, to pay adequate wages for menial jobs.

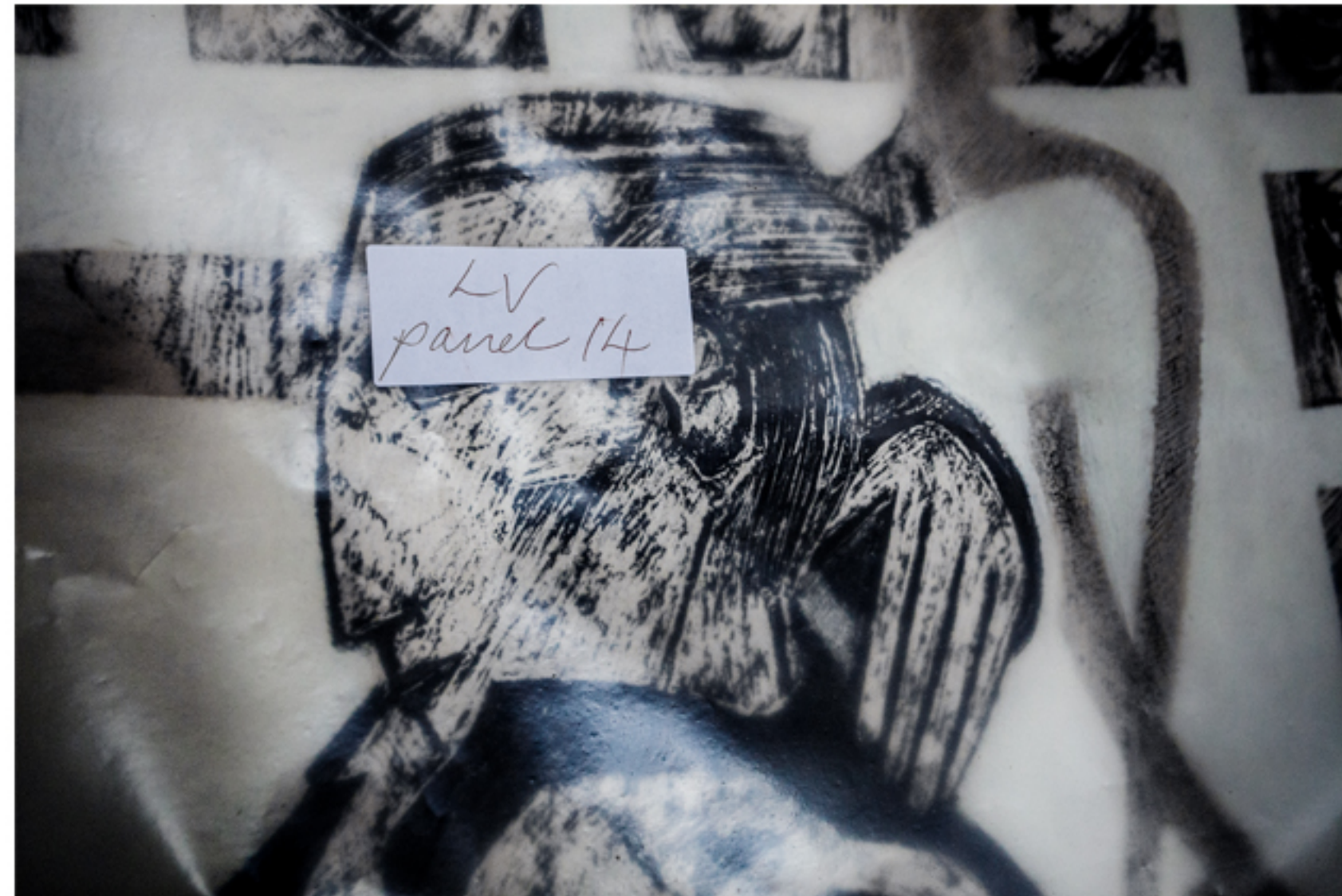
As I scrape away searching for justice, I wonder - at what point did we all decide to settle for a world that has so much senseless greed and so little moral compassion in it?



Heather and Ricky hanging the exhibition  
in the Bridport Art Centre, 13 April, 2015







end