



LSD TURNS 100 CELEBRATING ST. ALBERT AND THE LSD REVELATION REVOLUTION

World-renowned psychedelic painter and cosmic seer Alex Grey recounts a special trip to Switzerland to commemorate the hundredth birthday of Dr. Albert Hofmann, the man who discovered LSD.

ON JANUARY 11, 2006, the Swiss chemist who discovered LSD, Dr. Albert Hofmann, turned 100. The birthday celebration was an elegant gathering of family, friends, and colleagues held in Basel, Switzerland, at the Museum of Cultures. My wife, Allyson, and I were invited because of our association with psychedelic culture and participation in a symposium later that week. Distinguished guests at the birthday gathering spoke in German, but even monolingual Americans could understand the reverence and enthusiasm in these speeches praising Dr. Hofmann as a scientist and a sage.

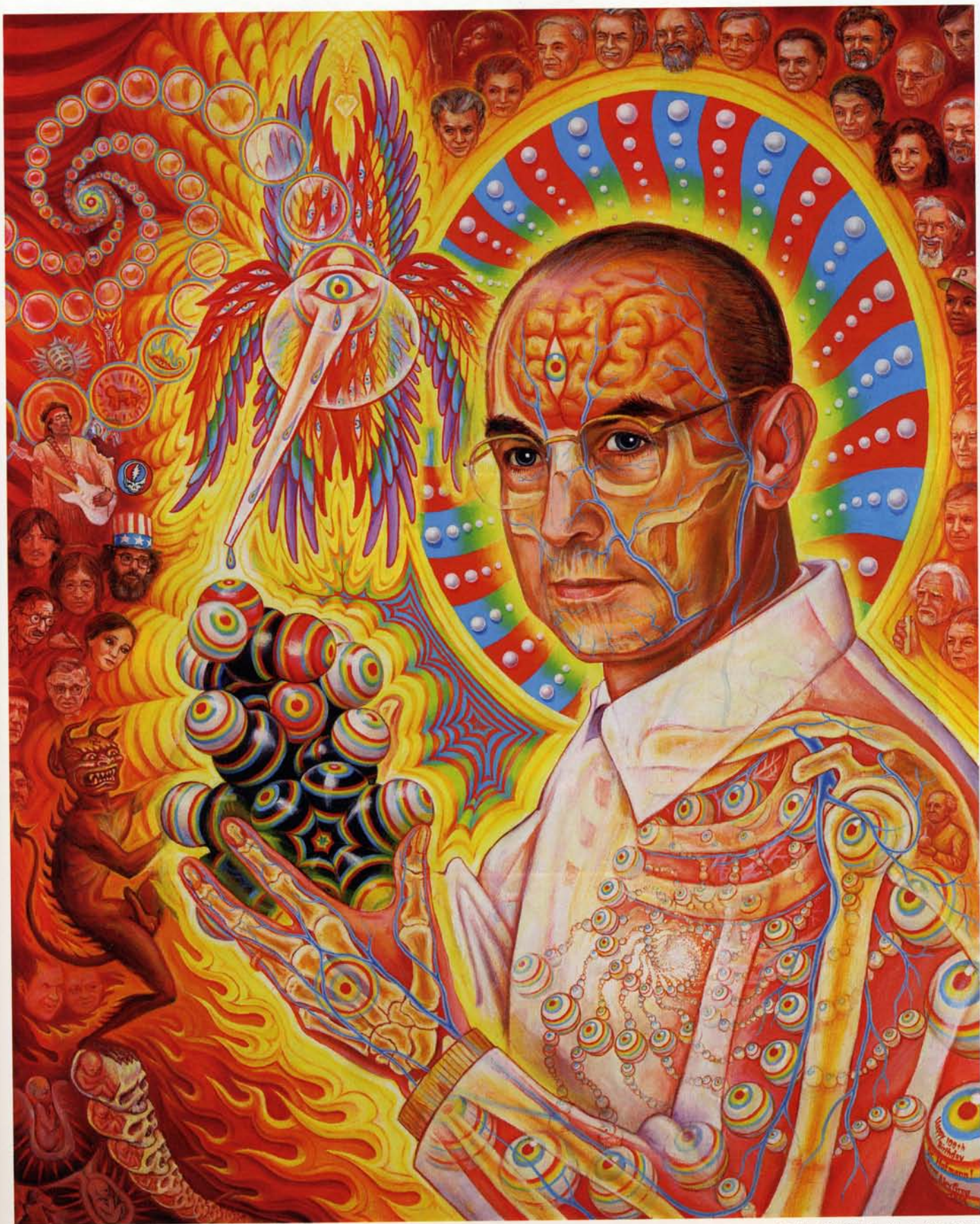
A reception followed where invited guests mingled and toasted. Allyson and I greeted many old friends and made some new ones. I was intrigued to learn that none of the members of Dr. Hofmann's large family or any of his relatives, except for his wife, had ever tried LSD. The good doctor has always steered away from advocacy, yet has come to feel that some kind of divine intervention or destiny did play a role in his discovery.

I was especially glad to see Stan Grof and HR Giger, because they could not be in attendance at the symposium. Having led over 4,000 LSD psychotherapeutic sessions, Stanislav Grof is the leading psychiatric researcher and premier cartographer of the spectrum of consciousness to which LSD offers openings. Grof has commented that LSD is a tool for exploring the mind in the same way that the telescope gives one access to the celestial realms and the microscope gives one access to the world of the cellular,

molecular, and atomic. He has also included with his research findings amazing drawings and paintings by LSD patients and fine artists describing various altered states of awareness. Grof has used the art of HR Giger in many of his books, such as *Realms of the Human Unconscious* and *Beyond the Brain*.

Talking with Giger, I asked the obvious question whether LSD had made a difference in his own work. His response was, "Oh, no, no, it is against the law, it is forbidden!" I guess you've got to respect a man's privacy, though I do admire artists like R Crumb and Keith Haring who admitted that LSD was critical in the development of their own style. Allyson and I regard the substance as profoundly influential to our own work.

The next day we joined some good friends on a visit to the Giger Museum, an astonishing, in-depth immersion into the artist's unique visionary shadow realm. Finding Giger's castle in the small and beautifully Swiss alpine town of Gruyère takes some commitment. It is the biggest collection of his work ever on display, with dark galleries offering demons of modern life, a festering, biomechanical, psychosexual orgy of predators and victims. On an upper floor, Giger exhibits collaborative works with several artists and has several galleries of his own art collection, which includes Joe Coleman's amazing Charles Manson portrait and a few beautiful originals by Ernst Fuchs. No one leaves without getting a drink at the Giger Bar, a traditional Swiss tavern with "Gaudí meets Gunter Von Hagens" decor.

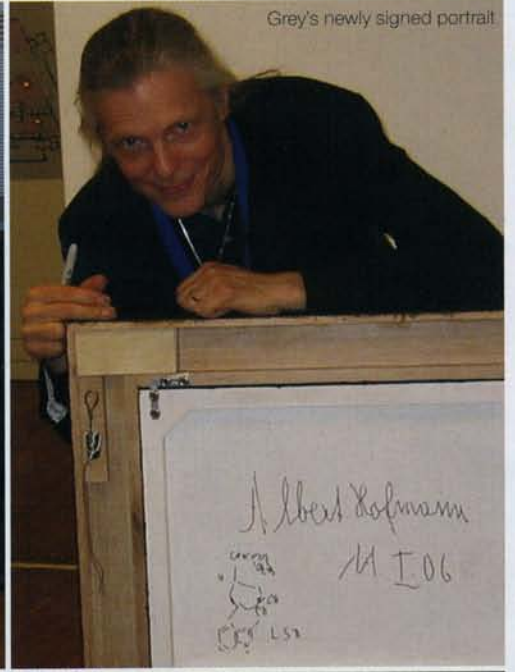


St. Albert and the LSD Revelation Revolution, oil on wood, 24" x 30", 2005–06, by Alex Grey.

Grey with Dr Hofmann



Grey's newly signed portrait



Grey, Jon Hanna, Silvia Thyssen, Jody Polishchuk & Alyson Grey at the Giger Bar



Grey in a Giger Bar chair



The Giger Museum



Inside Paracelsus' alchemical lab in Basel



BACK TO BASEL

To honor Dr. Hofmann's centennial, a three-day LSD symposium was held January 14 through 16 in Basel, Switzerland (www.lsd.info). Leading scientific, psychiatric, pharmaceutical, legal, artistic, and mystical voices spoke about the various physiological, personal, social, and spiritual impacts of LSD. Dr. Albert Hofmann spoke the first and last evenings and was showered with praise and applause by over 2,000 attendees (we also sang "Happy Birthday"). Hofmann was swarmed with fans wherever he went. One of the symposium announcers apologized on behalf of Dr. Hofmann that he would not be able to sign everyone's book. Dr. Hofmann explained, "I'm no longer 90."

Dr. Hofmann first synthesized the LSD compound in 1938 while researching ergot derivatives as a chemist for Sandoz Pharmaceuticals in Basel. The substance was tested on lab animals with no interesting results, so, as with hundreds of similar test compounds, investigation of this drug was abandoned. Yet in 1943, at the horrific height of WWII and shortly after Fermi made his discovery that led to the atomic bomb, Hofmann had a "peculiar presentiment" to resynthesize LSD.

Those were dark days in 1943. I imagine the smoke of the ovens of Auschwitz psychically wafting over Switzerland. Hofmann said that never before or since had he any similar "presentiment." Remixing LSD-25 in April of 1943, he discovered the psychological vortex, personally experiencing an overwhelming fear of dying and the feeling that he had left his body, followed by heavenly kaleidoscopic visions.

The first LSD trip, April 19, 1943, is also widely known as "Bicycle Day" because of Hofmann's wild bike ride from his lab to his home through the streets of Basel, full of perceptual distortions, not knowing whether he would ever return from his madness. I painted the portrait of Dr. Hofmann to honor the man and the centennial celebration, and the last element added to the portrait was a tiny, bike-riding Hofmann. In honor of the good doctor, I was on LSD as I painted it.

My portrait of Dr. Hofmann is entitled *St. Albert and the LSD Revelation Revolution*. The eye of transcendental spirit in the upper left hand corner of the painting releases spiralic streams of primordial rainbow spheres of potential. One such rainbow sphere becomes a compassionate alchemical angel, whose tears drip down to anoint, or "create," the LSD molecule the doctor holds in his hands. A demon, here identified with Nazi power, tugs or pushes at this molecule. LSD opens a visionary gateway to the heart, as shown by the spiral of fractally infinitizing eyes resembling the stripey eyespheres of the molecule, swirling into the center of the chest.

On St. Albert's shoulder blade is a portrait of Paracelsus, the alchemist of Basel, who is credited with founding modern chemistry 500 years ago. It was the alchemical goal of Paracelsus to discover the Philosopher's Stone. Alchemy was the art and science of the transmutation of the elements. The object of focus, turning lead into gold, was always a metaphor for transforming the souls of alchemists through their journey to enlightenment. Modern chemistry took the psyche and mystery out of the material realm of weights and measures and reduced the world to a heap of atoms. LSD brought psyche back, front and center, to the chemical material world. I contend that LSD is the Philosopher's Stone, the discovery of which is the result of an alchemical process put in motion by the great Paracelsus. While in Basel, Allyson and I visited Paracelsus' alchemical laboratory and the Museum of Pharmacology.

Numerous LSD personalities and symbols were painted in the aura of Dr. Hofmann. Aldous Huxley, Gordon Wasson, Maria Sabina, Richard Evans Schultes, and a few others portrayed in the painting were Dr. Hofmann's friends. Each person included in the piece had

a special connection to psychedelics. Huxley wrote fearlessly about the psychedelic experience in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, which also describes visionary states and works of art. Noted by his wife, Laura, Huxley's dying wish was to be injected with 100 mcg of LSD to assist his transition. Gordon Wasson brought the magic psilocybin mushrooms to the attention of many in the US and Europe, by attending the Mexican *curandera* Maria Sabina's sacred mushroom healing ceremony and then writing about it in *Life* magazine. Hofmann later analyzed the mushroom and distilled the previously unclassified psychedelic psilocybin.

Classic psychedelic "heroes" like Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Ralph Metzner, Grof, Ott, and McKenna are included in the painting. A few lesser known psychedelic stories are also represented. Pittsburgh Pirate baseball player Dock Ellis pitched a no-hitter on acid and said he witnessed comet trails on every ball. Nobel laureate discoverer of DNA, Francis Crick, admitted using LSD for creative thinking in an article that appeared in the London newspaper *Mail*, August 8, 2004. The headline read, "Crick Was High on LSD When He Discovered the Secret of Life!". Kary Mullis, portrayed in the portrait as Crick, won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1993 for his invention of PCR, a method for detecting even the smallest amount of DNA in ancient materials. "Would I have invented PCR if I hadn't taken LSD? I seriously doubt it," said Dr. Mullis. "I could sit on a DNA molecule and watch the polymers go by. I learnt that partly on psychedelic drugs."

One of the best summaries of the mystical impact of acid was George Harrison's *Rolling Stone* interview from 1987. In it he says, "For me, 1966 was the time when the whole world opened up and had a greater meaning. But that was a direct result of LSD ... it was like opening the door, really, and before, you didn't even know there was a door there ... I had such an overwhelming feeling of well-being, that there was a God, and I could see him in every blade of grass. It was like gaining hundreds of years of experience within 12 hours. It changed me, and there was no way back to what I was before."

The LSD Symposium could be a turning point in the story of this miraculous molecule, as the subtitle of the conference, "From Problem Child to Wonder Drug," suggests. Thousands of people from all over the world came together to discuss the proven possibilities of LSD in psychotherapy, spirituality, and the arts, and for creative problem-solving in all fields. Also addressed was the misuse and abuse of LSD by the CIA, as well as by many seeking a recreational high who catalyzed their own latent psychoses.

In Harvard's 1962 "Good Friday Experiment" and in follow-up studies, psychedelics have been shown to evoke a mystical experience and bring a person closer to God. Even if only a glimpse of the infinite is experienced, a person never forgets this encounter. Such a vision of unity has the potential to inspire self-healing, compassion, and respect for our world. Taken in the proper set and setting, LSD can be a medicine for humanity's ailing and alienated soul. I pray that God will help humanity find a fair, legal, spiritual status for LSD throughout the world in the 21st century.

One of the most intensely beautiful moments of the trip to Basel came when Dr. Hofmann generously signed the back of my portrait, adding also the date of his birthday and the LSD formula. I will also always remember when Dr. Hofmann wagged his finger at me and said with his German accent, "You've got the eye!" He agreed to sign an edition of 50 prints (already sold out) to help fund scientific psychedelic research through MAPS (www.maps.org), and to assist our cultural center in New York City, the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors (www.cosm.org). *St. Albert and the LSD Revelation Revolution* will be on display in the Chapel. Please come visit. For a more in-depth description of the details of the painting, visit www.alexgrey.com. ☺