

Alex Frew solo show catalog

After completing a seven-year prison sentence, I was determined to hit the ground running upon making parole. I was determined to make any connections I could in the world of art. On my third day out, I saw Oren in the new Exchange Gallery while walking in between tattoo parlors and asked if he wanted to see my art. He insisted that he did, so I began to lay out everything I had on the floor. I've met other curators for a bunch of local galleries. None were as receptive to me as Oren had been. I always try to keep an eye out for any submissions that I can make to any shows he runs. I've never met a stronger advocate for the arts and local community. That's why I decided five years ago that I wanted to have a gallery showing when I turned 40. It was clear to me that it had to be with Oren and The Exchange.

"Life has to end, love doesn't"

48x60. NFS

Perpetual cycles of life, death and renewal are threaded through the fabric of existence. The impermanence of our bodies against the endless expanse of time and nature, as well as our guaranteed return into nature takes a front seat in this painting.

"One thorn of experience, is worth a wilderness of warning"

16 x 20. \$1,600.

Beautiful and alluring meets prickly and grotesque in this abstract portrait. These figures are generally not people that the artist knows, but just simply inspired to take someone's likeness, and begin exploring. This is one of my favorite portraits that I've painted. Started tattooing it as a back piece but it was never completed. I absolutely love tattooing portraits just like this one.

"Minds stretched by experience can never go back to old dimensions"

12x36. \$1,100.

I've always enjoyed abstract portraiture. The world of art could be sliced into two halves: rendering realism and abstraction. It's a delightful challenge doing portraiture, but then I prefer to deviate and add a touch of something else. In doing so, I feel I'm bringing together the best of both worlds. Abstraction is also great for hiding problems, from cover-ups in tattoos, to hide weaknesses in my reference photos, or sometimes I'll use it to hide my own weaknesses artistically.

"Belladonna"

20x30. NFS.

Belladonna means beautiful woman in Italian, but deadly poison in English. The inclusion of the poppy flowers, exposed internals, and deteriorating flesh are inspired by the harrowing journey through opioid addiction.

"Seek what sets your soul on fire"

12x36. \$1,500.

There are some hallmark signature elements of my work. Of course some abstract portraiture is infused with botanical elements. Also a relatively monochromatic color scheme. I found that working monochromatically works best for me. I can only paint on nights that I don't have to design tattoos. Some weeks I'm lucky to paint more than one night a week. Sometimes I'll knock out a painting in a week.

“I can resist everything except temptation”

24x30. NFS.

Portraying women in a dark or ominous fashion has always appealed to me, and seems to resonate strongly with my female clientele as well. I've gained some notoriety for my tattoos featuring dark femme fatales. In some ways painting or tattooing these sorts of figures can be cathartic and emblematic of previously soured relations.

“Dare to be yourself, no matter how strange”

NFS.

Started this self-portrait from a 20-year-old photo of myself back in art school. It didn't feel complete so I tried to merge it with myself now 20 years later; of course there's always room for texture, movement, and nature. The wormy, root-like shapes to the left and right were inspired by images I saw of how all the universes are interconnected through a cosmic web of unimaginably large rotating hydrogen filaments. This was only recently discovered.

“Loose lips sink ships”

24x48. NFS.

This piece was inspired by a tattoo request. The original request was for “loose lips sink ships” rendered in an American traditional fashion. I'm not a fan of that style. However, I instantly thought of a different approach, and this is it. Still hasn't been tattooed. Would really enjoy making it into a half sleeve or full back piece.

“Every act of creation is first and act of destruction”

46 x 60. NFS.

My first of the giant poppy series. Since recovering from heroin addiction (February 2008), I have often rendered poppies with dreamlike qualities. I like to present them as alluring and dark much like their derivatives are in addiction. Most people have a delightful response to seeing poppies, leading few to ever guess why I paint them the way that I do.

“Creativity, like life itself, begins in the darkness”

46 x 60. NFS.

The second of the giant poppy series. I will take liberties with rendering my poppies, feeling no need to honor the fidelity of sticking to traditional poppy characteristics. I'll throw in the characteristics of other flowers at times in an effort to create an enticing focal point in the flower's core that seems more interesting to me.

“What is now proven was once only imagined”

48 x 60. NFS.

The upper portions of this painting were inspired by newly released photos from the James Webb space telescope. Pillars of creation and cosmic cliffs have been mashed together with my third giant poppy. It's amazing to me that swirling gas clouds, that are solar system incubators, bring forth life of various scales and complexities. If you've got 45 minutes to kill, just ask me about the recent admissions and legislation by our government regarding UFO's!

“Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors where there were only walls”

16 x 20 (x2). NFS.

This piece is on loan from the Martie Miller collection. I really enjoyed the juxtaposition of the bright colors and lovely flowers with the knowledge that to me, they represent a darker, more insidious subject, addiction.

“Mankind is stripped naked when he’s in conversation with God“

48x60. NFS.

This is the result of the digital collaboration with Brian Murphy. Brian is a friend, mentor, tattoo artist, and owner of Third Dimension Tattoo in Stroudsburg. We both maintain a penchant for portraiture with a flare of je ne sais quoi. He is the gentleman I go to for most of my tattoos. I continue to be inspired by and learn from Brian.

“What we achieve inwardly will change our reality”

48x24. NFS.

Rendering the body with internal structures exposed more clearly reminds us how we are derived from nature. The barren tree branches of winter often remind me of the vascular system and bronchial tubes of the human lungs. This piece is laced with duality from life and death, day and night, rigid architectural structure versus organic, to complementary colors, blue and orange. Like the yin and yang, everything contains its opposite, and its opposite is needed to be in harmony.

“Reality is merely an illusion albeit at a very persistent one“

12x36. \$1,500.

This painting envisions mankind as a delicate yet resilient existence sandwiched in between the realms of the quantum and the Galactic dimensions. Through my creation, I’ve strived to visually articulate the intricate dance between the infinitesimally small and the astronomically vast, inviting viewers to contemplate the profound intersection of our earthly existence within the cosmic tapestry.

“Don’t search for God in the sky, look within”

20x24. \$1,400.

My own understanding of God has matured alongside me. From a white bearded Greek-like demigod to understanding that the universe is God. Somehow we are the remnant particles of previously exploded stars that have become animated. This thought alone I continue to find perplexing and amazing.

“Hell is empty, all the devils are here”

12x24. \$1,600.

In the face of temptation, internal battles wage within, and the broader, societal implications of yielding to seductive forces. It is a mirror, reflecting the universal struggle against the allure of the forbidden. I may or may not have used ChatGPT for this description. Originally designed as a hip tattoo. I felt compelled to paint it.

“soul of a woman was created below”

24x36. NFS.

Acting as a visual metaphor of temptation as a malevolent force -- the devil, a seductive presence that urges us into realms of moral ambiguity. The brushstrokes capture the struggle against irresistible allure. I definitely worked with ChatGPT for this description.

“Time waits for no one“

12 x 24. \$1,400.

Could have called it skull study #27. I’ve painted many skulls; most never turn out very special. I felt this one worked out quite well. It was first a tattoo design I had created, then forced it to be a cover up tattoo. I find it challenging and rewarding to create these coral-like organic crags in the skull. You can probably spot it reused throughout a number of my paintings.

“Pennsylvania Bald Eagle”

NFS

This piece is on loan from the Ken Miller collection. Every Christmas I'm involved in a family “secret Santa” thing. I always end up making a painting as a gift. I tend to focus on Pennsylvania landscapes for these. Next year will probably be a red covered bridge!

“Chasing Dragons”

NFS

Probably the first piece I did that was trying to convey addiction. Thought catching a dragon was more interesting than chasing one. Of course it still has a hold of you as well. You may notice there is no year listed on this piece. When you're wo years in on a 7-to-20-year prison sentence, you really don't like thinking about what year it is!

“Metamorphosis”

Originally inspired by an MC Escher woodblock print. I decided to make my own, with the exception that mine was dedicated to addiction. It was heavily influenced by an old girlfriend who has since passed away from an overdose. I tried to show stages of addiction. From experimentation, to using needles, to a dissociation of the self, to whatever it takes to make money, and ultimately death. This design wrapped around two walls of my prison cell for a few years.

Two prints by my former co-worker and friend Ken Kile.

In the picture is myself on the left, Rainy Pritchett in the middle, and Ken on the right. Ken played a large role in me getting into the tattoo business. His work was far ahead of the rest. After a couple of years I had closed my Danville tattoo shop just to go work next to him. It was a great pleasure and honor to have worked alongside him. Sadly he has passed away. I continue to keep him in my thoughts and continue to draw inspiration from his work.

@frewtattoo @rainylyneatattoo @kenkiletattoo

A painting done by Brian Murphy.

In the photo, I'm on the left, Brian is in the middle, and the lovely and talented Jess Lockard is on the right. Brian has been tattooing since the 1990s with a remarkable lineage of master/apprentices that go to the heart, and to the beginning of tattooing. In 2019 I convinced him to let me drive to his shop Third Dimension Tattoo twice a week to tattoo there. I really just wanted to study him and Jess up close. I'm still making the trip down there periodically to continue to learn from them and get more ink myself.

@frewtattoo. @bmurphysart. @jess_locks

This eye was an important piece to me.

It was the first time I went big and just started creating. It felt like something I could see myself doing for the rest of my life, which I had never felt before. It was taped to the wall at the foot of my prison bunk bed for nearly half a decade. There's a slight bit of water damage. We would cook in our cell using a modified extension cord called a stinger. You throw it in a tub of water with baking soda in it and it will boil. That's how we cooked. Mostly meals starting with ramen noodles called “chi-chi's”. You'd be surprised how tasty they can be.