

## LIFESTYLES

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Rosco Crooke uses a fine-tipped brush while working on a piece called "Thinking Happy Thoughts" at his home Wednesday in Pendleton.

# His heart in paint

Rosco Crooke uses bright colors, canvas to explore his inner self

By PHIL WRIGHT  
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Hundreds of bottles of neon and glow-in-the-dark paints stand across the top of Rosco "Carrico" Crooke's kitchen table, his makeshift art studio. A colorful, shimmering work that looks like so many pieces of hard candy sits near completion, two others are in more basic stages. Several adorn the walls of his home near downtown Pendleton.

Crooke, 38, a beefy man with a dry laugh, has spent the past two years developing into a painter, about the same time he broke away from a stressful job at the post office to reset his head, he said, and "just relax." (He and a few of his friends were the subject of a March 2013 lifestyle on living the graveyard shift). Crooke said he sold tie-dyed T-shirts and worked odd jobs to pay the bills, and his mother, Donna Crooke, who died last July, encouraged him to give painting a go. Tapping into this creative vein took him back to his childhood, he said, when he watched his grandmother, Pat Carrico, paint.

"I was always fascinated as a kid — how'd she do that?" he said.

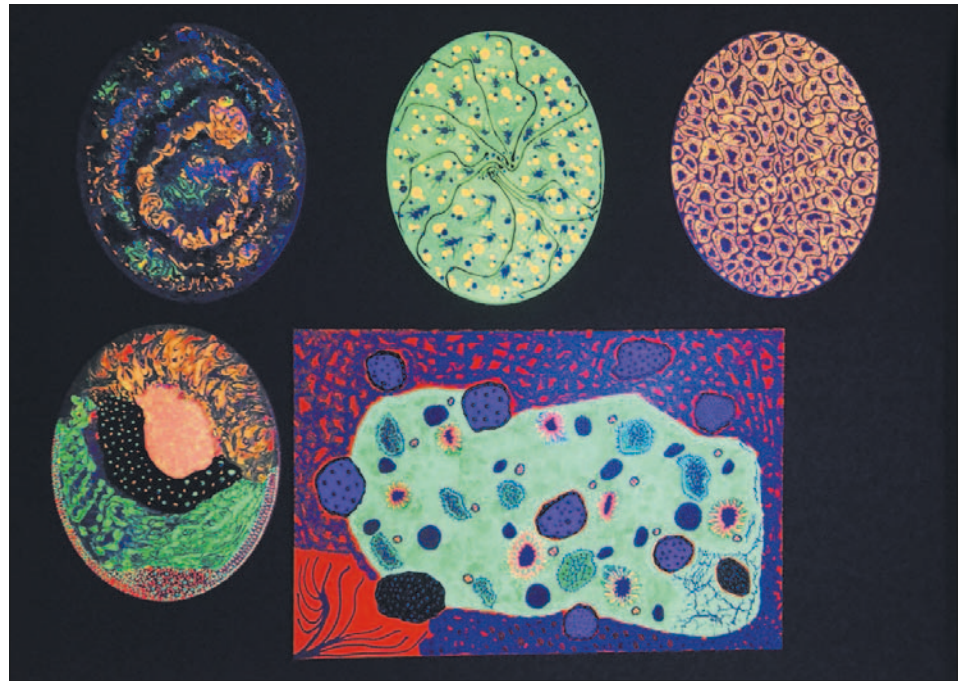
His early efforts focused on

subjects he thought people were interested in buying. "I tried to do landscapes, I tried to do portraits," he recalled, "but that felt like pulling teeth, that was awful."

So he turned to what spoke to him — exploring emotions, thoughts and states of being on canvas. "I've always been a person who has to visualize things to understand them," he said. "Tree of Doubt," for example, shows a silhouette of a tree against a stark background, its barren branches wilting, almost like tears falling.

He avoids flat paints — "It's flat," he said. "You know, it's just not fun." — and covers the canvas in bold, intense neons, glow-in-the-dark, and metallic paints. The paints and their combinations allow the colors to shift depending on the light, and in black light, or course, they take on entirely new characteristics.

Working with the paints has taken plenty of trial and error, Crooke said. Some of the substances are thin, so he applies layer after layer to build up colors. And the paints takes several hours to dry, so he said he works on three canvases at a time, moving from one to the other as he needs. Most works take about a month to complete, he estimated, but some took several months to a year.



Crooke often uses glow-in-the-dark paints in many of his works. Here are an example of his paintings as seen under a black light. The works are (top) "Bereaved," "Melancholy Me," "Inside a Child Like Mind" (bottom) "Her Emotional Metamorphosis" and "Probiotic Cure for Depression."

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Building up layers also allows him to play with depth, shapes and textures to create other multi-dimensional effects. Cellular-like structures in "Probiotic Cure for Depression" look scooped out, but close inspection reveals the paint and texture help fool the eye.

"That's really important to me," he said. "I want to achieve real texture, real depth."

Family and friends will gander at the works for hours, he said, and even point out images he did not realize he created. And someone always asks him what he calls his style.

"Some people call it 'organ-

ical,'" he said. "Kind of leaning toward that a little."

The term "abstract" comes up a lot, he said, but not much of his work is abstract, which in art is a simplification of forms. Crooke's paintings have all sorts of images, but they are not usually abstracts of real things. The work is more free and flowing, though complicated.

"I'm trying to make my own style, my own avant garde thing," he said.

He also often employs oval canvases. Squares and rectangles make people look to the edges and for points to where the work ends, he said, but ovals move eyes to the center. And ovals are a common shape for mirrors, he said, which again plays into the reflective quality of the pieces.

Crooke described himself as "hyper-emotional," and what he feels he puts into the work. He made "Tree of Doubt" when he questioned if he was on the right life path, if he maybe should chuck the whole artist thing and strive for a regular job.

"After it was done ... doubt will not control me," he said. "I'm going to move past it."

Crooke has taken to the Internet to help market himself as an artist and his paintings. His website, [www.carrico creations.com](http://www.carrico creations.com), as well as the commercial website Etsy, has allowed him to sell works locally and to folks hundreds of miles away. He also has used "guerrilla marketing" to help build some buzz, though a recent effort backfired.

He said a few weeks ago he mailed pictures of his art and an accompanying messages to 18 people in Pendleton — some who

work at a bank, teachers at Blue Mountain Community College, two mental health professionals and one medical doctor. He said the hope was to get a few people talking about the painting and sharing about his work.

But some of the recipients called the police on Feb. 5. Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts said the photos and the "cryptic messages" on them made a few people uneasy and concerned, so Sgt. Paul Wolverton looked into it. Roberts said Crooke cooperated with the brief investigation and did not violate the law, but he should find a better way to get out his message.

"I feel bad it was received that way," Crooke said. "That was not my intent."

A more traditional display of his work is on the horizon at the Pendleton Center for the Arts. Center director Roberta Lavadour said she took a look at Crooke's portfolio and offered him to have a showing in the center's Lorenzen Board Room Gallery. The area showcases artists who are just starting out, she said, and lets them gain some exposure while they learn the ropes of being artists, which includes how to display work and create artist statements. Lavadour said Crooke's paintings will be on display June 4-26.

Crooke said he is thrilled with the prospect and aims to have at least 10 paintings for the show. The tricky part, though, might be trying to show the paintings under a black light.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Artist Rosco Crooke works on a painting titled "Thinking Happy Thoughts" at his home studio Wednesday in Pendleton.