

CALIFORNIA LEAF™

THE PSYCHEDELIA ISSUE

COVER ART BY
ALEX GREY & ALLYSON GREY
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW INSIDE

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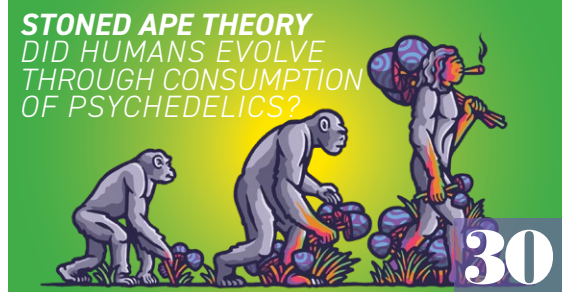
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EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW WITH
VISIONARY ART
POWER COUPLE
ALEX GREY &
ALLYSON GREY

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ABOUT THE COVER

EVER SINCE THE LEAF first started doing a Psychedelia Issue, whenever we discussed who should be interviewed or featured on the cover, one name has always topped our wish list: Alex Grey. Alex and his wife Allyson are, in our minds, the greatest visionary artists alive today—and anyone who's seen their work up close (especially under the influence of entheogens!) knows why. The custom image the Greys crafted for our cover is actually a mash-up of two works of art: Alex's "CannaFist" and Allyson's "New Order 2." We are honored to have their sensational art gracing our cover and to have an exclusive interview with them inside. Thanks to Alex, Allyson, and their entire team for sharing their genius with us.

ART by ALEX GREY & ALLYSON GREY
@ALEXGREYCOSM | @ALLYSONGREYCOSM

WES ABNEY

EDITOR'S NOTE

Thanks for picking up the Psychedelia Issue of the Leaf!

While I didn't listen to my DARE instructors about Cannabis, or a few other fun substances in college, one warning I always believed in through my college years was to beware of psychedelics. We had all heard the stories of the friend who took 10 hits of acid and wasn't the same, or the horror stories of eating the wrong mushroom and dying. To be fair, these are true warnings – and I took them seriously until one fateful winter night.

I'd finally decided to indulge in magic mushrooms, and unknowingly ate about three grams of blue-tinged caps (this was before identification of mushrooms or weed strains was common) and proceeded to have an epic melt at a house party. I don't remember much, except for walking around a house with a container of Quaker Oatmeal, repeatedly asking people, "Why is the Quaker Oats man so happy?" I also reportedly ate a lot of raw oats.

Needless to say, this wasn't my idea of a typical college party night and I went back to my weed smoking ways for nearly a decade, with the memory of eating too many mushrooms burned into my brain as a powerful warning against psychedelics.

Fast forward to my 29th birthday and I had tickets to see the Terracotta Warriors Exhibit at the Seattle Science Center on Friday, and chose to indulge in a little LSD at the suggestion of close friends. Standing in the immersive Augmented Reality exhibit with amazing color-changing, motion-triggered exhibits while in the presence of the 2,250-plus-year-old warriors gave me a feeling of connection unlike anything I'd ever felt. It was transcendental, and I knew in that moment I would have a new relationship with psychedelics. I felt connected to the past and present in a whole new way, which was heightened by the presence of ancient talismans meant to protect the Chinese Emperor in the afterlife. The experience changed my frame of reference in many ways, especially in regards to opening my mind and consciousness to new experiences.

Since that fateful trip I've had the pleasure of unlearning the DARE propaganda, and also ignoring the wooks at festivals offering drugs – instead finding a happy medium between research and controlled experiences, with much intention into the set, setting and those around me as I opened my mind with psilocybin, LSD and DMT in ceremonies that have had major benefit in my life. I went from scared to take a substance (for many good reasons) to being scared not to challenge my own frame of reference while confronting the issue of consciousness and my place in the universe. Today, that fear is what drives me to explore the final frontier of psychedelic therapies and substances.

Over 2,000 years ago, Socrates famously said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." I believe that wholeheartedly, and that the use of entheogenic plants is a way to explore one's life in a way that should be part of everyone's life experience. We have but a short time on this planet, and finding peace and meaning within the journey will help us to find peace when we reach the destination. While I don't plan to go out like Aldous Huxley, I have learned from his writings and plan to be in a happy place when my brain releases DMT for the final time, as I pass into the great beyond. On that note, check out Dan Vinkovetsky's piece on the use of psychedelics for easing fears at the end of one's life, page 40-41.

I hope my words can inspire those with fear about psychedelics (or life itself) to explore, learn and live in the moment – and that this amazing Psychedelia Issue put together by our amazing Leaf team can be an inspiration and guide to your future experiences. Thanks for reading, and please share the Leaf!

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-Wes Abney

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THE ART OF TRANSCENDENCE

The Leaf gets inside the heads of visionary art power couple **Alex Grey & Allyson Grey** to find out what effects Cannabis and psychedelics have had on their art, spiritual beliefs, and lives.

INTERVIEW *by* BOBBY BLACK @BOBBYBLACK420/LEAF NATION

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ince its emergence in the late 1960s, psychedelic culture has continued to grow, evolve and express itself – primarily through music and art. And over the past few decades, no psychedelic artists have achieved higher notoriety or had a more meaningful impact on our culture than Alex Grey & Allyson Grey.



ALEX & ALLYSON AT THE CHAPEL OF SACRED MIRRORS - HUDSON VALLEY, NY.

Together, they comprise a psychedelic power couple regarded by many as spiritual leaders with an almost cult-like status.

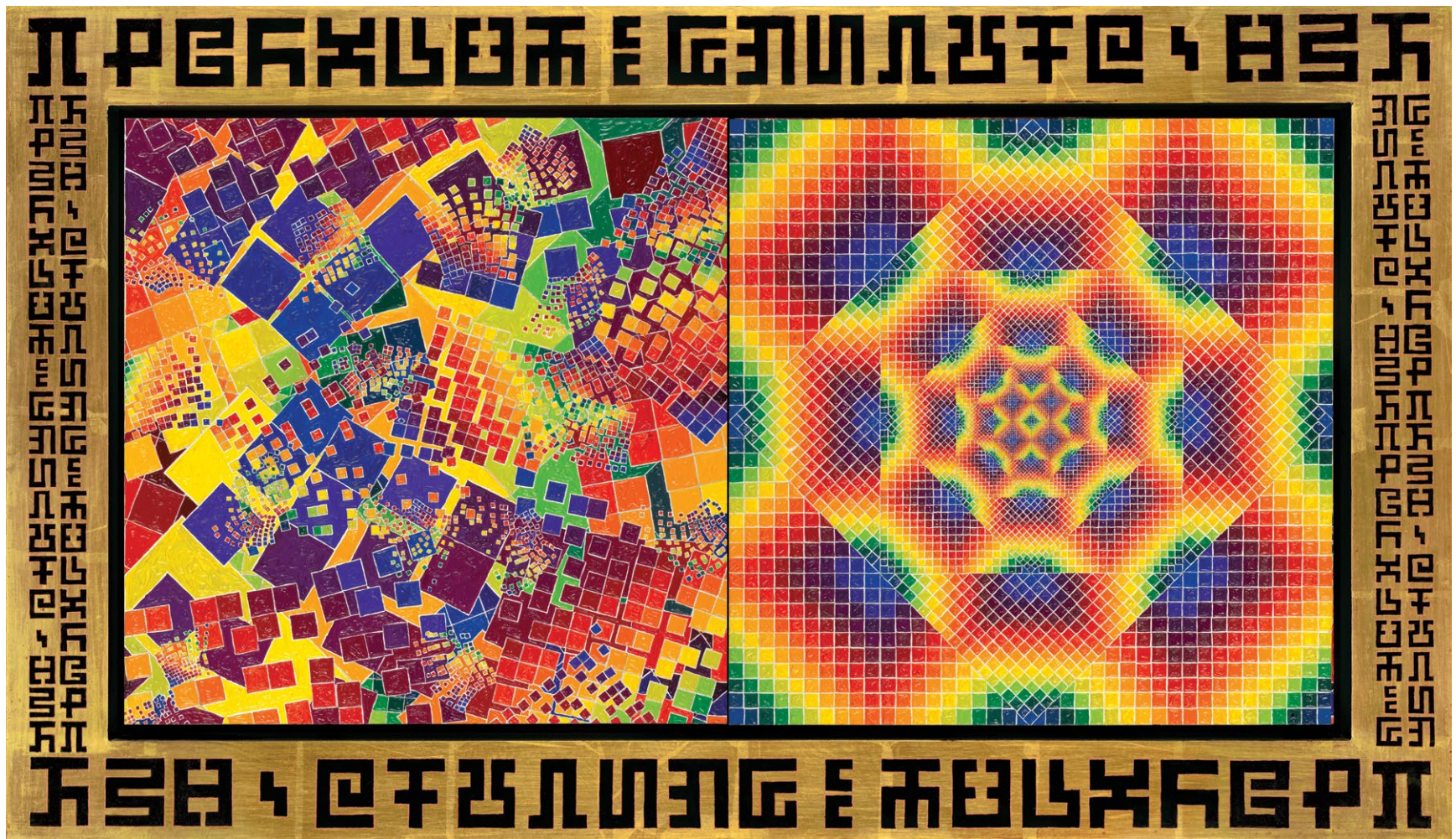
I first met the Greys at the Cannabis Cup in 1998, and our paths have continued to cross ever since. I attended one of their earliest Full Moon gatherings at their apartment in Brooklyn, blazed with them in Amsterdam, tripped out in their tent at Burning Man, and visited the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, or CoSM – their temple/art gallery in NYC – countless times. Yet, I'd never had the pleasure of interviewing them ... until now.

BEST KNOWN to many through his collaborations with the progressive metal band Tool, Alex's art is a spectacular synthesis of love, light, birth, death, rebirth and beyond. His imagery penetrates the psycho-spiritual strata of existence – peeling back the superficial surfaces and exposing the auras and energies that surround us, vibrating and pulsating when viewed through one's third eye.

The same is true of his soulmate, Allyson. In contrast to Alex's anatomical style, Allyson's art is abstract – tapping into the sacred geometry of the cosmos to utilize fractals, symbols and mathematical patterns to develop her own secret, sacred language.



"CANNABIS SUTRA" BY ALEX GREY, 2007



"CHAOS, ORDER, & SECRET WRITING" BY ALLYSON GREY, 2009

Was your desire to become an artist innate, or did something happen in your life that made you consciously decide to become an artist? *Allyson:*

Teachers and peers recognized both of us, at an early age, as artists. That foundational encouragement gave us our artistic identities. Growing up, we both won awards for our art, exhibited our work, and were leaders in school.

Alex: My father introduced me to drawing as an infant. I would watch faces and creatures emerge from the tip of his pencil, and I'd dance in amazement. He activated something that may have been part of my past lives.

How did you meet and fall in love? *Alex:* We met in art school in 1974, in a class on Performance Art, Mixed Media and Conceptual Art. Throughout art school, we continued to create performance installations and paint collaboratively.

Your work has inspired a great many people ... but who inspired you? *Allyson:* As early as high school, abstract expressionists Jackson Pollack and Helen Frankenthaler influenced me, as well as minimalist Sol Lewitt and mixed media creator Lucas Samaras.

Alex: Michelangelo was always my favorite artist. After taking LSD, I discovered visionary artists who drew inspiration from psychedelic experience, like Ernst Fuchs, Mati Klarwein, William Blake and Jean Delville. But Allyson has been the most inspiring and influential artist in my life.

It's often said that the best art arises from suffering ... does that adage hold any truth for you?

Alex: Buddhism teaches that life is suffering. Everyone suffers. We love our life – the highs and the lows. My art has embraced hopefulness as well as depression and difficult challenges, both personal and global.

Allyson: My art reflects an inner world – a spectral psychedelic vision and an essentialized worldview that is both bright and dark.

Alex – your work has reached a broader audience thanks to your collaborations with Tool. Tell us a little about that relationship. *Alex:*

Adam Jones came to my 1999 exhibit in a Santa Monica gallery, and we became friends. Adam invited my work to be part of three amazing albums: *Lateralus*, *10,000 Days*, and the astonishingly prescient *Fear Inoculum*. Over the past 21 years, I've designed stage sets, music video collaborations, posters and merchandise to accompany their tours ... I even painted a drum set for Danny Carey. The members of Tool and their fans have been some of the greatest forces in supporting CoSM. Inside Entheon is a Tool shrine with some cool relics, including a bronze sculpture by Adam, samples of Maynard's wines, a wrap of the drum design and many photos, posters and preliminary drawings for the art that became associated with Tool. They are masterful musicians and it's been an inspiration to work with them.

Describe your first experience with Cannabis. *Allyson:* My sister and her friend got me stoned just before I went off to college at age 17. It was unpleasant, and I had to sleep it off. Almost as soon as I left home, I moved out of my dorm room and into an

apartment with hash dealers. We smoked every day, and I remember laughing my ass off listening to Firesign Theater.

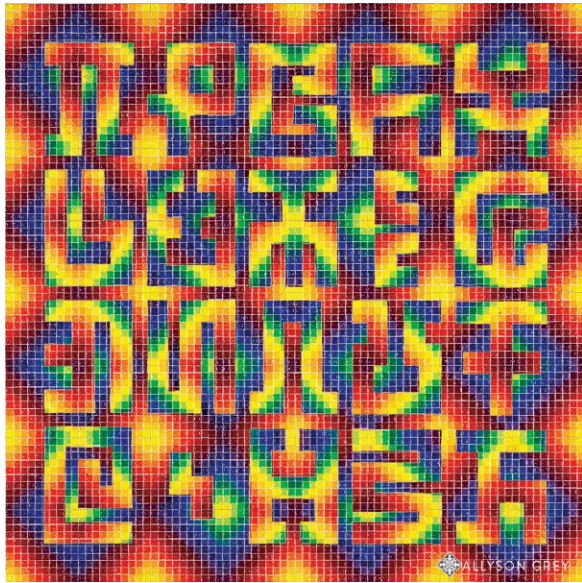
Alex: At 18, on my way to my first music festival featuring Mountain and Traffic.

How often do you use Cannabis? Is it a part of your creative process? *Alex:* Until Covid, we used it daily and often. It has been part of our creative process, but we've also created art stone-cold sober for years at a time.

When did you first try psychedelics and what was your experience like? *Allyson:* My first trip was at age 17 on the campus of NYU with my high school boyfriend. It was supposedly mescaline in pill form, but I suspect it was actually LSD. We walked about 70 blocks down 5th Avenue talking about our experiences and life. After that, I was privileged to experience LSD regularly and often for about three years – Orange Sunshine, Purple Haze, Owsley acid, and others.

Alex: My first trip was in Allyson's apartment in 1975. Wary of my mental health, I waited until I was 21. That day I had asked God to give me a sign that I should go on living. That evening on the way to Allyson's party, I was offered LSD mixed into a bottle of Kahlua. I drank half the bottle and when Allyson met us at the door, I handed her the other half of the bottle. I sat for hours, not speaking to anyone, envisioning a pearlescent spinning tunnel. I was in the dark, spiraling toward the light. The light was God, and that became my path. It was my first night with Allyson – that has lasted all these years. *INTERVIEW CONTINUES >>*

THE ART OF TRANSCENDENCE



"THE LIZARD KING" BY ALLYSON GREY, 2011



"NET OF BEING" BY ALEX GREY, 2007

How would your art and lives be different if you'd never taken psychedelics? *Alex:* It cured my suicidal ideation. Without meeting spirit, I don't know if I'd be alive today.

Allyson: For three years, I took LSD with friends and alone – climbing a mountain, people watching, and on bicycle excursions. Every journey was evolutionary and self-revelatory. In 1971, I read the book "Be Here Now" by Ram Dass and tried taking LSD solo in a dark room. In that journey, I saw Secret Writing – the cryptic language of the divine. It transformed me and my artwork. Until I met Alex three years after, I dared not share the meaning of my secret body of art.

Allyson – can your "secret writing" be translated and comprehended, or is it purely an abstract expression of imagination? *Allyson:* Secret Language in my art is an ineffable and untranslatable language of creative expression coming directly from my personal vision. They were made visible to me in the psychedelic state. Their meaning comes from the divine, the force some call God.

What does "God" mean to you?

Allyson: God is faceless. God is ineffable, beyond physicality or description – a force in all beings and things. Any guru will tell you that God is within.

Alex: God is an experience that, once known, cannot be unknown. God is beyond conceptions. The divine

is a transcendental force animating all life and the creative intelligence that birthed the cosmos.

Is there one religious tradition you relate to most, and why? *Alex:* Born

into a family of Methodists, I saw Christ as my first spiritual friend. After meeting Allyson, I began studying Tibetan Buddhism in the late '70s – a connection that has strengthened for decades. Having studied the mystic traditions, I find connections between them all.

Allyson: Since Alex began studying Buddhism, I've learned and appreciated a great deal in the wisdom of that tradition. Decades ago, we had the privilege of studying with the Dalai Lama at Harvard Divinity School. It is our regular practice to read to each other from Tibetan Buddhist texts each morning after yoga and meditation.

But I grew up in the Jewish tradition, which most resonates with my psychedelic experience. God's message is transferred through writing in all the major religions, and in Judaism – where graven imagery of God is prohibited – the Torah and libraries of commentary are the most revered works of influence.

How did you first conceive of the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors? *Allyson:*

The Chapel of Sacred Mirrors (CoSM) was inspired by a 1978 collaborative performance called *Life Energy* that included Alex's life-sized ink drawings

of the human anatomy. After noticing the popularity of these charts within the performance, I suggested painting an entire series of life-sized paintings that would include the systems of the human body, mind and spirit.

Alex: In 1984, a collector who was interested in purchasing the series gifted us two doses of MDMA, then legal. Three days later, we took MDMA for the first time and envisioned the series as an installation that included sculpted pictorial frames in a public psychedelic space. Within months we began sculpting and casting the 21, 10.5-foot frames for the paintings that became the Sacred Mirrors.

When did the "Chapel" part enter the picture? *Alex:* CoSM became a

nonprofit organization in 1996 with the following mission: 'To build an enduring sanctuary of visionary art to uplift a global community.' In 2002, a shaman advised us to begin hosting Full Moon ceremonies and pray with friends for the advancement of that mission. The first CoSM Full Moon ceremony was held in our Brooklyn loft in January 2003. There has since been an unbroken chain of 244 Full Moon ceremonies to date.

Allyson: On Easter Sunday, April 20th, 2003, a landlord offered us a raw industrial space on 27th Street in New York to hold ceremonies and events. By August 2004, the CoSM spiritual creative center was open – offering exhibition space for the

"LSD HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUR FAVORITE. IT OFFERS THE LONGEST AND MOST VISUAL JOURNEY. WE'VE ENJOYED MANY PSILOCYBIN EXPERIENCES AND HAVE PARTICIPATED IN NUMEROUS AYAHUASCA CEREMONIES IN THE PAST FEW DECADES."

–ALEX GREY



"FLESH OF THE GODS" BY ALEX GREY, 2021



An artist rendering of the soon-to-be-completed ENTHEON—the Greys' 12,000-square-foot temple/gallery, which will host the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors (below), galleries of both of their artwork, and rotating art from the International Visionary Art movement.



Sacred Mirrors and many of our other works, a rotating exhibit of works by other visionary artists, a dance studio, an event space, offices and a gift shop. But five years into our lease, a new landlord threatened to quadruple our rent. We realized that our 'enduring sanctuary' needed a secure home and would be better suited to a tranquil environment in nature. Fortunately, Alex found the perfect location – a small retreat on 40 wooded acres, 65 miles up the Hudson River from Manhattan in Wappinger, New York.

Alex: The property features eight restored buildings, including a 10-bedroom house to accommodate guests and an old carriage house that's been transformed into a 12,000-square-foot exhibition space called Entheon. A sanctuary of vision-



"SECRET WALLS #1"
BY ALLYSON GREY, 1976

ary art, Entheon – which is set to open soon – will host the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, galleries of both our art, and an annually rotating exhibit of the International Visionary Art movement.

In recent years, it feels like dark forces have been ascendant in this

country and around the world.

What, if anything, can we do to reverse this tide and move things back toward the light? *Allyson:* As

darkness gets darker, light appears brighter. That's what we can do – be a beacon of light. Creativity and compassion can make our tiny corner of the universe a better place by being the best we can be, through eco-consciousness and our acceptance of differences. Be kind, and if only for your own benefit, love everyone.



"CANNABACCHUS" BY ALEX GREY, 2006

IN 1971, I READ THE BOOK "BE HERE NOW" BY RAM DASS AND TRIED TAKING LSD SOLO IN A DARK ROOM. IN THAT JOURNEY, I SAW SECRET WRITING – THE CRYPTIC LANGUAGE OF THE DIVINE. IT TRANSFORMED ME AND MY ARTWORK." -ALLYSON GREY

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