

## Countermeasure

**Alan Magee, (b. 1946)**  
oil on canvas  
H. 50 x W. 75 inches,  
James A. Michener Art Museum, Museum  
purchase funded by the Janus Society



### Biography

“Art work is a way of becoming the best person I can possibly be.”

*Alan Magee*

Alan Magee painted *Countermeasure*. A countermeasure is an action taken to counter or balance out a danger or threat.

He was born in Newtown, Pennsylvania, and loved art since he was a young boy. He was always excited by the forms and surfaces of things he saw every day.

Alan Magee attended Bucks County Community College, the Tyler School of Art and the Philadelphia College of Art.

He was not interested in abstract art, because he was determined to master the basics of drawing. So, he studied illustration. His early professional work included cover illustrations for novels by Graham Greene and Bernard Malamud, both of whom are famous writers to this day. Alan had to read the novels before he made his illustrations, and learned at a young age how art could represent life and ideas in a unique way.

Among Magee's well-known early works are a number of paintings of beach stones, created along the shores of Maine. These amazingly realistic paintings reflect his fascination with texture and surfaces. They also show his interest in objects that change over time – although in the case of rocks, the change happens very slowly.

In later works, Magee turned from his realist mode to some very different ink and brush pieces, monotypes, oil crayon and watercolor studies. He also began to use collage in the late 1980s. Increasingly, his work illustrates social and political ideas.

Alan Magee's art has been published in several books. He has been interviewed on radio programs and in television documentaries including, "Alan Magee, Visions of Darkness and Light." Magee has received awards for his painting from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and the National Academy of Design. His works can be seen in many public collections in addition to the James A. Michener Art Museum, including The Art Institute of Chicago, The Portland Museum of Art, the Farnsworth Art Museum, and the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio.



### **These rocks look so real. Is this a painting?**

Isn't this amazing? These stones are made with oil paint on canvas. Alan Magee loves to paint stones he finds along the coast in Maine. The large paintings of stones are nothing more than a painting of a section of beach with very big stones on it. Imagine stones like these going on forever and ever along a rugged coastline! Alan wants to paint the stones because he wants to call them to your attention – he wants you to think about them. It is his way of grabbing up a handful of stones, holding them toward you and saying, “Look at this.” The stones in his paintings are exciting because they are so beautiful.

Alan Magee started his career in art as an illustrator. This means that he studied very carefully how to create things on paper and canvas that would look extremely real. In his large stone paintings, Alan uses painting techniques that make his stones look very much like photographs. His main goal is not to create an illusion, however, but to study something intensely, to bring out the power of the object and to share the value of the object with the viewer. Alan wants to not only draw and paint objects, he also wants to develop an appreciation for everyday things – and share that appreciation with his audience.

### **Does Alan Magee do art other than painting?**

Alan Magee does many things in addition to the paintings he creates for museums and galleries. Alan creates an occasional book or magazine illustration and designs note cards and t-shirts. He also does folk art and makes puppets for animated films. He enjoys working in a variety of media and methods. He finds it all challenging, and he thinks it is a nice way to combine the high art museum and gallery experience with everyday art that is available to many people.

Alan really enjoys seeing people wear the t-shirts he designs. He feels even that is an artistic experience, where the artist and the wearer of the shirt work together to make something creative happen. Alan once said: “I love to see somebody walking around with one of my more outrageous t-shirts on; we share the joke at that moment even though that person doesn't know I'm seeing him. It's a nice feeling that's quite different from seeing my painting on a gallery wall or having that painting purchased.” Did you ever imagine that when you wear a t-shirt you are an extension of the artist who made it? Did you ever imagine walking down the street and seeing or being seen by the artist who made your t-shirt?

Alan Magee also dabbles in the world of animation. Old black-and-white films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* inspire him. Learn more at [www.filmmonthly.com](http://www.filmmonthly.com). He likes the dream images and the expressive themes in these movies. He is interested in exploring the ideas of movement and time in his work. Just imagine looking at his painting *Countermeasure* – and all of a sudden watching it move. How would it move? How would it change? How could it come alive?

### **Is this a landscape or a still life?**



A landscape is a painting, photograph or other work of art that depicts scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers and forests.

Look at a few landscape paintings you might see while on a visit to the Michener Art Museum. Edward Redfield, at [www.michenermuseum.org](http://www.michenermuseum.org), loved to paint en plein air in the snow, and Daniel Garber, at [www.michenermuseum.org](http://www.michenermuseum.org), is known for his pastel hues and pastoral scenery.

A still life is a work of art that depicts inanimate (not moving) objects. Look at some still life paintings you might see while on a visit to the Michener Art Museum at [www.michenermuseum.org](http://www.michenermuseum.org). Dorothy Double created many illustrations for the women's suffrage movement, and Martin Johnson Heade is considered one of the most important American artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Look again at Alan Magee's *Countermeasure*. Combine your understanding of the definitions of landscape and still life with your observation skills. What do you think? Is Alan Magee's *Countermeasure* a landscape or a still life? If you could ask Alan Magee, what do you think he would say?

### **I love these stones. They seem magical!**

What is it about the stones that seem so magical? Is it their size, their realism, their arrangement? There are real stones around the world that are believed to have magical powers. There are people who carry special stones because they believe they have magical or supernatural powers. There are also many stories about magic stones.

### **Learn More**

#### **Learn more about stones around the world.**

There are places in the world where stones have taken on special meaning. Have you ever heard of Stonehenge or Avebury in England? The Rollright Stones or the Merry Maidens? The Blarney Stone in Ireland? The Islamic Ka'bah? The Dolmens in Europe? What about Meteora in Greece? The stone eyes at Homol'ov in the American Southwest? Look at the photographs of these sites below. Why do you think they look sacred? What is it about them that makes them seem magical? Learn more in the activity "Stones Around the World" below.

#### **Learn more about stories in stone.**

The folklore of stones throughout the world is fascinating for their tales of mystery, fantasy and magic. Many stories and poems have been written about special stones that have magical powers. Some books you may want to read to learn more about these stones are listed below in the activity sheet "Stories in Stone."

**Look at paintings and photographs of stones** in the activity "Which Stones are Real?"



## Related Images

To see artwork by Alan Magee, visit the websites of these American museums: The Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois at [www.artic.edu](http://www.artic.edu) The Portland Museum of Art in Portland, Maine, at [www.portlandmuseum.org](http://www.portlandmuseum.org) Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, at [www.farnsworthmuseum.org](http://www.farnsworthmuseum.org) Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio at [www.columbusmuseum.org](http://www.columbusmuseum.org)

To learn about the exhibition *Alan Magee: Three Decades of Paintings, Sculpture and Graphics*, visit the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, at [www.michenermuseum.org](http://www.michenermuseum.org). Visit Alan Magee's website at [www.alanmagee.com](http://www.alanmagee.com).

## Related Links

Learn more about the art colleges where Alan Magee studied: Bucks County Community College in Newtown, Pennsylvania at [www.bucks.edu](http://www.bucks.edu) Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at [www.temple.edu/tyler](http://www.temple.edu/tyler). Philadelphia College of Art, now University of the Arts, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at [www.uarts.edu](http://www.uarts.edu).

Rent *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* on [www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com), or take it out from your local public library.

Watch the Maine PBS production of *Alan Magee, Visions of Darkness and Light* at the Skokie Public library in Skokie, Illinois [www.skokie.lib.il.us](http://www.skokie.lib.il.us).

To watch an interview with Alan Magee entitled *A Discussion with Alan Magee* made in collaboration with the Skokie, Illinois Public Library, visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

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