



Art & Ideas is a promotional newsletter featuring the art and process of a creative community by expanding critical thinking and imagination. Specifically, this newsletter provides an opportunity to better understand the motivation and meaning behind the subjects, medium and style of local artists. Thank you for reading.



In this issue:

Hot Topics
 Hot Creative: Alan Brash
 More on Moral Injury:
 Bullshit and Nerve



Technical Corner
 Evening Lighting and
 Looseness



Events & Shows
 Philadelphia Erotic Gallery
 Hyatt Centric
 Philadelphia Stories
 Petchalonis Dental
 From Darkness to Madness

HOT TOPICS - Hot Creative: Alan Brash – Feeling Weight of Lived Experiences

I met several fellow artists on a similar path as my own at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) Open Studio course “Big Heids” in the summer of 2024. Bonding over large portraiture and wisdom from our Glaswegian mentor (Alan Wilson), our group consisted of many lovely and talented people with productive careers behind us – now making art on a regular basis. As two openly gay students on the course, Alan Brash and I had discussions about motivation, message, darkness and reactions to making and experiencing art. Since then, he has earned his Master of Letters in Fine Art from GSA and has been featured by Artmag in their coverage of GSA’s Post Graduate degree show in 2025. <https://artmag.co.uk/meeting-the-glasgow-postgrads-at-2025-gsa-showcase/>. As I work through my own creative process, conversations with people like Alan help push me to think deeper in confronting my beliefs, fears and accomplishments and translating those to canvas therefore boosting my practice. Responses to a set of interview questions from Alan are provided below in a pure form to preserve his authenticity and eloquence.

Q: What are your favorite visual elements in appreciating or creating art and why?

A: Message / Meaning - Above all else, I want a painting to say something. My work is rooted in lived experience — queer identity, memory, shame, and resilience — and I need the viewer to feel that weight, not just observe it. **Colour** - Colour does emotional work that words often can't. I use bold colour blocks alongside subtler tonal shifts to signal mood, vulnerability, and defiance. The interplay between warm and cool, saturated and muted, carries much of the emotional tension of a piece.



Alan Brash, *Resilience*

Symbolic Objects - Colour in my work is symbolic as well as visual. Blue signals conscious reasoning; yellow, optimism and open-mindedness; green, comfort and assurance; white, submission. These choices are not decorative — they are a reading system, inviting the viewer to move beyond the surface of the image and into the psychological state of the figure. Objects carry meaning in the same way. The recurring floral cushion that appears in both *Don't Dream It, Be It...* and *Unforeseen Consequences* represents a tropical homeland, the paradise of possibility, and the breadth of the world available to us — memory, aspiration and place held within a single painted object. I also use exaggerated space within the composition, allowing the figure to breathe and pause for introspection. In *Resilience*, the figure stands isolated in the vastness of the landscape, and that space does as much work as the paint.



Alan Brash, *Don't Dream It, Be It*



Alan Brash, *Unforeseen Consequences*

Q: Why do you create art? Please describe your motivation. A: *I create art because I need to.* Growing up as a gay man during the late 1970s and 1980s in the UK meant navigating a double life — shaped by societal and political forces that actively sought to suppress queer lives through shame and rigid ideals of masculinity and family. In the UK, the 1980s saw legislation (Section 28, 1988, repealed in Scotland on 21 June 2000) that explicitly prohibited the discussion of gay relationships in schools and public life — a deliberate act of state-sponsored erasure. For decades I carried the internalised shame that produced. Now, later in life, painting has become the means by which I examine it, process it, and let it go. **It is an act of reclamation — of self, of story, and of space.** The studio is genuinely my happy place: a place where I can be honest — with the work and with myself.

Q: What messages or meaning are you hoping to convey through making art? At the core of my work is the question of what it means to simply exist as who you are — but my most recent paintings push that further, into the territory of **how identity is negotiated** even within love. *Don't Dream It, Be It...* shows my partner on our sofa, his body folding inward while the cushions flare outward — aspirations held in check, desire perhaps quietly eclipsed by devotion to another. In *Unforeseen Consequences*, I painted myself on the same sofa, unconsciously gripping and distorting that same floral cushion — a gesture I didn't plan, but which asked a difficult question: is this a metaphor for the damaging compromise that can exist even inside a loving relationship? These two paintings together suggest that knowing who you are isn't something you settle once. Even inside love, that question keeps coming back.

Q: What is unique about you as an artist? Several things distinguish my practice. First, **my work is deeply autobiographical** — not as confession, but as a structured, considered body of work tracing the arc of a queer life: from private self-awareness through compromise and resilience, and into a hard won domestic ease. Second, I came to formal postgraduate study at the Glasgow School of Art later in life, which means **my paintings carry the weight of lived experience rather than purely academic exploration.** That shift in timing changes everything about what ends up on the canvas. Third, **my figures are either anonymised or self-portraits** — a deliberate strategy that shifts between emotional distance and direct self-examination, giving the viewer a way in while I stay close to the personal truth of it. ArtMag UK observed that my figures are "frequently caught in moments of stillness — nude or semi-dressed, alone or in intimate domestic settings — evoking both presence and absence".

With decades of life experience behind him, creatives like Alan often share deep messages told through compelling art of an elevated quality. His paintings are large and make an immediate impact, but I am more drawn into the intellectual explanation of his creative process. For example, he describes symbolic impressions of four dominant colors above to convey a method for viewing telling a deeper story and sharing with us more of who he is (*blue, conscious reasoning; yellow, optimism and open-mindedness; green, comfort and assurance; white, submission*). With this information, I look more closely at these colors to follow his intention in his paintings but also to ponder what color might symbolize in my own work. I am convinced that great art needs an accompanying narrative from the artist. We pour much of ourselves into the ideas and countless decisions made in the production of a body of work often inaccessible to the viewer. It is with deliberate intention that this newsletter shares some of this creative information from art makers to enthusiasts. Want more of Alan? I know I do. Visit: www.tealcreatives.co.uk and <https://tealcreatives.co.uk/exhibitions/pgds-2025.php>

More on Moral Injury: Bullshit and Nerve

As I have written about life in the United States in 2025, I have been even more shocked by what 2026 has brought. The current federal administration continues to promote a white, Christian, straight agenda that preys on a predominantly uneducated population easily manipulated by fear and propaganda. Policies that are against immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, women's health, global relationships and scientific accomplishments violate my moral compass as a physician, but also as a person with compassion for others living in the 21st century. More insulting is the violation of law and failure to prosecute and pursue justice. The deaths of people in ICE detention, killings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis and the uninvestigated sex crimes contained in the Epstein files are examples of ongoing gross injustices that make living each day in the US difficult. Added to this we are experiencing the normalization of insults and bullying from the White House and their Project 2025 emboldened circus.

The conduct by American leadership over the past 17 months can be a triggering factor for some of us who experienced bullying in our lives. I credit many members of Congress who continue to call out these behaviors and injustices on behalf of the people, but sadly there has been no authority to ensure justice and punish this ongoing cruel and criminal behavior.



Steven J. Alles, *Time and Attention*. Oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

Put downs and insults were a routine part of growing up for me from members within my own family. A military grandfather often called my brother and I "mary" during our childhood when our feelings were hurt. He had an extensive wood shop however he never engaged us in the creativity of this space, which I am sure my brother and I would have enjoyed immensely. Worse than this was the lack of defense to these intentional insults and behaviors from anyone - not my father, mother, older brother or grandmother. While these examples may seem small - the silence from my parents was much worse as it sent

a message to us to believe the insults lowering our self-worth. My brother, closest in age, and I went through an incredible amount of self-discovery as we became adults to work through these difficulties and the trauma we experienced. Growing up and finding oneself is hard enough, but what made it worse was to experience this type of pain and to not have an adult address or correct it. The above painting “*Time and Attention*” describes my childhood family dynamic (my brother and I enjoying a ride on the far right). My fiercest look in drag is interrupting the scene separating the joy from my father and other brother on the birth of his first daughter. This painting symbolizes calling out the neglect and unfair treatment I received from my father compared to an older straight brother who received praise and continuous attention throughout his life.

I was a naïve child. This naïveté caused me to believe the adults surrounding me on all issues, including proper conduct and religion. I simply did not ask questions, was not encouraged to question, and because of this it never occurred to me to even question important ideas. My mother was a psychiatric nurse who worked every weekend. As promised, my father would take my brother and I to Catholic school on Saturdays and mass on Sundays and then leave us there on our own. From the ages of 7 to 11, I remember the confusion in seeing whole families of my neighbors at church, but neither parent of mine was there with us. Clearly my father did not support the teachings of Catholicism, and this odd dynamic was simply never discussed. Again, there was no communication and more avoidance of addressing important behaviors. My parents divorced soon after this time. As I grew into a young adult, I became more confused by the lack of evidence for God and Christian teachings, and this notion of *faith* sounded more and more as something you’d say to children to control their behavior. During the early years of the AIDS epidemic, Evangelical leaders claimed the disease was punishment for homosexual behavior, one even claiming that scientists were lying when they declared that HIV could be spread heterosexually. That actual scientists would lie about these claims sounded false, and as a young gay man with a profound interest in the truth, I studied biological sciences in college and ultimately attended and graduated from medical school. After a Masters in Epidemiology and a 30 year medical career behind me, I feel as though I have a

good understanding of how the world works.



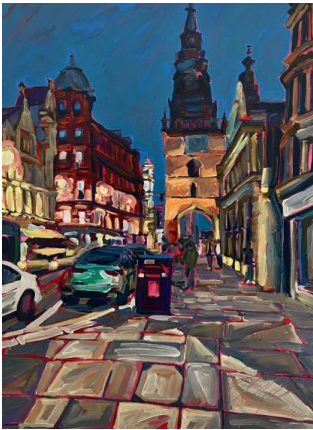
Steven J. Alles, *Instincts and Perseverance*
Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"

We don’t start out as critical thinkers in this world, and without encouragement to question and reason, we can grow into adults easily manipulated by loud mouths and propaganda. Trauma and injustice were the catalyst for me to question and work on developing my own critical thinking abilities. In *Instincts and Perseverance*, my journey through Catholicism, education, and higher reasoning are represented as I am the subject three times; a catholic boy in the lower left, a college graduate in the lower right, and a fierce drag queen seeing through the bullshit. The upper right depicts a former church converted into a pub in Glasgow’s West End; a haven for an intellectual and generous community.

Both paintings combine images from my childhood and adult lives with a fierce drag queen. It takes enormous courage and nerve to dress in drag and go out in public as I did to promote STD testing and prevention at Pride events during my public health career. This is the determination we need in today’s political climate in the States as we continue to experience malice and injustice from our own leadership. Parents could take lessons from drag queens – mine certainly should have. Drag queens are a threat to the MAGA movement. This is true not because of the expression of gender fluidity, but because of the intelligent creative power and toughness drag queens possess to fight back.

TECHNICAL CORNER: Evening Lighting and Looseness

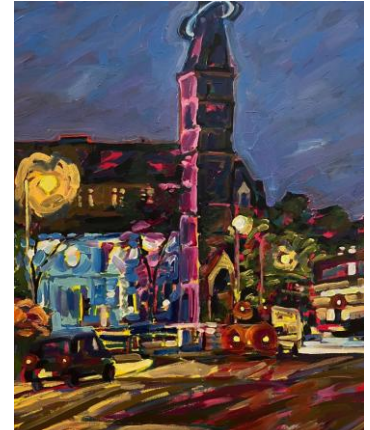
Scotland has extremely long days in early summer and a prolonged period of dusk where last light of the day is observable past 11:00PM. Even on cloudy days, it is remarkable how the sky often clears in the evening revealing a diffuse glow from a combination of the setting sun and city lights. In gearing up for my exhibit in Glasgow for 2026 (From Darkness to Madness), I painted a set of cityscapes from some of my favorite places during those evening hours.



Trongate, 30" x 24"



Kelvinbridge, 24" x 36"



Oran Mor, 30" x 24"

Let's start with the sky. There is a musky blue tone to the evening sky above Glasgow that I represented with medium tones of cerulean and cobalt. Land and cities reflect light and so it was a simple move to keep a more intense pure blue where sky meets land as I did in the first two scenes above. For the Oran Mor scene, I added subtle shades of browns and oranges mixed with blue to give a more muted tone along the building edge suggesting some cloud cover. Adding a purple/grey tone to all three skies I believe added a density consistent with evening humidity that is often the case in western Scotland.

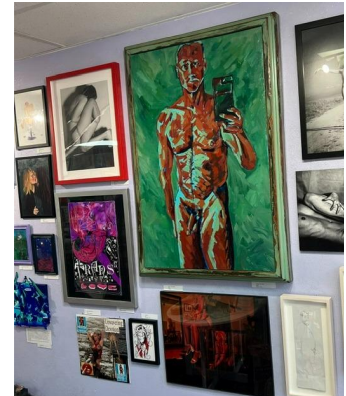
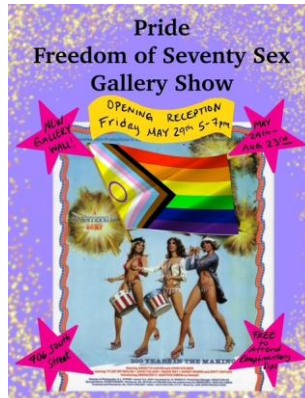
City lighting provides many opportunities to use color to represent reflection and to vary intensity. It is relatively easy to select colors consistent with the hue of the streetlights, vehicle lights, and reflections. The shape of the brush strokes was dictated by the shape of the light or object I was painting. For example, streetlights and car lights are round, so I used quick concentric brush strokes to represent the aura emanating from the light source. This is where I kept it quick. Paint was applied very fast using an intuitive movement to simulate the shape of the reflection or object. The faster and wetter I went, the more successful I found this approach. Below are close ups from the paintings above that showcase this technique. I will be storing this method away for the future when appropriate and will challenge myself to use it again for other inquiries (perhaps in future still life paintings).



EVENTS & SHOWS

Philadelphia Erotic Gallery (PEG) and Sex Museum: Freedom of Seventy-Sex – 706 South Street, Philadelphia (May 29 – August 23)

Located in the vibrant community of east South Street, The Philadelphia Erotic Gallery and Sex Museum has on display: Freedom of Seventy-Sex – a collection of tasteful art expressing human joy. Coloring books, stained glass, ceramics, drawings, paintings, greeting cards and postcards and much more put forth a positive message of human sexuality and pleasure. Items are available for purchase. [PEG! Gallery, Gift Shop and Museum - Philadelphia Erotic Gallery](#)



Transcendent Musings: Hyatt Centric – Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

Located at 1620 Chancellor Street in Philadelphia, the Hyatt Centric is one of InLiquid's satellite locations and is celebrating LGBTQ+ Pride by displaying a set of paintings from me and compelling collage work by Ernesto Beckford that celebrate authenticity. The work will be up from **May 11th - June 29th**. Gender influences, childhood experiences and time-traveling drag queens feature across my work.

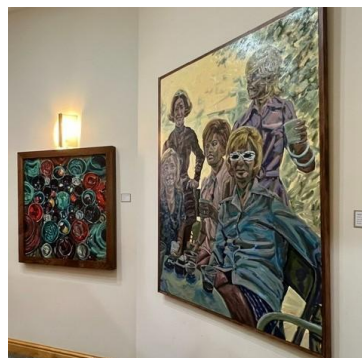


Philadelphia Stories 250: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Joy – City Hall Philadelphia

In celebration of America's 250th anniversary, Creative Philadelphia's Art In City Hall program and the Office of Councilmember Rue Landau present a juried exhibition entitled: *Philadelphia Stories 250: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Joy*. The exhibition elevates the creative voices and expressions of Philadelphia's LGBTQ+ community in the contexts of Philly Pride Month and the nation's semi-quincentennial. Exhibit up from **May 26, 2026 - July 24**.



Petchalonis Dental & Associates – 248 South 21st Street, Philadelphia



If you are looking for a great dentist in center city Philadelphia and wish to admire some nerve-calming fine artwork – then I highly recommend Petchalonis Dental & Associates located on 248 South 21st Street. I can attest to getting great dental care there for the past 20 years. [Home - Petchalonis Dental & Associates](#)



Viola Salon: 403 2nd Street, Philadelphia

If you are searching for excellent hair care and interested in viewing original art - book a cut and style with Viola Salon in Headhouse Square. The owner is a star and models his business on these principles: *Everyone belongs here, All hair is good hair, Comfort is part of the service, Beauty is a collaboration, and Excellence is the baseline*. [VIOLA Salon | Schedule Your Style](#)

Alchemy Experiment: From Darkness to Madness – Byres Road, Glasgow UK

Scheduled for **August 21 – September 3, 2026**, I have a solo show building from my last exhibit “Grey Glasgow, Darker States” at the Alchemy Experiment in Glasgow’s West End. From Darkness to Madness will describe the worsening political climate in 2026 in the United States, and my resolve to lean heavily into my sexuality and science-based career through art making and personal story telling. Several new Glaswegian cityscapes will be for sale (see Technical Corner) with the underlying theme describing how a respite in Scotland serves to recharge my faith in humanity. Please see last year’s exhibit description: [Grey Glasgow 2024, Darker States 2025 by Steven J Alles MD MFA MS](#)



Steven J. Alles, *North Gardiner Street*
Oil on canvas, 36” x 24”

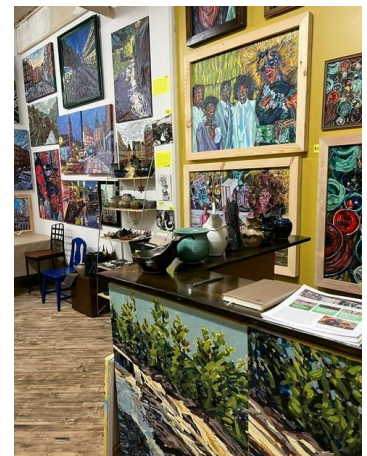


Steven J. Alles, *Crossing the Clyde With My Peeps*
Oil on canvas, 30” x 40”

Open Studios: Vox Building: 319 North 11th Street in Philadelphia

Saturday and Sunday (October 17, 18) from 12:00 – 6:00PM I am opening my studio as part of the Philadelphia Open Studio Tours (POST) with the Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA). Learn more about this two-weekend city-wide event at: [Philadelphia Open Studio Tours \(POST\) 2026 — The Center for Emerging Visual Artists](#).

The Vox Building is a 6-floor industrial building that is home to a collection of small galleries and artist studios. In my studio, wet paintings in progress and new ideas are always on display in addition to a collection of affordable prints, greeting cards, and original sculptural pottery from Duende Designs. The studio is on the second floor (2A) and is open by appointment or during select open studios (non-summer first Fridays). See email information below to set up a visit.



CONTACT AND MORE INFORMATION

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