

CATALYST

RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE LIVING



Cosmic Elf by Alex Grey



ON THE COVER: "COSMIC ELF"

BY ALEX GREY

Alex Grey is a visionary artist and painter whose work has been exhibited worldwide. His most famous work is a series of 21 life-sized paintings, collectively titled "Sacred Mirrors," which presents physical and subtle anatomy in the context of cosmic, biological and technological evolution. A book of the paintings, also titled Sacred Mirrors, with text by Ken Wilber, has been translated into five languages.

Grey will speak about his art and life at the Sun Valley Mountain Wellness Festival on Sunday, May 30th, 3-4:30p.m. For more information, visit Grey's Website (www.alexgrey.com) or the Sun Valley Mountain Wellness website: www.svmtnwellness.org.

See Erin Geesaman's interview with Alex, page 24.

Grey recently won a Jammy Award for "Cosmic Elf," which is featured on the cover of String Cheese Incident's "Untying the Not" record album. A signed limited edition print is available at www.alexgrey.com. The image is property of String Cheese Incident. Used with permission. (Thank you!)

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The New Anatomy

A conversation with Alex Grey

BY ERIN GEESAMAN



The Mission of Art by Alex Grey

If you have not seen the work of Alex Grey, do yourself a favor. Go to your local bookstore and peruse a copy of his *Sacred Mirrors* or his more recent *Tranfigurations* or visit his website (www.alexgrey.com).

An unboxable individual, Grey is a prolific painter, a performance artist, a visionary art teacher, a Buddhist meditator, a dedicated husband and father, and an advocate for the responsible use of entheogens (psychedelics). His artwork holds the respect of Deepak Chopra, Ken Wilber, Albert Hoffman (inventor of LSD), Walter Hopps (senior curator at the Guggenheim Museum), the Beastie Boys, and the rock band Tool. I had the pleasure of talking with Alex over the phone late one April evening. Alex will be a featured presenter at the upcoming Sun Valley Mountain Wellness Festival over Memorial Day weekend.

How would you describe your work?

I'd say that my work is concerned with the elements of consciousness, love, transformation, all of the elements that make life worth living as far as I can see; artwork that focuses on the human body and attempts to visualize how body, soul and spirit all interrelate. It takes a multidimensional perspective on being and attempts on a two-dimensional surface to evoke a multidimensional reality.

You do a wonderful job of that.

Artwork usually deals with subjects that cannot be effectively communicated by other mediums. So trying to wrap words around the pictures isn't always an effective way of communicating what they're about. As with most art, it needs to be experienced. Nevertheless, I'm interested in using all aspects of our consciousness, which includes conceptualizing and intellectual discourse. I would like the work to function on many levels so I can be successful in terms of the beauty of an object – the craft involved in creating an object, which is not a value that's highly prized in contemporary art. So works can take months, if not years, sometimes. There's a highly refined and detailed focus on the object making. On another level you have the ideas or the intentions that go into the work and they are the intentions that would be of the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people. Occasionally I'll use that as a kind of vow to focus me.

If we go back to indigenous cultures and sacred art from all different world cultures, we find the taproot to the sacred unconscious.

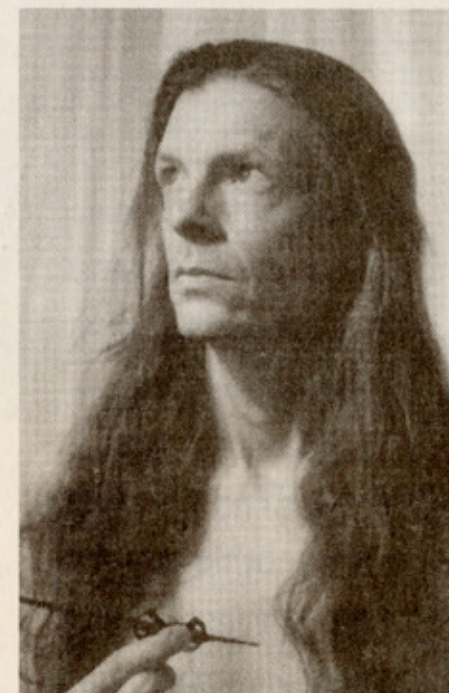


photo by Allyson Grey

Do you have a particular intention for how your work affects the viewer?

The most inspiring intention that I have covered in the realm of art making has been the intention of the Tibetan Buddhist artworks that were described by a teacher of mine, Namkhai Norbu.

I am also a student of Namkhai Norbu.

Yeah? All right! He was describing some of the Samantabhadra artworks and some of the works that were supposedly done by Padmasambhava or blessed by Padmasambhava, saying that these particular works along with numerous other relics and artifacts were classified as "Liberation Through

Seeing." These objects were said to implant a seed of liberation in the viewer simply by the viewer witnessing, being open to their presence. The works were batteries of consciousness and presence and provided transmission in themselves. To me that's the highest kind of intention artwork can aspire to – so that it plants a seed of liberation in the mindstream of the viewer. So, that would be the aim. Whether you miss the mark or make it is probably more up to the viewer. I'm working on a book right now called *Liberation Through Seeing*. What if we as contemporary artists were working with that kind of intention? It's more like a bodhichitta [awakened compassion] intention as well. Which, as you recall, would pertain to doing the work not just for your own benefit but for the benefit of everybody.

I thought it was interesting that in your book *Mission of Art* you say that, in Western culture, much of religious art has dried up.

Where do we find the vital church art going on today? Like the work of Michelangelo, who was a stand-out being – a giant. If you follow the trajectory of art history, there's been a decreasing emphasis on iconography that is related to any of the religions and an increase in individuality for the artist. I think this has been very necessary and important for us to overcome the dogmas that have been indoctrinating us as a culture and have led to so many wars. Religious wars seem to be fought by the dogmatic believers, but war comes about not just through that. All the negative delusory elements – we're a nation that's fostering that here.

But in contemporary art there is a paucity of religious imagery. If you look at the archetypal creative genius Picasso, you certainly could go to him for inspiration in terms of the power of the creative force, but you wouldn't necessarily go to him for spiritual guidance or inspiration. And in contemporary art, if you look at the giants Jackson Pollack or Andy Warhol, the same could be said. The spiritual life of humanity is usually reflected by the artwork of the culture. The soul is made visible by the artwork. In contemporary painting one can find a lot of irony and even morbid, disturbing imagery and a take on humanity that is not really hopeful.

How do you support people in approaching art in this more transcendent way?

Well, we have found that there are a number of art school refugees and artists who still work with their imaginations and are not just attempting to relate to what contemporary art magazines declare as significant or worth making art about. They want to have a language of communicating their inner worlds, which is what I always imagined art was about. If we go back to indigenous cultures and sacred art from all different world cultures, we find the taproot to the sacred unconscious. Art has always been reflective of magnificence and beauty. Look at the structural magnificence in Islamic geometric patterning, the sacred geometry in their mosques and temples. Jewish temples are the same way. Many are patterned with these infinite interconnected grids and they evoke an iconic notion of the sacred. In the Christian and Buddhist traditions, we find the iconic traditions which reflect the sacred through the human form.

Your art sort of does both, doesn't it?

I'm probably more figurative than abstract. My wife is more of what I would consider a tantric, geometric, abstract artist, evoking the divine through patterns of infinity. I do try to work with those patterns to some degree but I usually try to integrate them into the human form as well.

You asked how we support the visionary. We do what we call "vision practice." That's facilitated by a shamanic journey or guided visualization to take the participant into some level of the unconscious or superconscious. Imagery evolves naturally from there. It is suggested at certain points in exercises. And then they come out of that inner world and make artwork based on that experience. You start crude and get progressively more refined.

Whenever you honor the process, the muse gives you a little hint, a little glimpse of a vision... or a full blown symphonic spectacle. You honor the muse by making notes and by making as good a picture as you can of it and refining it and sharing it with other people and describing it. There is a therapeutic aspect to making the work as well. It tends to be reflective of the psychological process that's going on,

maybe just under the surface. We might know what's going on or we might not, really, so this might provide a key for unlocking something buried or important that needs to come to the surface. There is that therapeutic aspect of art making that comes through these workshops.

The other thing we do is look at the cross-cultural art historical family tradition of visionary art. That's always really empowering for artists to see that they're not alone in working with their imagination. Indeed the archetypes that they encounter in the unconscious or superconscious – whatever word you want to use to describe the inner world – are archetypes that have been explored for millenia. We see the references to the angels of different world cultures and the devils as well: imagery of light and shadow that inhabits our

There was some element of taboo against experiencing the divine through a substance that you eat or take in. It's the thing that woke up the mother and father of Western civilization, Eve and Adam.

dreams and our myths and our stories and our artwork.

We talk about visionary substances from traditional tribal cultures. Some native American tribes used peyote; then there are the ayahuasca shamans from South America, the Huichol Indians in Mexico, the various cultures that are in contact with shamanic worlds, the Australian aboriginal cultures, the dream timers. We look at all these different world cultures that share all these different archetypes. Even though they've had no contact through books or the Internet, they nevertheless have common themes that run through the art work. And we find contemporary things that art history professors at art school never show you — a whole tradition in

Western art that is not integrated into Jansen's art history but nevertheless has great meaning for understanding ourselves.

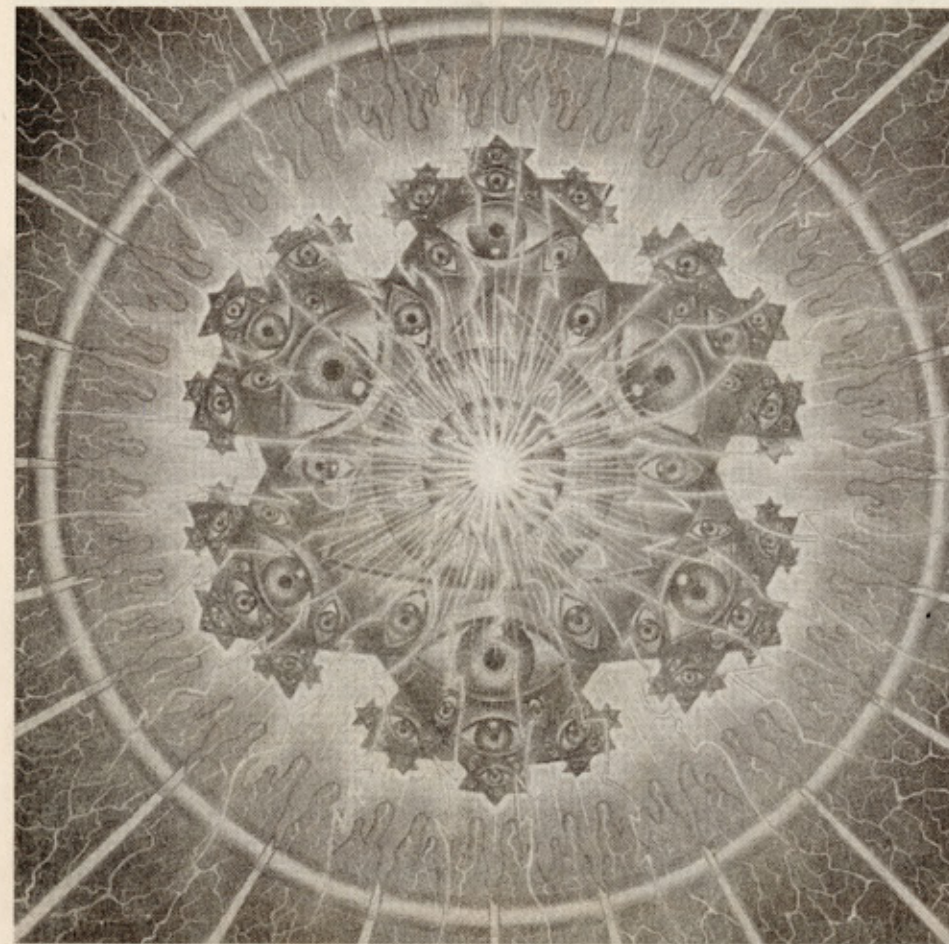
That's some of what we do. Support each other. Artists come from all over the world really, but mostly the United States, Canada, Mexico, the UK. Getting together a group of like-minded artists who are working from their imagination is inspiring. People go away stoked. Some come back year after year.

I have a question about how you experience the dimensions you express in your work. Visual, sensual – I'd assume it would have to be multidimensional for you.

Speaking as a meditator to a meditator, at different points when we're doing our contemplation, you're not just kind of forcing the meditation along or pushing it with your mind; it takes a life of its own. At that point you're in relationship with Vajrasattva or whatever archetype you're working with, and it has a living quality. The rainbows are not just imagined. We move into a realm of luminosity that these archetypes are based on. I think that all the different traditions have ways, whether through the mantra or repetitive prayer; Sufis like to whirl, other folks have different ways of getting there.

I am somewhat known for my outspoken admission of the use of entheogens and I will never not acknowledge the power that these sacred medicines have. The traditional cultures have known it for a long time. Our most ancient religious texts – the *Rig Veda* written over 6,000 years ago – mentions "soma" which has to be a psychedelic of some kind. That's the most ancient writing we have on religion. It began there. We can certainly say that the indigenous shamanic cultures that predate any established religions may have had some relationship with these substances. Not all of them – I'm not saying that all religion is based on drugs. But I think they played a role.

When we look at the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the things the serpent said were things like, "God just doesn't want you to take this because you will be as gods." There was some element of taboo against experiencing



Vision Crystal by Alex Grey

the divine through a substance that you eat or take in. It's the thing that woke up the mother and father of Western civilization, Eve and Adam. There's something interweaving in our own culture. The pre-Judeo-Christian religions of Greece most assuredly played into that. Socrates and Aristotle took a substance called the kaekon a substance used in the Eleusinian mystery cult. It was part of the six-day ritual and was obviously a psychedelic of some kind. They're still trying to determine what it was, but they think it was related to the ergot/ LSD type substance. You've got the Eastern Hindu *Rig Veda* and the Western civilization's roots in the kaekon. I'd say there's an important relationship between humanity and these sacred plants. And they are currently illegal in the United States which I think is a sick shame.

I would like you to comment on a quote of Ken Wilber's that you feature on your website. He says, "The artist needs to ask himself, 'Is my art just a way of affirming my mediocre, whiny-ass self, or

am I up to the challenge of spiritual transformation, reaching for the higher self and deeper art?'" In this conversation, he talks a little bit about the common experience of labor pains and that often art comes out of this violent, painful process. Do you still go through this with making art?

At some point in making the artwork I go through a "I am really crazy for doing this, this is most assuredly a complete waste of time, and I have no idea why I'm doing this" stage. That's part of the whole constellation of feelings and ideas that come up around making a work of art. Especially if you spend a lot of time on it; the longer you spend on it the more apt you are to go through every single spectrum of emotion, so your "whiny-ass self" is probably in there somewhere, as Ken so aptly puts it, but it's subservient to trying to make something that will take you beyond your current notions of who you are and also try to expand the consciousness and heart of the viewer.

You write about the moral responsi-

bility of the artist and what he or she is transmitting through the art. This view seems absent or unarticulated in the art world. Am I correct in this assessment?

Well, I think probably Congress tries to mediate and censor the various art forms one way or another and I think that most artists and most of the general public find that offensive. Hitler tried to dictate what kind of conscience artists ought to have and the kind of subjects he deemed worthy for them to work with. Likewise the socialists have a fairly fascist sense of what subject matter is important and how their artists can contribute to making a strong social state and things like that. As contemporary artists we find that completely repulsive, because it's the state trying to dictate what we ought to find important, and as American independent thinkers we don't like that.

However, the other side of the spectrum is the complete and utter moral chaos and decadent celebration of violence and inhumanity that a lot of art is enmeshed with today. We can see that fairly easily reflected in a lot of pop culture. And therefore I think it's a legitimate question to raise for the individual artist: whether they feel that conscience is an aspect of their art making and whether ethics are not an aspect of things. If we're trying to look at a work of art on many levels, I think we can ask that question. What does it support? Does it support the long-term survival of our species? Is it a hopeful work of art? Is it a work of art that is uplifting and not only acknowledges the human shadows and hell realms that we have created here on Earth but also points to the possibility of making a world that works? That points to a humanity that's not just wounded but that can become a community of wounded healers. Healers of the wounded web of life. Artworks that can point to unity and respect and tolerance. All of these aspects are actually aspects of character, which if we had more of, the world would be a better place. If there were more wisdom, if there were more compassion. Artists don't really like to be preached at and told what's meaningful and worthwhile – but it's up to each artist. I simply think it ought to be part of the questions artists ask themselves. Certainly they ought to create with as much freedom as possible, but I think there are responsibilities that should come with freedom and part of that is the question that you raise with

yourself and that you answer with yourself: "How is this serving myself? And how is this serving the collective?" I think it's a legitimate question for artists to ask.

I think it's a great question. It was enlivening to hear it asked.

All these things are a lot more succinctly and intelligently discussed in my book *The Mission of Art*. This is one of the things I love about the whole Buddhist path. Lopon Tenzin Namdak, the Bonpo teacher, is an amazing teacher. I've heard it said by other teachers, but it was basically, "Why do we [in dzogchen practice] not have all these vows we have to keep to?"

He threw the question open to everybody. We all said hmm. Hmm. He said because it's basically all there. When you're a realized being, compassion is naturally arising and is not even a question. There's no element of forcing or keeping vows or anything, you're naturally doing what is best for whoever is involved. So the kind of force of compassion that is a source, a fountainhead of activity, that just radiates through everything that you do, that's the state I'm trying to get aligned with. That connects anything that one wants to do with bodhichitta [awakened compassion]. But it's natural, not imposed. Not having to make the vow and live up to the vow. The whole dzogchen approach. If you can live with that view and keep trying to align yourself with that, that's what it's about. For me, I only get little glimpses, but a glimpse is better than nothing.

Art as self expression versus divine communication: Do you think it's necessarily one or the other, or can it be both? How do you see yourself in relation to that?

That is a great question and it gets to the root of the fundamental question, "Who are we? Who are we anyway?" How is self expression not divine communication? Seen in some way, all art works are expressions of the soul and have value. Even the darkest and most disturbing, unconscious, vile works represent an aspect of our shadow and who we really are as beings. There is a hell realm that humanity inhabits. We don't want to

"The chapel of Sacred Mirrors is a womb for gestating the human spirit." That sounds right.

just paint flowers and bird songs and avoid hell realms.

Some people do.

Yeah, some people do. But I think that's to their art work's detriment, frankly. By embracing the full spectrum of being and who we are and what we can be, I think that makes for greater works. Look at Beethoven. Beethoven wasn't interested in lyrical works. He was interested in reflecting stormy transformative passages and dark tempests that blow through the soul. I think he expanded our sense of being through making that kind of music, from the softest and the funniest work to the most potent symphonic uplifting of our collective being in the Ninth Symphony.

In the greatest artist there is this transparency to the divine. "Rage Over a Lost Penny" is one of the funniest works Beethoven ever composed. It sounds like a silent movie score, a Keystone Cops kind of thing. Then you've got the Ninth Symphony with the "Ode to Joy." I can't think of a more inspiring and uplifting or more human and human-meets-the-divine statement than that. If one really listens deeply to the greatest composers, I can't imagine not being moved by that. Same way with Bach. Some of these great musical geniuses worked so hard and it came naturally that what they heard in their inner ear came out into something that was really important for humanity to hear.

So for certain artists there isn't much difference between seeing an expression of the divine and seeing a particular artists work. I feel that way about Michelangelo, I feel that way about William Blake. In a sense, it's proof of God's existence. For me. For certain artist's works. I am so ecstatically enraptured when I'm witnessing it or experiencing it. I can't help but

think that it's just a clear transmission that the artist had that they wanted to share with others. It was so awesome that they had to share it. That's the call of art. It's a call and response. God calls out to us and from some inner deep level we're called toward God. Certain works of art can answer the call. You can use a work of art like a modem to access the divine.

What a great analogy!

It's your broadband. In some cases, as in the case of Michelangelo, you can be present in front of the statuary and the presence that became apparent to and worked through the artist simply becomes the veil through which you can perceive the infinite. That's what artwork needs to do, it needs to feed humanity because we need and hunger for that sort of soul food. How can art nurture our souls? To have it at least acknowledge that we have souls.

One might say to the personal versus divine communication question: The more surrendered you are to the process of the divine, the more transparently it operates through you. You look at van Gogh. It's not just the story that here's the guy who cut off his ear and killed himself; it's part of it — biography is definitely part of it. Before he did those things which he did because he was so deeply suffering, he yearned to make a difference in people's lives. He really tried to help the miners. He was dedicated, absolutely devoted to them and really tried to help them. He was a minister, so much so that the church found him offensive. He gave away all his clothing, all his food. He took care of sick people. He just did what Jesus would do. He thought that was the point of it all. When the church found that he was living and looking so shabby, they thought he was not a suitable representative of the church, which kind of disenchanted him toward that whole thing. But I think he poured that same kind of devotional zeal into his painting. When we go and we look at a van Gogh, that's what we're going to see; we're going to see that communication, that divine inspiration that he had and the vitality that he placed in that work.

They're like batteries of psychic energy that zap people with thrilling

rhythms of eternity. Same reason that we listen to Bach, Beethoven, Mozart. They continue to inspire us. They were persons. They were people. They were sometimes very ambitious and driven. In the case of Michelangelo, not very nice. People found him really hard to get along with. He was not interested in getting along with people. People thought Picasso was a real prick, but he was an amazing artist. Who can say that his works were not divinely inspired? If you look at *Guernica*, it's pretty hard to deny it. It just happens to be that it's reflecting a really dark time in the soul of humanity, you know? I think that artists are reflecting the soul and they're accurately reflecting it in a century that was known for its killing machines and its potential for people to destroy each other. It was absolutely essential that paintings like *Guernica* were painted. The question is... we know that now. We know that humanity is going to hell in a hand basket. Are there any things we have that are worth saving? That are worth reinforcing? Anything to be hopeful about? How many works of art are hopeful and are not saccharin? How many works of art can we point to that really uplift us, that avoid being cute, cloying or sentimental? It's a tricky thing to try and make positive work.

I think it was in *The Mission of Art* you said something about the soul of art and art as soul food and how the soul cannot thrive on junk food. We're so steeped in junk food in our culture these days.

It's a junk food culture. Occasionally, though we have a genius like Charlie Kaufmann [writer of the films *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Adaptation*, and *Being John Malkovich*]. His work speaks through the mediums of pop culture. He can slip completely inventive and beautiful and inspiring works into contemporary art culture. It's really rare, but those kinds of moments remind us that it's possible. Certainly Philip Glass is a genius. And I think the rock band Tool is astonishing. Moby's amazing. Great folks who are making great work. White Stripes are incredible. Artists who are pushing themselves and making it in pop culture. So, you can't make categorical statements like, "All pop culture is

junk," because it's not. There are some real diamonds in the junk. But we tend to get buried in the junk. And it doesn't really reflect what's best in us. We lose sight of it.

Speaking of one of the bright spots, I am interested in what you're doing with the Sacred Mirrors Chapel project. It sounds like it's really underway.

It's in the heart of the contemporary art world right now in Manhattan. We're very excited. I was in there today. The walls are going up and the electricity's in and insulation, ductwork, all kinds of things are being done. Hopefully it will provide enough immersion in the art work that if we're lucky and if people are open they can get a hint or a hit of their own divinity through contemplating the work. That's the whole meaning of "sacred mirrors": to see the divine reflected in yourself. That's the intention. When I was in Brazil on ayahuasca, I got a little message that said "The chapel of Sacred Mirrors is a womb for gestating the human spirit." That sounds right. The chapel space that houses the 21 Sacred Mirrors is more like a hall — a 75-foot by 14-foot hallway. Fortunately all the pieces will fit in there, just. As far as the coloration of the walls, I'm thinking it will feel somewhat womb-like. We're going to use every trick we can, also knowing this is a temporary [three- to five-year] installation. That's as long as our lease is for. This is all coming about due to the support of people who have found the Sacred Mirrors worthwhile. Folks who send us \$25. It's been the angels who've supported this coming into being. Hundreds and hundreds of people.

Soul food back atcha. Sort of call and response in another way.

Exactly. We're trying to reallocate funds away from the war machine and into the transformation engine. So that is the first stage in what we hope will be the creation of 21st century architecture to house the collection. Ultimately, other works of visionary art by other artists and cultures in a structure that we hope to build someday. This is the first installment of that. There will only be about 40-45 works. At least now, they will all be my works. That's how the landlord wanted it. If we

can enroll enough people, enough high rollers to build the architecture, then it will be mission accomplished.

I thought it was so beautiful to notice looking at your self portraits as they're featured on your website. There is this deep softening over time. It's like I can see your spiritual practice blossoming. The latest one especially, there's a really different quality of presence that comes through that self-portrait. And you write about how one of the roles of visionary art is that not only does it have a transformative effect on the viewer but on the artist, of course. I wonder how you would describe how you feel you've been transforming over the years through your visionary art.

Taking a psychic dipstick...well, I wouldn't say that I've erased all of my negative qualities, that's for sure. It's interesting. Maybe you become more acutely aware of them. And perhaps you have a millisecond more consciousness about whether you're just going to reflexively lapse into it and inflict it on other people or whether you're going to make a better choice. I know I've become very frustrated at times trying to move the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors forward. I'm like the Don Quixote tilting at windmills. On the other hand, that's what the ego says. The other side of things is answering a call from a higher source that says you have to do this, this is your job. It's what you have to do in order to provide the best possible place for people to get the most frictionless transmission of the absolute through a work of art. And sorry buddy, that's what you signed up for in this lifetime. If you feel like a weenie and a whiny-ass person, sometimes that's what you go through. But that's what I signed on for, and it may seem pompous or even preposterous to attempt something like that.

On the other hand if you don't challenge yourself with what you imagine to be the greatest challenge of your life and your work, you're not living at your full capacity, you're not answering the call. And if I didn't answer the call I'd likely be more shut down and more of a jerk. What's been happening in the last year has been a remarkable

opening up of our home to the community that is interested in having the chapel come into being. Hundreds, thousands of people over the last year have come to our home for the full moon prayer gatherings and I'm only one component of that ceremony. There's a shaman, Alex Stark, who does a wonderful aligning of the forces: Everyone with their own spirit, and to help potentiate this project. We have a kirtan singer and numerous other guest luminaries come in and speak to everyone's higher nature.

I think the art has been challenging me to grow into a bigger person and to stand for transformation. To be a stand for transformation. That is what my work has always been, but I haven't really had to articulate it or to face larger groups or to be working with them as much. The previous incarnations of my work have been the studio, and alone time, and meditating, and time with the artwork. Now there's a more communal aspect to the work and when I look at it recently, that's been a rather remarkable transition. I turned 50 last year and I think it's about time that the work stands up for transformation on more than a personal level – on a social level. I certainly want to stand for transformation in the art world and in the rest of the world. There's a lot of people doing that too. I don't stand alone. I'm part of a choir trying to wake people up and trying to wake ourselves up too. So, as much as possible I like the artwork to be reflective of and pushing me toward realizing my interconnectedness with others and how it's serving a greater connectedness. It's very directly pointing at it. If I want to honor the call.

You also quote Ken Wilber as saying something to you like "Chasing many rabbits, catching none." This whole idea of really choosing one path. The teachers I value most greatly who really take me seriously have said, as Chagdud Tulku put it, don't go collecting parts from different vehicles and building your own because it isn't likely to get you anywhere. Don't go mixing spiritual paths. But at the same time we're blessed with access to all the different wisdom traditions

If you want to mirror your own bullshit, get with a truthful person who loves you. There you go. If you can't handle it, you run run run. We've been together almost 30 years. That's been my spiritual path and has been more effective than anything. No drug and no set of teachings have been any higher or more meaningful.

like never before. How do you dance with that? Clearly you do.

As much as possible I try to read widely and I certainly value Ken's integral perspective and Huxley's perennial philosophy. I tend to go with this operating system that there is a spiritual reality that we as human beings can get in relationship with and we each maybe have great ways of finding that. For me the dzogchen practices and the use of psychedelics have been the most positive. And making artwork related to those visionary experiences I've had through those things. It works for me and I would say that that's an unconventional blend. It's not something that we could find taught anywhere, and I don't necessarily recommend it to anyone but it's just what works for me. I still say the Lord's Prayer and I like to read through the Vedas and the Upanishads. I like to find the common truths reflected through the language and different forms. I think we can admire those different forms. But we realize that there are practices and that they all take time to develop. So

I'm not trying to become a Sufi. I'm not trying to become a Christian minister. Or all those various things. I'm more or less looking for direct access to this universal creativity through these shamanic and yogic traditions and bringing them directly into the artwork. Ultimately I'm an artist. And the more transformation I can experience as a human being, the better my art can get and the more transformative my art can become. They work together. That's my fantasy about the way I'm proceeding. A general directive.

I think also if you're in the media and you're attempting to connect with and describe the menu of possibilities, you have a responsibility not to favor one or the other but find the greatest aspect of those things that can serve people. That's a hard thing to do, too, because we all have those things we're naturally drawn toward. But it's different for different people. I think the whole notion of tolerance is really important for us to have toward other people's spiritual paths and choices. And some kind of commitment ourselves toward whatever we consider our spiritual path.

What I didn't mention and what is really, when I get down to it, the most important spiritual practice I have in daily life, is my relationship with my wife. Just the experience of life on a daily basis and all the struggles that that entails as well. Because it's inevitably wearing down your separateness, your wall of separateness, your delusions of yourself. If you want to mirror your own bullshit, get with a truthful person who loves you. There you go. If you can't handle it, you run run run. We've been together almost 30 years. That's been my spiritual path and has been more effective than anything. No drug and no set of teachings have been any higher or more meaningful.

I tend to think that's God's secret name: Love. I don't mind any of those names for the sacred. I love them all – primordial perfection, Buddha nature, God. I'm not one who quibbles about "Do you have a soul?" It's all how you see it. ♦

Erin Geesaman is a yoga instructor and longtime meditator living in Salt Lake City. See page 3 for information on Alex Grey's appearance at the Sun Valley Wellness Festival later this month.