



From **WHERE**
to **WHAT**

Since first featuring her studio in *Where Women Create* in early 2019, Alexandra's painting practice has evolved into a compelling series of portraits rendered on vintage gloves.

ALEXANDRA
DILLON
CURATED BY
SANDRA EVERTSON



MY JOURNEY AS AN ARTIST

Since I was a child, my art has been my quiet refuge, the place I find myself. I have always found joy in creating and have made art consistently throughout my life. What began as play became a practice.

After studying Film at UCLA, I went to Florence, Italy, to learn the painting techniques of the Old Masters. Returning to Los Angeles, I grappled with how to incorporate my love of classical realism with contemporary sensibilities. I knew I wanted to paint people, but conventional portraiture seemed stultifying to me. I experimented with pop-surrealism, which was all the rage at the time, and I made a lot of very cool paintings in that vein. I painted classical still lifes to hone my technique, but I always came back to faces, which seemed to me to be the most interesting subject I could paint. I painted on canvas for many years, but my work really came alive when I began to work on found objects. Here, I could take my love of portraits and character and juxtapose it with an everyday item, an item that, in itself, held meaning, historical context, and a soul of its own.

I began with the paintbrushes. Each well-worn paintbrush received an imagined, unique portrait, often in the style of Greco-Egyptian mummy paintings or the Spanish Baroque. I have always loved these older styles of portraiture. For me, these styles best conveyed the personalities of the characters I was dreaming up. I often paint these faces with crowns and gold jewelry, not because I have any adoration for royalty or wealth, but because to me, these fineries are emblematic of an elegant soul. I don't see the people I paint as idealized; rather they are real people who may have lived, who have endured all the trials of what it is to be human, and who occupy real space. That's why the engaging gaze is something I strive for. They look at you and say, "I too have suffered."

These old souls soon found their way onto other objects, such as locks, axes, and shovels. Often, I only used part of the face, such as a single eye or a sly smile. These pieces became a body of work I sometimes refer to as psychological surrealism.

Then I discovered the joy of painting on vintage leather gloves.



ALEXANDRA DILLON is a Los Angeles-based artist best known for her portraits on paintbrushes and other found objects, such as gloves, locks, and axes. Her surreal works have received international press and earned her a large social media following. She has exhibited at SCOPE Miami, the Oceanside Museum of Art in Oceanside, California, and was the featured artist at the L.A. Art Show, Los Angeles, in 2022.

MY PROCESS

Vintage gloves have so much inherent character. You can really feel the woman who wore them, and the way they have been shaped by her hand. To adorn these gloves with a set of portraits felt right from the first pair.

I find vintage gloves at flea markets and thrift stores. Often, the gloves need to be straightened, so I press them under books until they are flat. Most gloves cannot be washed, so the stains and imperfections may become part of the painting, lovingly attesting to their life well-lived.



Acrylic paint and old leather are a match made in heaven. I work carefully, adding thin layers of the paint, not too wet, to achieve a painting that looks smooth on the leather. A good quality matte medium also helps the paint flow and adds transparency in the final layers without giving the painting a glossy surface. If I have a set of gloves that are a great color, I usually use that color as the background. But if the color is boring, I may change it to something more pleasing.

Sometimes the paintings are simple, with little embellishment. Others are highly ornate.

I never start with a fixed idea. I do occasionally use a reference to get the lighting, but I never do copies. I like to make up my own, imagined people. What is important to me are the faces. I feel, if the portraits aren't interesting, then the whole painting isn't interesting either.

Sometimes, if the gloves are humble, I skip the finery and paint portraits of old and elegant souls without embellishment. As with all my work on found objects, I let what I'm painting on tell me the direction.

I usually start with the right glove and then create the left one. Once I've established the characters, any other decoration comes naturally, as now I know who they are. Occasionally, I will do a single glove instead of a matching pair.

"You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."

—MARY OLIVER





MY CHARACTERS COME

to me the way a novelist's do; they just show up and tell me who they are. I often change direction. If I don't find the face to be engaging and interesting, I will paint over it and start again. I let the painting take me where it wants to go. Once I create a character, the whole color scheme may change to fit that character's mood or look. I make lots of left turns and unexpected changes. After so many years of painting, I've finally learned to trust my instincts.



Often, the idiosyncrasies of the actual glove come into play and suggest forms or decoration. For instance, if there is decorative or functional stitching, I usually incorporate that into the embellishment and design. If there is a rip or tear, that might become a focal point.

The best part about painting on gloves and other found objects is that it is always a surprise. When I just let go and let the paintings take their own direction, I usually come up with something I really like, and then I feel inspired to go on to the next project.

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