

Sculpture and ralph hicks

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It's a cold and overcast day in February and a man sits alone at a park bench, at the Dotted Sculpture Park. He watches as the river splashes aggressively about, caused by the strong wind blowing that day. Perched above him on the top of a hill just a few feet from the road, sits a large-scale sculpture called "Salutation", by Ralph Hicks. Standing only 6 feet tall, it's original conception called for the sculpture to have a height 30 feet and be placed at five of the major entry. Pays leading into Toronto.

They would have welcomed visitors entering the city, if Toronto had won the bid for he 2008 Summer Olympics. On the first visit to Salutation, the lack of sun casts a shadow on the face as it bends forward and faces down, displaying a feeling of sadness. Shaped from metal and grey in color, the sculpture seems to reflect a feeling of submissiveness on this dark winter day. Its block-like smooth texture contrasts to the nature surrounding it, but offers balance with its simplistic lines and movement.

The large size does not intimidate, but rather holds a lonely tone, reflected by the days weather. The use of lock like pieces allows for a childlike appearance and its rounded corners allow the installation to feel friendly. If the structure had contained sharp corners with a combination of grey color and metal exterior, it would have projected hard lines and been unwelcoming. Though it appears Hicks motive for its location was to greet people as they drove by, I have to question that decision.

Salutation is not only misunderstood but also neglected by motorists who do not have the ability to interpret the meaning of the piece. Neither did it receive much attention from the pedestrians walking below. The riverside

path is located at the bottom of the hill and by observing a few walking by, they did not look up towards the sculpture once. The visitors attention seemed to be directed at either the river, the other sculptures, the skyline or themselves. Thus placing more emphasis on the loneliness the piece portrays.

Another visit to Salutation with the morning sunrise reflecting upon it, did deliver a more cheerful feel. But the loneliness still lingered from the prior visit and now it's as if it was smiling but still disguising the sadness within, as many go about their days and do. The sculpture with its rhythm of playfulness and kindness, puts a smile on your face if you allowed it to. Salutation has no reference to gender, age or race and in that way it transcends and relates to all. It faces east, as if to greet the morning sun and take on the day.

Later as the sun sets behind it with it's head bowing down, one feels a sense of it speaking and silently saying, " goodbye" and " well done" at the end of the day or a long Journey. A metaphor for life, from dawn till dusk. The salutation action is an attitude of respectful courtesy, which is conveyed through a human form. Salutation the sculpture by Ralph Hicks, assembled with the simplicity of irregular blocks, conveys a commanding presence and attitude. As it bows its head to passing travelers, Hicks tells us little about the model, providing no indication of race, social class or gender.

Salutation is indiscriminating to viewers and offers the same greeting to all. Born in London, England in 1941 Ralph Hicks moved to Toronto at the age of 26. He first developed an interest in sculpture while still a student after

seeing large-scale bronze sculptures by Rodin, Lisse and Matisse at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Hicks graduated from the University of Bristol and Harvard Business School and worked in the marketing and management field till 1996, where he then committed full time to his current passion of sculpture art.

He works out of a studio he built in Mule Hills, Ontario and spends his summers carving stone outside, and works with other material in the studio during the colder months. Hicks designed art with a variety of material such as, soapstone, limestone, wood, bronze, traditional plaster, polished aluminum rod, clay and even whimsical vinyl tubing. A lot of his work is tone carving that requires power tools to do the bulk of the work, but obtaining the final finish is the most time consuming part of the process.

Hicks designs large-scale pieces because he feels size has impact and public installations are seen by many people and that's rewarding to him as an artist. He creates sculpture for his own satisfaction, but what makes him happiest, is when he hears how a completed piece makes people feel. With his art he has no rules and that's what makes it exciting to him. Salutation is Art, and Art is Salutation with simple cuboids who gives away little information, acknowledges your presence with a friendly bow and asks nothing in return, but causes a lasting impression.