

Title - Is an alter ego necessary to enhance a person's creativity within the art world?

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Is an alter ego necessary to enhance a person's creativity within the art world?

Alter ego derives from Latin with an English translation of The Other Me (Google Translate, 2025) but is defined as “the part of someone’s personality that is not usually seen by other people” in the dictionary (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). In contradiction to this definition, I will be investigating the alter egos of three people who are or have been very visible to the public.

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was a student of medicine. After developing an interest in neurology and psychiatry he later constructed his own theories concerning topics such as dream analysis, the defence mechanisms within the human brain, the controversial psychosexual stages and the composition of the psyche regarding the structure of the personality (Leo, 2023).

McLeod (2025) stated that during 1923, as an update to his earlier representation, Freud considered the personality to be made up from 3 elements, Id, Ego and Superego. This is known as his psychoanalytical theory. Each one works in unity to create a balance. The Id focuses unconsciously on instant pleasure; the superego concentrates on morality with the ego being the mediator to bring about harmony. Both the superego and the ego function unconsciously and consciously where the id is purely informed by the unconscious mind over which there is no physical control.

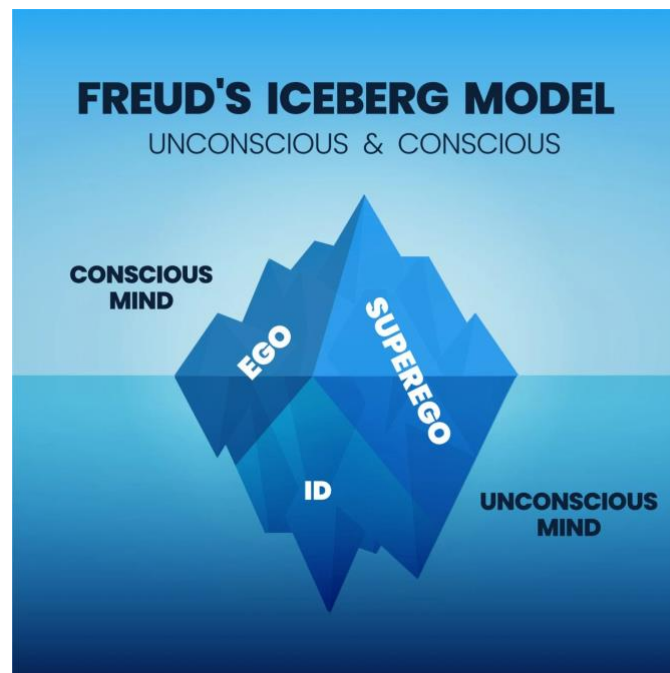


Fig 1 – Freuds Psychoanalytical Theory (McLeod, 2020)

If there were to be an unconscious change in equilibrium between these elements it would manifest itself as an alteration of the persona, which would then create an alter ego due to the personality switch. Psychiatrist Eric Berne developed his own theory and method of therapy in the 1950's known as Transactional Therapy (TA). He equated Freud's states of ego theories as being the Parent (Superego), the Adult (Ego) and the Child (ID) and believed that when conversing with others the dialogue would be influenced by how the person was thinking, feeling and behaving (Murray, 2025). This produced therefore the possibility for a multitude of personalities dependant on the varying levels of each factor.

Otto Rank, a once close aide to Freud and collaborator of his work, presented an opposing theory to his Psychoanalytical Theory with regards to the artist. Whereas Freud, as a non-creative believed that talents were borne out of childhood experiences, Rank, as a creative, believed that an artist had to consciously question who they want to be, other than who they are. He believed it began a process of creating a persona to oppose the limitations that others choose to live by. This then becomes an alter ego (Waddlington, 2001).

Kavlin (2020) discusses how personalities adapt to the social arena they are in with behaviour differing dependent upon whether a person is associating with work colleagues or family members. An individual's behaviour can alter dependent upon their physical position within a situation or how they perceive themselves within that situation. Kavlin discusses this further in relation to a controlled study run by White and Carlson (2016) whereby children aged 3-5 years old were tested on their reactions to a series of tasks. White and Carlson discovered that the most correct responses came about when the child was role playing, providing their answer as a 3rd person, in this case Batman.

Many musical artists adopt alternative personas to aide them with their performances. Beyonce empowered herself by becoming Sasha Fierce. Sasha had a different way of speaking and acting which allowed for a show for which Beyonce, as herself, did not have the confidence to perform. As her belief grew from experience and maturity Beyonce retired Sasha and no longer required her to stand in (Smith, 2022). Inspired by this story Adele too created an alter ego to help her through in the beginning of her career. Sasha Carter was made up from the influence of 2 people, Beyonce and a country signer by the name of June Carter (Robson, 2020).

Andreason (1978, p.45) discusses the many studies and investigations, going back as far as the early Victorian era, into whether creative genius and mental illness go hand in hand. Other factors such as genetic traits and the environment in which creatives live also have an input in to any definitive answers. One point that Andreason does include within the conclusion is;

the families of creative persons may have a higher prevalence both of creativity and of psychiatric illness than occurs in the general population, and there is some suggestion that this pattern may be explained in part on the basis of genetic factors (Andreason, 1978, p. 45).

Research has indicated that the act of inventing an alternative personality allows an artist to distance themselves from being a performer, enabling a healthier emotional view towards the difficulties that can arise from fame. Perhaps an indication of how the subconscious mind can influence the conscious mind in order to protect itself.

Case Study One – Daniel Lismore

According to The Observer (2011), Vogue named Lismore as “London’s most outrageous dresser” since he began living his life as an artwork. “I have lived as art my entire adult life. Living as art is how I became myself” (Lismore,2019). Lismore wears the hat of many different people. He is an artist, an activist, a model and a public speaker just to mention a few. He champions for people to love themselves for who they are and for them to become stronger in the face of any adversity. He does this by living true to who he really is.

Downing (2022) explains that Lismore experienced a difficult childhood. He was profusely bullied at school for being seen as an outsider by having interests that differed to those around him. This was exacerbated by the fact that he was tall, drawing further attention his way. Growing up with his antique dealer grandparents, he delighted in being around objects of history and splendour and had an extravagant selection of dressing up items which would then go on to inspire him in later life. Lismore’s way of life is not a production or a character. It is borne from a desire to be comfortable as himself. As a creative he can manifest his design ideas from vivid dreams along with other ideas spawned from found materials around him. As someone who has spent time in Africa as a volunteer working to help ease the uncomfortable surroundings of people with HIV, Lismore has used that experience and encompassed cultural adornments to an outfit in order to raise awareness of their plight. As an activist and a celebrity, this is his customary way to bring attention to the matters that concern him the most. Other outfits have included objects to express his disgust at the practice of fox hunting and the use of old tents to bring awareness to the homeless. He calls them “the 3D tapestries of his existence” (Downing, 2022, p.72).

In some of his creations Lismore incorporates armoury. It is complimentary to the medieval look that many of his outfits have. In fact, when invited to a meeting at The House of Lords to take part in discussions relating to the practice of sustainability concerning fashion, “he was the first person to wear armour in Parliament since it was made illegal by Oliver Cromwell” (Culture Space Coventry, n.d.). Nemov (2022), in an interview with Lismore, explains that he is a very shy person. In his younger days, starting out as a fashion model, he hid his true identity of being a gay man due to discrimination.

He struggled further by having to hide his individuality as the times dictated a more conservative look, “I was going through hell by not being allowed to be the real me” (Nemov, 2022, para 6).



Figure 2 – Daniel Lismore (George, n.d.)

In 2016, curated by Rafael Gomes, Lismore was invited to display his outfits at SCAD Fashion Museum of Fashion and Film in Atlanta, which he named “Be Yourself; Everyone Else is Already Taken”. He had previously made notes from analysis of his own work and had recognised that many of his outfits incorporated or intimated at elements of armour. He likened this to the Terracotta Warriors in China “who from a distance all look similar, but actually are all individuals” (Nemov, 2022, para 10). Lismore’s repeated use of armour may be an unconscious symbol of protection but may also be a way of deflecting any negativity back to those who view him critically.

However, the role of body armor extends beyond its physical attributes. It impacts the psychological state of its wearers, influencing their sense of security and ability to perform under pressure (Customarmorgroup, 2024).



Figure 3 – Daniel Lismore (Ksenia, 2020)

Lismore recycles items to create new outfits. Not only does this refresh his look, but it creates a new conversation piece. Experience as a photographer and designer show that Lismore has a good eye for matching items in a way that compliment each other visually.

With a psychedelic mash up of haute couture, charity-shop finds, vintage fabrics, found objects and religious paraphernalia, sustainability sits at the heart of his design philosophy (V&A, n.d. para 3).

He allows these material correlations to generate attention in a bid to inspire positive conversation concerning matters that are important to him in the world. Sharrock, (2024) notes that an exhibition curated by Lismore titled 'Fragile' held at the Bomb Factory in London, saw him bring together other activists and artists to produce pieces of art that reflected their own personal experiences concerning the fragility of the world as we know it. According to Curtis Holder, (2024), one of the twenty exhibitors, the artists represent those that have been displaced, exiled or oppressed for reasons of race or gender and

have used this platform to bring public and media attention to the injustices that have been felt by many over the world including they themselves.



Figure 4 - 'Fragile' artists pictured from left to right: Craig Robertson, Sharon Walters, Martha Freud, Ian Brennan, Leila Bartell, Curator Daniel Lismore, Curtis Holder and Kostya Benkovich. The artists are pictured with Oksana Mas 'Ukrainian Guernica'.
(Montgomery, 2024)

Case Study Two – Grayson Perry

Grayson Perry is a respected British artist whose work is exhibited all over the world. He creates his pieces in many mediums but is most famous for his tapestries, paintings and ceramics. Hattenstone (2014) explains that when Perry first began making pottery, he had already created his alter ego, Claire. He had been a transvestite since childhood with few people knowing about it, but it had not been happily accepted by his family creating problems during his teenage years. This element of femininity, although is not a need or

a want to be female, has sexual connotations for Grayson. Due to this situation he physically, but not mentally, packed Claire away until her reappearance when Perry left home for university. Years later Claire was introduced to the public when Perry was awarded The Turner Prize in 2003.



Figure 5 – Grayson Perry at the Turner Prize Award Ceremony (Benett, 2003)

Claire is an important ingredient of Perrys personality. She is the feminine attribute that allows Perry to portray a softer image and speak from a position of power when discussing issues important to him such as gender fluidity and identity. Her vulnerability allows Perry to communicate with his audience on a deep and personal level encouraging healthy discussion around the subjects of political and cultural diversity and gender fluidity.

As is usual for most women, Perry has reimagined Claire's look over the years to become a confident and proud wearer of colour and pattern. She has had multiple images, some mature, some much younger. Opting now for short and elaborate baby doll dresses, this boldness and confidence expands out into Perry's artwork. Using Claire as inspiration, his alter ego has regularly featured in and influenced the story telling of his work.

Perry also has another alter ego. Alan Measles. Alan is an old toy bear that, according to the BBC, (n.d.) was given to him during his early years when he was recovering from the measles, hence the name. He also helped him to deal with the anxieties he felt during his childhood. Perry describes Alan's personality in the beginning as "an angry rebel; now he's like the Dalai Lama" (BBC, n.d. para 2). Alan Measles represents Perry's masculine, working class side and appears in many of his works as a playful, nostalgic but vulnerable and childlike character as apposed to Claire who, as the middle-class side of Perry, is empowered and wishes to critique the world and take it apart to see the layers. Together they encapsulate all the aspects of Perry's personality. They often appear together in his artwork with some depicting their wedding or relationship as shown in figure 6, World Leaders Attend the Marriage of Alan Measles and Claire Perry.



Figure 6 - World Leaders Attend the Marriage of Alan Measles and Claire Perry
(Unknown,n.d.)

Perrys artwork, be it ceramic, tapestry or etching, relate to social issues such as consumerism, child welfare and global unrest. These can be emotional subjects, but he uses Alan Measles and Claire to demonstrate them in a way that makes them palatable to view, even though some of the compositions may have unpalatable images on them. One such piece is included in the exhibition *Delusions of Grandeur*. Judah (2025) notes that the ceramic vase in question shows Alan Measles and Claire meeting a new but temporary Alter Ego of Perry's named Shirley Smith. She too has an alter ego called The Honourable Millicent Wallace. The story symbolises the act of snobbery, trying to be someone that you are not, amongst the upper classes. Shirley has been the victim of abuse and has spent time in a psychiatric institution but by being Millicent Wallace she has hidden her misfortunes and is perceived as someone completely different to fit in with class ideology.



Figure 7 – ‘Doomy’ ... a detail of Grayson Perry, Alan Measles and Claire meet Shirley Smith and The Honourable Millicent Wallace (Hems, 2024)

Although Perry is very open concerning many aspects of his private life, he still relies on the portrayals of his alter egos on his artwork to voice his disapproval to aspects of society that he finds uncomfortable with. This may indicate that Alan Measles and Claire Perry are more than the alter egos created to allow him to comfortably express himself, they may also now have become a company brand.

Case Study Three – David Bowie

David Bowie was a British musician and actor. He was celebrated for his innovative approach to his live performances and the countless times he reinvented himself during his career which spanned over 5 decades. He was a pioneer of new music in a time where the new sound of Rock and Roll had revolutionised the industry, but he took it further. As an all-round showman Bowie created many alter egos during his career. Each one different to the other. They allowed him to push boundaries in his performances and also within the music industry itself. His first alter ego was Major Tom, created in 1969, for an album titled Space Oddity. (Gonzalez, 2023). At the time of his conception the world was living through an era of science fiction. The space race had begun and the first landing on the moon by man had been achieved. Major Tom depicted loneliness and disconnection. In a later revival, Major Tom was briefly resurrected but portrayed as a junkie which fitted in with the narrative for many of his other alter egos.

Bowie created his additional personas as directors would create characters in a show. Carefully ensuring that each one fulfilled the brief. The most famous of his alter egos was Ziggy Stardust. He was an androgenous rock star, worshiped by his fans. According to an article in Business Advisor, (2016), the story explains that there is only five years until the death of the Earth, young people are no longer interested in rock and roll.

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Figure 6 – Unknown. (n.d.) *Grayson Perry - World Leaders Attend the Marriage of Alan Measles and Claire Perry* (2009) [Image]. Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/museum/comments/z31sd/grayson_perry_world_leaders_attend_the_marriage/ (Accessed: 19 December 2025).

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