

## **Albania & Art: An Interview With Artist Keith Edwards**

We're thrilled to present an exclusive interview with the talented visual artist, Keith Edwards. Keith is renowned for his vivid and thought-provoking artwork, which he showcases on @keithedwardsartist. His pieces captivate audiences with their unique blend of colours, and narratives, pushing the boundaries of visual artistry.

In this interview, we explore Keith's artistic journey and inspirations. So, stay tuned for an inspiring journey exploring the work of Keith Edwards.

**SAH: Keith, can you tell us a bit about your journey into the world of visual arts?**

How did it all begin for you? My artistic and musical training began at age seven. My Mother Ingrid was born in Switzerland and her family emigrated to America when she was a girl. Her father and her stepmother were both accomplished artists. She became a Broadway dancer and then a New York area Artist who gained recognition.

She dictated the household tenor, and it was very European. Lots of art and classical music. Her art studio was at home on our porch, it had a southern exposure, we called it the sun porch and I spent many hours there with her, living the life of an artist.

She taught me about painting in oils, acrylics, and watercolours. I learned to draw in pencil, charcoal, and pastels, and to stretch and prepare canvas. I was always helping her, and her artist friends load artwork into the car, then set up and break down exhibitions.

All this was set against the backdrop of my father's work at home as a composer and playwright. His piano and workspace was in the living room and as I grew up, he wrote the Tony award-winning musical 1776 in that room.

So, whenever I was at home there was this creative thing happening that spanned the whole house. My sister was an oboist who went on to play with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and growing up we shared the unfinished attic space for our bedrooms, so she was always up there practising oboe

and working furiously at her little desk with a sharp knife, making reeds for her instrument.

As hard as everyone always was working away, when I was a kid we never seemed to have any money and I was about eight years old before I realized that not everyone's family went to "work" like this at home.

**SAH: We love that your artwork is unique and very captivating, sometimes amusing. What would you say is your primary source of inspiration?**

Well, thank you. I agree with Thomas Edison (who invented the lightbulb among other things and was good at turning verbs into nouns) when he quipped that genius consists of 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration... both require motivation then implementation. I have always been a very motivated person but art has allowed me to use my energy judiciously, and I get more proficient during the course of each project.

For me inspiration is a moment-to-moment thing. I generally take a minute to envision the image then I try a lot of different ways to render it. It's a very quick, bio-feedback process. When something inspiring emerges, I get a certain feeling and I know that particular image is right. A lot of the remaining time is spent in execution. I strive to make it "perfectly imperfect". All this influences my choice of colors, composition, lighting, and subject, and I think provides continuity in my style. I think of it as a "feedback loop."

**SAH: Describe your artwork in a few words.**

Energized, Colourful, Amusing, Pleasing, Accessible.

**SAH: How has your style evolved?**

Right now, in traditional terms I would describe my work as Postmodern-Eclectic-Pastiche. I am influenced by a variety of styles and genres, beholden to none. I think there are a finite number of pure, "unique" styles that can exist before they start to contain elements of each other.

I consistently use my reflection of artistic influences from Pop Art, Fauvism,

Abstract Expressionism and Contemporary Realism. I instinctively mix and blend these traditions. As I tend to create series of pictures instead of just one, I often lean into different styles within a single series of operas.

As far as my proficiency in digital art is concerned, I tend to use a lot of different apps withing one picture. I have favorite elements that stem from my experience in physical painting in oil, acrylics, watercolours and drawing. I still look for those elements. I sometimes I use my 2D pictures within 3D diaspora, or my 3D pictures in a 2D diaspora. This is an effect I like contrasting background and foreground elements. I see other artists using diffusion model AI to achieve this kind of effect, however I dislike this format, I like to build the environment manually, "by hand".

**SAH: Can you share more about your favourite piece and the story behind it?**

Well, I can share my favourite story behind a piece since I have several favourite pieces. During the Covid pandemic at one point the only destination country we were interested travelling to, one that would allow Americans to enter, was Albania.

We made the trip not knowing what to expect; after an extended visit, my wife and I decided to spend a lot of our time there.

During the transition, I was staying in an old apartment during the summer of 2021, the hottest summer on record in Albania. The apartment had one anaemic A/C located uselessly in a far corner. I started taking photos inside the apartment.

One picture turned out to be an old beat-up set of candleholders lying on a wooden plank shelf. Later as I was thinking about my artistic philosophy trying to get a handle on choosing the subject matter I came across this unremarkable picture. At that time I had adopted the name "Poster Arte" for some of my work that I painted from photos. I came up with the trope "creating remarkable art from the unremarkable".

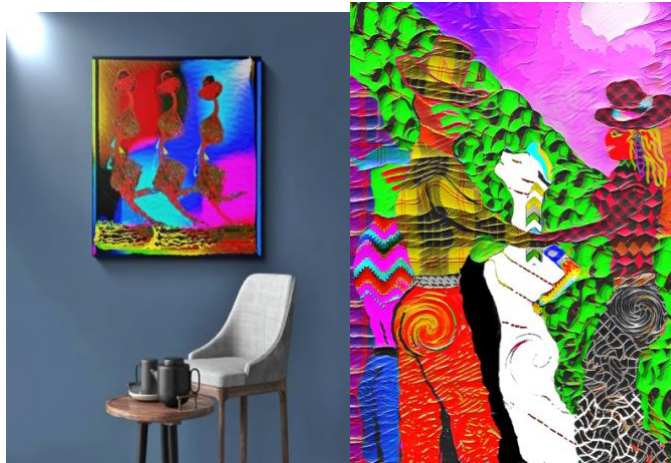
The candleholder picture was unremarkable – and I decided to try out my motto, and make something remarkable from it. This was an important self-assignment because I had to stretch. And I did many iterations of those

candleholders with lots of experimentation. The results were “No Joy at the Ho-Down” an abstract of an American “Ho-Down”. This came by way of b “Caberet” dancing girls and “At the Moulin Rouge”. As these were all places I had experienced it was also fun to revisit them in my minds eye.

### The Evolution



*"Caberet"*



*"At the Moulin Rouge"*

*"No Joy at the Ho-Down"*

**SAH: What do you hope viewers take away from your art? Are there specific messages or emotions you aim to convey?**

If I am not enjoying the work I'll turn to something else. I try to create what the viewer can enjoy along with me. When I achieve the right "look" it not only looks right to me it "feels" right, on many levels. So to for the viewer. So I think I've been successful when I can convey this. I aim to transfer my mood to a viewer. If that happens I believe the work is unique and captivating. I try to promote transcendence out of the moment, attach an energized state to the picture.

I am naturally a hopeful person, I believe in people's ability to rise above and overcome negative circumstances. If art supplements this then I think art is achieving a worthwhile purpose. There may be frivolity and hubris attached to this perspective. Considering the scale of the terrible situation many people in the world find themselves in today, artwork may not make any difference, but for example re-introducing art into a war-torn city is certainly worthwhile as a example of hope.

**SAH: How do you think growing up within a creative family and experiences has shaped your artwork?**

Until I was in grade-school I thought everybody's parents either went off to an art studio or stayed home and played the piano ever day. It was a schizophrenic experience growing up in a working class town in this situation. But religiously, my father was Jewish and my mother Lutheran and we followed most of the big holidays for both. We might have a tree and Christmas songs playing in the house, then pile into our beat-up car for Passover dinner at a relative's house. As the youngest I read the traditional Passover ceremony questions. So actually music and art are a lot more universal in a place like where I was raised, that than say, religion is. However music and creativity are "normalized" and subsequently can me "minimalized" when growing up in a family like mine. In music there was an element of competition with a "pecking order". When I started writing music at 14, my dad who was already a successful composer and songwriter, became threatened because I wrote some good material. It was very weird. On the other hand, art was a lot more fun and as I mentioned my mother was a great instructor.

In retrospect, other aspects of my young life were more influential. I became deeply involved in athletics and in aviation. I began sports also at age seven, with football, wrestling, baseball and swimming. For years I worked hard but was not a standout. It wasn't until I reached high school that I emerged as a successful athlete. That experience has come back to help me again, with each new skillset one starts as a beginner. That can be a really fun period. Or, I have seen it turn into a really nasty experience especially when someone who has been successful in one endeavor starts something new. A lot of times a person will expect themselves to be successful because that's what they've always been before. The normal evolution is starting from inept and working up from there. One must understand this and it can be disheartening, I seem to have embraced it with art.

At twenty-one I landed my first professional flying gig with a Cessna Sales Center and flight school nearby in Morristown NJ. I did all sorts of flying in general aviation – but the relevant piece is that going to work every day as a pilot in the busiest airspace in the USA taught me how to use my eyes. Flying at low levels in that airspace environment, with all kinds of varying visibility and air traffic affects the way a person uses their sight.

That never left me and it wasn't until I began using my eyes artistically after that I realized how years the years of flying had influenced the way I see. It has a noticeable effect on how I choose composition, focus and clarity, colour, and distance. I have heard about other pilots who have had similar experiences.

**SAH: Is there a particular artist, past or present, who has significantly influenced your work or style?**

As a kid, I loved Frank Frazetta's art, he pioneered Fantasy Art, and did the illustrations for Edger Rice Burrough's Tarzan characters.

I've been influenced by Wassily Kandinsky; at one point I decorated my whole house with his work.

I've also been influenced by the Hudson River School of Art. I love the spatial balance of Roman frescoed art, and I love the colours in Ancient Egyptian art. Currently, Cooper Cox has caught my eye.

Of course other influences exist such as generative AI art like diffusion. It's cool but doesn't really offer that much, certainly not what the big budget movies offer visually. The huge AI exhibits such as the one at the MOMA in NYC look like pumped-up versions of the old Apple Visualizer.

**SAH: What are your plans or goals as a visual artist? Are there any upcoming projects that you're excited about?**

Yes, I have an upcoming solo exhibition with Curator/Gallery owner Rosanne Guadnigno at Zanon Gallery in Rome on May 14th that I'm very excited about. The prelude to that is an online solo show at <https://www.artboxfrattina.com/>.

Also I'm in a group exhibition "Interconnecting Lines" in New York on April 17th – 24th at Artio Gallery at One Art Space, curated by Bisa Bennett.

And International Exhibition Hosted by Artio Gallery at the European Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona, Spain. From June 28th to 30th, 2024.

**SAH: Lastly, what advice would you give to aspiring artists who admire your work and want to pursue a career in visual arts?**

I think it's important to consider the difference between being an artist and pursuing a career in the visual arts; it's not necessarily the same thing.

So, I would advise aspiring artists to examine the specific role in the art industry they want to participate in and mentally create a path to it; I think this involves giving oneself permission to stumble along the way, and to find enjoyment in the process not just achieving goals. Also, a common belief is the idea that to be a legitimate artist you must make your money from art. This is false. a flawed concept that really hurts many artists.

There are good ways to make money, and there are good ways to make art, they're not always the same. Depending on art financially isn't a good way to do either.

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