



Alan Magee: art is not a solace





A feature documentary by David Berez and David Wright





# INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of great political and environmental turmoil—events that have shaped the work of artist Alan Magee. He dares to explore the darker aspects of human nature and behavior that most of us would choose to ignore, while also celebrating the beauty he finds in the natural world. Through his work, this film explores many of the greatest challenges that we face as a society—social injustice and violence, the increasing threats to our democracy, and the urgency of speaking truth to power.







## THE ARTIST

Alan Magee's arresting images which comment on corporate greed, on cruelty and gun violence, and on civilian and military victims of war at first seem at odds with his exquisite and serene paintings of nature and found objects. But when we begin to understand the visual language and the common themes that link the two sides of the artist's work, we then recognize that these dual realms are inseparably interwoven.











# THE FILM

*Alan Magee: art is not a solace* takes the viewer on a breathtaking visual journey—an exploration of the artist's recurring subjects, locales, and the historical sources which have sustained his passion for five decades. Through his paintings, sculpture, monotypes, music, and short films Magee invites viewers to travel with him through the veiled recesses of human experience—and back into the affirming light of day.





From the wild coast of Maine to the streets of Berlin, the film features long-time friends and collaborators such as world-renowned author Barry Lopez, Berlin-based classical cellist Frank Dodge, California artist and art historian Joseph Goldyne, Episcopal Priest Holly Antolini, Suzette McAvoy, Executive Director and Chief Curator, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, labor-union director and historian Harris Gruman, and artist Robert Shetterly, creator of the *Americans Who Tell the Truth* project. The film is shot in cinema quality (4K)—conveying the subtlety of Magee’s artwork to the cinema screen.





# INFLUENCES

## WEIMAR-ERA GERMANY

In the final days before Germany's 1918 surrender to the Allies at the end of the First World War, the German Admiralty ordered its fleet to launch a suicidal "honor battle" against the British. The sailors revolted and within days the rebellion had spread from the Kiel naval base to cities throughout the country. The German people were sick of the war and the years of official lies promising imminent victory. The Kaiser was quickly deposed and a new German republic was declared.

A German National Assembly convened in the city of Weimar and it unveiled a democratic government in August of 1919. The new constitution gave German citizens unprecedented liberties—freedom of speech and privacy were guaranteed and censorship in any form was prohibited. Women gained the right to vote and many immediately won seats in parliament.

But the senseless tragedy of the lost war left a climate of grief and dread, and the punishing Treaty of Versailles gutted the country's economy. Hunger was widespread. Hyperinflation rendered the personal savings of ordinary Germans worthless, while former war profiteers resumed their conspicuously privileged lives. In this atmosphere of gross financial inequity, post-war trauma and previously unimagined freedoms, the arts flourished.

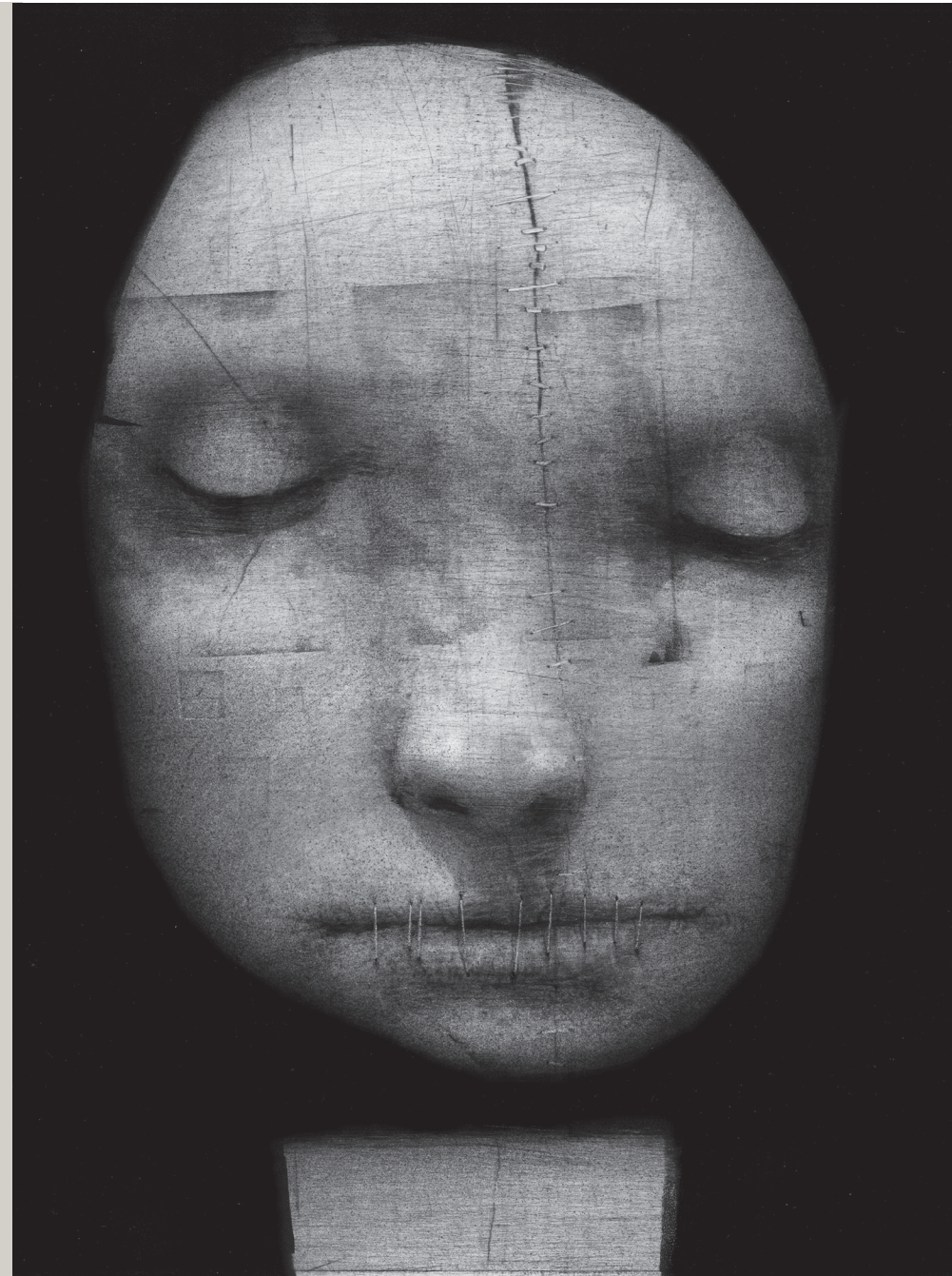
In film, Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Calagari* (1920), and W. H. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) epitomized Weimar-era foreboding. Calagari's expressionist, low-budget sets made of painted canvas and wood conveyed a world of madness. Murnau's use of location shooting and imaginative photography in *Nosferatu* created a mood of palpable menace that has not lost its edge today. The visual artists Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, Otto Dix,

*"Ah, what an age it is, when to speak of the trees is almost a crime, because it is a kind of silence against injustice."* Bertolt Brecht (from *To Those Not Yet Born*)

John Heartfield, Felix Nussbaum, and their contemporaries attacked the culture and the business of war, the exploitation of workers, the greed of the privileged, and the ignorance and complicity of the German people.

Though the styles of these artists differed, their work belongs to a shared attitude, a worldview, and an art movement known as the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity. This art looked at the world with unblinking sobriety. It was deeply moral, but streetwise, irreverent, and often darkly funny. (Think of the repartee in the screenplays of Billy Wilder, a writer/director who came of age in Weimar-era Berlin.) The artists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* were not shocked or bewildered by human behavior, as if discovering evil for the first time. They revealed the world that is, not the world that should be.

Alan Magee





# ART AS SOCIAL CRITICISM

Violence and war have been among the subjects addressed by art since antiquity, but most descriptions of war, from the *Iliad* to Jacques Louis David's painting of 1805, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, have emphasized, and praised, patriotism and military valor.

In the modern era, the painter Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) has been widely recognized as the first artist to depict war as unmitigated tragedy. In his *Disasters of War*, a cycle of etchings recording the horrors of Napoleon's occupation of Spain in the first decade of the nineteenth century, Goya reported on every form of barbarity—from torture to the executions of Spanish insurgents. Other prints in Goya's series make it clear that the occupied Spanish were equally capable of atrocities against their French oppressors.

One of Goya's etchings depicts a Spanish father being brutally

separated from his wife and children by a French soldier. The terror in the face of the father is palpable. Goya's caption for that print reads, "I Saw This".

Goya's themes echo through the two centuries since the *Disasters of War* series was created, appearing again and again in visual art, in literature, in music, whenever injustice overruns the bulwarks of civil society. The rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s produced both unimaginable horrors and some of the most arresting art made in the twentieth century. The plays and poetry of Bertolt Brecht, the sculpture, drawings, and prints of Käthe Kollwitz, and the photomontages of John Heartfield and Hannah Höch are quintessential examples of art in resistance to tyranny.

Art that has championed the underclass and advocated peace and social justice has historically had to make its own way in the world.

Established institutions embrace socially-critical art, if at all, long after the particular issues have been laid to rest. Goya's *Disasters of War* was not published in his lifetime; it condemned current events too directly. The prints were not seen outside of Goya's studio until thirty-six years after the artist's death.

Closer to our own time and place, the songs of Woody Guthrie and Phil Ochs, the iconic anti-war posters of the Vietnam era by Lorraine Schneider and Seymour Chwast, and the long-running Bread and Puppet Theater created by Peter Schumann defied the ethical indifference of America's elite cultural institutions and reached out to audiences directly.

Today, the work of contemporary artists Klaus Staeck, Al Farrow, Sue Coe, Peter Kinnard and Banksy testify to the multi-faceted and irrepressible conscience of art.

As Jean Dubuffet wrote, "Art will not lie down in the bed that is made for it... its best moments are when it forgets what it is called".

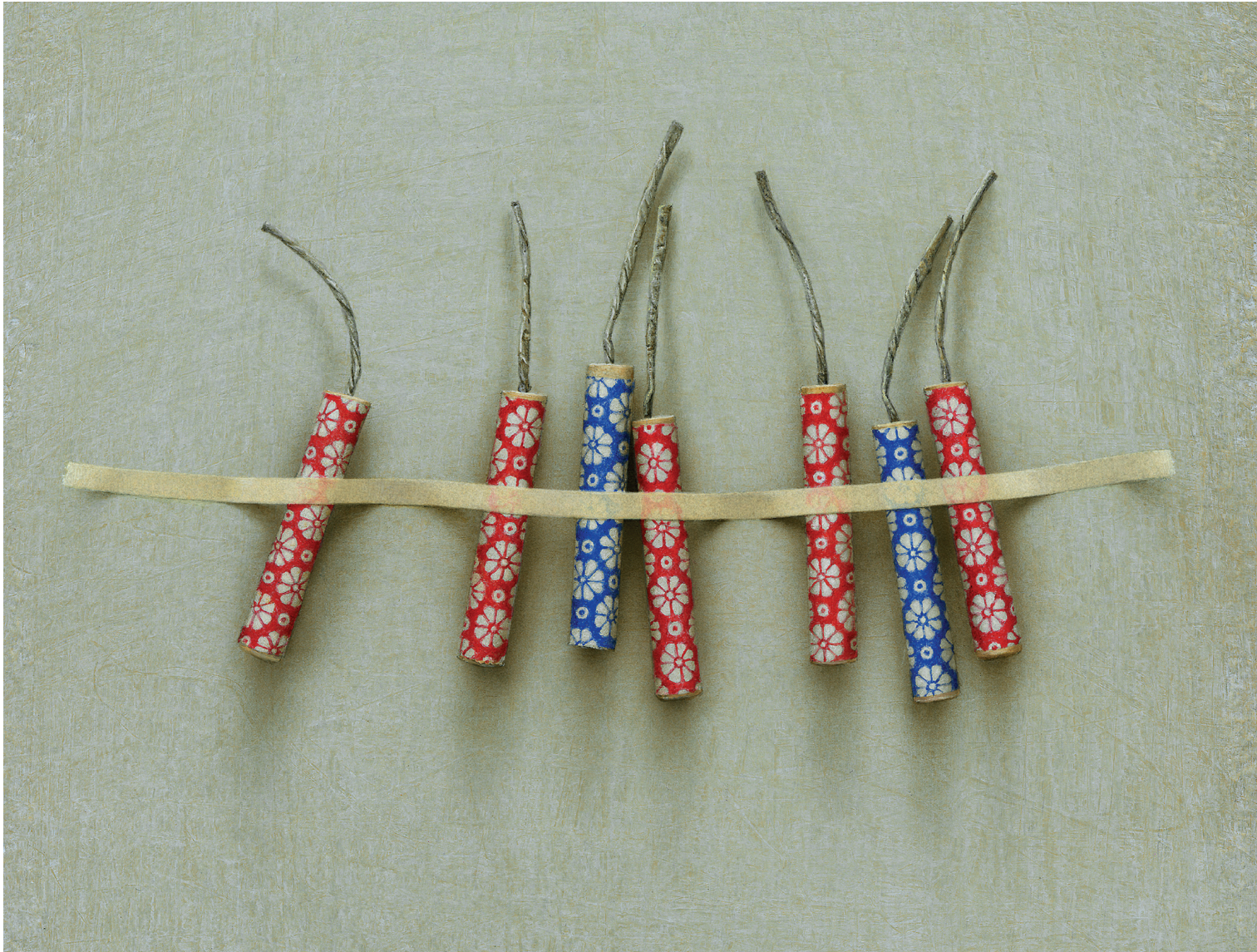
Alan Magee





# THE VISION

Through this film about the multi disciplined creative efforts of artist Alan Magee, co-directors David Berez and David Wright hope to inspire viewers, especially the young, to bring their gifts and aptitudes to bear on the multiple issues and crises that threaten our common future.





# THE TEAM

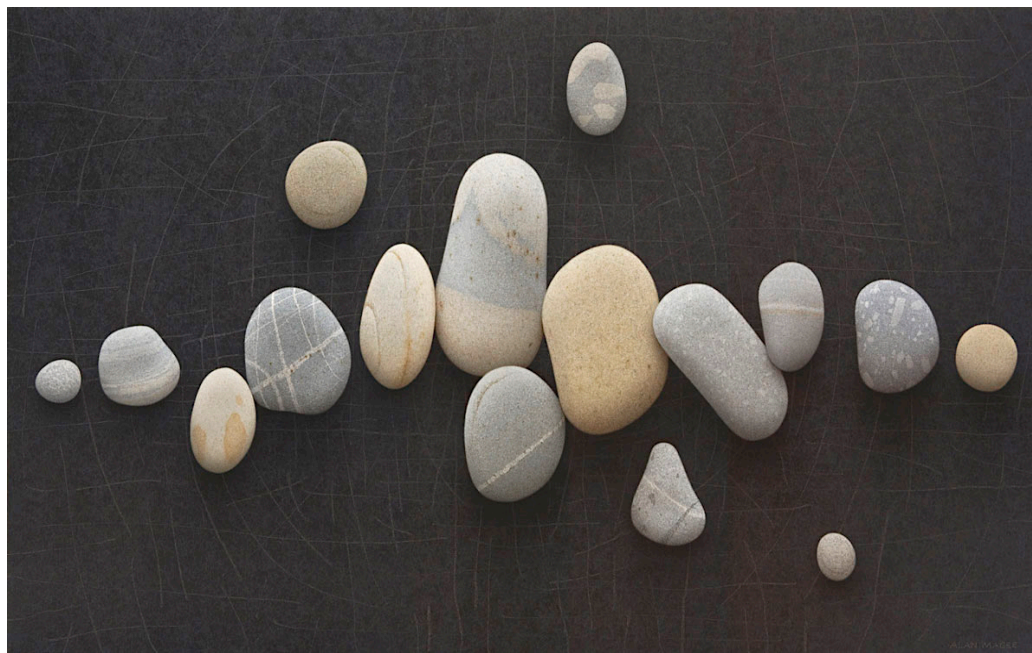
## **DAVID BEREZ: CO-DIRECTOR/ EDITOR**

P. David Berez is a Producer and Director of more than 400 video, film and multimedia projects for broadcast, corporate and nonprofit clients. He is the senior producer and owner of Post Office Editorial, a boutique post production facility in Camden, Maine. His work ranges from nationally broadcast PBS documentaries to a CLIO Award winning multimedia history of orthopaedic surgery. David has directed and filmed from the underwater canyons of Bloody Bay Wall to the aeromedical evacuations out of war torn Iraq. His work has appeared on PBS, The Discovery Channel, Animal Planet and in numerous board rooms across the country.

## **DAVID WRIGHT: CO-DIRECTOR/ CINEMATOGRAPHER**

Filmmaker and Photographer David Wright has worked in over 60 countries for clients including National Geographic, PBS, Curiosity Stream and the BBC. Stories covered include wildlife, history, human interest and travel. David works both as a cinematographer and producer on film projects. Recent stories include a PBS Special on the Pentagon, an expedition film from Tibet, as well as a photographic exhibit retracing the steps of explorer Lowell Thomas from northern India to Lhasa. Awards for his documentaries include two Emmys, a Jules Verne Award and a BAFTA.





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