

Alex Israel

Heaven

Feb 15 — 23 and Mar 7 — 16, 2025 | Aspen Art Museum, CO, US

ASPEN, COLORADO (December 19, 2024)—In partnership with Aspen One, the Aspen Art Museum is pleased to present 'Heaven', an expansive project by Los Angeles-based artist Alex Israel that takes the form of a lift ticket, an exhibition, on-mountain signage, activations and merchandise.

Open to the public and running Feb 15 - 23 and March 7 - 16, 2025, 'Heaven' will transform the historic Ruthie's cabin on Aspen Mountain into a first-of-its-kind, ski-in-ski-out art exhibition.

The project is in celebration of Aspen One's 20th Anniversary of the Art In Unexpected Places program, which exhibits the works of contemporary artists across the resort in unique ways.

Israel creates artworks that draw upon traditions of pop culture, celebrity, and entertainment to consider ways in which fantasy, escapism and the pursuit of joy shape our lives. To make his work, Israel often embeds himself within industries he examines, harnessing their magic through incorporating their methods of production. Much of his work, including props, set pieces, signs and scenic backdrops of sunset-hued skies, is made within the Warner Bros. Design Studio.

At the invitation of Aspen One and Aspen Art Museum, Israel designed the 2024-2025 season lift ticket. Across each ticket, against a radiant skyscape reads the phrase: "Your ticket to Heaven." The dynamic red script in which the title of the project is rendered references the logo of Heaven: The Supermarket of Pop Culture, a novelty store founded by artist Brad Benedict in Los Angeles' Century City Mall in the late 1970s. Known for selling graphic t-shirts greeting cards, candy, toys, and collectibles, the unconventional store became a treasured emblem of the city throughout the 1980s. The iconic graphic, created by Benedict, could be seen on merchandise worn by celebrities including Freddie Mercury, Divine, Sharon Stone, Brooke Shields, and Andy Warhol. Punchy and effervescent, the logo evokes a bygone era of graphic design and retail experience. As such, Israel presents this lift ticket not as an image of an artwork, but a work of art in and of itself that resurrects a cherished brand.

Acts of resurrection characterize Israel's exhibition, which unfolds in a building formerly known as Ruthie's, stationed at the base of the treasured Ruthie's Run on Aspen Mountain. Built by Frank Lerner in the early 1980s, the restaurant shuttered in 2001 yet remains extant on the slopes. As Heaven, the entire interior is painted a luminous white and inhabited by over thirty life-size painted portraits of celebrities who have died since the launch of Instagram on October 6, 2010. Israel is attuned to the ways in which figures of pop culture are memorialized in a tidal wave of recycled imagery on social media. For a short time, feeds become entirely devoted to a person celebrated by many but known by few. These images form the basis for the portraits, which are painted upon an aluminum structure that mimics a cardboard cutout. Hyperreal and bodily, Israel's trompe l'oeil techniques place the work somewhere between an apparition and memorabilia.

“My goal is to create an experience that will further enrich the lore of Aspen Mountain. Aspen, for me, has always been a place of joy and community, something of a heaven due to both its altitude and natural beauty,” notes Alex Israel. “I learned to ski here as a child, and it has been a happy place for me ever since. Heaven as a destination exhibition challenges viewers to question their surroundings and invites them to see the mountain in a whole new light. It’s a treatise on loss and grief, but also on finding joy through community and collective memory, in shared spaces both physical and online. Heaven is an opportunity to contemplate rebirth, immortality and the enduring power of myth.”

Nicola Lees, Nancy and Bob Magoon Director of the Aspen Art Museum states “Alex Israel’s Heaven invites us to see the museum as a dynamic site of connection—where memory, performance, and place intersect to shape meaning—even outside the museum walls. Celebrated for seamlessly merging art, pop culture, and storytelling Israel brings a sensitivity to how we both memorialize and mythologize. Situated slopeside, this project reflects the museum’s ongoing exploration of how art can expand beyond conventional frameworks, fostering conversations and experiences that resonate both locally and globally.”

The dramaturgy of 'Heaven' catalyzes imagined conversations amongst stars across time and situates the exhibition itself as a mirage on the face of the mountain, overlooking the town below. For decades, memories, traditions, and lore have been generated on Ajax. Heaven emerges as another sublime chapter in its evolving history.

Art In Unexpected Places (ArtUP)

Since 2005, ArtUP has brought world-class art to the slopes and community of Aspen One through installations, lift ticket artwork and special events. The program has featured renowned artists including Takashi Murakami, FriendsWithYou, Paola Pivi and Rashid Johnson. The program is grounded in the belief that artistic works should be accessible and universal—cutting across class, race, and politics—and celebrates contemporary art’s spirit of spontaneity.

In partnership with the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen One is revisiting and celebrating featured artists who have sparked moments of unanticipated discovery through lift ticket art, on-mountain installations and interventions, multimedia storytelling, and special events. These moments have defined the program for 20 years and solidified our company and community as champions of accessible art.

"For two decades, ArtUP has transformed our lift tickets into pocket-sized works of art," said Aspen One Chief Brand Officer Gabby Cohen. "Our lift tickets this season feature Alex Israel’s work with the words ‘Your Ticket to Heaven’, and we are thrilled to reveal the full meaning of the ticket with the announcement of the upcoming ‘Heaven’ exhibit on Aspen Mountain. This transformation of Ruthie's brings the intersection of art and nature to our guests and community."