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ON THE FLY
 In pieces such as "All a Twitter," Alison layers canvases fashioned from recycled scraps of paper with oil-painted icons and emblems such as birds both cartoonish and literal.

To Die For

What's whimsical painter-storyteller Kelly Alison latest bright idea? Going dark.

| By Amber Bell |

Morbid as it sounds, death just might become H-Town artist Kelly Alison, whose newest works cover the subject in a cool and colorful way.

Some 30 colorful pieces—assemblies of paper and oils, resembling at a glance sprawls of graffiti, but on closer inspection are filled with a vibrant mix of both highly representational and cartoonish symbols and hieroglyphs such as guns, skulls and birds—are on display April 6-27 at D.M. Allison Art (2709 Colquitt St., 832.656.7698). To the artist, the pieces in the show, named *Pick Your Poison*, are picture stories that deal with fatality in various ways.

"Some of them are logical, and some of them are silly, like alien abduction," says the UH grad who's been making art of many sorts in Houston since 1977, including having been one of the earliest affiliates of the Lawndale alternative arts space. "Over the past five years, I've become really aware that what I do is storytelling. I'm usually telling some kind of serious story, some kind of tragic story, some type of real-life human drama."

Although her current topic is dark, Alison's personality is anything but. Known to sport a shock of purple bangs in her brunette hair, the artist, 55, splits time among her peaceful country home in nearby rural Brazoria, her studio at the Box 13 live-work space in the Second Ward, and her apartment in the Heights—where her husband Preston resides during the week

while working at Mitsubishi Caterpillar. Her two grown children, Madeleine and Jacob, live in town as well.

On this particular French morning, as the Plainview native listens to eclectic French music and the birds singing outside in Brazoria, she sips a Diet Dr Pepper and gets to work in her upstairs studio, still wearing her flannel pajamas. Alison gathers old paper scraps—grocery lists, discarded sketchbook pages and newspapers, the more weathered the better—and collages them into patterns and shapes atop a canvas. "A lot of times I'll just leave whole tablets of paper in my driveway or in my backyard for a while until the wind and the rain and the ants have their way with it," she says.

Next, Alison draws on the top of the collage with black and white oil sticks to clarify the shapes and images, occasionally finishing it off with a sparing use of colorful oil paints. "I always try to cover everything in a whimsical way." Whimsy—and prolificness—have become her hallmarks. Her celebrated 2011 series *Tweet*, for example, includes 365 paintings, inspired by news headlines and posted daily on Twitter.

"I don't mind drawing a little attention to myself," she says with a chuckle, clearly not prepossessed with thoughts of death. "My kids are grown, I'm in good health and I've got more opportunity now to be a professional artist than ever in my life. I think this is my time."