

ROTHKO VIA MUNCIE, INDIANA

The 1980s. Beginning of the long decade, the century's late works. Snow on the grid, field bisected by a late model John Deere's progress in low gear with a front-end load of straw bales. Its operator's daughter dons her brace, thinks her scoliosis the devil's work on her, a not-good-enough Christian. Her mother talks scripture on the phone in the kitchen and the kitchen smells of coffee and it smells of dog. Christmas lights

strung along the eaves of bungalows, vehicles moored to bungalows by their block heater cords. Rumours of drunkenness and corruption sunk the Democrat's bid for mayor: *For we favour the simple expression of the complex thought. The large shape's impact of the unequivocal. Flat forms that destroy illusion, reveal truth.* Now the union's eye has twilight in it, and the city dump will stay where it is. Evening falls, or rises, or emanates from the figures. The SportsPlex and Model Aviation Museum, the Muncie Mall and both quadrangles of Ball State University shed their associations, perform an unknown adventure in unknown space. Halogens illuminate an anecdote of the spirit. You won't see his face around here again. The violet quarry hosts a greater darkness further in, the White River sleeps in its cabin of pack ice. Among the graduating class an abstract feeling develops,

an inclination to symbolism born of the fatal car wreck on New Year's, a spike in requests for Bob Seger to the call-ins from a quasi-religious experience of limitless immensity. To achieve this clarity is inevitably to be misunderstood. Their lives take on the dimensions of the fields, the city, its facades and its plan, whose happiness will be their own. Rent, food budget, sweaters indoors. Basketball, basketball, and a second marriage.

—Karen Solie

The three studio executives assured Hanson they supported his vision, as did, initially, the network executives. They ordered thirteen episodes, the show went into production and that's when the problems began.

"It became clear very early," Hanson told me, "that despite everything, they really did want a *CSI*-style show. I just kept telling people, 'I'm not going to do it'. Honestly, I thought I was going to lose my job a few times." The pressure to change the show was coming from every corner, but Hanson closed his ears and kept working. "I kept saying I wanted it to be about the characters, and people in suits kept saying things like, 'You haven't earned it yet with these characters. It has to be more plot-driven.'"

The network kept moving the show, which premiered September 13, 2005, all over the timetable map, which wasn't helping, but the fourth episode, in which a bear was opened up to find it had ingested most of a human arm, proved popular with the audience. Also, the network found that no matter where they moved the show—Monday night, Tuesday night—there were always seven or eight million people who managed to find it. The show was resonating with viewers, surprising the network, surprising the studio, surprising even Hanson somewhat, given the fact that it was not being given preferential or even stable time slots. Then, perhaps due to the positive reviews of an episode just before Christmas, the show made a quantum leap.

Just over seven million people watched Episode 9 of *Bones* in Season One. Nearly eleven and a half million people watched Episode 10. The day those numbers came in, the pressure started to ease.

"I think it was Preston who first came to me and said, 'You know, there's something about this show. No matter what happens to it, you just can't kill it.'"

Hanson is referring here to Preston Beckman, the Fox Network Executive Vice President of Strategic Program Planning and Research who is one-third of the three-person team that decides what gets made and where it goes on the schedule. I met Beckman in the soft glass and brushed steel of Building 101 on the southeast corner of the Fox lot. I asked him what it is that has made *Bones* and Hanson so successful, and he noted first that network success is usually defined by ad sales, whereas cable defines success through critical reviews and subscribers. "Still," he continued. "What's notable about *Bones* is how shockingly consistent the ratings have been over the years. But it's a smart, funny, fun show that leaves you feeling good and good about yourself. You don't finish an episode feeling like you want to kill yourself."

As for Hanson, he said, "I think there's a modesty there, a bit of a twinkle in his eye, that maybe he doesn't take it all too seriously, although he's very passionate about what he does, of course. I get the feeling that he probably hasn't changed all that much from when he started. And I think he can distinguish between what he does for a living and what his personal tastes might be. He understands what his job is, and who he is appealing to."

Executives like Preston Beckman and Bruce Margolis applaud Hanson's work, but there is still the view held by some that his shows are the pack animals of network television doing the heavy lifting of bringing in the numbers so that the sexier, edgier work can be done by more high-profile Emmy-bait. Hanson's friend Dave Thomas sees it that way. "I don't think Hart's shows are treated with the respect they're due by the network," he told me. "Hart's shows are the bread and butter of television, and they wear their learning and humour lightly, whereas something like *Terra Nova* is a failed experiment in network indulgence. Shows like *Terra*