Alex is a continuing student of philosophy and artist. He earned a BA in Philosophy; Law; and Asian Studies from Simon’s Rock College of Bard. Although he has never been formally trained, Alex comes from an art-loving family, one of whom was a painter, another a graphic designer, and another a photographer and architect. He grew up around art books and studied Art History at an early age. His lack of formal training, repetition of almost totemic imagery, and experiences, lend an outsider quality to his work. If imagined as murals, a strong Street Art influence can be seen. There is also an overhanging pop-sensibility. The following describes his thinking around the images he creates and the broader philosophical concepts with which he illustrates.

Alex deploys deep philosophical symbolism in dynamic imagery, combining the grotesque and the beautiful. Philosophical influences are drawn from those the American audience have dubbed “Post-Modern.” Following their genealogies, there are strong symbolics referring to German Phenomenology and French Existentialism.

The imagery explores a tense relationship between terms like the “self” and those “others.” The “ego,” centered-self; and the “alter,” the other-intruder. There is also the “subject”-self against which is pitched the edifice of the “Big Other” found in cultural, institutional, and state knowledges. Further, there is the alienated, “subaltern” other, those whose being is summoned at the liminalities of culture, knowledges, and territories. The symbolism called forth cuts to a few core concepts, abstracted from select readings. Even if we walk into an ever newer, stranger world each day, we can agree that what our intellectual forebears saw remains with us, sometimes amplified, sometimes more subtle. The following explains those symbolics.

Heidegger and Sartre note that we have anxiety regarding certain seemingly-impending things in life, one and chiefly of which is death. This is literally represented by the abstracted clavicle bone, highlighting the significance of human finitude. The clavicle is also a play on Gothic melancholic ideas, previously signified by skulls and certain attitudes towards religiosity, which had an influence on existentialist thought as well. As a consequence of our finitude, we are as free as much as we are responsible and singularly attributable for our actions. The appearance of bars in some of the pieces is a literal reference to Sartre’s vacillations between being free and being
a prisoner. The sum of our lives, all that we are, can only be expressed when we finally expire, and this, we can agree, is as basic a fact as is existing. There is a prevalence of eyes. For an existentialist, that might suggest a subjection to the gaze of other people. This bare idea, is taken up and nuanced by a number of following thinkers.

We are circumspective, poking at the outsides of things, figuring things out, and then utilizing what we have found. Peering into or exiting ears is likened to an excavation of cultural knowledge, that figuring out of how the world—or better, our world—works. Regurgitation and consumption of bodies represents the machinations of those knowledges, while also illustrating a social sickness, the current ailment of our times as schizophrenia, per Deleuze and Guattari. There are also references to psychoanalytic thinkers like Jacques Lacan and contemporary philosopher-psychoanalytic, Alain Badiou, in that we find a void within ourselves, which is itself vacuous, sutured to being, and is also both the evidence and source of multiplicity and unadulterated creativity, rendering us subjects in fidelity to the events that impact us. The cut into bodies represents this void. Something seemingly Deleuzian, if we read it as a “body without organs.”

The void carries similarity to desire in its emptiness and its paradoxical never ending drive. For desire, there is no satisfaction, a forever draining hole at the bottom of a slowly filling bucket. It is a leaky vessel. The drops of water carry a dual meaning: something that flows away, leaks, is never to be full; and something that purifies and washes away, almost non-existent, there but to disappear itself.

There is also a literal reference to the “Big Other” in the large and repeating faces. The “Big Other,” Freud might have likened to a super-ego, Foucault gives it more dynamic characteristics in describing othering in many power-dynamics. Lacan finds personifications of that otherness in institutions like The Law, state institutions, cultural norms, or maybe what Foucault would call an Episteme. One theme that shines through is the primacy of transparency on the part of the subject, of being seen, recognized, though in certain ways. Being judged by community members, being labeled by the edifice of the law or medicine, being in a continuing state of surveillance, or maybe just the belief that there is such an apparatus, like panopticism, again with eyes.

For many of these writers, subjectivity is both the creation of powerful relations, their reification, and their reproduction. This theme follows Althusser’s developments around “Ideology” and “interpolation.” Interpolation is a form of recognition, an affirmation of belonging. Further than mere salutation, it is the recognition of a person as “something” or “someone” with a cache of characteristics. Our ideology informs the texture of our experience and is oftentimes more productive than it is repressive. Ideological formations and our testament to them in how we treat each other informs our identities, whether we are in dissent or deference. Finding meaning among all the versions (institutional, cultural, scientific) is also an aspect of our circumspection. The question that we must ask ourselves is whether or not we only find ourselves at the interstices of powerful relations, and in the gaps and hinges of truth-making procedures, or whether we can say we are something more then, different than, unaccounted for, subtracted from, or even more basic than all those things heaped upon us, all those things that, in this manner, might be called a kind of fascism.

As those writers appeal to their readers, I appeal to my viewers to find one’s own truth, to shuffle the yoke of subjectivity, and to that effect, to support the Neitzschean endeavor of finding one’s own greatness. We need more “militants of the truth,” more soldiers of conscience.