

## **White Lady Art, Alexa MacDermot [Aug, 2011]**

Missed-Call Girls are an ongoing series of females that you paint, and that you have said is becoming more minimalist as you go on. How do you feel you've developed artistically since you began?

Missed-Call Girls are a series of downcast female characters I have been painting for a year or so now. This particular set of heartbroken girls has changed ever so slightly over the last year. I keep trying to strip back the artwork to the minimum to keep them as pure and uncomplicated as possible. I want to keep as much emotion and energy in the work but at the same time removing all unnecessary elements, for example I never paint noses on the faces of the Missed-Call Girls. I just paint the shoulder line of the body and the rest is usually just a downpour of drips, I guess I do this to avoid defining the girl's body therefore keeping the attention and focus on the face. In some ways it's like I keep trying to paint the perfect girl, constantly trying to capture that mixture of beauty and emotion I suppose...

You've been involved in a street art project called Whitewash for almost a year now. Could you tell us about it? How did it begin, and are folks responding to it as you thought they would? Where would you like to see it going over the next few years?

Yeh ..... Whitewash is rockin'. For all we started out with it has really grown so much in the last year. I set it up in July 2010 with the help of Millennium Court Arts Centre. They support the urban arts in a big way and have been great to me in letting me do my own thing and growing such a fun event. I basically wanted to put on a night that allowed artists to paint live and showcase their work, put a few beats in the background and open a few cold ones. I'm not claiming to inventing something new, I just felt the need to give graffiti artists, street artists and even tattoo artists a stage to offload the shit that goes on in their heads onto a huge canvas to an audience. It was planned for one show a year but it was such a success that we had Whitewash 1,2,3 &4 all within 12months of kicking it off. And it will continue as long as there is an audience... and funding of course... (follow on facebook)

When we met you, you were busy doing a wall in Dublin for Roadworks. Could you tell us about this project, and your involvement in it?

Yes, I painted 'Her Redundant Heart' in St Andrews Lane, Dublin. This piece for Roadworks, part of the huge Dublin Contemporary show starting 5<sup>th</sup> Sept. Jon Lynn from ANEWSPACE facilitated the project. The piece is inspired by a story of a heartbroken girl in the streets of Dublin. The Dub-Con theme was 'Terrible Beauty' (Art, Crisis, Change and the office of non-compliance) Anyhow this led me to painting the Missed-Call, tears, the downcast girls and the Irish rain... all of these floating in a rush of colours and verticals. I see it as describing a 'terrible' situation for a 'beautiful' girl ....This project will see lots of street art going up in Dublin centre over the next few weeks. I was given such a welcome when I was down painting, such a great city, proud to be involved...

You are an apprentice tattoo artist right now: tell us how you landed your apprenticeship, where you're doing it, and how it's going! Also, where did your interest in tattoos and body art begin?

Aiye I got my apprenticeship with Addinktion Belfast in October last year. I knew Dre (the studio owner) as he was doing most of my work back then and whilst getting tattooed I asked him would he consider taking me on as his apprentice but he was working for someone else at the time and said 'no, but one day when I get my own studio we will see.' So a few years later I was having a smoke at a petrol station (as you do) and he came screechin' into the car park, hopped out of the car and said 'I just opened a shop ....You still want this apprenticeship?' I was quite taken back, kind of scared shitless and really happy all at once, but I said yes.

The studio is in High St, Belfast. It's a new studio in the city centre and that alone was quite intimidating for me as an apprentice, but Dre is well seasoned as a tattooist and has taken me in and treated me well. I have gained so much from the time at the studio as it has put me in situations that tested nerves, brought me back to basics, developed my drawing but most of all it has focused the direction of my personal artwork. Its quite a contrast to using spray paints though, I find I am quite slow at working, for example I painted a 7ft x 40ft mural recently in less time than tattooing a Missed-Call Girl on an inside right forearm.

I have always been into tattoos, I grew up working in shit factories and being from Northern Ireland you get to see your fair share of shit tattoos too. This fascinated me for some reason but I used to love going to tattoo shops to look at the tattoo flash just to see the artwork. I got my first tattoo when I was 20 I think and like anyone that's into tattoos, I don't mind suffering for a bit of art.

Going through your sketchbook and seeing all the different variations of your Missed-Call Girl, it's clear how versatile you have made your character. She goes

from being a skeleton, to a beautiful picture of your wife holding your son, to a mermaid. Where did she come from?

I'm not really sure if its ever the same girl, I'd like to see it as it's a series of different girls I guess. S it can be an unknown girl but Sometimes I draw a girl based on my wife or even my daughter (who falls out with me a lot) I tend to spend a lot of time in my art, in my studio and away from my family and in a way I have occasionally put my work and passion before them (but for them). I want to be the best person and artist that I can possibly be but sometimes one hurts the other. In some ways I try to use this as themes for my work in order to turn a bad situation into a positive one.

Often your Girl is surrounded by cascades of long, flowing hair. It looks quite romantic and surreal: like a dream of a girl. What is it about doing great swathes of hair that appeals to you so much?

I am not sure what it is with long flowing hair, it lends itself so well into art that you can work it so freely in a piece to make it soft and feminine. It's also a method of capturing the beautiful qualities of a girl that both men can appreciate and women identify with.

Did you go to study your craft in college (art/design, etc.)? What was your experience of this if so? Do you think there are pro's and con's of studying art at third level?

I graduated in 2006 with a first in Creative Imaging from Huddersfield University without ever setting a foot in the campus. I was working fulltime in a factory when I went back to my local college one day a week and did the course from there. I never wanted to settle for a factory job. There's nothing wrong with a job like that but my passion was in creating art and I did everything I could to make it happen. I loved doing my degree and I love learning from people. It wasn't easy but it thankfully worked for me.

When did you decide to work professionally as an artist? Was there a defining moment, or was it a natural progression?

I was made redundant in 2008 when my wife was pregnant with my son and my daughter was a year old. I used that as an opportunity to just go for it and make something happen. It has honestly been an up and down journey but I'm entering

my 4<sup>th</sup> year now as a self employed artist and I wouldn't have it any other way. No one will hand it to you, you have to go make things happen... somehow...

Where have you shown your work in the past, and what has been your experience of this so far?

I have shown my work in few galleries, few websites, walls here and there, but the biggest and best experience was putting that piece in St Andrew Lane, Dublin. I felt so alive painting that piece. It really was a dream come true for me. Being on the same lineup of artists who I held so high as my heroes was such a buzz. I love the interaction with people and places with my art and that Roadworks piece topped any gallery or show ive ever been. Loved it.

What is your preferred medium to work in, and are there any others that you would like to develop further, or try first-hand?

I love spraycans and fatcaps, they're so instant and allow you to work fast. I was given my first can when I was 14 whilst waiting on a schoolbus home. I fell in love with the can straight away.

I recently bought a quill to work with. I love things that make interesting lines or marks. I have a show coming up in Dublin in Oct that I may use to create some of the work. (LittleGreenStreetGallery)

What is your ideal working day? Do you have a time of day/environment at home or in a studio/outside/music on/films playing/etc.?

Wake, Redbull, Subway Breakfast, Southwest sauce, Drawing, Talking, People, Studio, Night, Quiet, Paper, Inks, Sprays, Drips, Splash, Experiment, Vino, Upload, Sleep .....in that order

What is your view of new Irish art today? Do you find it exciting, or less so than you would wish? How supported do you feel as an artist by the country you live in, and the spaces available to exhibit in today?

I have a great relationship with Irish Art at the minute, at first it was a little bumpy but we had a chat and figured some shit out and now I do my own thing and 'she' seems to like it. All seriousness though, the art scene has been good to me and I have met some great people doing what I do. Some of the most generous &

friendly people are strangers that I met through art and now call friends. There is such a buzz with street art or urban art scene at the minute and I am excited to see what next year brings. That's the beauty about street art. It allows you to see that you could exhibit anywhere you wish....