

# START JOURNAL

ISSUE ONE

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TOWN HALL BY BOTTACCIO



**TRUE VISION:** Justin Dingwall on challenging cultural tropes and a new kind of beauty

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The Last Tears of Summer, 2024, courtesy of Justin Dingwall

Welcome to the very first issue of *START JOURNAL*, a new publication that introduces the participating artists at StART KX – providing insight into the creative mind via in-depth profiles. With its finger on the pulse of the ever-changing landscape of contemporary art, *START JOURNAL* celebrates a panoply of unique artistic talent and announces the relocation of StART to Town Hall by Bottaccio in London's Kings Cross, a stone's throw from the iconic creative technology hub Kings Cross, St Pancras (now known simply as KX).

Since our very first show in 2014, StART has helped to springboard the careers of emerging artists from around the globe, celebrating its 10th anniversary at Saatchi Gallery, London in October 2023. Now, one decade on, StART has relocated in a move that heralds a visionary new future. The first edition of StART KX in its new home promises to be an uplifting experience that celebrates art and creativity allowing visitors to get to know what is behind the conceptual drive of the exhibitors, and how their work relates to the overarching themes of the zeitgeist.

In the first issue of *START JOURNAL* you will find Piers Secunda, who takes us on a journey into the genesis of an incredible

series of ink paintings that portray sunlight shining through a haze in the jungle. The ink used for these paintings has been produced from charcoal gathered from illegal fires set by farmers and loggers in the Amazon rainforest, and the works are being sold to raise vital money for the tribal leaders of the Xingu Reserve in the Brazilian Amazon, who need fire-fighting equipment to put out the fires on the reserve.

We also get deep and philosophical with artist Alex Mayhew, who discusses his Bowie Bots: a series of original artworks inviting the viewer to imagine new personas David Bowie might have embraced in his immortal existence, through a series of cybernetic resurrections. Simultaneously, the project contemplates the enigmatic nature of our existence and consciousness, exploring the implications of emergent technologies on human identity. It confronts a timeless question: are we merely intricate biological machines shaped by genetic programming and life experiences?

From starman to stardust, Las Vegas-based artist Matthew Samson, renowned for his signature meteorite-based works, discusses his celestial sculptural and canvas works. Inspired by the universe's vast interconnectedness, Samson incorporates meteor-

ite dust into his art, symbolising the cosmic origins of life. Meteorites, he says, estimated to be over four billion years old, offer a tangible connection to our shared cosmic heritage. Conversely, the more earthbound American photographer David Aimone, explains how his artistic philosophy is rooted in his musical background – drawing parallels between music and photography, he strives to make artistic images that unfold like beautifully crafted symphonies.

Not to mention our cover star Justin Dingwall – a boundary-pushing photographer from South Africa, whose vibrant visual narratives resonate with emotion and use nuance to challenge prescribed perceptions and provoke thought; the multi-disciplinary gay artist Graeme Messer who interweaves visual art with performance, photography and AI to create art that is unashamedly autobiographical; and the wonderful Elizabeth Dyer, whose inimitable and touching portraiture comes to explore the human condition from a more ethereal angle. Take a journey into the future with us in the pages of the debut issue of *START JOURNAL* ...

*START JOURNAL* has been created, edited and art directed by John-Paul Pryor. Additional design by Luke Fowler.







# CYBERNETIC ANGELS

Alex Mayhew on technology, art and  
the enduring creative legacy of David Bowie

Interview by John-Paul Pryor



The multiple award-winning visual artist Alex Mayhew brings his unique tribute to Bowie to StART KX in October. Beloved for his groundbreaking blend of cutting-edge technology and art, he creates captivating works that push boundaries of expression, and his work has been exhibited at prestigious institutions worldwide, including MOMI in New York and the National Museum in Singapore. Mayhew first gained global recognition as the creator of a groundbreaking and hugely successful AR Art Exhibition at the AGO – an immersive digital intervention that piqued the interest of Apple CEO Tim Cook, who came for a private tour. Here, the unique creative unpacks the conceptual genesis of his visionary Bowie Bots, which explore personas the starman might have embraced through a series of cybernetic resurrections.

What does Bowie mean, or represent to you? What made you want to use him as a totem for immortality?

David Bowie, for me, represents the pinnacle of human creativity and spirit. He was an otherworldly figure who embodied everything inspiring about the human condition and epitomized the mesmerizing potential of human creativity. Like many, I feel a profound sense of loss at his passing. This collection began with a personal plea: "No, don't go. You have so much more to do." It then evolved into a narrative where Bowie continues his journey through my imagination, an ongoing tribute that honors his legacy while celebrating his innate ability for fluid change and his defiance of conventional identities. Bowie's creative approach is something I have always related to. His impact wasn't confined to his music; his creativity was boundless, spanning music, performance, and even gender identity. He ventured into the unknown, famously advising: "Always go a little further into the water than you feel you're capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth, and when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom,

you're just about in the right place to do something exciting." I feel a certain kinship with this approach. This collection also explores various existential questions related to religion, consciousness and technology.

What made you specifically want to explore robots or automata?

Historically, both Eastern and Western religions used advanced automata – early robots powered by clockwork – to create moving figures that encouraged belief in a particular god or religion. These automata created an illusion of greater power, drawing people into the fold as true believers. Many religions have promised spiritual immortality and an afterlife, but definitive proof has always been elusive. Ironically, technology now appears poised to deliver on these promises. We're approaching the possibility of prolonging life or even uploading our consciousness to a computer, creating a form of digital immortality. Technology might soon offer us a kind of eternal life, transforming us into cybernetic angels.

How do you think the relationship between man and machine will evolve in our lifetime?

AI is an incredibly powerful tool, with significant dangers and profound positive potential. Ethical concerns are prominent, as many AI systems have been trained on existing artists' intellectual property without their consent, understandably tainting its reputation. This raises issues, especially when someone with little artistic ability can generate a 'work of art' instantly, exploiting years of other artists' learning and honing their craft. As a trained artist myself, I understand how upsetting this could be. At first glance, from this point of view, AI-generated art could seem indefensible. However, I think it is important to look at this subject from multiple perspectives. If we set aside the potential legal issues and focus on the moral criticisms, isn't building upon the whole pantheon of art what

all artists do? None of us work in total isolation. Cultural evolution is about making our work better and more relevant in response to the rich history of time. We are all influenced by what has come before.

You have described yourself as an artist working in the multi-present – can you unpack what that means in relation to the Bowie series?

Working in the multi-present means creating art that is dynamic and responsive, engaging with the viewer in a deeply personal and multifaceted way. It's about making art that aims to transcend the boundaries of time, space, and reality, inviting viewers to explore and connect on a visceral level. In the case of the David Bowie series, biographical and character exploration, my desire to pay tribute to the great man with fictional narrative development, and exploration of concepts around consciousness, religion, and technology all inform the development and content of the work. I constantly ask myself which combination of mediums and technologies can elevate the experience further. In this sense, how the work is experienced becomes as integral to the art as what is being experienced. For example, as the viewer moves around works like 'Golden Angel Deluxe', they will see the work respond with a glamorous sparkle shimmering across the work from the hand-applied micro glitter and diamond dust. The effervescent reactive finish makes the work feel alive in both an angelic and cybernetic way, harking back to the futuristic glam of Bowie's early 70's era. Similarly, 'The Change Maker: Blinker' uses kinetic lenticular technology to reflect Bowie's defiance of confinement. Each piece responds differently to light and human presence. The observer's interaction with the art initiates its response, and this dynamic interplay elevates the narrative elements that are revealed.

To find out more about the artist visit [alexmayhew.com](http://alexmayhew.com)



Zigla Redux (Part of the Bowie Bot Series), 2024. Digital Montage archivally printed on Aluminum Panel with hand painted resin and micro-glitter. Courtesy of Alex Mayhew



## GRAEME MESSER ON THE ART OF SELF-LOVE

Originally hailing from South Africa, Graeme Messer came to London in the mid-80s where he flexed creative muscle both in the West End and on the experimental fringe, directing works by Shakespeare and Roald Dahl. Since 2010, after studying drawing in London and New York, he switched his focus to visual art, creating self-reflective works that boldly explore identity and connection. In this interview, he discusses his unique practice, and the series RED LOVE, which will show at StART KX, explaining how his days in theatre have shaped him.

*How would you describe yourself as an artist? How has your background in theatre shaped you?*

I am very definitely a multidisciplinary artist, and my work ranges from sculpture and collage to photography, video and performance art. I think the main influence from my theatre days is a tendency to work on a very human, emotional and personal level most of the time. When you work in the theatre, you are always working with the human condition in a very psycho-

logical way and your aim is often to find intimacy, vulnerability and compassion.

*Can you talk to us about the ideas behind RED LOVE?*

Most of my work before RED LOVE was very self deprecating and looked at my hang-ups and dysfunctional past. In RED LOVE, I wanted to explore the idea of someone encountering themselves, not someone like themselves but actually themselves, and for each self to feel acceptance and love for the other.



*Why do you employ AI tools in your work?*

I think AI can offer a chance of making otherwise virtually impossible work. In this case, I was able to have two identical versions of a person encounter each other. Although I created the works initially in AI, there was a lot of post production, upscaling and modifying in photoshop in order for the images to be as convincing as possible when printed.

*What are you seeking to transmit about intimacy in this series?*

Intimacy and self acceptance is key in these pieces, and my aim was not to stop at self

acceptance but to show a deep passionate love for oneself as well. In terms of sexuality, there is an interesting gay undertone to the images, in spite of the fact that the works are essentially about two versions of the self. I guess the images can also open up questions about gay narcissism, although that wasn't a primary focus. Being a gay artist, I welcome these layers.

*How do you define self-love?*

My ideal form of self-love is a deep love and acceptance of all parts of oneself, including the cruel, nasty and selfish bits. I'm interested in a very real and honest self love that is willing to encounter the shadow as well as the good.

*What for you is ultimately the purpose of art?*

I think, for me, art is about contact and intimacy. It is about sharing our soft, raw and vulnerable sides and a sense of shared humanity. A very rewarding moment for me was when someone who had been through a very difficult time bought my 'I Love This Motherfucker' mirror. She said she loved the idea of waking up every morning and seeing herself in that piece with those words written over her reflection. When people really get my work and respond to it, I feel the greatest sense of purpose.

To find out more about the artist visit [graememesser.com](http://graememesser.com)





# TRUE VISION

Justin Dingwall on constant evolution  
and art as a catalyst for conversation

Interview by John-Paul Pryor





Wheel of Life, 2021 (in collaboration with Roman Handt). Courtesy of Justin Dingwall

The incredibly successful Johannesburg-based artistic photographer Justin Dingwall creates images that are charged with visceral emotion and challenge prescribed notions of beauty. His exceptional works pivot heavily towards the unique and unusual, employing modern techniques in contemporary image-making to create an interplay of imagery that comes alive with subtle symbolism and metaphors that evoke what it means to be human. He has exhibited extensively both locally in South Africa and internationally, and has been selected for various awards. In this interview, he discusses what first attracted him to photography and tells us how his art has been shaped by his background in South Africa.

Can you recall what first set you out on the path of the artist in life?

As a child, I never really thought about becoming an artist, although my interests were always based in creativity. I enjoyed experimenting with various forms of art, and I took part in after-school art classes, but I never set out with the actual goal of becoming an artist. Art was more of an escape for me, something that took me out of my "everyday" and into a different world.. I grew up in a smaller town where there were no large-scale exhibitions, or museums. This lack of access to formal art venues forced me to be creative and challenge myself. My younger years were also without the invention of the internet, so I had to find my own ways of experiencing and expressing art, which ultimately shaped my unique perspective and approach to creativity. I liked working with my hands, and I attended a technical high school to be able to pursue more creative, hands-on activities. This kind of manual background definitely had some influence on my career. I was fascinated with the idea of building/creating something. Photography was an art form that very much allowed me to do this in my own way, by being able to create through imagery. I could create with my hands, as well as with my mind.

What essentially are you seeking to explore in your work?

Well, my journey began in the realm of commercial photography, where I thought about and saw the world through the eyes of a commercial photographer. This began to change however, through the years of creativity and experimenting with art, through meeting and talking to interesting people, and through the exploration of various topics and themes - my perspective has been profoundly transformed. Art has become a tool for changing the way I think about and view the world. As the French philosopher Marcel Proust said, "Since we cannot change reality, let us change the eyes which see reality." My "eyes" have been deeply influenced and changed since I began my art journey. I aim for my art to become a catalyst for conversation, through which important topics can be explored and discussed at a deeper level. My goal is not to speak for others, or to impose any predetermined ideas, but to encourage the viewers' voices to be heard, and for them to interact with their own ideas, and engage in constructive conversations about them. I believe that art can be a powerful medium to start these conversations and spread awareness about issues that need light.

What would you say are the qualities that make you unique as an artist?

Many factors have shaped me into the artist I am today. Growing up in South Africa during the turn of democracy instilled in me a heightened awareness of social inequality and injustice, and growing up in a country that is so diverse has influenced the way I see the world, as well as the eyes through which I create my art. I wouldn't necessarily describe myself as a political artist, but my work undeniably engages with social and political themes. With the aim of having my work bring about conversation and by engaging viewers to explore and question the world around them, these discourses can take on political elements (as well as any other aspect

the viewers bring to the conversation). For me, my work is a reflection of my personal journey as well as the broader human experience. My art is a blend of personal expression and societal commentary, woven together by using visual symbolism and metaphor. Another factor that has had an effect, is my experience in the advertising and commercial world. It has allowed me to sharpen my skills to be able to translate ideas into compelling imagery. These collective, as well as many other individual personal experiences in my life, have been what has built the unique lens from which I view and create. I am constantly evolving, always striving to refine my craft.

Is it the duty of the artist to critique the socio-political paradigm they find themselves within?

While I do believe that the role of an artist is inherently personal and subjective, I agree that artists have a unique position to reflect upon and add to a greater critique of the socio-political paradigm in which they exist. Art has the power to challenge and inspire change by presenting perspectives that might otherwise go unnoticed or unspoken. This is why I aim for my work to encourage conversation. Artists are often more sensitive to the nuances and complexities of the world around them, which is why it can be seen as the duty of artists to critique them. By engaging with socio-political issues, artists can raise awareness, spark dialogue, and encourage critical thinking. This can take many forms, from direct commentary and activism to subtle allegories and metaphors. My work involves subtlety and symbolism. However, I do also believe that it is not the sole duty of every artist to critique their socio-political environment. Artists may also choose to focus on other aspects of the human experience, such as personal introspection, abstract exploration, or the celebration of beauty. Ultimately, I think that the duty of the artist is to remain true to their own vision.

To find out more about the artist visit [justindingwall.com](http://justindingwall.com)





Equilibrium, 2015 (from the series Albus). Courtesy of Justin Dingwall



Mob II, 2015 (from the series Albus). Courtesy of Justin Dingwall



# AMERICAN BEAUTY

Artist David Aimone on re-framing art history  
and the changing landscape of beauty

Interview by John-Paul Pryor







Previous spread: Addiction, 2018, digital silver gelatin print, courtesy of David Aimone.  
Right: Lost In Ravine, 2023, digital silver gelatin print, courtesy of David Aimone.





Burnt Head, 2011, silver gelatin print, courtesy of David Aimone

*The US-based photographer David Aimone seamlessly intertwines the aesthetic principles of the pictorialists with modern expression, marking a unique convergence of artistic tradition and contemporary vision. Themes of ephemeral states, beauty, and imperfections saturate his incredible work, which relentlessly challenges accepted notions of photographic perfection. His imagery extends an invitation to viewers to transcend ordinary visual norms, in order to discover beauty in new ways and craft personal narratives from the images. In this interview, he discusses how the language of beauty is changing, for better and worse.*

*Who is the photographer who first inspired you and how did they change your life?*

Whether it be photography or music, I've never been one to study other artists, contemporary or historical. I prefer to work from my own instincts. I am probably one of the least able name-droppers in the art world that I know. People mention this or that photographer being an obvious influence for me, and most often I reply, 'Who?' However, I do remember one event at the Hyde Museum in Glens Falls NY where I was asked to photograph the walk-around presentation of two sister exhibits called 'Ansel Adams And Photo-Secession At The Hyde Collection'.

The presentation was done by husband and wife Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg who had together assembled and curated their own collection. The presentation started with the early Ansel Adams work and I was duly impressed at his technique. But, when we moved onto the pictorialism of the photo-secessionists, I became mesmerized. This was my reason for not only purchasing a large format film view camera (like those used by Adams), but also collecting defective and soft-focus lenses to impart and imperfect and other worldly edge to my work. Though the Photo Secessionists are often defined as an American phenomenon, I noted that this presentation included many early European Pictorialists, and I loved their work in particular. I have been ever since striving to take the approaches of both Adams and the Photo-Secessionists into the modern world, using technologies both old and new.

*How are our notions of beauty changing in the digital age? How do you think AI will change the game in terms of the photographic image?*

Artistic dilution and deception if we allow it, or artistic assistance and freedom if we insist on it. It is like every other modern technology. Inherently these technologies have the ability to help create a better world for our children's children, and they have the inherent ability to de-

stroy and defile. When I look at other modern technologies and how, in general, they have been used, I am not optimistic. When given the chance to apply technologies for the betterment of mankind, we instead often use these technologies for destruction, manipulation and pollution. The most simple negative consequence is the ability to create too much noise in the world. The more insidious uses are for propaganda, war, pollution, etc. Wouldn't it be great if we could use nuclear power to provide for all? Wouldn't it be great if we could use the internet and social for community building and cooperation? Wouldn't it be great if we could use AI for improving the lives of people across the globe? I don't see it happening until we move away from greed and competition to empathy and cooperation.

*What do you consider to be your greatest achievement in life so far?*

Sticking with my own process and not giving in to commercial demands, both with music and photography. As I get older, I actually feel I am getting more creative and have more ability to translate that creativity into something to present. That is an advantage of being an artist, reaching our peak later. I truly feel like an emerging artist in my 60s.

*To find out more about the artist visit [aimonephoto.com](http://aimonephoto.com)*



# PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

## STEP INSIDE THE MIND OF ELIZABETH DYER

Elizabeth Dyer is a Canadian artist who unravels a narrative on canvas that transcends the tangible. Her contemporary portraits, a fusion of oil and ground marble, exhale with a palpable, almost sculptural, and ethereal quality. In this interview, she explains why every portrait is an observer, watching you or emerging from the very canvas.

What first made you pursue the life of the artist?

Painting was the path that seemed to naturally fell under my feet. Since

childhood, drawing and painting have been my focus, particularly around the figure. I have had and continue to have many creative passions, but figurative painting and portraiture are part of me.

How does your Canadian heritage play out in your work?

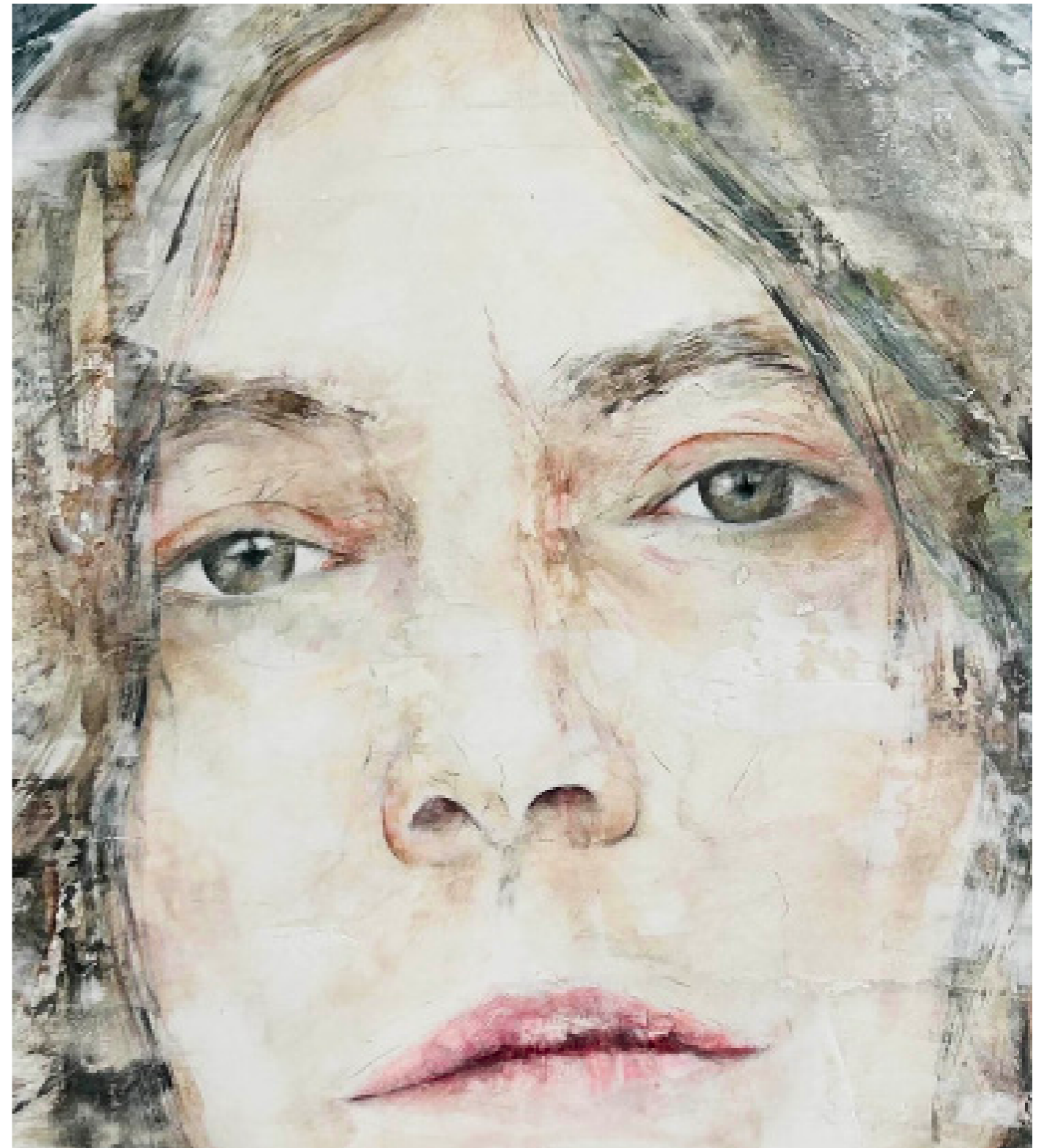
Canada is a large, expansive and wonderful country. When you fly across it, it's not unusual to spend hours looking at forests or tundra with little to no evidence of humanity. This Canadian sense of space

and time has drawn me to scrape away layers to get to that balance of character and negative space.

What do you hope to inspire?

I want to connect the person to their space. Much like the eyes, the space someone inhabits, where they spend their private time, holds the feeling of their story, and I want to try to capture this.

Tell us a little about your process. How do you approach a blank canvas?



I start the process with a line drawing. Then, I go through a long process of building and scraping away layers. Each of my pieces has about five or six layers. It is a fine balancing act.

How do you think portraiture can capture the essence of a subject?

I think portraiture doesn't have to capture the complete subject. It doesn't have to be literal. Someone's hands, their posture, a wrinkle – these details can be overwhelming when trying to capture everything about a person. The essence of portraiture is the opportunity to strip everything away to the small details that make a person and highlight these details.

Do you think it is important to champion diversity in art? Should art serve a social or political purpose in your view?

Absolutely. That is its most powerful quality. You don't need to be able to read and write to be moved and feel something about a piece of work. You don't need to know who created the piece or its intention to be moved.

What do you hope a viewer will take from the experience of your work?

I hope my work helps people look for the stories that can be found when you scrape away the bits of life that get in the way. So

much of life is about building, growing, and adding, and something can be said about the beauty that can be found when you remove all the debris in the way and find daylight.

Can you tell us which artist, or artists, most inspire you and why?

I first discovered the German expressionist painters Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt when I was 12. I immediately fell in love with Schiele's drawings and his use of negative space that completes a composition. There's an immediacy and beauty in his line work that I love.

Find out more at [elizabethdyer.ca](http://elizabethdyer.ca)





# SMOKE IN THE JUNGLE

Piers Secunda on art's moral imperative and  
shining a light on climate disaster

BY JOHN-PAUL PRYOR



Piers Secunda is a London-based multi-media artist forwarding a research heavy practice that uncompromisingly delves into some of the most significant geopolitical subjects of our time, such as the bloody histories of so-called ideological conflicts and, perhaps most pertinently, the deliberate eradication of cultural iconography – with a particular lens upon the wanton destruction of culture that has happened under both the Taliban and ISIS. His most recent undertaking has been to shine his light on the deforestation of the Amazon, raising money for the charity Migrate Art by producing a series of charcoal drawings made with the ashes of burned trees from the Amazon Basin. Here, her tells us about the ideas behind these works to be exhibited at StART KX and explains why he believes art should always be driven by a moral imperative.

Can you talk to us about the ideas behind *Smoke In The Jungle*?

Around the age of 14, my parents put a TV in my bedroom. I used to fall asleep with it on and wake up very late at night to amazing films happening on the screen. One of these was 'Last of the Hiding Tribes' a documentary in which the Villas Boas brothers walked through the Amazon rainforest, to try and move the uncontacted tribe called Panara. Their territory was tragically in the path of bulldozers, which were coming into the rainforest to build the new city of Brasillia, and open up the interior of Brazil. The scenes of that film seared themselves onto my brain and I started to collect books about the Amazon's hiding tribes. I've been captivated by uncontacted tribes ever since. It's a privilege to be alive while they still exist, voluntarily in the stone age, aware of the outside world and refusing it. The works for StART KX are ink paintings on paper, made with an ink produced from burned trees in the rainforest. They portray smoke in the jungle, illuminated by shafts of sunlight, a glimpse of the sublime.

Talk to us about the charity initiative and guide us through your creative process in regard to this series ...

The charcoal which was used to produce the works about the Amazon, was collected by Simon Butler, whose charity Migrate Art raises money for amazing causes internationally, by asking celebrated artists to make and donate works for Christie's to auction. Migrate Art provide the paints, in this case made with the charcoal of burned trees in the Amazon, which were turned into ink, acrylic, oil paint and pastels.

Is it essential for you that art-making is driven by a moral imperative?

I don't have an issue with getting in harms way to gather the materials I need to make my work. In 2018, I was mortared by ISIS on the front-line with the Peshmerga, in the war which the Iraqi military and the Kurds were waging against ISIS. There have been hairy moments on several trips and some extreme repercussions for making the work I produce, but I can't portray something, if I haven't seen it, smelled it, heard it and asked local people what they feel about it. I need to understand, to make the works. At this stage of civilisation, what's the point of making art if you're not saying something about what's happening in the world? I need to point out that the works which get sold at StART KX, generate a charitable contribution to Migrate Art's Xingu Reserve project. The Xingu Reserve is a territory in the Amazon about the size of Belgium, which is the home to a large indigenous community. They badly need fire fighting equipment to fight fires lit by farmers on their land, which Migrate Art have raised funds for, and which we will contribute to.

How do you think AI will change the game in terms of art and the photographic image?

AI is another technological development which is touted as a tool

for reforming our experience of life, but is being usurped as a tool for government and big industry to use against the population. AI is already being used to steal – on an industrial scale - and sell images created by centuries of artists for private profit and to programme software to make automated 'art' An image generated by software is not art. It's an emulation of human expression. It's a blended lie. AI may provide some intelligent solutions to issues that big business and medicine can sell to the population, but it's legacy will likely be detrimental to the average person's life. The more you can take humans out of the operations of business, the more efficient it will be.

Why is creative expression so very important to you?

The first system of expression by human beings were marks made with charcoal on walls in caves, about 60,000 years ago. Without the ability to express ourselves, our feelings and our thoughts, we are muted. During World War II humans who had lost their freedom to Facism were slaves. If we loose our freedom of expression, we have sleepwalked into that place.

Would you describe your practice as inherently political?

I am simply willing to take the work where my conscience tells me to. It isn't possible to make art about the human journey, without examining the politics of what we are doing. The part that most people miss is that the work is also about the politics of making art. There were very few artists making work about political issues twenty years ago. Artists who did this were the outliers, the 'stray cats'. Now, most art is politically affected and topical. The mainstream art world is increasingly forced to deal with the desire of artists to examine politics, or be left behind.

To find out more about the artist visit [pierssecunda.com](https://pierssecunda.com)



Smoke In The Forest, 2024, Amazon rainforest charcoal ink on paper. Courtesy of Piers Secunda





Cherry Coke Throat, 2023, oil on linen, courtesy of Jamie Gallagher

# SOUL ASYLUM

Jamie Gallagher on art as therapy  
and abstract notions of selfhood

Interview by John-Paul Pryor



Jamie Gallagher brings a comprehensive knowledge of colour theory and composition to his visceral and contorted portraits, developed in his 20-year career as an artistic director. This allows him to enact a push-and-pull between figurative and expressionist forms which reflect the root of his practice – a pursuit of introspection. Born in Edinburgh, Gallagher splits his time between his studio in rural Herefordshire, and Toronto, where he runs a creative agency. He didn't begin painting until around 2015, a time in which the loss of a close friend, a painter, inspired him to turn to the medium as a means of processing grief. For Gallagher, painting became therapy: the materiality and process a welcome vehicle for simultaneously exploring both the medium and his mind. A deep connection with the materials and tactility of the process feed the work — From the heavy impasto oils and raw, textured linens to delicate gold leaf, diamond dust and bleeding inks — each mark is instinctive, each image forged during the process rather than conceived in advance. Here, he takes us on a journey into abstraction, beauty and the vagaries of the human soul.

What made you change career and become an artist?

I lost a close friend to cancer back in 2017 that had worked with me in my design studio. He was a fine artist, and we'd always talked about starting to paint again, so, after he passed, I took a small studio in an old mill and started to paint – I guess it was a tribute, of sorts. Two years later, I lost another close friend in the same way, and it was at this stage that I realised I was using the painting to process the grief, and as a form of therapy. I've used it in this way every since. I would describe my work as figurative expressionism. I'm trying to capture the human condition in a visceral and unsettling way. Through the distorted

forms and fragmented figures, I'm exploring the tension between reality and the subconscious, inviting viewers to confront the complexities of their own identity, emotion, and corporeality, but, at the same time, making entirely self-indulgent work.

What fascinates you about the abstraction of form?

My process is all about considered mark making, which is heavily influenced by abstract expressionism, but the intent is to create images that provoke the viewer to impose their own experiences upon them – I think figuration is the best way to enable that. As humans we naturally look for our likeness in abstraction – we project our experiences and emotions onto images that we instinctively relate to. I find this interaction fascinating. My work is intensely personal, born of my personal experience, yet someone else experiencing it has a similarly personal reaction, completely unaware of mine. This is why the balance between abstraction and figuration is important to my work, walking that line has been in my work from the start, navigating clarity and ambiguity.

How do notions of beauty play out in your work?

My work can be quite grotesque on first look, but, for me, the beauty is in the materials and the details. I want the viewer to get in close to really experience the thick sculptural jewels of paint, the marbling and texture – these strokes are very considered and highly abstract when you get up-close-and-personal. I love people to interact by physically moving back and forth when they view the work, enjoying the abstract clusters of individual beautiful elements that, as a whole, may create a darker, visceral, even vulgar image.

Why is painting and creative expression so important to you?

Painting is a hugely important part of my life and my balance, it's become the way I process everything in my life, from stress to trauma, difficult decisions and finding a way forward. The work is produced in a very instinctive way without a plan of the final image – embracing accidents. When the work is finished, and I step back and really spend time with it, whatever I was working through subconsciously while the work was being created becomes clear to me. That's the reason naming the work is so important. The names may seem obtuse, but they are a breadcrumb trail to take me back to what I worked through in the creation. This interplay of instinctive mark making and slow rationalisation allows me to express the inexpressible, not painting what I've seen, but what I've felt.

What for you is ultimately the purpose of art?

For me, the purpose of art is to provoke a response – how much or little an artist chooses to control that response is up to them, but it's ultimately got to be the objective. I've had people contact me saying my work made them cry, which is quite a shocking thing to hear. People bringing their own experiences to the work was something that really spurred me on to create more in the early days – the first few works I sold were to an army psychologist working with soldiers with PTSD, a cancer patient with a fresh diagnosis who felt connected with a very challenging piece, and a gentleman who had experienced abuse from the Catholic Church. All three of these people reacted instantly to certain works, came and purchased the pieces from me directly. Each of them spent a good few hours talking and sharing their experiences with me – witnessing these experiences and connections, I find very humbling as a painter.

Find out more about the artist at [jamiegallagher.co.uk](http://jamiegallagher.co.uk)



Bubblegum Cortex, 2023, oil on linen, courtesy of Jamie Gallagher



# STARSTRUCK

## Las Vegas artist Matthew Samson on creating art with meteorite dust and the mindbending nature of time

Interview by John-Paul Pryor



*Matthew Samson is a self-taught artist from Las Vegas who creates thoughtful three-dimensional canvases from materials that are more than four billion years old. For over ten years, he has been creating his work from ancient meteorites, which contain some of the oldest known elements in the Universe. Here, we discuss the philosophy behind his work, which incorporates cosmology, mysticism and poetry – exploring quantum entanglement and what it means to be alive.*

*What would you say essentially drives you as a visual artist?*

I would just describe myself as very inquisitive, and collecting data every day through experiences – questioning our human existence. As an artist, you are participating in this world and thereby creating works of art based on all the information you have gathered – that's the process of creation. All of us are creative beings, for sure, but some of us have a drive to put it onto canvas or sculpture – to get that self-expression out, and then put it out into the world

*What is the work like that you are bringing to exhibit at StART KX?*

I am bringing four different pieces, each from a different series. There will be one from my *Portal* series, one from my *Fall, Wind And Stars* series, one from my *Sunflower* series, and one from my *Shadow Figures* series. The stardust idea came about one night when I was walking my dogs and saw shooting star, and I thought,

'I want to work with that, and that is landing somewhere!' I started making phone calls the next day and found a gentleman that's been in the meteorite business for over 25 years. I started working with him to acquire the stardust, and it took me about a year experimenting with it – making small little sculptures – to get the right ratio combination of stardust and resin, and then start using it on canvas. That was a process that then led me to my emulsion, which is a combination of stardust, marble dust and paint mixed up together, then applied on canvas. The way it ends up looking is a little like terraforming – similar to when you see lava cooling into rock.

*What fascinates you about working with meteorites?*

Well, beside working with the meteorite dust I love working with nature. I started working with real sunflowers. I would submerge them into my emulsion over and over, until they became encased, and then use those for sculpture pieces, or even apply to them on canvases. I also have these beautiful sycamore trees in my neighborhood, so I started collecting the dried leaves every winter and then submerging those into my emulsion and applying those on canvas, which became the series *Fall, Wind & Stars*. At this point, when I go for my walk, I'm always paying attention of what else I can work with and submerge in my emulsion.

*What interests you about how we perceive time?*

Man has had to construct time so that we can function in daily society, but when you read material from theoretical scientists, there is no 'time' because everything is happening simultaneously. However, we have to use it to wrap our heads around trying to explain the universe. It's amazing that the meteorite that I'm using is estimated between four to five billion years old. The fact is that we are made up of stardust, so we're all billions of years old, and when you stop to think about that, it gets interesting. So, to be self-aware and pay attention to how we're thinking, and feeling with everything around us is important – just knowing that everything you come into contact with and touch came from inside of a star can connect us. I think one of the main things that I would like people to take away from seeing my work is to realise how truly connected we all are, and maybe take a pause and remember to be kind to everyone, because we all come from the same source. Ultimately, you have to let the individual interpret the work for themselves and let them take away whatever thoughts and feelings came into them from that piece of art – there is no wrong or right, it's just the emotion that's flowing from them. Art gives life meaning and we get to view the art through the lens of all different type of minds. We are all creators, even if you don't physically do something with your thoughts, you are still creating in your mind and putting it out into the universe.

Find out more about the artist at [matthewsamsonart.com](http://matthewsamsonart.com)



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