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FERDINAND COOPER

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SUMMER 2013

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COVER: Alex Grey, *Diamond Being*, 2003



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ALEX GREY'S NET OF BEING

A new book celebrates visionary artist Alex Grey's life, art and ethos

Introduced by NUALA ERNEST

Alex Grey was born in Columbus, Ohio on November 29, 1953, the middle child of a gentle middle-class couple. His father was a graphic designer and encouraged his son's drawing ability. Young Alex would collect insects and dead animals from the suburban neighborhood and bury them in the back yard. The



themes of death and transcendence weave throughout his artworks, from the earliest drawings to later performances, paintings and sculpture. He went to the Columbus College of Art and Design for two years (1971–73), then dropped out and painted billboards in Ohio

Bardo Being
2002
oil on wood
24 x 24 ins., 61 x 61 cm

for a year (1973–74). Grey then attended the Boston Museum School for one year, to study with the conceptual artist Jay Jaroslav. It was here that he met his wife, Allyson Rymland Grey. Alex then spent five years at Harvard Medical School working in the anatomy department, studying the body and preparing cadavers for dissection. He also worked at Harvard's Department of Mind/Body Medicine, conducting scientific experiments to investigate subtle healing energies.

Grey was an instructor in Artistic Anatomy and Figure Sculpture for ten years at New York University, and now teaches courses in Visionary Art with Allyson at The Open Center in New York City, Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, the California Institute of Integral Studies, and the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York.

Grey's paintings have been featured in venues as diverse as the album art of TOOL, SCI, Beastie

Boys and Nirvana, in Newsweek magazine, on the Discovery Channel, and on rave flyers and sheets of blotter acid. His work has been exhibited worldwide, including at Feature Inc., Tibet House, Stux Gallery, P.S.1, the Outsider Art Fair and the New Museum in New York, the Grand Palais in Paris, and 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. (1)

The following text is from Alex Grey's book, Net of Being (Rochester VT: Inner Traditions, 2013), describing his journey through life, love and art, and the formation of Alex and Allyson's unifying spiritual theory, which is now embodied as a recognised church.

Art is a way for the subjective inner world of the artist to be fully expressed into an outer world object. First, a vision illuminates the artist's inner world – the subjective conscious interior of an individual. To use the example of the *Net of Being* painting, this step would be when I first experienced the image on a mystical ayahuasca journey. Second, the vision or subjective state of the artist is expressed

into an individual aesthetic artifact – such as a painting, story, or dance. Related to the *Net of Being*, 'outputting the vision' took several years. Third, the artifact enters the collective systems of aesthetic reception – the gallery, museums, newspapers, magazines, and websites – like when the painting was reproduced by Tool on their album, on banners at concerts, on T-shirts and other merchandise,

Glimpsing the Empyrean
1997
acrylic on wood
8 x 16 ins., 20.3 x 40.6 cm





and so on. Fourth, the artifact is absorbed into the meme-stream of the cultural psyche by a public interpretation of the meaning of the artwork, potentially transforming the collective interior. Like a tincture added to a body of water alters the entire body, so artworks can color and anchor a collective's understanding of itself, birthing a unique worldview of cultural meaning for that community. The altered zeitgeist becomes a context for the next phase of visionary aesthetic inspiration.

To develop a unique voice, an artist individuates from the social fabric, distilling their own touch, emotional flavour, and worldview, which generates and saturates their aesthetic artifact. My 'polarity works,' such as the half-shaved head, were initiatory rituals, ordeals, trials. Fulfilling a dream vision, I shaved half my hair, externalising the

Liberation Through Seeing

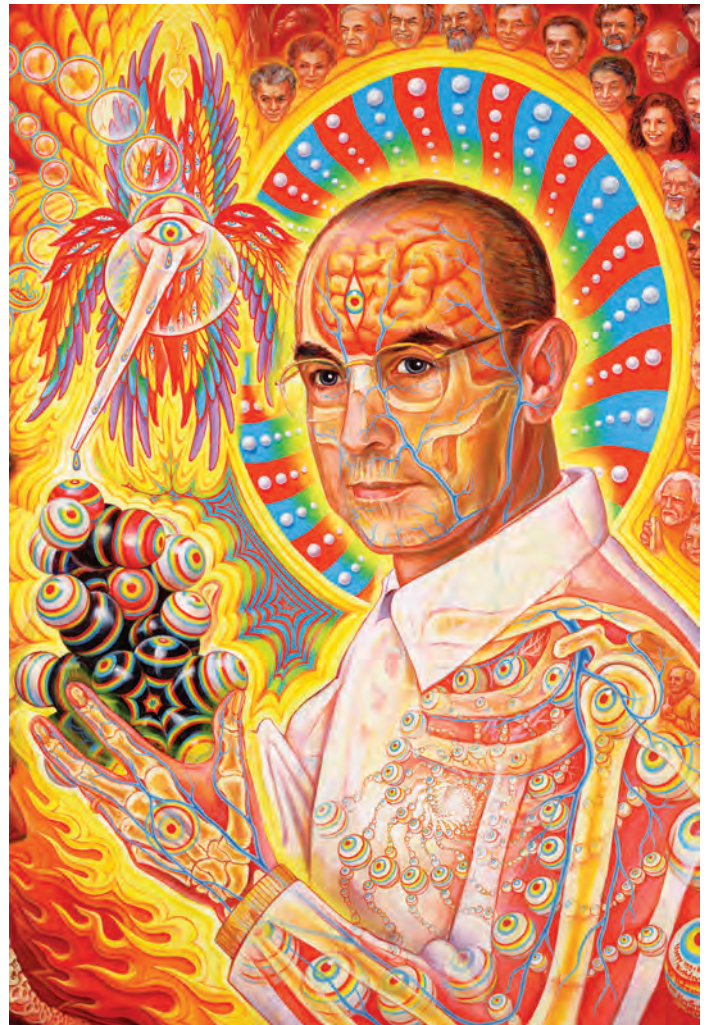
2004

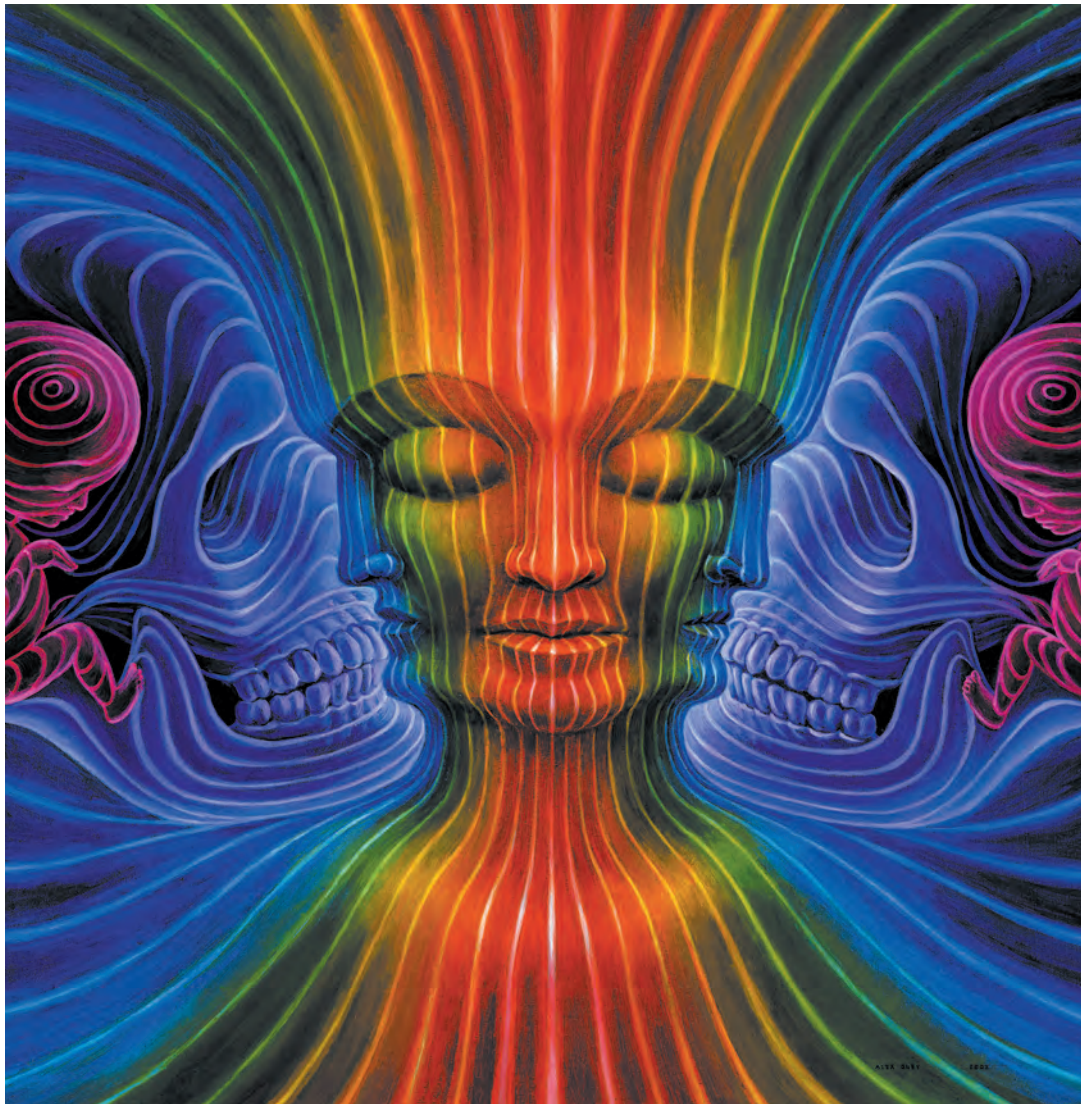
oil on wood

11 x 14 ins., 27.9 x 35.6 cm

division between rational and intuitive hemispheres of the brain. For half a year I maintained my half-shaved persona, performed various polar experiments, and pondered whether life was worth the effort of living. Overwhelming anxiety and despair hung like leaden clouds over me. At age 21, suicide called to me in the shadow of a shallow, pointless existence. Desperate times call for desperate measures. So, I prayed for a sign from the God that I didn't believe existed. That same day, May 30, 1975, I took my first dose of LSD. My mission as an artist was now clear: to reveal and unite polarities, male with female, flesh with spirit. This propelled my search for the One love and light at the heart of all mystical tradition. That unknown God landed me at a critical time, a major turning point, in the perfect place with the perfect

St. Albert and the LSD Revelation Revolution
2005–06
oil on wood
24 x 30 ins., 61 x 76.2 cm





person, my partner in
eternity, Allyson.

On June 3, 1976,
Allyson and I had a
simultaneous vision, a
mystical experience that
changed our lives and our
art. We sacramentally
ingested a large dose of
LSD. I awakened as a
glowing toroidal fountain
of love energy, part of a
vast Universal Mind

left: *Interbeing*

2002

oil on wood

24 x 24 ins., 61 x 61 cm

overleaf: *Net of Being*

2002–07

oil on linen

90 x 180 ins., 228.6 x 457.2 cm





Lattice, a matrix of connectedness with all beings and things. Duality of self and other was transcended in this infinite dimension beyond gender, beyond birth and death, a luminous cell in the body of God that felt more alive and more real than my physical body.

It was Allyson who inspired me to create the Sacred Mirrors series. She suggested that I paint

Cosmic Elf
2003
oil on wood
30 x 30 ins., 76.2 x 76.2 cm

detailed physical-to-spiritual maps to reawaken the viewer's connectedness to these systems. The Sacred Mirrors are 21 paintings that function as one piece, exploring who and what we are, revealing layer after layer of material – biological, sociopolitical, subtle, and spiritual aspects of the self. The viewer is invited to stand before each work in the series to reflect

Song of Vajra Being
2005
oil on wood
24 x 24 ins., 61 x 61 cm



upon and identify with the systems portrayed. The Sacred Mirrors suggest a transpersonal point of view not tied specifically to one faith but pointing to the One light of love and wisdom that runs through all sacred traditions.

Art is the opposite of war. Artists wage peace with their creations. Festivals are gatherings that blend the ability to be freely yourself while

being a vital part of community, a creative meritocracy where the most fully and outrageously self-expressed reign. Can a festival provide a context of meaning and a socially impactful message? Ecstatic bonding with large groups of people through art and music provides an experience of expansive Beauty, essential nutrition for the Soul. When tribes of

Cosmic Creativity
2012
acrylic on canvas
30 x 40 ins., 76.2 x 101.6 cm



humans gathering in natural surroundings experience inspirational mass consciousness, utopian dreams are catalysed, which is important for human survival. At the festival, our Spirit is uplifted when pushing its creative edge.

In a breakthrough of transformative visions catalysed by entheogenic meditative experiences, Allyson and I shifted our creative focus toward manifesting icons of infinite interconnectedness depicting Oneness with the Divine and portraying our embeddedness in the web of life. After the soul awakens, how does the individual understand and communicate their profound relationship with the All, except through symbolism? Sacred art is theophany, the appearance of God, in manifest form. The highest function of creativity is the revelation of spirit. The deeper we tap in to our yearning for creative expression, free from limitations, the clearer a channel we become for the cosmic creative force to

manifest. Creation is activated evolutionary spirit. Creation is redemption. Redemption is divine rescue from the transgression of meaninglessness.

[After Allyson and I had] worked on the Sacred Mirrors series for years, a collector offered to purchase the paintings. He also gave us our first tablets of MDMA, which changed our lives forever. On our journey, lying in bed, in silence, a simultaneous vision of the Chapel crystallized. I also saw elaborate philosophical frames for the art, pictorialising the evolution of consciousness. On this inner journey a voice and vision told us that the Sacred Mirrors and other precious works should not be sold and that a Chapel of Sacred Mirrors must be built to share the collection. This insight gave our lives a mission.

In 2008, CoSM was officially approved as a church. CoSM embraces the mystic core of truth running through all sacred wisdom traditions.