

Zio. "Cyclical NatureL An Interview With Artist Andrew Schoultz." The Hundreds, October 15, 2015

Cyclical Nature: An Interview With Artist Andrew Schoultz

For his current exhibition, *Cyclical Nature*, at Mark Moore in Los Angeles, artist **Andrew Schoultz** transformed the gallery into a post-apocalyptic plaza. The back wall is painted in gradated neon orange that brings to mind a nuclear flash, gallery benches are dripping and melting into the floor, and a large-scale symbolic sculpture holds court in the center. "Creating an immersive environment is always a goal of mine when presenting work in the gallery or the museum," Schoultz explains. "I like the idea of putting a viewer in a situation where, perhaps, they almost become part of the piece."

Engaging the viewer is important to Schoultz, who often explores hot-button issues through his art—past topics have included the economic crisis, globalization and environmental degradation, and in this exhibition, he investigates how patterns in history relate to contemporary life. "My new exhibition is about the cyclical nature of history and, for that matter, war," Schoultz says. "I have been intrigued with the recurrent patterns of war and history for a very long time."

But there is also a less-ominous aspect to the exhibition, which references Schoultz's own history as a lifelong skateboarder. "For example, the base of the sculpture sits on an embanked pedestal, which would be perfect for skateboarding," he describes, "the benches that are melting into the floor make perfect ramps to launch off of." The double meanings in these works are intentional: Schoultz wants viewers to see things as more than they seem. He wants people to be curious, thoughtful and optimistic, despite the disconcerting themes he explores in his work. "That there are always other purposes and potentials for everything in life is an idea that I value and really want present in my work," he explains in the following interview. "It is a simple aspect of hope."



***Cyclical Nature* is your second major solo show at Mark Moore Gallery. How is this exhibition similar and different than your first there? How have you evolved as an artist since the first?**

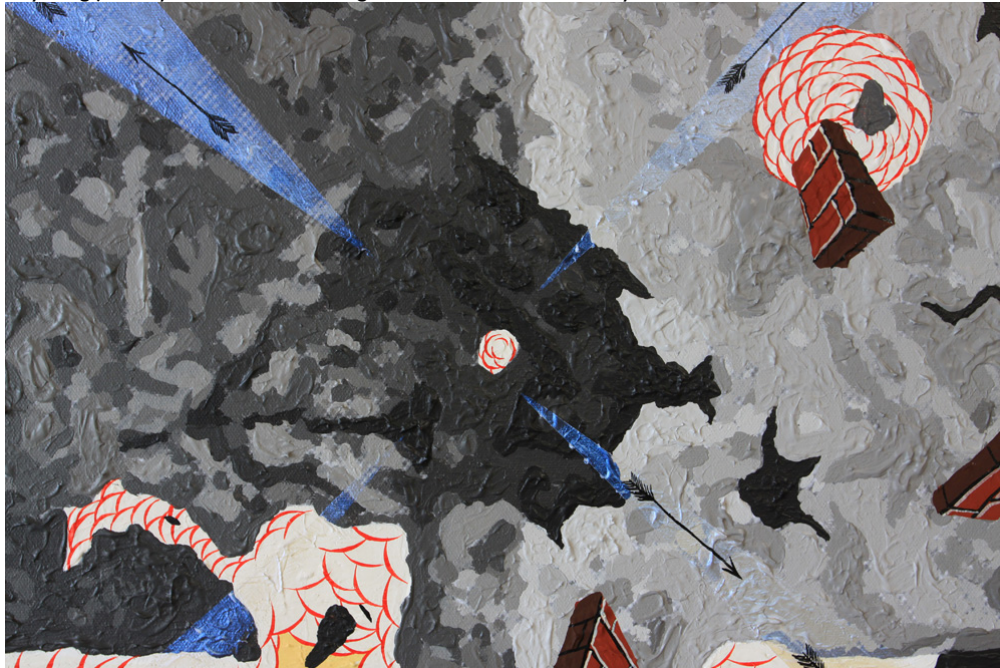
There are always similarities to my previous work present in my current work. That being said, there are always major differences as well. I am very interested in continuity in my work and in my exhibitions. Investigating different topics and concepts over a long period of time seems like a more sincere and legitimate route. Things change and progress really slowly. I embrace the learning process and oftentimes do not move into these things with a very heavy one-sided perspective. Many of the topics I am interested in and attempt to conceptualize in my work are very

multifaceted subjects that contain a lot of grey area and a lot of different perspectives and variables. It is really hard to just sum it all up in any type of simple or short way. It feels more natural to approach this on a more long-term basis. In my new exhibition, there are many new directions present there, as well as some aspects of work that is more indicative of the work I have made in the past. I would say that the “War Helmet” paintings are a brand new direction. In my last show in 2013, *Fall Out*, there was a huge focus on the economic crisis, and its effects, many of which are related to war, world power structures, globalization, and environmental degradation. At the time, I was very focused on raw materials and currency, and their relationship to the U.S. debt, and the rising world power of China. Although these things are definitely still my concern, I would say my new exhibition is more related to how all of these things relate to history, and in the way history is in constant repetition—it is about the “cyclical nature” of history and, for that matter, war.

The previous exhibition was presented as an installation based on a more traditional colonial plaza, with a very traditional monument, which was a war canon. It had a very theatrical stage set type of feel to it. The current installation is also somewhat of a plaza as well, but I think it has much more of a futuristic vibe to it. I have been very interested in the idea of public space, from painting murals in public and writing graffiti on walls, to utilizing public plazas for activities [like] skateboarding. I have spent an overwhelmingly large amount of time over the past 25 years hanging out at public plazas skateboarding and, for me, these places always hold so many fond memories and hold so much history—most of which is related to the subcultures I participate in. The origin of the public plaza was to be a community gathering spot to discuss and debate topics that were important to the community at the time—ironic how now this is rarely what they are used for. In most cities, they have become the dwelling place for the homeless, but don’t worry, the police will still bust you for skateboarding there. I find the “plaza” an interesting context to present art in, in the gallery—like bringing the public place inside so that it can serve the purpose it was meant for in the public, but in a private space.

This exhibition is about the recurrent patterns of war and history. Can you expand on that and, also, explain what intrigues you about these topics?

Many years ago, I became interested in books about very early map-making attempts and techniques, such as the *Nuremberg Chronicle* of 1492, among others. I was first attracted to these things for purely aesthetic reasons—they have a very archaic look to them. They are very detailed but also are drawn in a very naive way, where things like perspective and realism are pretty much thrown out the window. Many times, they have a very obsessive-compulsive quality and are very decorative and ornate, and have amazing fonts and storyboard aspects drawn around them. As many things go, you are first attracted to things because you like how they look, but after further investigation, things will start to resonate on many more relevant levels. In this case, it started to become really clear that the purpose of making these old maps was actually to be able to strategize on how to conquer new frontiers. They were, in fact, some of the first tools of strategized modern war. This fascinated me, being that this was right around the time of 9/11 and the U.S. had just invaded Iraq (which I strongly opposed). This seemed like an interesting starting point to begin to try to vocalize my perspective on what was going on in the world through my art. It began a very long journey, which to some degree, I am still on to this day.



I also became interested in Persian miniature paintings from around the same time period as well. In all of this, the undertone of religion was very present, whether that religion was Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hindu, etc. To

reiterate, I was so fascinated with all of this stuff, and my personality is such that I get infatuated and go deep. It became pretty obvious fairly quickly in all of these old paintings, maps, and manuscripts that the wars and conflicts of hundreds and hundreds of years ago were in fact the same ones going on in the present day, and it immediately made sense to use all of this as reference material to fuel my work that would talk about the same wars and conflicts still going on today, [with] the big difference being that it would be put in a contemporary context. These are some of the things that have influenced my work and have made history a key component to the work I make. Of course I am influenced by many other things as well, such as underground comics, modern art, graffiti, architecture, and pop culture.

Like most of your exhibitions, *Cyclical Nature* has a large on-site installation. Can you tell us a little about “Infinity Plaza”?

“Infinity Plaza” is supposed to have sort of futuristic, perhaps post-apocalyptic, vibe to it. At the same time, there are large-scale paintings of corroding war helmets from the Crusade, presented on a wall painted in a graduated color palette that resembles a California toxic sunset. The helmets have a very un-futuristic look to them, which I think works very nicely with its antithesis. I liked the idea of presenting these “war helmet” paintings in this context. For me, the helmets hold this perfect vibe of what I would call “old war,” like from the times where people dressed up in armor and went out and engaged in hand-to-hand combat in this very personal and accountable way. This was still a very brutal form of war, however, there was something very human about it. Like an actual human being was out there killing and fighting and getting blood all over them. As I said, still very brutal, but quite the contrast to post-contemporary drone warfare or nuclear war for that matter, where there is no real human accountability or responsibility in it, just a button getting pushed or video game getting played from a remote location. This is not to say that there are still not soldiers out there fighting on the front lines, but it is more to just reference the unaccountability for much of the aspects of futuristic war.

The main sculptural component is a large, sort of tweaked infinity symbol that kind of doesn’t work, rendered in grey scale. The sculpture is really just supposed to represent sort of this infinite cyclical nature of history. [It’s] painted in eight shades of grey, [representing] grey area when talking about history; nothing is black and white. The sculpture and symbol interacts very nicely from many different vantage points with the painted walls and hanging works in the show. The helmets are definitely a new direction in my work—aesthetically they appear very different from my more familiar work, but conceptually, they are very much about the same things. There is definitely a “skateboard friendly” aspect to “Infinity Plaza,” which is intentional.



But what I think it really reflects back on is the idea of perspective and looking at a thing and immediately seeing alternate uses for it, rather than what the original intention was. This is so important in life and in art making, and it is something that I feel like was really given to me from skateboarding. This idea that there are always other purposes and potentials for everything in life is an idea that I value and really want present in my work. It is a simple aspect of hope, despite the fact that much of the subject matter of my work is pretty heavy and dark.

Your work often deals with themes of chaos and destruction—I remember I went to an exhibition in L.A. a few years ago in which you had a large-scale tank breaking down a stylized brick wall. Why is chaos and destruction a recurrent theme in your work?

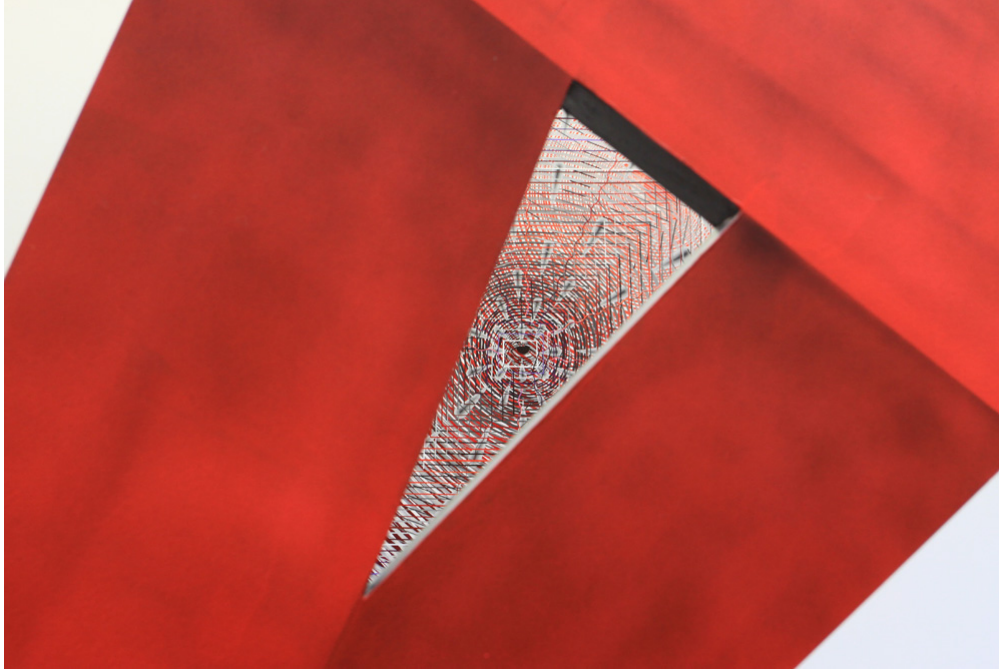
Chaos and destruction are reoccurring themes in my work because I feel like these things are happening all around us constantly. Whether it is the multiple wars being fought all over the world, the natural disasters that seem to happen on a somewhat regular basis, the man-made environmental disasters that are becoming more and more prevalent, to the economic crisis that has been crushing this country's poor and middle class for years. I feel like you really cannot talk about one of these things without talking about all of them, so it becomes a monster of a subject.

I oftentimes really try to set out to make work that is happier and not about this type of stuff, but for whatever reason, I just never find my momentum or motivation to see it through. I have been sort of consumed by this, which can sometimes feel a little self-defeating. As I have said before, living in the western world, we live in a very privileged society where it is actually quite easy to ignore all of this stuff or be apathetic to it. And—quite honestly—who could really blame you for doing so? A lot of it seems like it really never affects our day-to-day life—until one day when it does. And that's kind of the truth of the matter, especially in the States. A great majority of people never really concern themselves with things until they feel the painful effects of those things on themselves or their loved ones, and by then, unfortunately, many times it is too late. I am not by any means trying to say my work can move mountains, or is serving some type of greater purpose on this earth than anybody else's work. After all, I don't think anyone can turn this giant oil tanker in a puddle around. I am merely just stating what makes me tick and what drives and motivates me to make my work. Hell, I wish there was something else that gave me the same motivation and energy.

What real-life events have most inspired your work?

There have been many real-life events and experiences that have affected my work. I would definitely say just living a certain type of lifestyle for so many years has really shaped the person I am and has made me into the artist that I am. I have always subscribed to a more DIY ethos in life and this has really benefitted me greatly in my path as an artist. In the beginning, I never really needed someone to give me a place to show my art, give me a wall to paint, give me a place to skateboard, or give my friend's band a place to play—we just went out and made it happen somehow, somewhere. I guess, in a lot of ways, I never really set out to do what I do now. I really was just doing things that I loved and following those things where they took me. By doing that, I was lucky enough to meet people who gave me opportunities, become aware of a lot things, and become pro-active within a worldwide community of friends. I guess it sounds cheesy, but I blindly followed my heart and it never really led me astray.

In 2009, I was fortunate enough to be able to travel to Havana, Cuba, to participate in the 14th Havana Biennial. When I was there, I came across a building with 200 black flags flying on flag poles outside of it. I was immediately intrigued by what this building was. Seeing this mass of black flying in the sky just gave me this dark gut feeling. I did not know what this was about, all I knew was that it had an immediate presence and gave me a very powerful feeling. Years later, I found out that in fact this was the evacuated U.S. Embassy. Years and years ago, when the U.S. had to evacuate the Embassy there, they decided it would be a smart idea to leave LED light projectors in the windows so that they could perhaps project messages out of them to the Cuban people from a remote location. As an extreme symbol of deviance, Fidel Castro erected 200 black flags outside of the embassy to block the projectors. Of course, there would have been easier ways for him to get rid of these, but he insisted on this extreme symbol instead. I just found this so fascinating. This has also had a long-lasting effect on my approach to art.



What do you have planned for the rest of 2015?

I have a pretty busy schedule for the rest of 2015. I will be doing a giant wall project in Downtown L.A., the last two weeks of November, for the Converse “Blank Canvas Project,” which I am really looking forward to. I plan on doing my most ambitious mural to date for this project, and if all goes as planned, it will also be my largest mural to date. I also curated a show titled *Major Work* that will open at Chandran Gallery in San Francisco on December 11, which I am really excited about. The basis for this show is pretty simple: each participating artist will contribute what they perceive to be a “major work.” Chandran Gallery recently opened their beautiful gigantic space with a solo show by my friend Richard Colman. They are really ambitious in their approach and were really receptive to this idea. Most of the work included in this show will be of massive scale, and I am so happy about all the artists that have agreed to participate—REVOK, Alicia McCarthy, Kelsey Brookes, Eric Yahnker, James Marshall, Sam Friedman, Tim Biskup, Hilary Pecis, Aaron Noble, and Mark Dean Veca—among others—have all been confirmed. Some artists will be producing their work in San Francisco and will be working in the space the weeks leading up to the show. Alicia McCarthy will be painting the massive wall on the gallery outdoor area. It will be really awesome to see all of these works in the same place at the same time.

What is your best piece of advice?

I do not really know 100% for sure what my best piece of advice would be. As an artist, I would definitely say stay true to your own voice and vision and follow through with it. Sometimes you will not know if something works until you complete it, and many times you learn a lot more from failure than you do from success. As a human, I would say to remember to slow down and enjoy the moment you are in and the people you are around. You never know, they could be gone tomorrow. As an artist living to some degree in this thing called the “Art World,” it is very easy to get caught up in all the social ladder-climbing games and “cool guy” shit. It can be very distracting and depressing if you let it. It can consume you and you can really lose perspective on what is really important in life. I have had tastes of this in the past and then realized later how far my head was up my ass. I would also say it is always good to stay humble in all of this. As an artist whose goal is longevity in this, you quickly realize the ebbs and flows of a long-lasting career. There have been extreme highs and lows, and it is good for the soul to accept that and realize that anything that comes fast also leaves fast. Patience is a virtue.



Cyclical Nature will be on view at Mark Moore Gallery until October 31. More details [here](#).