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Since
1995



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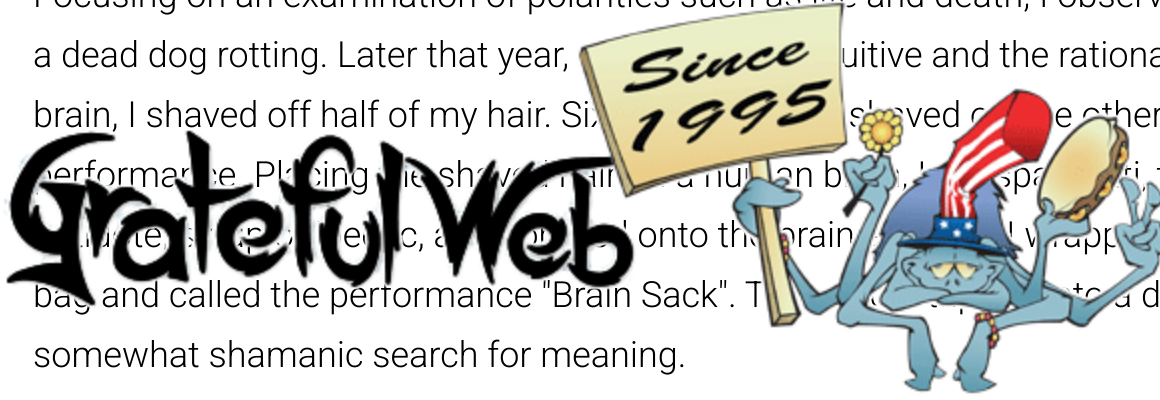
Alex Grey (<http://www.alexgrey.com>) is an artist specializing in spiritual and psychedelic art (or visionary art) that is sometimes associated with the New Age movement. **Alex Grey** (<http://www.alexgrey.com>) is a Vajrayana practitioner. His oeuvre spans a variety of forms including performance art, process art, installation art, sculpture, and painting. Grey is a member of the Integral Institute. He is also on the board of advisors for the Center for Cognitive Liberty and Ethics, and is the Chair of Wisdom University's Sacred Art Department. He and his wife **Allyson Grey** are the co-founders of the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, aka CoSM, a non-profit institution supporting Visionary Culture in New York City.

Grey's (<http://www.alexgrey.com>) paintings have been featured in venues as diverse as the album art of Tool, SCI, the Beastie Boys and Nirvana, Newsweek magazine, the Discovery Channel, Rave flyers and sheets of blotter acid. His work has been exhibited worldwide, including Feature Inc., Tibet House, Stux Gallery, P.S. 1, The Outsider Art Fair and the New Museum in NYC, the Grand Palais in Paris, the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil. Alex has been a keynote speaker at conferences all over the world including Tokyo, Amsterdam, Basel, Barcelona and Manaus. The international psychedelic community has embraced Grey as an important mapmaker and spokesman for the visionary realm.

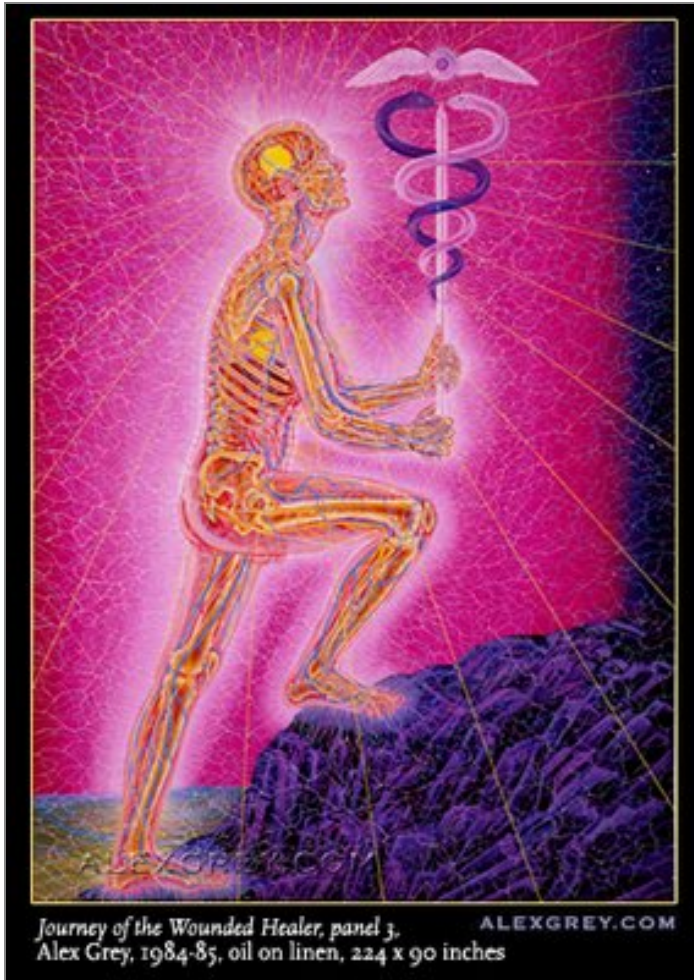
GW: Alex, can you recall your years as an art student? Also, at what point were you first interested in visionary art?

AG: As an art student I was a nihilist existentialist. I dropped out of art school after two years and went to work for Columbus Outdoor Advertising to paint billboards. I sent invitations to the openings of the new boards I painted, calling the work Capitalist Realism, making them part of the conceptual art movement of the 70's. Then I moved east and attended art school again for a year, studying conceptual and performance art.

Focusing on an examination of polarities such as life and death, I observed and documented a dead dog rotting. Later that year, I shaved the intuitive and the rational hemispheres of the brain, I shaved off half of my hair. Since 1995, I shaved the other half in a ritual performance. Placing the shaved hair in a human brain, I wrapped the entire mess in a bag and called the performance "Brain Sack". This was a deeply disturbed but somewhat shamanic search for meaning.



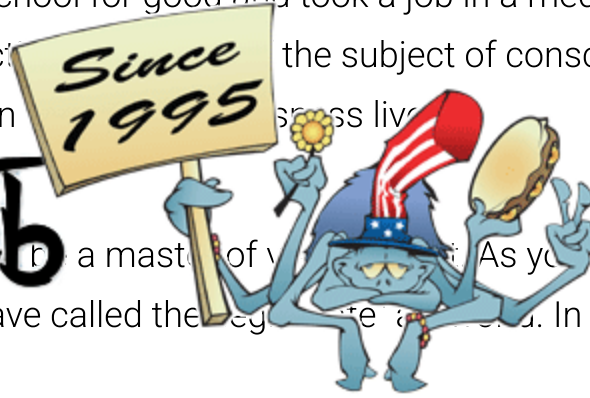
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My study of polarities led me to trek to the North Magnetic Pole to perform "Polar Wandering". I found it ironic that the force humanity relies upon to get its bearings, the site to which all compasses point, is continually in motion, a phenomenon by that name. Returning, I asked God to give a sign because I felt desperately in need of spirit. Within 24 hours of that supplication I took LSD and experienced the unity of polarities as well as having met my wife, the human embodiment of divine love in my life. LSD was my first "visioning."

After "Polar Wandering", I left art school for good and took a job in a medical school morgue where I prepared bodies for dissection. When I became interested in the subject of consciousness, I felt it was imperative to study the container in which we live.

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You were inspired by a teacher who was a master of visionary art. As you know, visionary art is often not accepted by what you have called the "legitimate" art world. In your opinion, why has visionary art struggled?

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AG: Considering Modernism and Post-Modernism, the importance of Mystic and Visionary states of consciousness have been downplayed or ignored by most artists, critics and curators. Picasso's Cubism flattened the world into broken surfaces and shadows, with very little spiritual elevation. Pollock's chaotic compositions reflect further fragmentation of self, a loss of center, continuing the existential crisis of Modernism. Pop art is a perfect mirror of our shallow, surface-oriented materialist corporate culture. Most recent art that includes religious imagery profanes the sacred (Serrano, Warhol, Gober) or if there are spiritual intentions behind the work, it's appearance is ambiguous (Rothko, Agnes Martin, Turrell).

When art devalues the self and the authenticity of the inner worlds we get art of the absent self, the hollow and shattered self, a hopeless self, in short, the art of today. Outsider Art is one cultural venue where visionary states are considered relevant, but often "Outsider" artists are considered naive or pathological. Humanity needs art that helps us reclaim the sacred experience of life, so that we will take actions that favor our species' long term survival.

GW: At the same time... the history of visionary art can be traced back to the dawn of man. The roots of what we call visionary art today is deeply embedded throughout the span of art history, correct?

AG: There is a strong global visionary tradition. Visionary art has existed and continues to exist in every culture from pre-historic to contemporary times. I write about the tradition of visionary art extensively in my book *The Mission of Art* and speak of it also on the audio cassette *The Visionary Artist* (SoundsTrue). The 16,000-year old cave paintings of human/animal hybrids, such as the "Sorcerer of Trois Freres," are a good starting point.

Ancient shamanic art, such as African ritual masks or Aboriginal rock and bark painting, clearly depict visionary dream-time encounters in the lower and upper spirit worlds.

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Pulling Apart (self-Portrait age 18), Alex Grey, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40 inches. ALEXGREY.COM

One of the earliest known Western mystic visionary artists was Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th-century German nun. Icons created from her visions are direct gifts of spirit. The 15th-century painter Hieronymus Bosch's "Garden of Delights" is one of the strangest paintings in the world

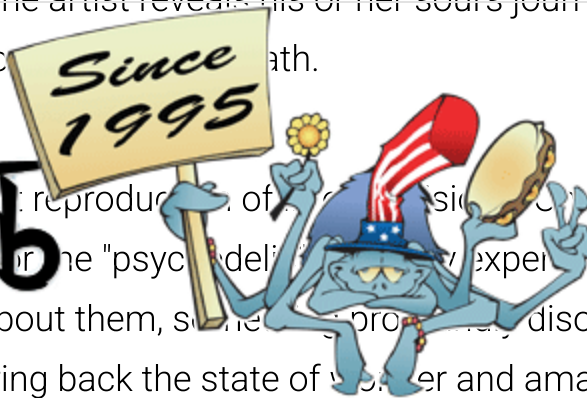
Blake's work laid the

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AG: A work of visionary art can shock a person out of their normal thinking patterns, and help them to see the world in a new way, help them to transfigure their perception of reality. Obviously, it's only one of many potential catalysts to healing and transformation, but I think it

can be a significant one. It is as if the artist reveals his or her soul's journey through art and leaves the door open for viewers to follow.

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As my work is about the direct reproduction of a visual experience, the viewer's memory gets filtered by the nature of the "psychedelic" experience and there is something you don't understand about them, so the experience is disorienting but important in them. My goal is to bring back the state of wonder and amazement as directly as possible. That way, the contemplative viewer can resonate with it and it might reinforce an experience that has meaning for them.

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artwork by Alex Grey

My work examines the nature of consciousness, life, human identity and relationships through various mediums and imagery. I paint representations of the physical body and interlace the subtle vital and psychical energy systems from both eastern and western occult mystical and medical traditions, the acupuncture meridians and points, the chakra systems, halos, etc. I take a multicultural and multidimensional perspective in order to get as many truths as possible into my vision of our divine nature.

GW: There has been some controversy over your work through the years - specifically your use of drugs as a means of exploration. Now, the United States has taken a hard line against drug use. What are your thoughts?

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A: I am not a doctor and I am not a drug taker. I mean, however, when I am asked to comment on the source of my own personal experiences, it would be hypocritical not to discuss my entheogenic experiences.

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A Johns Hopkins medical study, reported in Psychopharmacology Journal (2006), has proven scientifically that psilocybin can enable people to have full blown life transforming mystical experiences. Because the mystical experience is the foundation of all world religions, the United States government is interfering with people's freedom to practice religion by criminalizing the use of these sacraments. I am a stand for cognitive liberty, the right to alter consciousness anyway one sees fit, as long as the user causes no harm to anyone else. This is a right that requires a mighty sense of responsibility. Some people are allergic to peanuts and could die if they eat them. Peanuts should not be outlawed and are not safe for everyone.

An artist does not have to experiment with drugs to create visionary art but must experience the visionary state. Adult artists who are interested in this type of exploration, should consider an appropriate set and setting to enhance the sacred dimensions of one's consciousness. Young people should not take drugs. They should be forming their identity and strengthening their ego, not dissolving it prematurely.

GW: What about the dangers of using drugs to explore yourself and the beyond? Do you have concerns about that?

AG: A person could poison themselves and die from drinking alcohol all day. Smoking marijuana day and night for a week would not kill you. Alcohol is legal but it is far more toxic than marijuana. Corporations decide which drugs are forbidden and which are promoted. There is no known toxic dose of LSD and used in a therapeutic setting it has the ability to

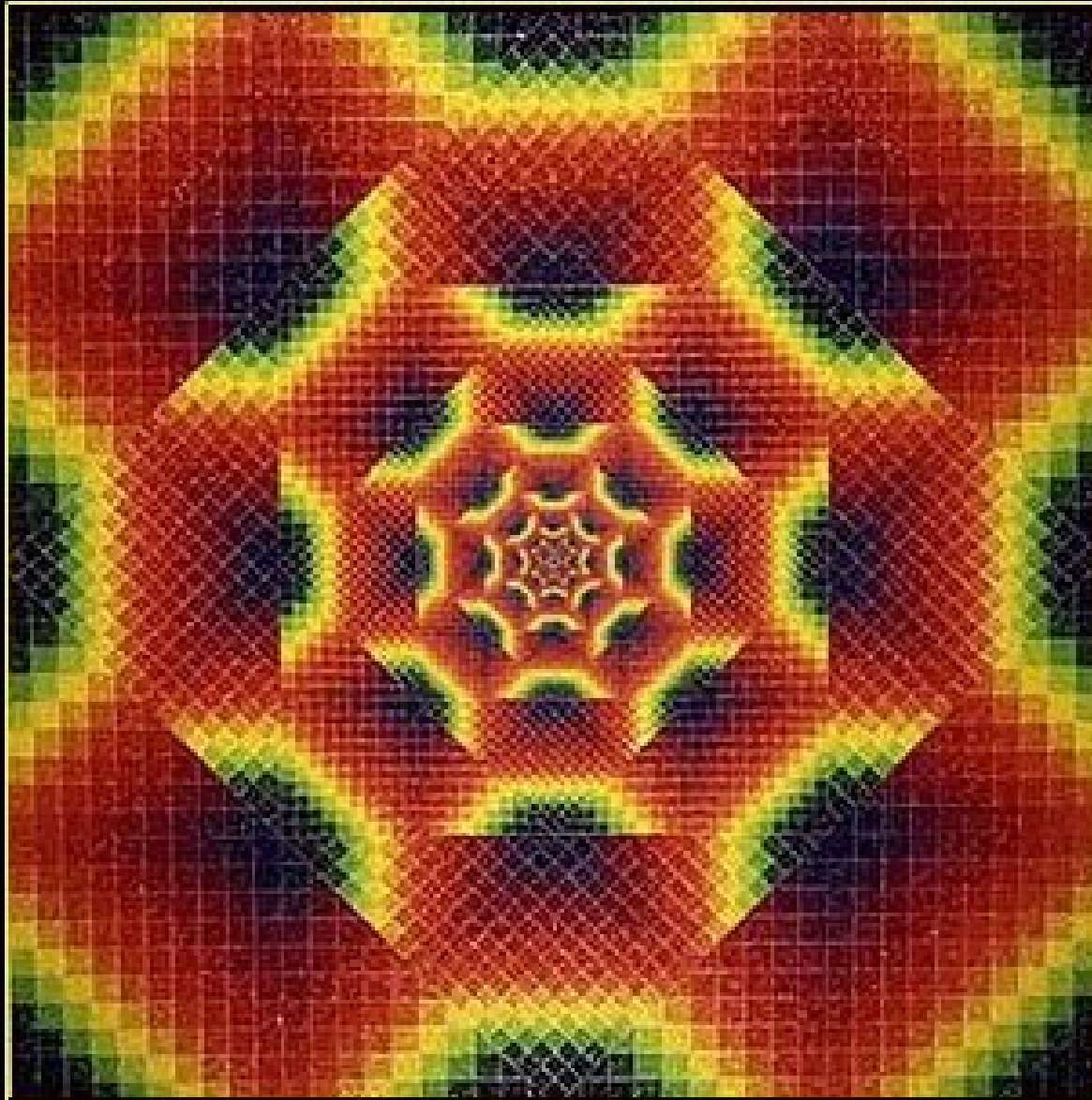
—relieve people from addiction to alcohol. Ibogaine can alleviate an addiction to heroine in one session. Psychoactive drugs need to be replaced by safer inebriants such as marijuana, should be legal.

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! Can you think of the things that drug have done for society and art in general? You mentioned the sixties earlier...




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Square Root, Allyson Grey, 1987,
oil on wood, 48 x 48 inches

AG: The psychedelic '60s spawned a new approach and style to all the arts including clothing design, graphic design, music, film, sculpture. Psychedelics influenced every aspect of visual life. Ernst Fuchs and ... are two of the greatest painters that came to prominence from that era. ... are of course ... of psychedelics. In the 70's, ... worlds were still ... in the works of H.R. Giger, famous for his work on the movie, "Alien." ... of the most powerful artists of the 80's credited LSD as the inspiring source of his style. What unites these artists is their unconventionally intense imaginations and their capacity to reveal the full spectrum of the vast visionary dimensions of the mind, the heavens and the hells.



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GW: Alex, can you talk about some of the symbolism behind your work... the eyes for example?

AG: The eye is the lens through which we see and through which we recognize others. It is the focus of awareness. The eye is the window to the soul, an outer manifestation of awareness in the deepest sense. A multiplication of eyes signifies expanded or increased awareness. An infinite field of eyes represents infinite awareness.

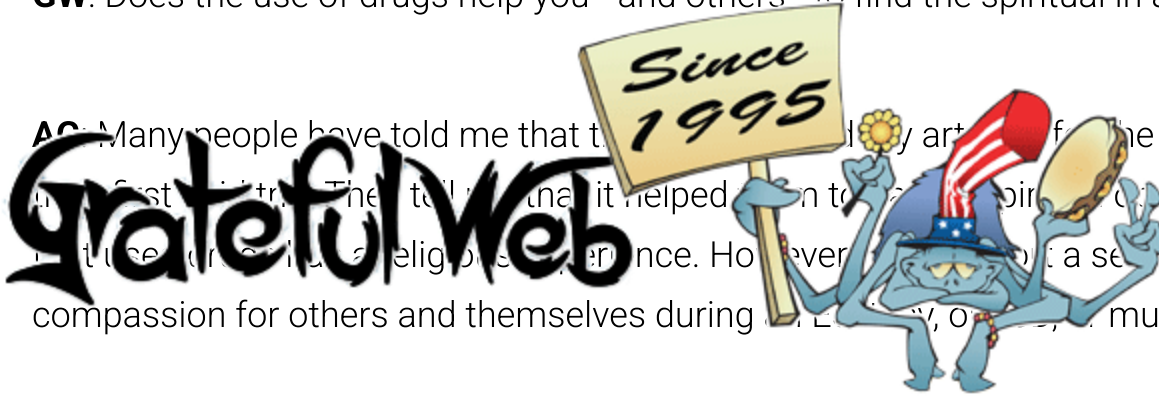
GW: What about the spiritual side of your art?

AG: Art can be a spiritual practice, enabling the practitioner to develop qualities of mental clarity, mindfulness of the moment, wisdom, compassion and access to revelations of higher mystic states of awareness. A contemplative method, such as yoga or meditation, will stabilize and assist in the progress of spiritual awareness. An artist's craft can become a contemplative method, and the creations may provide outward signs of an inner spiritual journey.

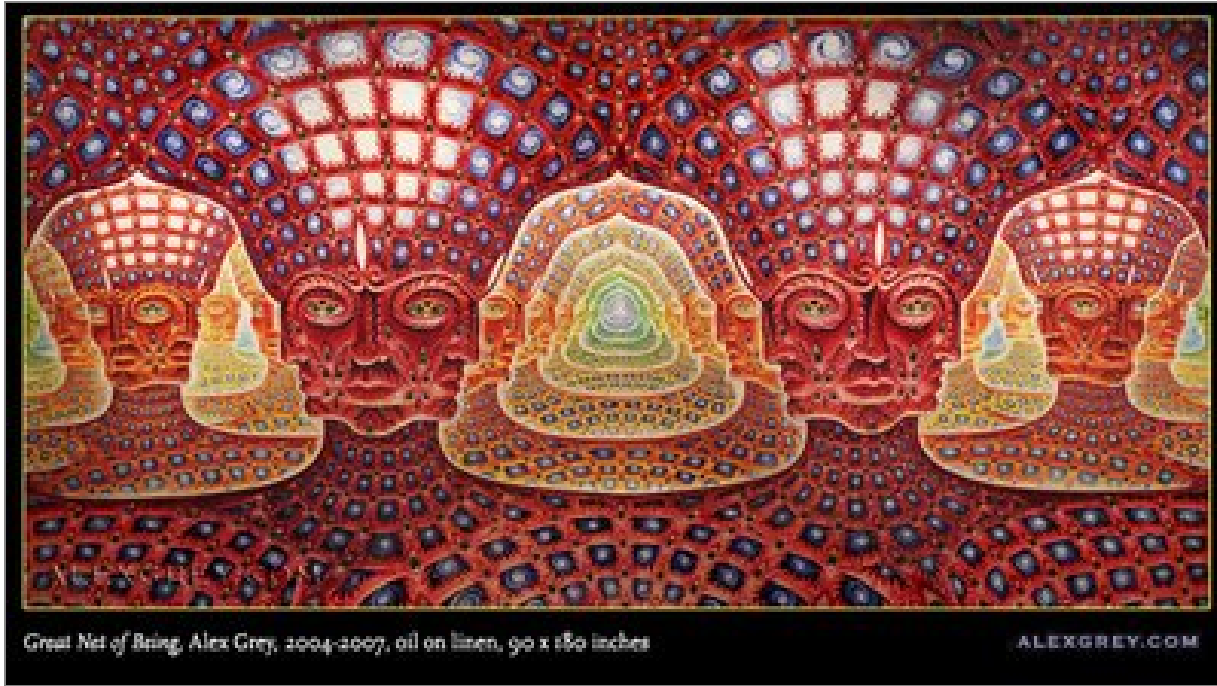
Art is a covenant relationship between spirit, the artist and the viewer. The artist, if he or she has an inspiring spiritual experience, has a responsibility to translate and transmit that experience as closely as possible so as to evoke a similar experience in the viewer.

GW: Does the use of drugs help you - and others - to find the spiritual in art?

AG: Many people have told me that they did not do any art until the first time while taking a "first trip". They tell me that it helped them to open their mind and heart. Not everyone has these "crisis of religious experience". However, I have had a sense of unbounded compassion for others and themselves during my "first trip", or, mushroom experience.



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During a trip, the typical boundaries of our identity dissolve and one may be able to experience their unity with all dimensions of reality simultaneously. It can be overwhelming, but it can also be a guidepost and affirmation of the soul's mission in life. A good trip can reveal the perfection, beauty and preciousness of every moment.

BS: Finally, do you have any advice for emerging visionary artists regarding success in the art market? Perhaps you have some suggestions for them?

AG: Draw and paint everyday. Create a unique body of work. Study what is important and make your art about the most important thing. Read Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet. Honor your visions by noting them whenever you have them. Always carry a sketchbook and enter in it daily. Create a website for your work and print a postcard and a business card and give

them out. Write an artist's statement - over and over again. Learn to talk about your work so that it inspires others. Go to galleries for artists. A certain amount of solitude is necessary but don't be isolated. Study hard, immerse yourself and become obsessed with your art and art in general.

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The best advice about becoming a great artist was given to me by my daughter when she was six years old. We made a very small self-help book from this advice that Allyson and I give to every one of our students (and which you can purchase from **www.alexgrey.com** (<http://www.alexgrey.com>)) - it says: "Be Yourself", "Do Your Best", "Never Give Up." You can learn more about **Alex Grey** (<http://www.alexgrey.com>) by visiting his **website** (<http://www.alexgrey.com>).

Take care, Stay true,



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