

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Dale Grimshaw: Street Art of Two Worlds

Sami Wakim · Wednesday, September 24th, 2014



Dale Grimshaw in his studio. Photo: Logan Bannatyne

Dale Grimshaw was born in Lancashire, in the North of England, and has established himself as one of London's most prominent artists. During a difficult childhood, his drawing and painting became extremely important to him. As a teenager, he was able to develop these skills while completing an Art Foundation course at Blackburn College and, later, he was able to study fine art at Middlesex University in London.

Over the past decade Grimshaw has developed a highly successful gallery career, with exhibits in London, Berlin, several in the USA and in France. His paintings often have a psychological narrative to them and deal with subjects such as alienation, loss, conflict and isolation in both a personal and political way. One of his most successful shows at Signal Gallery, in London, was entitled 'Semi Detached' and documented some of the troubled events of his childhood.

Dale's first work on the street consisted of elaborate and powerful woodcut prints which were pasted up all over Europe and in Brazil. This work has been included in a large number of international street art books and magazines, and more recently he has been concentrating on large scale murals, which he has painted in London and elsewhere across the UK. These murals have attracted a great deal of favorable attention and have led to him being invited to paint in multiple cities across Europe.



Culture Club, Hoxton London, 2013.

Grimshaw's new work on the street goes under the working title of '2 Worlds.' These large outdoor pieces portray figures from Indonesian or African tribes, in ceremonial dress, placed in alien settings, such as Western cityscapes or amusement parks. The juxtaposition of these elements is intended to emphasize the gap between these two worlds. The artist is keen to portray the strength and beauty of the tribal people and their traditional make-up and decorative elements, set against more mundane or bleak images of Western society. He poses the question about how do we measure the quality of our existence, in a world so full of cultural and financial differences? As the artists says 'the age-old, spiritual, tribal, and organic meets the corporate monsters of the West, such as Disney, in a riot of color and intensity, but behind all these visual games is the frightening reality that dominant cultures are encroaching on every corner of the world, causing ecological and environmental vandalism.'

I recently had the opportunity to send Grimshaw a few questions, and this is what he had to say:



Grimshaw work of oil on canvas.

Could you tell us a little about yourself, where you're from, and how did you get started in the urban art scene?

I'm from a small, industrial mill-town north west of England called Accrington (Saxon times was called Akarinton) – famous for producing hard, red bricks with iron in them that were used for the foundations of the Empire State building. Oh and for having a very old football team (if not one of the most hopeless). Oh the glamour...

I was born with three thumbs originally and grew up with my mum and two sisters. I loved creating things, like paintings and strange sculptures. I've been fascinated by graffiti on and off all my life, but ended up in the urban art scene by mistake really...

Do you have a formal education?

I guess I do. I went to University to do a degree in fine art in north London, although I probably only ended up in further education due to being in care when I was a teenager – one teacher at the in-house school could see that I had talent and she nurtured me a bit. I'm forever grateful although my route to formal education was slightly unorthodox. I was expelled from Secondary school but even then I was aware I would thrive in a more informal, arty environment. I hated secondary school – they managed to choke any enthusiasm I had for subjects like art, history and sport.

Could you describe the development process of your artwork?

At the moment, due to the abstract nature of the current work, I tend to work out compositions for canvases digitally on my studio pc – I collage together photographs I've taken, along with other reference material I've found. I sometimes throw in close-up photographs from an existing painting – particularly abstract splashy bits, just to see if they'll work. I do the same for the outside wall pieces too. Reference/source material is really important to an artist like me... it's a bit like dance music – you can't write some phat beats with a lifeless kick and snare sample. On the other hand, I believe you learn more from the paintings that you really struggle with.

How do you go about creating your art piece? How do you choose a wall/environment?

I very rarely have a say on which wall I paint. Each painting I do, whether it's a wall or canvas, starts out as a digital sketch. With each outside piece I do I start with thinking something on the lines of "Right, this is gonna be the best fucking wall I've ever done!" So no pressure there... I tend to think stripped-down ideas can work best outside as they usually have to communicate quite quickly with the people passing by.

I start by rolling the wall to block it in, then I'll get the face put in – in particular the eyes as they will anchor the rest of the face and so on. I'll do the detail work with a spray can and the more splashy energetic elements with a brush. It's got to have some energy about it. It can be frustrating though, not being able to come back to things, like you can in the studio with canvases.



Disney's World, Hoxton London, 2013.

How much does your art affect or influence your everyday life and are there any role models

or artists who inspired you?

My current themes don't impact my daily life too much although at the moment I'm working with lots of decorated figures from remote tribes, etc, so I'm quite aware of that kind of imagery or news or articles encompassing issues related to them. When I was working on my 'Semi Detached' show a few years ago, which was about quite dark, childhood memories, I found myself feeling quite emotional about negative about things from my past & dwelling on them. Not good!

Has your style developed throughout the years?

It has naturally, yes. Although I've also consciously pushed the themes and subject matter along with each show I've done, too.

I like the idea that there's still a stylistic link to each body of work – a style that people will recognize as mine. I couldn't be one of those artists that bang out almost the same thing year after year. What's the point? It would drive me mad.

What are your thoughts on the way the internet is influencing the art world?

With regards to change, I think there's always gonna be a pay-off and a cost. The internet can be great platform for pushing your work, collecting ideas or communicating with others, etc. On the other hand, everything seems to be on steroids when it comes to social media – artists posting up three images a day. It's like they have to feed this social media monster – only for people to look at the work for a split second before flicking on to something new.

It will be interesting to see how the internet shapes the art world.

Which countries have you visited to paint so far and where did you like it best?

I've not really been out of the UK up to now. I was due to go Paris and Rome this year but they have been re-scheduled. I have done paste up work in Berlin, Spain, Paris and in the south of France though. I have a friend that travels around the world photographing work and he pastes my large woodcut prints up in places like Brazil, France & The Netherlands – which is great because he seems quite in tune with the kind of places I would paste them myself.



Wonderland, Shoreditch London, 2013.

Have you painted in the USA? If so, how was your experience like?

No I haven't done anything in the US. I visited New York about 8 years ago and saw Swoon & Elbow Toe paste-ups around. I was inspired by them as I had done quite a bit of wood/lino printing myself – I could also see endless possibilities for this medium. There's been a healthy, mural culture in Philly for decades now and I've been reading about their techniques, especially the outdoor, collage techniques that some of the artists have been using.

Is there a message in your art?

Yes, there's a message of sorts – my work tends to deal with subjects like alienation, loss, conflict, isolation – in both a personal and political way. I've also dealt with subjects like consumerism and globalization, but I always try to capture a powerful, psychological narrative in some of the work too. I like strong bold imagery.

Street art is still considered vandalism by some. Did you ever have any problems with the law?

All the big walls pieces I've done are all legal pieces. The paste up work is not authorized though,

although I've not had problems up to now. I've been scribbling on walls on and off for a long time now, probably since the age of about 10. The first time I ever remember doing it I got caught and chastised by a stranger... it just made me want to do it again...



Harlequin, Tottenham London.

What has been your most challenging and rewarding piece of work thus far?

I was most proud of my 'Semi Detached' show from around 2011. There was some really powerful, dark pieces. I really felt I had captured a truth, an energy in some of those. I didn't believe for a minute people would buy them, but I was wrong.

Then again some of the mural pieces I've done of late have had a more gentle feel to them – like "Disney's World" (pictured above) near Old Street tube for example. It was quite ambitious at the time – was slightly bonkers with all the Disney World rides in the background but yet it still managed to capture real feeling in the main figure too.

What do you do when you are not creating art? What are your hobbies?

I go to the gym and do weights and cardio work about 4 or 5 times a week. I stay in a lot these days & I love good food and inviting people round. I'm passionate about animal rights and other causes, although I stay away from trouble with the Police these days. I like to see exhibitions too and I'm lucky living in London for this. I recently saw an exhibition called the 'Human Factor' at the Hayward Gallery in London, which was about human sculpture – which was really great.

What's next for you? What shows or projects do you have planned?

I'm currently working on a new body of work in the studio and hoping to do a solo show next year with my '2 Worlds' tribal theme. I'm doing a decent sized wall in Birmingham for the City of Colours Festival in September, then I'm off to Cardiff in Wales to do the Empty Walls Festival. I'm very excited about both.

I've got another hand-finished print release with 1 x run in Detroit coming out soon, too. Onwards and upwards!



Babylon is Burning

Any words of advice for aspiring new artists?

Try new things. Switch your phone/computer off and sit quietly for an hour with a note pad – try thinking of amazing paintings/art, ideas and compositions in your head. Ask yourself – what would I really produce if I wasn't trying to please other people, or to get their approval... or if money wasn't an issue?

Don't just bang out endless paintings of sexy, pouty girls (SPG) just because they are easy to do and people love them. It won't make you a good artist. (Oh and don't try and disguise your SPG with graffiti drips, tags, lettering or decorative elements or use words like "empowered" or "post feminist" to describe them. Because I'll still have to kill you for being boring).

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