

Interview with Steve Mitchell regarding Art, Subversion and the Lord of Misrule

I've been a fan of your art for many years; from your work as a tattoo artist, your carving of crystal skulls and now to what I consider to be the medium which I think you seem to show the greatest ability to express your true self, painting.

Would you agree, that from all your years as an artist in various mediums, painting has given you have found the greatest ability to express yourself?

Yes, painting is the medium I feel I can express fully.

Let me explain.

Tattooing is a art form which I love and respect , but when I am tattooing someone it is not my inner visions that I am expressing , it is the inner visions of the client, admittedly in my style and interpretation.

Tattoo art for me is about helping clients express their inner vision, with a few exceptions.

Tattooing has a great place in my heart, and a rightful place in the art world, but it was restrictive to me as a visionary artist.

The carving of the crystal skulls was a vision/mission I received while living with the Native Americans in Canada.

The skulls have many interesting metaphysical property,

The creation of the skulls marked the transition in my work from tattooing to painting,[service to visionary creation].

Painting is the medium I can fully express my self into.

I love the magic of bringing a vision to life in 2d.

There is magic in a painting [not some of the crap I see in so many art shops and gallery] painted by a master; it has the intoxicating power to bridge the 2d and 3d world.

I don't know of any other medium that does this.

I have great respect for the masters of the past, I strive to reach the highs in my paintings.

A master painter can create a painting of a door, and I believe I can walk through it. This is magical, and inspiring to me.

I see my visions in my mind's eye, and use painting to express them as beautifully as I can, and then you can walk into my reality.

I was pleased to see that you had started to show your work beyond the cult following which you have amassed over the years.

What made you decide to do this, as within your own sphere you have achieved success both financially and in terms of positive reaction.

I wanted to share my visions, this is the driving force to exhibit.

Steve, your first exhibition 'Pandemonium in the Rose Garden', in Walcot Street Mortuary Chapel was superb. I found it to be more of an installation piece than simply an exhibition.

Can we expect the same in London?

Yes , with a few surprises!!! I've been working feverishly towards this show for 2 years.

Interesting that your first exhibition was at an old Mortuary Chapel and your next will be in a building that was originally in a slum area which housed the undesirables and underclass's before it was custom built to house a horse hospital.

Why the choice of such interesting venues?

Wouldn't it be easier to exhibit in mainstream galleries?

I chose these venues because they compliment my art, and also my art compliments them. The installation, location, paintings, all have to work together to create the visionary experience, I want people to feel and experience my art in the best possible way.

I have and do exhibit on "white walls " as I call them. However to be fair to my art, I want to put on an exhibition, not just hang art on a wall.

In modern terms The Horse Hospital has a reputation for putting on exhibitions of various forms of art that falls outside the conventional and mainstream: anarchic and subversive art.

Do you feel this is the place your own work belongs; in the world of the 'outsider'?

Well, when I first went to visit the HH, I was impressed by the space, and after talking with its owner and curator about my vision for the show, I knew that it was where I wanted to do my next exhibition. The space lends itself perfectly to my vision of 'Saturnalia, The Feast for Fools'.

Whether or not my art belongs in the outsider category is an enigma. My art is enjoyed and collected by people from all walks of life.

For example, at my last show ...

Tattoo freaks , pop stars , bank managers, factory workers, house wives , children, all mingled together.

I watched Leonard Cohen, a young girl with her mother and a big biker, all stand together enjoying one of my painting.

I can't put my art into a box,

As for my self, I think one of my collectors puts it well.

He said, " Hey Steve I've known you for 20 years and I finally understand something now , we are all inside this life looking out the window at your world, but you bastard you're on the other side looking in at us!"

That pretty much sums up how I feel about fitting into the establishment.

Now the title of your exhibition 'Saturnalia, A Feast for Fools' is interesting.

I did a few Google searches (as one does) and found that Saturnalia was a Roman Festival where Saturn (the God of Restriction)) is unbound and holy hell reigns.

Roles of gender and status were reversed and chaos was let loose.

The Feast of Fools was a mediaeval continuation of this and both festivals were ruled by a 'Lord of Misrule'.

Usually this festival was at Winter Solstice, but you have even reversed the times as your exhibition is on the build up to the Summer Solstice!

Why have you gone with this title and theme; the fact that your title ties in with your exhibition being shown in the centre of subversive art, The Horse Hospital, seems no coincidence.

Do you consider yourself to be a 'Lord of Misrule'?

Lord no, I'm Mitchell the artist!!!!

Here's the feeling I wrote down, while sketching the vision for the show.

I am blowing your fiddle in a stove pipe hat

Bring me a feast for fools

And set the trickster free

I want to hear colours, see sound

And turn the whole fucking thing upside down

So enslave the muse

Hang the judge

Rip the veil from lovers

Let Geisha dance her flamenco to the wheel of industry's music

Let stone be more precious than flesh

And doves rip meat from bone

Dark gods can drink tea, and read the FT

Kings can ride in carousels

And the horned god will piss on the cross

For today is Saturnalia

I am Misrule in a stove pipe hat

I rule the world

Mitchell 2009