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# ALARM

ISSUE #17

DIVERSE . SPIRITUALIZED . THE SHINS . MEST . CHARLIE AHEARN . FROM ASHES RISE . MATES OF STATE . THE LOT SIX . BIG COLLAPSE





Jogjakarta, Indonesia July 2003 Photo by Nano Warsano

## ANDREW J. SCHOULTZ

By Buck Austin

The stink eye knows no language barriers. So when the middle-aged woman in the polyester slacks and Hawaiian shirt scowled at Andrew Schoultz, it didn't matter that he didn't speak Bahasa Indonesia and she didn't speak English. "It was pretty clear she wasn't very stoked about the fact I was painting there," Schoultz recalls of those first few days in the summer of 2003 painting a 19,000 sq. ft. mural in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. Even though the mayor and over 100 residents of Jogjakarta had approved the mural,

the glaring proprietress of the beauty salon/gas station across from the concrete canvas wasn't having it. Only since the toppling of the Suharto regime in 1998 have the Indonesian people even had access to public spaces for art, so it can be understood how the idea of anyone, much less a foreigner, painting a mural could be disconcerting to an old-timer. "Even if you were just painting a teddy bear flying a kite, it would be insane to them," Schoultz says. "You have a whole other responsibility there." With this duty in mind, he persisted, painting on the wall for up to 8 hours per day as the exhaust of hundreds of passing motor scooters painted the walls of his lungs. Thousands of brushstrokes and gallons of sweat escaped from Schoultz. Early one steamy morning as he mopped his brow with a paint-splattered wrist, a "Selamat pagi!" floated up to his perch on the bamboo ladder. Schoultz cocked his head in the direction of the greeting and recognized the scowling shopkeeper. But now she wasn't scowling. She had replaced it with a satisfied grin that would last the remainder of Schoultz' month of painting. When the mural was finished, members of Indonesian artist collective, Apotik Komik, filmed interviews with local residents to commemorate the

event. The middle-aged woman explained to the interviewers that Schoultz had won her over with his work ethic and the themes in his murals – the struggle of the working class to find dignity and respect in a system designed to exploit them.

People often seem to find their own stories being told in Schoultz' murals. He doesn't so much manufacture fantasy worlds as hold up vast anthropomorphic mirrors to the neighborhoods in which he paints. Imagining Walt Kelly's politically aware "Pogo" creatures lost in the cautionary tale of Hieronymus Bosch's "Earthly Paradise," Schoultz nails the angst of working class disillusionment. Given this subject matter, it was fitting that Schoultz, 28, was invited to Jogjakarta to collaborate with members of Apotik Komik, the socially-conscious, boundary-smashing Indonesian artist collective. Schoultz and the members of Apotik Komik, in concert with artists like the UK's Banksy, Beijing's AK47, and Sao Paulo's Os Gemeos, have created an international forum for aesthetically intriguing social commentary through public art. Their works bound the cultural differences and competing political agendas of their home countries to create

a free and open dialogue. Because their pieces are so accessible both physically and in subject matter, they remove barricades to understanding like language, education, ethnicity, class and nationality. Thus an artist like Andrew Schoultz can travel to Jogjakarta, Indonesia, and communicate with a middle-aged woman with whom he shares no words. His murals speak an international language. Maybe even more so than a stink eye.

Schoultz explained some of his views on public art in an interview at his studio/apartment in San Francisco's North Panhandle District.

### How did you get started doing murals?

Basically, murals were the natural evolution from doing graffiti art for me. I always painted walls. As time went on, I started wanting to do stuff that took too much time to be done without permission. Graffiti is the voice of the streets. If you want to truly know what is going on in a city, read the walls.



*The World is Our...*, 2003, Acrylic on Wall, Approx 22ft x 26ft, San Francisco,  
Commissioned by Matt McGraw, Photo by Leslie Bauer.



*Generator*, 2002, Acrylic on Wall, San Francisco, Collaboration with Aaron Noble, Photo by Leslie Bauer.

### Is there a message in your murals?

There are definitely messages in my murals. I try to have many messages in one. A mural *should* have a message or statement in it. It should serve a purpose for the public and the community it is in. I try to have many messages in my murals that collectively can tell a story. I try not to be too definitive though. The messages, for the most part, I think are obvious, although I do try to leave it somewhat open for interpretation by the audience. If the message is too obvious it eliminates the audience's motivation to think about it and process it. I also believe when painting murals, if you voice a particular viewpoint or opinion too hardcore it cannot be as effective in reaching and perhaps changing those who have a different viewpoint or opposite opinion from mine. That's the audience I would like to reach with my murals; people who are on the opposite side of the fence from me politically. I don't have to convince people who have the same political views as me of anything. We already agree. For them, I would hope for them to feel perhaps hope and support from my murals. I also feel that children are a very important audience as well, and are often times ignored. This is also the reason for trying to make my murals universal, to apply to everyone. I believe that what the audience gets from looking at one of my murals is just as valid as what I might be trying to say.

Sometimes the audience sees things in my murals that I never thought of.

### How do you feel about what is going on in terms of public art right now as opposed to what is happening in galleries?

When I speak of public art, I also speak of street art as well. They are two different things in many ways, but they both in some way have the same audience. Public art seems to be done in a much more spontaneous manner in the last couple years. People are just getting permission for walls and just going for it instead of dealing with city money, grants, red tape and all the legal mumbo jumbo. That had gone hand-in-hand with public art in the recent past. Dealing with all that stuff can make a mural take years just to get started. By the time you paint the mural, the design is old news. You have developed your art a lot more and you don't feel as connected with the mural as you did two years ago when you designed it. It's hard enough even getting permission to do murals, let alone getting someone to fund it. I guess in terms of galleries, public art doesn't have anything to do with them. That's why it's called public art: it's free. Although one thing I have seen is a lot of people that jumped on the street art bandwagon and have run around half-heartedly putting their stuff up all over the city for a brief minute or two merely to get a little bona fide street cred in the art world. Whatever. Those types of people play themselves out. For me,

I like street/public art because the territory seems a lot more free and pretty much the only way to reach a truly diverse multi-cultural widespread audience. It's been a priority for me and will continue to be.

### What can you accomplish with a mural that can't with a painting in a gallery?

For one thing, I would say you can work to a much larger scale, which is something I really enjoy. Paintings in a gallery are usually for sale. A mural outside on a wall is not. It's free to whoever happens to pass by. That said, the audience for a mural is way more diverse. People who would never step inside a gallery are exposed to your work. I like that. It is accessible to anyone. A good muralist should consider the environment and community they are painting in. It should apply. A good mural should work *with* the environment it is in, not against it.

### Why do you like to work on such a large scale?

Working large is in some ways a crossover from doing graffiti art. I always tried to do my stuff as big as possible. But, in other ways, I think large scale is good for the impact and attention it demands. One of the reasons I love doing public art is because you can paint so large. It is the possibility to paint something way larger than imaginable in your studio that really



Imaga, 2003, Jogjakarta, Indonesia, Acrylic on Wall, Collaboration with Nano Warsano.



Untitled, 2002, Acrylic on Wood Panel, Courtesy of Bucheon Gallery, Photo by Leslie Bauer

excites me. The mural site becomes your studio. It's nice. In Indonesia this summer I painted a mural that was about 15 feet tall by about 2 city blocks long. Eventually I would really like to do something insanely immense, like an 8-story building or something.

**With media increasingly coming under the ownership of just a few gigantic corporations, is public art becoming more important as an independent means of communication?**

Yes, definitely. It is probably one of the last forums and ways for truly free and uncontrolled news and media to get out to the public – particularly guerrilla art and posters. It is also a very affordable forum. It doesn't cost that much to go write or post on walls, although it can be risky. In terms of public art, I would say that a lot of wall space is covered with advertisements and billboards. There is not much space left, especially for the voice of the underdog. In a lot of ways, I feel like it is our duty when doing public art to address unjust situations. I think it is also worthy just to make something more beautiful, but I prefer to voice an opinion with my murals. There are so many problems

to address, how could you not if you were given the chance.

**Nature is a theme that keeps appearing in your work. What does nature symbolize to you?**

Nature is the origin of everything. Before cities there was nature. Before us there was nature. We came from nature and now we are destroying it. The environmental situation in the world right now is fucked, to say the least. The repercussions of a lot of these environmental situations will be seen for generations to come. The bare essentials are: rainforests and trees supply us with oxygen we need to live; yet we continue to see them cut down for corporate interests. I am simply about sustainable living. Taking away our oxygen by cutting down the rainforests is not sustainable living. Polluting our water and killing millions of species and offshore drilling in Alaska is not sustainable living, just to name a few. It's like a simple math equation. I don't understand why people don't get it. This is a deep, multi-faceted subject. It is very hard for me to just briefly scratch the surface. This is a 3-hour conversation. Basically speaking, nature is a theme in my work because the situation is something I think needs to be addressed,

or criticized for that matter. Generally my work is usually based on political commentary of what I see going on around. Nature and environment are two of those things. I don't care what opinion people might have. I just hope and wish for them to be conscious about the facts while making their decisions. Often this isn't the case.

**Do you see the smaller painting you do for galleries as part of a larger story?**

I look at smaller works, sometimes, as parts of a larger whole. I always envision showing many paintings that together work as one piece, but also by-themselves work as one piece. I've never really been into the whole "single-painting on a white wall with a spotlight on it." If the painting was really large, this could work, but otherwise I would prefer a more original approach to showing work. The space needs to be utilized and most times it is very obvious what type of presentation a space demands.

**How has the environment of living in San Francisco affected your art?**

San Francisco is a very highly populated small city. Space issues are an issue that





Moments in Time, 2003, Track 16 Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, Acrylic on Masonite Panel, Photo by Joshua White.



*Imaga* (Detail), 2003, Jogjakarta, Indonesia, Acrylic on Wall.





Above: *China Basin Mural* (Partial), 2000, Acrylic on Wall, Collaboration with Aaron Noble, San Francisco.

Right: First Images of *China Basin Mural*, 2000.



gets slammed in your face everyday. It really resonates on many levels. When you don't have much private space you really start to see the value (not just financial) of public space, as well as free space.

**Is public art under-appreciated in the U.S.?**

I don't think public art is under appreciated in the U.S. I think the general public appreciates it a lot. A lot of the time in America appreciation is measured in monetary value. Monetarily speaking, public art is very under-appreciated. There is not really any money in it, in terms of actually equaling the amount of work, and time that it actually takes to do: a mural, or whatever, in the public space. Most people I know doing public art, are not doing it for the money.

**Do you feel like there is a worldwide public**

**art movement through which people are expressing their political views?**

Yes, but I don't think that it is anything new. A lot of artists, generally speaking, are very conscious about what is going on today in the world, politically, as well as culturally, so it comes as no surprise to me that, political views would be voiced by artists in the public space with or without permission. This has been done for thousands of years. Although, I have noticed a surge in recent years of political public art, mostly through the graffiti, and gorilla posturing movement.

**Is there anyone that you would like to say thanks or hello to?**

Mary and Bill Schoultz, Madeline Born, C.A.M.P., Ray Patlan, Eduardo Pineda, Alicia

McCarthy, Travis, Aarron Noble, Rigo, Heart 101, Evail, Awe Z, Hello Noisy, Riel, Culture Cache, Willenbring-Meyers Family, Apotik Komik, Trust, Apex, Neon, Curue, Megan Wilson, Bucheon Gallery, Mars, Grady, Balazo Gallery, Track 16, Laurie Steelink, Mats, J-Ro, Buck, Lindsey Westbrook, Oh So Little, Anno Domini, Mark Pearsall, Sirron Norris, Oliver Rosenberg, Kyle Ranson, Matt McGraw.

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