

AMERICAN  
**art**  
COLLECTOR



*Now Showcasing Glass,  
Ceramics & Wood*





IAN SHULTS

# Sex, drugs and leave me alone

**I**an Shults is currently enduring some of the most difficult challenges he's faced in his life. This past winter he developed pancreatitis, forcing him to forever give up the substance, alcohol, that caused him to develop the affliction. About a month after leaving the hospital—a stay during which he went without food and water for six days while on an IV—his wife of 15 years separated from him. This is the first period in his life in a very long time that Shults has been alone, and he says the eye-opening experience has caused him to be the best painter he's ever been.

"I feel like the artwork is definitely getting better, and I feel pretty positive even though things are going pretty terrible," Shults, 36, from Austin, Texas, says. "I'm aware of every little brushstroke I'm doing and am trying to have a little bit more fun with every bit I'm painting.

I'm thinking about how I want every little thing I want to look. I'm paying a lot more attention and spending a lot more time."

This transition period in his life inspired the title of his upcoming collection of more than a dozen paintings at Wally Workman Gallery in Austin, *Sex, Drugs, and Leave Me Alone*. As someone who was used to

spirited times with his artist and service industry friends, Shults says even being the sober, designated driver at gatherings still presents some lonely times. It's a theme



featured in his exhibition's acrylic on canvas, *The Wet Blankets*, depicting a kissing couple next to a sullen man, as a woman in lingerie in the foreground chugs a bottle. A smaller painting sits atop the larger one, a woman whose skin and hair is red, with crimson and black hues dripping onto the painting below.

Several other works are comprised of large compositions paired with smaller works, such as *Trouble*, which takes a cue from his youth and features a clique of blonde girls with a boy wearing a crown in the larger work, while the smaller piece depicts an angry child. *Alice's Troublesome*

*Trip Abroad* shows a lesbian couple making love, as a sad woman looks on. A laughing older couple in a smaller composition tops the piece, a reflection of Shults feeling left out of love.

Sexual scenes such as this, and the erotic embrace in his acrylic and oil on canvas *Supper Club*, often infiltrate Shults' work. In a previous collection, Shults created his paintings with inspiration from photos he took at an alcohol-fueled party he hosted, where couples and singles gathered to mingle in an anything-goes setting decorated with props and lingerie. He says his work reflects an uninhibited world,

one he says most people would rather be a part of but don't really talk about, as evidenced by the positive response from that collection. As he experienced from the parties he threw, some of the most otherwise tame people would become the wildest when they had the opportunity.

The adeptness to craft a powerful narrative is a quality of Shults' that stands out to Rachel Stephens, partner at Wally Workman Gallery, which has represented the self-taught artist for more than five years.

"Ian's work peers into the dark underbelly of society," Stephens says, "and reveals its allure, humor and demise."



1  
*The Wet Blankets*,  
acrylic on canvas,  
40 x 50" and 18 x 18"

2  
*Trouble*, acrylic  
on canvas, 40 x 50"  
and 18 x 14"



**3**  
*Alice's Troublesome  
Trip Abroad*, acrylic  
and ink on canvas,  
40 x 40" and 12 x 18"

**4**  
*Long Division*, acrylic  
and ink on canvas,  
40 x 50"

**5**  
*Supper Club*, acrylic  
and oil on canvas,  
50 x 40"



3



4

Shults, whose artistic beginnings came as a high school graffiti artist, includes dripping and smudging techniques on much of his work, to give it a sense of movement and fluidity. That aesthetic resonates with set decorator and interior designer Jennifer Long, who says Shults' use of fragmented strokes make his paintings feel like they are alive.

"Ian is able to capture the moment with his subjects and make you feel moved by his artistic ability to create movement and depth through paint," Long says.

Considering his accolades, it is surprising Shults has no formal art instruction. He took his first art job at an Austin commercial fabrication company where he

learned sculpture and fabrication before starting to paint seriously for the past seven years. He's been a full-time artist for the past year, collecting old photos to integrate into story collages that inspire his paintings, some with muted colors and '60s fashion that has garnered comparisons to the television show *Mad Men*.

While Shults says letting go of his old lifestyle has presented some hard times, he's feeling healthier than ever and making better decisions substance-free—which can only positively impact his paintings, as well.

"All I want to do is make things that are cool and aesthetically pleasing," Shults says. "As dark as the subject matter can get, I try to make the art something you want to look at every day." ●



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