

# Futuristic art, traditional ideals: Alex McLeod is a Hybrid

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It's official, I have a crush on Alex McLeod. And by the time you finish reading this you'll have one too.



Each year the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art selects an artist to create a work for a limited edition print, sold exclusively at the [MOCCA booth at Art Toronto](#).

This year that artist is [Alex McLeod](#). If you don't know who he is yet wait ten minutes. He's had a busy year of solo and group shows all over Canada and the US (if you miss him at [MOCCA](#) this week, you can catch his solo show at [Angell Gallery](#) starting August 26) not to mention a serious internet presence (he's on [Kanye's blog](#), yo!) and next year promises to be even busier for the boy from Scarborough.

It doesn't hurt that Alex is a really nice guy (and he is a REALLY. NICE. GUY) on top of being a fantastic artist — he pushes the boundaries of his medium, gives back to other artists and the art community, and is a skilled and energetic self-promoter. He puts out a genuinely earnest love, and gets it back in spades.

He's a busy guy, this Alex McLeod, but not too busy for his new friends at Art Toronto. Read on for Alex's insight on school, work, and the technology that's changing his art form!

**impression/expression:** I'd like to start off by asking about your first experiences with art. Was there a time, a person, or an experience in particular that shaped your appreciation for making art?

**Alex McLeod:** My earliest memory would have been when my family took me to Gwartzman's art supply in Chinatown as a child. I grew up in Scarborough, so a trip downtown was very

exciting. After we left we went to my grandmas and I made a painting right away :D My family has always been super supportive of me, as many of them have painted as a hobby.

“I really valued my time at OCAD, and would often learn as much from my peers as I did from my professors.”

*i/e:* You're a graduate of OCAD — did your views on the creation of art and the business of art change from your first day to graduation? How integral a role did a formal education play in shaping you as a professional artist?

*AM:* While in school I understood that very few people could even pretend to have a go at being an artist once they graduate. Suffice to say I had absolutely no idealistic view of the art world being something that I could really be a part of.

I really valued my time at [OCAD](#), and would often learn as much from my peers as I did from my professors. There was a professional practice course which laid a good foundation, but marketing and making the work visible was something that each student had to figure out on their own.

“Marketing and making the work visible was something that each student had to figure out on their own”

*i/e:* Who are (or have been) your mentors? Who do you consider to be your contemporaries? How have these relationships affected your work?

*AM:* For a brief time I worked for [Kent Monkman](#) as an assistant. (I wish they has a program like this at school that could earn you a credit while assisting an arts professional.) Seeing his dedicated work ethic first hand left a very real impression on me of what it took to make it. Now I try and hustle hard everyday because of it :D

My friend [Luke Painter](#), who was once my teacher for “digital painting”, has helped me since my last year at OCAD. He has been super supportive by exposing my work to art professionals and friends who would have never have heard of me otherwise. That gave me a huge confidence boost, so now I try to help out others whenever I can.

“Balancing business with production has become easier because of my smartphone :D Now I can focus on email during transit to free up time to make art.”

*i/e:* Let's talk challenges: what's your greatest challenge in terms of making art? How about your greatest challenge in terms of navigating the business side of the art world? What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments on those same counts?

*AM:* Time is often a challenge. Four additional computers are configured to render parts of each image, which can still take up to a couple of weeks to render. The main business challenges I face are ensuring that everyone is on the same page, and that nothing is assumed.

Balancing business with production has become easier because of my smartphone :D Now I can focus on email during transit to free up time to make art.

“Software is becoming easier to use, more accessible, cheaper, but with all this there is a drive to work harder as suddenly there are way more people in the ring.”

*i/e:* You’re definitely working on a new level with your art, but where do you think digital art is headed? How do you see your work changing, and how much?

*AM:* I was just talking to my friend about this the other day. I had brought up the sketch2photo software which takes sketches and keywords and turns them into Photoshopped compositions, thus enabling really anyone to make a convincing constructed image. Software is becoming easier to use, more accessible, cheaper, yadda yadda, but with all this there is a drive to work harder as suddenly there are way more people in the ring. It’s ultimately good, as it will (or should, at least) keep digital artists from getting lazy :D

*i/e:* You have been selected by MOCCA as Art Toronto’s featured [benefit edition](#) artist (and we are absolutely STOKED). Tell me a bit about what the experience has been like for you so far?

*AM:* It has been fantastic! I’m very honoured to have been asked by David Liss at MOCCA to be part of this. We had talked about doing something like this before briefly, so given the opportunity it only made sense :D Supporting our free institutions is incredibly important. Both for tourism, as well as culture building.

Also I love continuity, so having Art Toronto brand themselves this year with my art has been a double score :D [*You're telling me! Readers, check out the brand new look for the Art Toronto [website](#) and our [twitter](#) page! Looks pretty spiffy, no?*]

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*i/e:* You are one of the hardest working artists with your deft combination of work and self-promotion. What do you think of as your greatest asset?

*AM:* Ha! That isn’t true for a second! Often I find myself with short periods during the day when I can’t work because I am waiting around for the computer to process something. It’s these pockets that have afforded me the time to [promote myself](#). Those time pockets are my greatest asset :D

“I try and hustle hard everyday”

*i/e:* Do you have something you want to say to coming generations of artists working in digital media?

*AM:* Always keep learning new skills and software if you want to stay relevant. Also I think it’s important to be aware of both trends and faux pas, then make work which incorporates both :D