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# "Individual Liberty" - a breakthrough, not a breakdown.

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Submitted by AlexR9 on Mon, 28/11/2011 - 5:34pm

To introduce myself, my name is Alex Roberts I am an artist, who lives and works in London. I work predominantly with paint, but explore other media such as film and installation too. I'm also a supporter of the Time to Change campaign.

At the moment, my studio practice focuses on the figure. I question the normality of human characteristics and explore the emotions that fuel our character. My current exhibition *Individual Liberty* (the first in a series) is a testament to my artistic journey to date. I spent the last four years developing this collection. Candid portraits, some large scale and other more intimate oils on linen celebrate the individual, coupled with humorous sketches detailing daily journeys are consciously arranged in the ex-depot, project space. Alongside the fearless 2d characters is a life size telescope with an intriguing image that pokes at the viewers' initial perceptions. This subtly commands an area of the main exhibition room as scantily clad mannequins and LED displays with poignant quips guide the visitor around the overall group installation to more personal alcoves. The smaller rooms, off the main warehouse area reveal more figurative imagery of all shapes and size – real women! In short the viewer is compelled to contemplate what really is beauty.



In conjunction with this collection I am using the show to tell more people about the social movement that Time to Change has created, and how being a part of it can help liberate people from the stigma that surrounds mental illness.

We have all had periods of time of feeling lost at particular moments in our lives. I went through a time when I felt directionless – feeling empty and being vulnerable to allow others' anxieties take hold, had got the better of me. Stepping back, pausing and giving time to examine my work and re-define my visual voice was my way through this testing time. What came out of it was a positive period of intense creativity, where acceptance and learning flourished. The beginning of Time to Change's campaign coincided around this era.

Through my paintings, in this exhibition I have highlighted how vulnerability is not a weakness: to allow ourselves to be vulnerable is to possess the confidence to let go of our own and others' preconceptions, and therefore free ourselves of society's constraints.

To quote Vivienne Westwood at a launch of her charitable concerns with ethical fashion Africa, "I believe in breakthrough not breakdown". The exhibition *Individual Liberty* is a celebration of just this. The exhibition offers the viewers the opportunity to introspectively view their own personal world, examining how we deal with our own subjectivity and consider how we all share emotions.

The images in the show ask us all to recognise that this shared experience is the essence of humanity.

I could see a clear connection with my own work's interests and Time to Change: both are challenging peoples' perceptions. My paintings celebrate difference and individuality with the irony that all our human conditioning is very similar, while still provoking the viewer to question how we perceive. I was inspired by the author Doris Lessing's idea that when "Writing

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about oneself, one is writing about others, since our problems, pains, pleasures, emotions – and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas – can't be yours alone."

Stigma and discrimination around mental health is not an individual thing – we are all human and our experiences and views for good or bad are not ours alone.

It is our stigmatising attitudes and fear that often stop us taking part in life or contribute to society thinking back to front. As an artist I constantly observe that society is currently living through a passage of great anxiety and this fear often blinds us to see what's actually beyond our immediate pre-occupied states of mind. Fear is negatively eating away at the core of society, individually and collectively. Using my art to learn how to manage and address that fear from an alternative viewpoint seemed a positive step forward.

I read a quote from Sue Baker, Director of Time to Change, taken from a talk she had given. She said, "We don't need flawless robots. We need human beings with rough edges". It made sense to get in touch.

I am not looking to influence or dictate in my work but I do think as artists we have a responsibility to observe the current period of time we are in and provide room for dialogue or contemplation from what we observe. I am simply observing, creating and reflecting, although through participating in this process, there is no denying that I am nudging the viewer to respond a bit. I would hope that I simply place the work out there and in so doing, 'poke' the viewers to arrive at their own informed and individual responses whether good, indifferent, challenging or excitable.

The curated experience and *Individual Liberty* show is a journey and a lively showcase of energetic statements with space for reflection. Stigmas are left at the door and I hope it is an environment to give each other space to flourish, similar to Time to Change's communicating idea.

***Individual Liberty is at 7/7a, Great Guildford Business Square, London, SE1 0HS (entrance at the end of Wardens Grove). The event is open from 10am – 6pm every day with a late night until 9pm on Friday. For further information about the artist and the event, visit [www.alexroberts.com](http://www.alexroberts.com)***

***Individual Liberty exhibition by Alex Roberts***

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