

ANDREW SCHOULTZ *Swimming in the waves with Paul Klee* MIRANDA JULY *A conversation on why It Chooses You*

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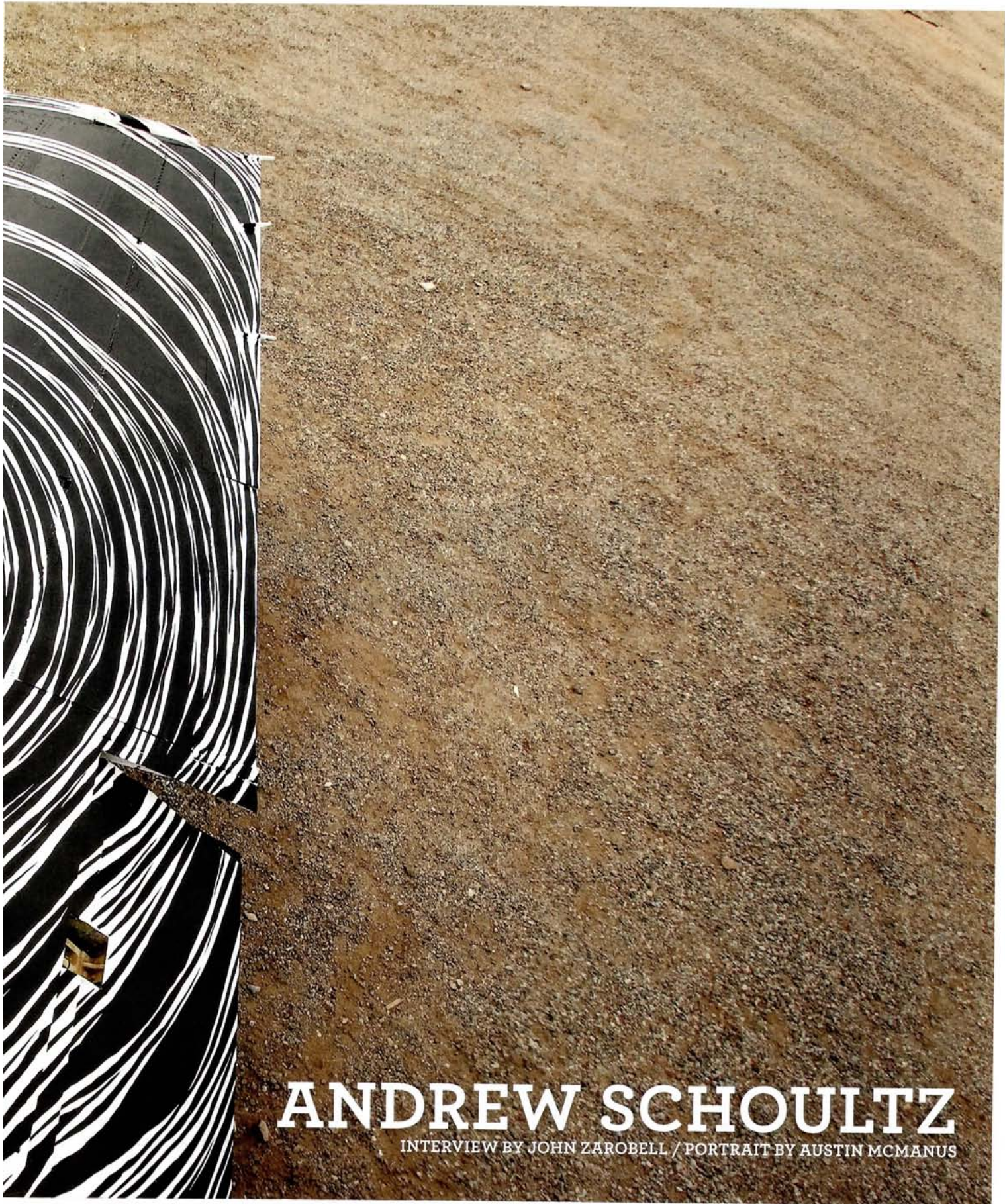
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ANDREW SCHOULTZ

INTERVIEW BY JOHN ZAROBELL / PORTRAIT BY AUSTIN MCMANUS

Tornado in Chaos

Acrylic and spray paint on panel

30" x 40" / 2008

Courtesy of Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles

Photo courtesy of the artist.

ANDREW SCHOULTZ IS A SAN FRANCISCO ARTIST (AND SKATEBOARDER) WHO HAS MADE GRAFFITI, PUBLIC MURALS, PAINTINGS AND GALLERY INSTALLATIONS. HIS WORK HAS BEEN RECENTLY REWARDED IN AN EXPLOSION OF ATTENTION WITH EXHIBITIONS AT GALLERIES IN NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, MILAN, AND HERE IN SAN FRANCISCO.

- 1 Recently exhibited works alongside Paul Klee at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
- 2 Was influenced by skateboard artist Mark McKee and Milwaukee graffiti writer, Obi One.
- 3 Pieces of his early murals in Clarion Alley are still visible, over a decade later.

He just finished the Fountainhead Residency in Miami in December, which allowed him to create a giant mural just in time for Art Basel Miami Beach. If that wasn't enough, Schoultz showed new paintings at Art Los Angeles Contemporary in January, and will showcase a painting in the Juxtapoz 18th Anniversary show at Copro Gallery this March. Curator and critic John Zarobell, who worked with Schoultz on a recent project at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, snagged the prolific painter before he flew to Tuscon, Arizona to decorate a former spy plane for the Boneyard Project.

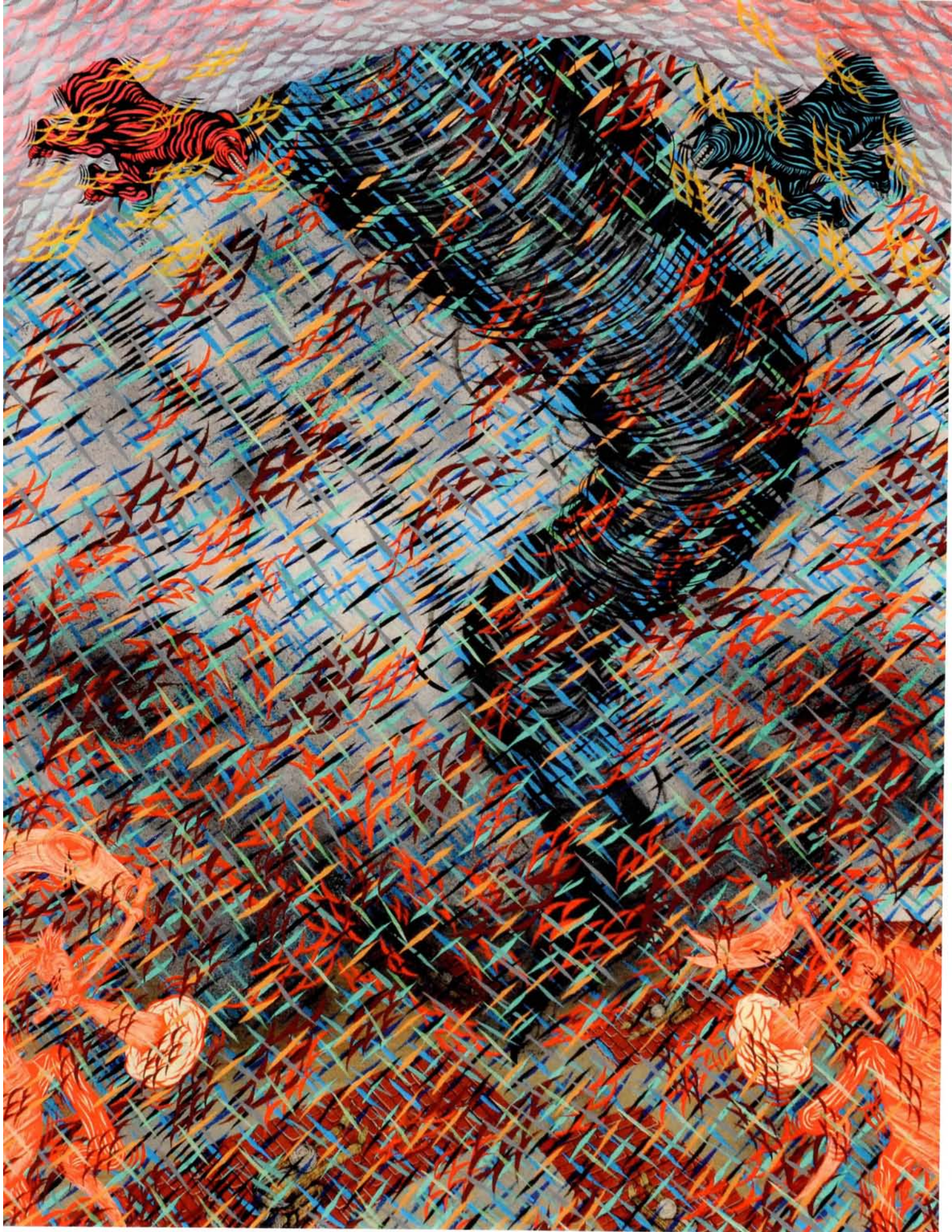
John Zarobell: Let's start with San Francisco. When you first came for art school, what were you interested in doing? Who were your favorite artists, what kind of work did you want

to do, and what were you looking at?

Andrew Schoultz: I moved to San Francisco in 1997 for a couple of different reasons, and one major reason was to come out here and skateboard. That was something I did heavily for a good many years. I started skateboarding in fifth grade and pretty much skated hardcore up until around 2001/2002. I still consider myself a skateboarder up until this day, but being a skateboarder growing up in the Midwest was actually not a common thing. Especially early on, you're kind of the outcast in a lot of respects. But I feel like coming from a skateboarding background, I was looking at a lot of different guys doing the graphics for skateboards. At the time, I remember being very influenced by Marc McKee. I also grew

up very interested in break-dancing, graffiti, hip-hop and all that kind of stuff.

I'd say prior to moving to San Francisco, I was influenced by a couple of artists in Milwaukee, one being graffiti writer, Obi One, his name being John Rieter. He's still an amazing artist but now is primarily a tattooer. I was looking at a lot of stuff going on in the streets, I guess because being a skateboarder, you're skating on the streets in all these places that most normal people wouldn't traverse. The average person isn't walking down certain alleys or going to hidden parts of the city, because why would they? I think there's also another part of skateboarding that I see very prevalent in the work I make now, too. When I skateboarded I was very fond of making sure I had my tricks



Three Caged Beasts
Acrylic and ink on paper
9.5" x 10" / 2011
Courtesy of Marx & Zavattero, San Francisco.
Photo by Randall Dodson



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I'M A PRETTY
 OBSESSIVE-
 COMPULSIVE
 PERSONALITY
 TO BEGIN WITH,
 AND NOW I AM
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 OF THIS
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down, that I could do them every single time, all the time, so there was definitely a lot of repetition. Now I see how that repetition in my skateboarding, and this sort of obsessive-compulsive desire to really have things locked in comes through in the art I make.

SF was a mecca for skateboarding and graffiti, so both those seemed very good reasons to come out here. When I first arrived, I would say I was still pretty heavily influenced by what was going on in the Midwest, specifically the Chicago music scene. I was heavily into the band Tortoise, the whole way they were presenting their music, their art, their album covers... everything they were doing at the time just seemed very artful and design-orientated to me; even a lot of the records they put out had a sort of print, limited-edition quality to them. At the time, too, the band Tortoise was infiltrating skateboarding videos, including San Francisco's Stereo Skateboards, which was owned by Jason Lee and Chris Pastras. They were always creating artful ways of presenting skateboarding in these videos with music. Just seeing this kind of thing happening was something I wanted to participate in and didn't really realize how to accomplish it. In SF, I immediately responded to many of the graffiti writers I saw: Felon, KR,

of course Twist, and the artist Alicia McCarthy. I was drawn to her work immediately.

After being here awhile, I started to feel this need for something more. I wanted to do something that had maybe a little bit more of a socially responsible impact. I had seen the Clarion Alley mural project in *Thrasher* many years before I ever moved out here, and it just so happened a graffiti writer I knew at the time, Peace, was living on the alley. I went over to his house one day and realized, "I'm in Clarion Alley. Wow, this is amazing." Seeing this project and how this public art could exist as a sort of very avant-garde art, seeming both sanctioned and unsanctioned at the same time, allowed to exist here very guerilla-style, but by the public, as something real and serious, that was influential. I'd say this had a very profound impact on me in a lot of ways, just all of a sudden realizing that this kind of thing could be possible.

I wanted to figure out a way to possibly do something in this project and learned that an artist named Aaron Noble was one of the people in charge. One day I just knocked on his door, proceeded to ask him if I could paint a wall in the alley, and he was kind of like, "Uh... yeah sure..." As I learned later on, lots

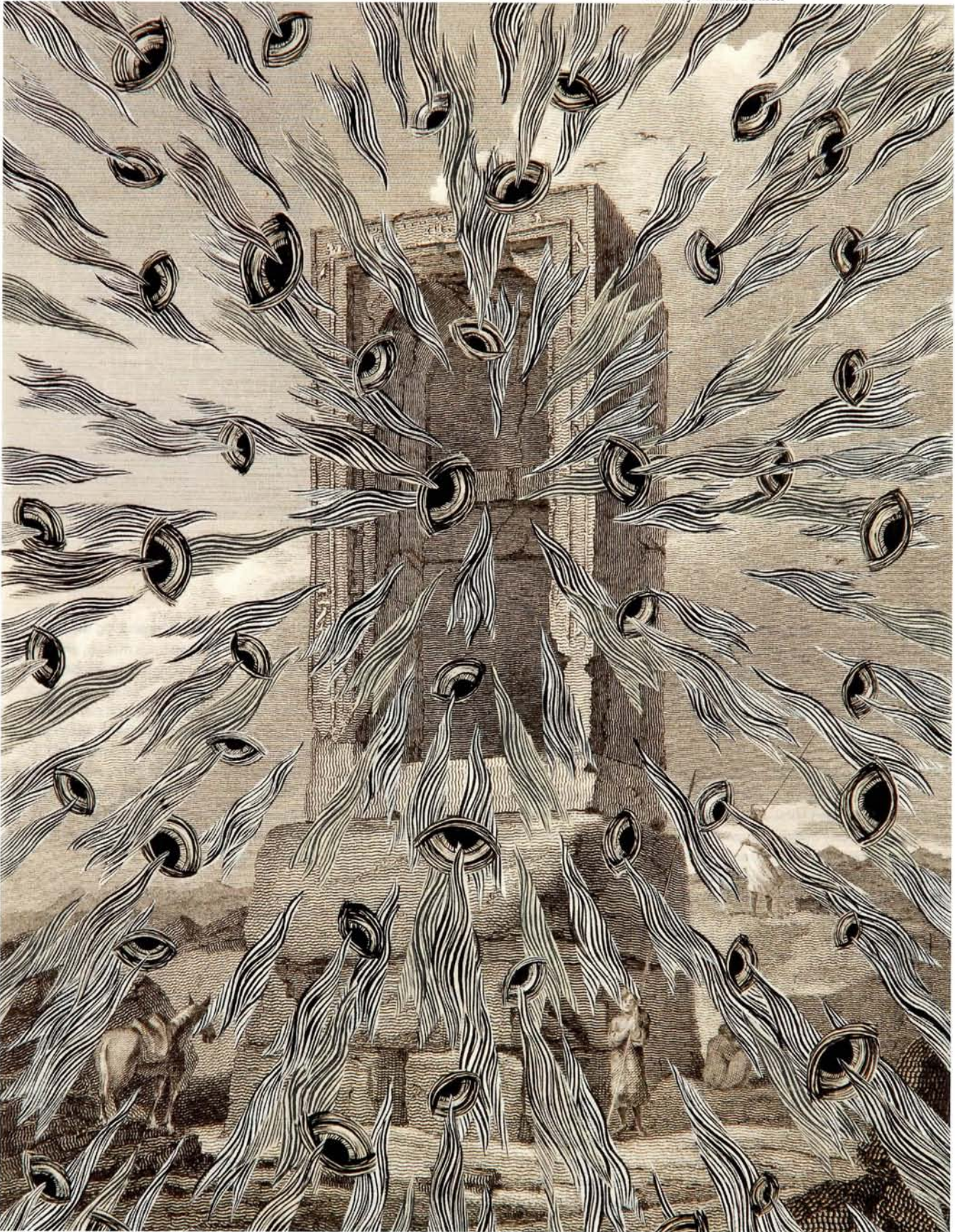
of people had been approaching the project to do these very ambitious murals, and a lot of times it ended up being a conversation where they'd ask, and he'd say, "yeah, come back with a design." And then they'd never show up again. I presented my idea to Aaron two days later, and eventually he organized it so my first mural went up in 2000. I can seriously go on and on about this whole thing, but that was a very crucial point in my moving to San Francisco, getting involved in this community-based project.

After that you did a bunch of other mural painting, right? You started in Clarion Alley and you sort of spread throughout the city.

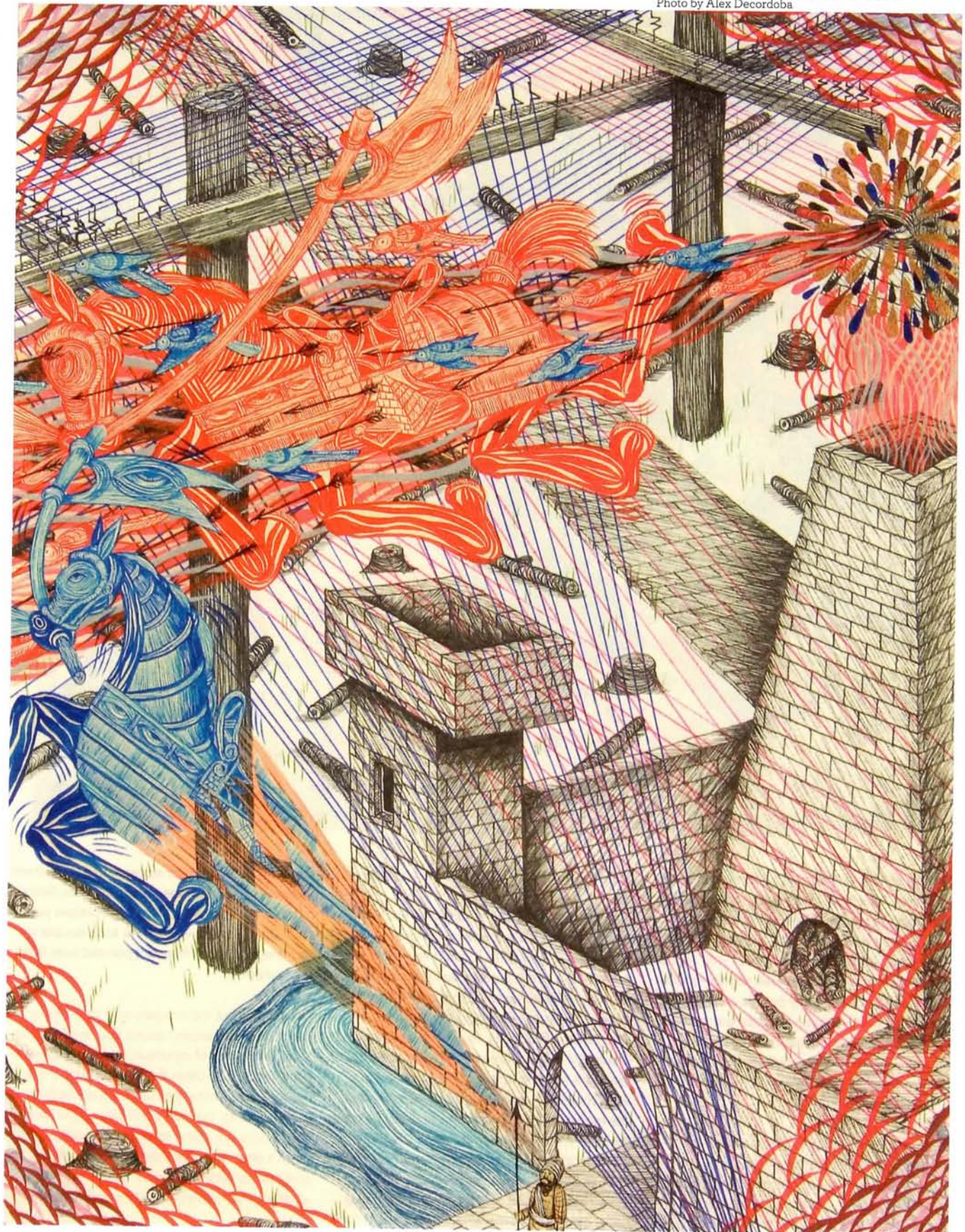
I started in Clarion Alley. Basically Clarion Alley is the stepchild of the first mural venture in SF, which is the Balmy Alley Mural project on 24th street. This began with an artist called Ray Patlan. Clarion was founded by Rigo 23, Aaron Noble, and Sebastiana Pastor, along with a couple other folks. Balmy was based in more of the traditional Chicano mural arts, and they wanted to expand in a project that was similar but more avant-garde and contemporary.

Ray Patlan had seen this piece I'd done there,

Revisiting Insignificant Moments in History (Monument)
Acrylic on antique copper plate print
1798-2010
Courtesy of Marx & Zavattero
Photo by Randall Dodson



Fortress Projection
Ink and acrylic on paper
12" x 16" / 2006
Courtesy of Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles
Photo by Alex Decordoba



Horse Repetition

Acrylic, ink, and collage on paper

22" x 22" / 2011

Courtesy of Marx & Zavattero, San Francisco

Photo by Randall Dodson



and he actually invited me to come and paint in Balmy. After that, I was highly motivated to just paint as many walls or murals as I possibly could, and I quickly ran into a pretty hardcore dead-end. And at this point, too, I was sort of going back and forth between regular graffiti and trying to do as many murals as possible. I guess if I had not been so busy with murals, I would've been doing less graffiti on the streets. But there was a definite bug in me, that I wanted to be painting on the streets as much as possible.

So then, how is it different to paint on the streets with graffiti versus these projects? I mean, it seems like a different kind of planning process, right? If you have to plan to do a mural, that's one thing, but if you have to plan

to do it, and not get caught, that is oppositional.

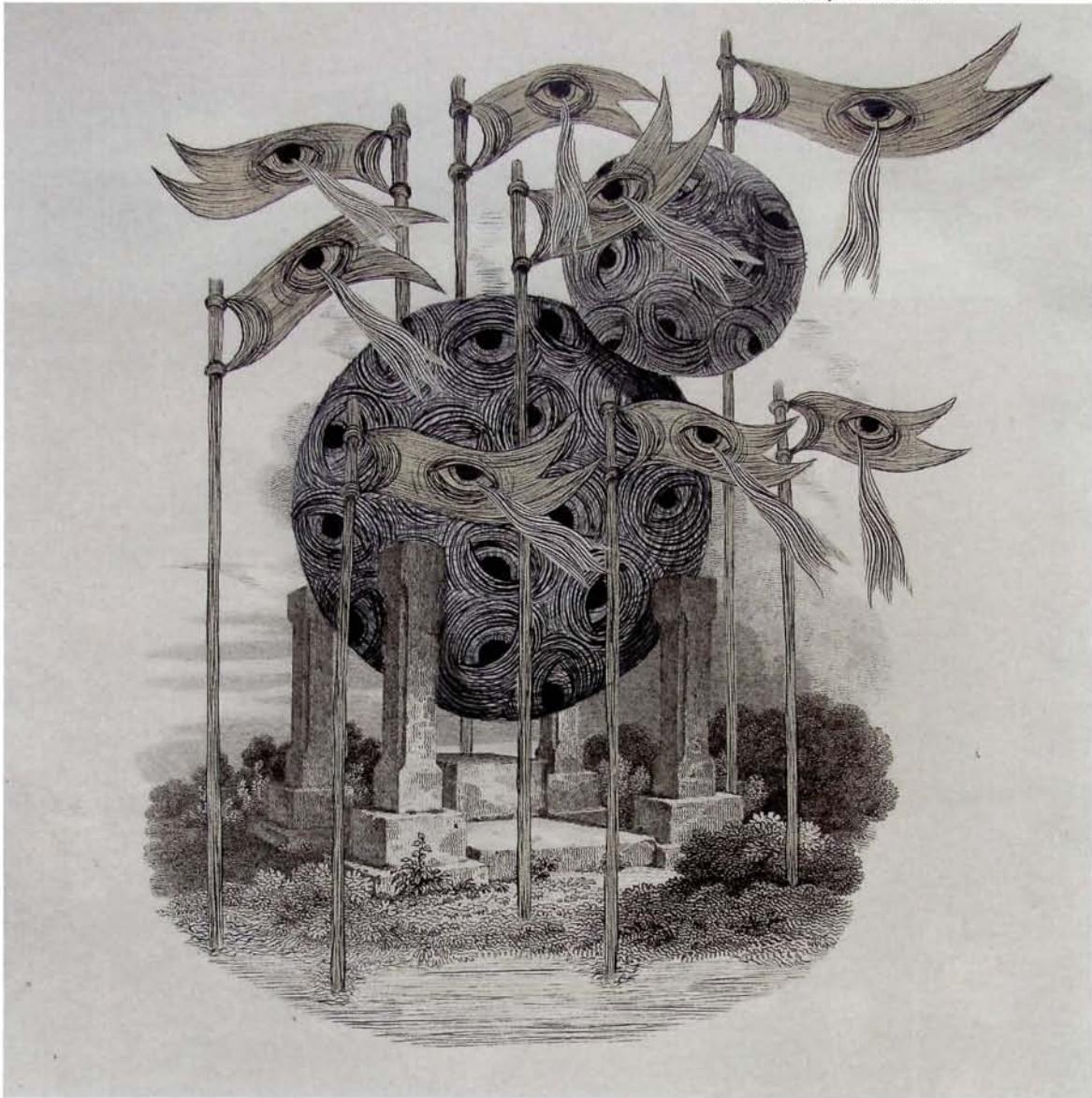
There is that level of graffiti where you do it and you know it's ephemeral immediately at the time that you do it. It could last a long time, it could last a day, it could last an hour. So that was always the mentality that carried over into the way I was approaching the murals. I think in regards, historically, to murals, I believe that in the 1970s you were working with the city, the city's funding it, there's all this red tape. With you doing numerous proposals to raise the money, by the time you're actually painting the wall, it's a year later. But then it's like painting this thing that went through all these checks and balances, so the mural is going to be there forever, and that type of process never appealed to me. Literally, we were doing

things on convenience stores and asking them if we could paint on their walls outside. Some of the ones I did were there for a couple years, and some of them were there for a couple of months, and when they got painted over it was like "whatever."

Thinking about the imagery and your design, a recognizable aspect about your work is that there is this kind of repetition, a kind of repeated symbolism. The other thing that struck me is the fact that you're talking about doing this graffiti writing, but you don't know how long your works are going to be up. I wonder if there's something intrinsic in this repetition and the transitory nature of this work, and whether that influences your approach.

Unbalanced Monument

Acrylic and collage on antique copper plate print
 16" x 12" / 1762-2011
 Courtesy of Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York
 Photo by Randall Dodson



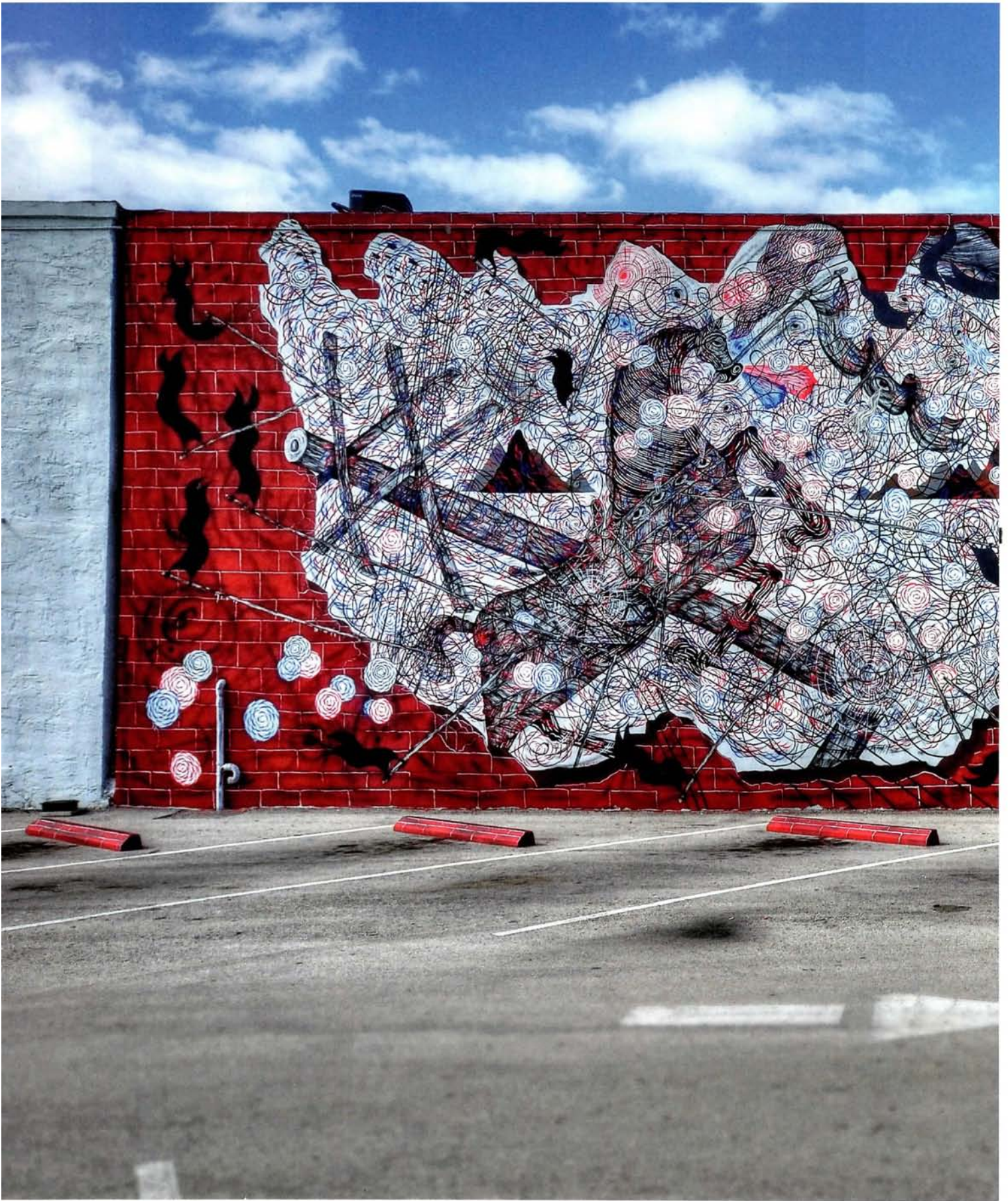
I'm a pretty obsessive-compulsive personality to begin with, and now I am more conscious of this characteristic, trying to create something with sort of an infinite amount of potential, and also things that were very intricate and layered. In a lot of ways, with the symbolism I've developed, I see many different possibilities and contexts in which to present these images. In the course of the years of repeating a lot of imagery over and over, that meaning and the overall feel of these images changes very drastically over time. This is something that interests me a lot. I would say, in very simple terms, that I've started to look at some of the recurring imagery that I use and some of these iconic symbols I've developed over the years, in terms of colors, in the sort of simple way of "that artist uses too much red." You don't hear

that literally but maybe you'll hear, "Oh, this guy always paints the same thing."

Venturing off into making mixed-media works and installations, there are just so many infinite prospects to present these images. That's also been something that interests me. Some of these images leave over the years, as well, and new ones emerge. I used to paint images of elephants, birds, and birdhouses, and the work used to be a lot more whimsical, and I'd say more geared towards the energy of children. Now, a lot of those images went away and new images have come back in. Also, in terms of creating a narrative with these images, there is less and less of a storyline happening and more of just trying to achieve an overall vibe with work that says many

things at the same time, and not just one aspect or message. That's been more of a recurring theme than it was in the past.

I like the way in which the images constantly overlap and take on different dimensions and meaning. That rhythm is one of the things that is really fascinating to me about your work. In some sense, all of these images seem to be layered with symbolism, but there's also a kind of rhythmic progression: the way in which the different repeating images overlap, the pyramids of eyes, the flags, the war horses, whether these things are big or small, whether one aspect or the other dominates. Because of the reuse of those images you end up with a different dimension to the symbolism in the work.



Black Flag Tornado

Acrylic and spray paint on cement wall
100' x 35' / 2011 / Miami, Florida
Courtesy of Primary Flight and The Fountain Head Residency
Photo by Gareth Gooch





In terms of drawing in general, the more times you go through the motions of drawing something, the more things you're going to figure out about drawing that image. So it's always fun for me to look back at the beginnings of some of these images and see certain little things that I used to do that have filtered out. Then I look at the newer way I'm drawing where there are these very subtle intricacies that change over the years.

Through repetition, I guess you're always forced to adapt, and the way in which your image adapts changes the way in which the image has meaning. Partially, it's about seeing it in the street versus seeing it in the studio, and then the gallery. If you see the war horse in here versus out there, that's kind of a different effect.

When you're working in galleries and museums, you're addressing a completely different audience than if you're making something in the street. And I feel like when you're making something in the street,

maybe if you're making it illegally and without permission, it's like, who cares what you do? And I do feel like that can be good or bad in a lot of ways. Whereas in the museum or the gallery context, you're maybe dealing with curators or the director of a gallery who has a particular vision. They have ideas about what they want to see in their space.

Then there's the other idea of doing a sanctioned piece of public art, and for me personally, I feel like it is a very big responsibility to do a sanctioned piece of public art in somebody's community. I think there are a lot of things you have to consider if you're being conscientious about it. I've always attempted to get to know who lives in that neighborhood, get to know who's around, who has to live with this, what type of people are passing by everyday, and maybe what kind of local issues in that community are affecting folks. If, in some way, you try to figure out a way to address these issues or address this community directly, they feel connected to this piece of public art. I think just jamming into somebody's

neighborhood where you don't live and painting a giant piece of art that's sort of a monument to yourself is a very selfish way of going about doing public artwork. I never approach doing public art like an advertisement. People are doing illicit things in the street geared towards design and advertising in a lot of ways these days, and I'm not saying anything's wrong with that, but it's just never been my approach.

Another thing that I see happening a lot nowadays is the prevalence and motivation to go out and do illegal art in the streets and end up one day in White Cube. I'm very surprised to have been able to show in a major museum, the show we did at SFMOMA. I've gotten to travel around the world, and I never thought this was possible in my wildest dreams. But I can honestly say that when I did public art, it was, and I loved doing it. I had no ulterior motive. It's interesting to talk about the difference between what's in a museum and what's in the streets now because I do believe that this conversation has changed drastically



over the last ten years.

Let's flash-forward to working at SFMOMA. We did this project last summer, and I had the idea of pairing your work with Paul Klee. As an art historian and curator, when I looked at your work, I was trying to find some work that I thought would rhyme with Paul Klee, that had some significant similarities. Your compilation came up not only because it's in our collection, but I knew it from a local gallery that you showed at, the Marx and Zavattero Gallery. For me, it was really clear to see that rhyming. You didn't see it the same way I did when I approached you, and that was actually a good, interesting beginning for a collaboration. You responded really well, and, in the end, you made your own body of work in response to Klee. So, looking at an artist like Paul Klee, obviously a modern artist, who goes way back—we're talking about work in the show that's from 1905, and some from 1935—how different is looking at that kind of art and trying to work your way through that in order to do something of your own in response?

I always loved Paul Klee and when this project came up, I was more just trying to figure out what connection you saw in the work. That intrigued me enough to try and figure it out. A friend gave me a book of Paul Klee. I actually wanted to get to know who this man was, and his motivation, so I could figure out how I could respond in some kind of a legitimate way. It's a big opportunity to get to work at SFMOMA, so thinking back to when you're younger and maybe more of a green thumb at showing, you just want to go for a big bang and try to make an impact. That was, of course, not the approach that I ended up going with. I immediately realized that most of Paul Klee's work was small, so I remember calling you and saying, "I know one thing is that I have to work small." I do work small very often but it was very challenging to make a whole body of, in my mind, cohesive drawings that were all of this very small scale. It's just a different experience to only work small. I remember, too, your interest at first was in the possibility of borrowing works that you already saw, or were familiar with, and for me

I really felt the need to get in deep with the project. I thought, "I want to know why he's pairing me with Paul Klee," and then, "I want to make work that's in some way rooted in this sense of what Paul Klee did, and who he was."

Another key component was that Klee was not setting out to make masterpieces and, in a lot of ways, he was making doodles and very whimsical drawings. He was very prolific. I also thought that—and a lot of this could be me making this up in my own mind—potentially, he's making things, and when he feels satisfied with them, he does something to them to say this is a done piece. That was a connection that I made immediately, which is something that I do as well. Maybe he made a drawing, and maybe he wasn't happy with it, so he glued it down to another piece of paper and then worked around the borders until he felt good about it. That's how I sort of romanticize how he made that work, which is very similar to the way I work.

My feeling is that, when a curator approaches



Melting Philanthropist

Acrylic on antique copper plate print
 12" x 16" / 1792-2011
 Courtesy of Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles
 Photo by Randall Dodson

I GUESS IN
 TERMS OF
 DRAWING IN
 GENERAL, THE
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an artist to do a combined show, they take some of your work, some of his work, and put it all together. I think the exciting thing was that you took on a project in a much more serious way. It's sort of like what you were saying about public art. You can do it however you want, go in and make a painting, and then walk out of the community and never see it again, never talk to anybody. But to do it right, you'd have to talk to the people in the community. I think what's interesting about this is that to give the project justice, you felt that you really had to get in there and talk to Paul Klee in a way. It ended up with really nice results because the work has a palpable responsiveness to Klee, but at the same time is 100% yours.

One last question, tell me about how you came up with the gilded flags that you have been showing recently. It seems like a very contemporary symbol.

When Obama was elected, I was actually very happy. But at the same time, in a half-jokingly way, I was like, what the hell is there to talk about now that we don't have this guy George Bush to address for all his blunders, mistakes and lies? But, sure enough, as things go, the next wave of crucial things to address

comes very easily. One of the main things that happened right after Obama was elected was the financial crisis and its fallout, and everything going on with that, which immediately became of interest to me. Also, with Obama being elected, there was this whole aspect of hope in a new era, promise and all these things. I've been attracted to the American flag in the past, but it was more during the Bush administration where this symbol of the American flag was almost being looked at as a derogatory symbol. All of a sudden comes the dawning of Obama, and we have all this hope and infusion of patriotism back in the air, exemplified by the American flag.

I was very intrigued how this symbol, as I am with a lot of my symbols, encapsulated dualistic sense. One minute it's being looked down on, the next minute it's being held in high regard. For me, this is fascinating, and so basically I was thinking about the symbol of the American flag on the one hand, and I was also thinking about the global economic crisis. Things have a way of being symbiotic, where you're looking into one thing and you're learning things about others at the same time. I had an idea in my head that I wanted to buy American flags, sew and stretch them on stretcher bars, and make paintings on them. I ordered some online

and received them in the mail, and learned that each one of these American flags actually was the product of a China, made in China. This just struck me immediately as tying these two different things together, and I wanted to figure out some way I could address this in a current piece.

For more information on Andrew Schoultz, visit AndrewSchoultz.com