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Q&A With Renowned Visionary Artists Alex and Allyson Grey by Melissa Hutsell

Alex Grey's work, including Sacred Mirrors, and album art for the band Tool's Lateralus album, among much more, have gathered much acclaim. Allyson's sculptures and paintings, including Secret Writing, have earned her much success. Individually, their careers have flourished, and jointly, they share success through collaborations such as their long-term exhibition and church, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors (CoSM).

Together, the internationally renowned, multi-media visionary artists have shared their passion and success. The Emerald Magazine spoke to Greys straight off their Burning Man experience about love, art and cannabis.

Melissa Hutsell: How did you meet?

Allyson: In 1974, we met in a class at the Boston Museum School called "Conceptual Mixed Media."

Love started on May 31st, 1975 following Alex's first LSD journey at my end-of-year school party.

Alex: At 21, my life felt meaningless and relentlessly depressing, so I was considering killing myself. I did not believe in God but nevertheless dared God to appear and show me a sign that I should choose life.

It was the last day of art school and I was saying goodbye to my professor on the street corner, when a beautiful girl from my class (Allyson) drove by the corner and invited us to her after-school party that evening. It was only two minutes we were standing there and if I had not been on that street corner, I would probably not be alive today.

The professor picked me up later that evening to drive to the party. He had some LSD in a bottle of Kahlua. I drank about half. When we got to the party, I gave Allyson the rest of the bottle, which she drank.

On her couch something miraculous happened that evening. I found God in the center of my being. When I closed my eyes I was inside a giant tunnel, made of living mother of pearl. The brilliant love light of God was just around the edge, and I was in the dark, but going toward the light. All the shades of grey connected the two extremes. My path was reset: I would change my name to Grey and bring the opposites together as my artistic mission.

I felt a philosophical mystical switch had turned on in my soul. It was a literal turning point for me.

When I talked to Allyson about my mystical awakening on her couch, she told me of her spiritual opening through LSD, and we fell in love and have been on a lifelong journey together.

Allyson: At our first intentional meeting, we shared our God contact and our love grew out of this resonant opening. A couple who unites in a spiritual life together, no matter what their other differences, may have a better chance of success and endurance in their relationship.

Melissa: You're both accomplished multi-media artist with individual, distinctive styles. What is it like to share a passion, a studio and success?

Alex & Allyson: Always a challenge, always rewarding, we have shared a studio for 41 years. Observing each other's unfolding work everyday for decades, we have influenced, advised and defied each other's advice regularly.

Our passion and whatever individual success we've achieved owes much to the other. Between us there are three bodies of work: Alex's paintings and sculpture, Allyson's paintings and sculpture and a third body of work, our co-created social sculpture, CoSM, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors. We feel there is a Third Force that brings people together for a higher purpose, in relationships and in organizations.

Melissa: What is the Entheon Project?

Alex & Allyson: Entheon means "a place to discover the God within." At CoSM, Entheon will be a sanctuary of visionary art and is targeted to open late 2017.

The CoSM collection of Visionary Art includes individual and collaborative pieces by both of us. The entry gallery of Entheon, Mystic Artists Guild International (MAGI Gallery), will feature preeminent works of contemporary Visionary Art. Recognized artists or collectors will be invited to loan precious originals for the annual rotating exhibition of MAGI Gallery.

Entheon's secure, acclimatized environment will safely share today's most accomplished portrayals of the Visionary state. Today's visionary artists often reserve their best paintings and sculpture, displaying them primarily in their studios while they sell prints, and post images online. For study and full appreciation, the MAGI Gallery will allow prized works to be protectively shared in their original state.

The ornamental sculpture planned for the exterior of Entheon points to the transcendent unity of all sacred paths, and will take many more years to realize. Academy award-winning digital sculptor, Ryan Tottle, adapted Alex's drawings into a 3D model that will be printed out in large foam sections. Panels will attach to the concrete building with metal armatures to create the 3-dimensional sculptural reliefs including a monumental band of identical Godheads that will wrap the exterior of Entheon.

Allyson's Secret Writing is the highest statement on the Godheads, banding their foreheads up to the roof. The alphabet is comprised of twenty unpronounceable letters that corresponds to the nameless presence existent in all sacred writing, the spirit embedded in communication that cannot be reduced to concepts, the divine mystery of creative expression.

Each Godhead displays a symbol representing one of the many world wisdom traditions. Angels of Creative Imagination on each cheek hold a snake entwined paintbrush as hermetic healing staff. These angels of creativity, bridging the Cosmic Eye of God and the human eye, are tears of mercy crying from the multi-faced Godhead. The

many eyes on the roof represent expanded consciousness. DNA dragons, symbolizing consciousness evolution, emerge from the Angels of the Four Directions and ascend back to the One. The Steeplehead atop Enttheon relates to the people of the four directions coming together in visionary oneness.

Melissa: Alex, your work has been featured on albums for Tool, Nirvana, Beastie Boys and Bassnectar ... what's it like to see your work featured with such a variety of award-winning musicians?

Alex: It has been a great honor. Millions have been introduced to my images through the album art, videos and stage designs of a few really great bands. Tool has introduced full arenas of people to my artwork while in a state of heightened consciousness and excitement. It has been a great blessing and privilege to have my art featured in those unforgettable moments of expanded awareness.

Melissa: Consciousness and spirituality are common themes throughout your art – Why?

Alex & Allyson: As artists, our subject and most essential choice was to portray the “God Contact” that lifted the veil and transformed our consciousness. There was no more important message to deliver.

Melissa: Both of your works of art are labor intensive and vibrant. How long does the average piece take to create?

Allyson: Some paintings can feel complete after a few weeks of work. Some percolate for years in preliminary sketches and drawings and take years to paint. “Realms of the Unpronounceable” took me three years to complete. The drawing alone took nine months.

Alex: Most of my paintings take several months. I painted Cosmic Christ for over a year. The Sacred Mirror, “Avalokitesvara”, the multi-armed Buddha of Active Compassion, took an entire year to complete. Throughout painting both pieces, I studied the subject. Painting tiny portraits for the Cosmic Christ altarpiece, I learned extensively about each subject. Painting the Buddha of Active Compassion, it seemed important to be initiated into a personal relationship with this Bodhisattva. So back in 1982 I entered seriously into Tibetan Buddhism, with many teachers, it is still a most important stream of wisdom for me.

Melissa: You often credit each other as sources of mutual inspiration for your art. Allyson, you helped to name Sacred Mirrors, (one of Alex's most famous works), can you tell us about this?

Allyson: In 1978 we collaborated on a performance called “Life Energy” for which I assisted Alex in creating a slide talk on the history of an invisible force that permeates all consciousness and animates our being.

For the performance, Alex created two life-sized figures — detailed ink drawings on paper depicting the Western and Eastern understandings of Life Energy — one with the anatomical nervous system and the other depicting the Eastern concepts of Life Energy including the acupuncture meridians and points, chakras and auras. An instructional sign invited guests to stand in the anatomical position facing the ink drawing and “mirror” their personal life energy systems. Guests lined up for this intermission activity.

On the way home, I suggested that the “charts” were the most beloved part of the performance, and that Alex could paint in fine detail all the anatomical and esoteric systems as a series of paintings. Alex felt called to this work and began right away. He continued painting the series for over ten years from 1978 to 1989. The final

Sacred Mirror, Sophia, was included to honor the birth of our daughter in 1988 and to include the Divine Feminine archetype essential to the series.

Melissa: You've both expressed that LSD has inspired your art. Has cannabis?

Alex: Yes. Cannabis is our friend. Cannabis is the great friend of humanity and it has been since the dawn of civilization. This is actually scientific fact. Hemp has been discovered at the earliest agricultural sites over ten thousand years ago. It's only in this foul era that our government has colluded to prevent the legalization of cannabis and criminalizes the intelligent people who decide to smoke cannabis. I'm all about the smell of freedom, let us burn a Doobie together my friend, let us smoke the peace pipe humanity needs. What a crossroads for humanity today, anything that can take us toward peace and away from war should be objective number one. Abolish these idiotic racist drug laws that keep people suppressed behind bars. Abolish the D.E.A. and put those agents to work planting hemp.

Cannabis has been part of the inspiration of quite a number of my art ideas. I remember getting some real insights into the building of Entheon directly after we visited the Sphinx when we smoked some great Egyptian hash, it put me in contact with the ancient spirits. The ancient Egyptians regarded cannabis as an important medicine. The Egyptian goddess, Seshet, is credited with the invention of writing and a seven pointed cannabis leaf is always above her head.

Cannabis has been a part of healing and sacrament for the ancient Hindus and today's Ganga smoking Babas who come out for the largest festival on earth, the Kumba Mela, carry on this most ancient sacramental relationship with the God Shiva through ritual smoking. So there is no doubt that cannabis is a medicinal sacred herb, and American laws against it are anti-sacramental. Smoking herb should be a religious right of all people, especially in a country that is supposed to stand for religious liberty and separation of church and state.

Remember the words of Martin Luther King: "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. It is your duty to break unjust laws."

Life is a sacred thing and this is why we try to preserve and defend the right to alter our consciousness so that we feel in alignment with the divine flow of the universe with the flow that comes about when we ingest the sacraments the holy sacraments that have been suppressed for 2,000 years. This is the most important news of any time. Real God is here, the miracle is in our midst and we need only to reach out and smoke an herb to contact the divine.

I am very excited to be working with Higher Vision, a company that approached me with the finest cannabis oil I have ever tasted. Higher Vision Cannabis preserves the aromatic terpenes that give a unique flavor to each bud and are lost in 95% of most oils available. So when I tried Higher Visions oil, it was like tasting the future. The oil is of the highest quality medical grade purity, tested and certified. Clean clear sparkling highs with all vaping or cooking. I am honored to have my art associated with one of the greatest suppliers of cannabis products in the world.

The mission of Adam Lustig, the founder of Higher Vision company, is healing the world with Cannabis. He gave me my first CBD, the most benign anti-depressant in the world. Been taking it on a daily basis for months. Loving

it. I feel like CBD could be an important nutritional supplement for most humans, especially in these stressful times. When more people take care of their cannabinoid deficiency, it will be a more peaceful healthier world.

Cannabis is a creative tool that is integrated into business, health, spirituality and general uplifting. Psychedelics opened a path for us and for many who heal from the experience and vision the interconnection of all things.

Featured Art 'George Washinton - Hemp Farmer' by Alex Grey

ALEX GREY



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