

Alex Frew

Artist Statement

I believe that an artist is someone who shows you a perspective of reality that you couldn't have gotten from anyone else. The events and relationships in my life have been pivotal to sculpting that vision. Throughout my body of works, a variety of reoccurring themes and subject matter became pronounced.

A large portion of my work has drawn influence from a seven-year journey through incarceration in the Pennsylvania state prison system, a consequence of grappling with the challenges of opioid addiction. I was an intravenous drug user for around six years. Eventually my antics lead to a seven-to-twenty-year prison sentence. I previously had dropped out of graphic design in college, but in prison I found myself making art on the regular once again, but behind bars. After some time I became known for being a top portrait guy. My first tattoos were also in this setting. Upon my release in February 2015 I set out to find how to make a living off art. Tattooing became an obvious route, and I haven't stopped since. I worked under Frew Tattoo, 3rd Dimension, Invicta, and now Absinthe Tattoo.

Frequent references can be seen throughout my body of work. Nuanced symbolism in the form of poppies often depicts the allure that comes from their derivative, heroin. I like portraying them as vivid and alluring with plenty of dark elements such as rotten flesh, exposed internal organs, or even just through strong textures. I think there's a lot of beauty in that balance. To me it represents anything from addiction and disease to corrosive mental health. My work revolves heavily around abstract portraiture, often stripping the flesh away revealing stark hideousness balanced with beauty. This has become a signature recipe for much of my work, frequently intertwined with floral elements to act as a reminder that we were forged from nature and ultimately return to it.

Cultural mythology has been a rich source of inspiration, infusing my work with timeless tales and archetypes. Good vs. evil, the devil, Greek Zeus-like figures melting into the cosmos -- all serve as a bridge between the ancient and the contemporary, inviting the viewer to contemplate the universal threads that bind us across time and space. Many of my painting and drawings are inspired by my clientele from tattoo work.

Whether within the skin or on a traditional canvas, it's a journey of expression. With ink, I'm usually telling other people's stories; with paint I try to tell my own. I keep working to find the intersection where they meet, trying to make a mark and hoping it hits deep. My intention is for the viewers to reflect on their own journeys . . . and line up to get some large custom tattooing done by me!