

hosfelt gallery

SF WEEKLY

Evicted But Not Forgotten: A Favorite Local Artist Returns

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When people talk about San Francisco's economic stratification and the growing exodus of artists because of eviction and rising rents, they're talking about people like Andrew Schultz. For more than a decade, Schultz worked from the Mission District, where his best-known street painting — an

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elaborate two-story collaboration called *Generator* that's filled with birdhouses, buildings, and swooping clouds — still looms on the side of an apartment complex at 18th and Lexington.

SFMOMA has eight of Schoultz's artworks, including *A Litany of Defense and Liturgy of Power (Came) from the Palm of His Hand*, an electrifying mixed-media piece that features a turbaned, bearded man calling forth a whirlwind of beams from his right palm. In a 2011 exhibit, SFMOMA paired Schoultz's art with that of the celebrated Swiss painter Paul Klee, calling Schoultz "a highly accomplished draftsman who makes visible fantastic and impossible worlds."

Those worlds are on display anew in "Blown To Bits," an exhibit at Hosfelt Gallery that has temporarily brought Schoultz back to San Francisco from Los Angeles, where he moved earlier this year. Schoultz is still angry about the real estate upheaval that is transforming the city's character, and one of his most potent pieces at Hosfelt is *Broken Pattern (Exposed Wall)*, an intricate commentary on greed and fortune that has two men bowing on rugs before a billow of gold that's emerged from a wall. The scene is overlaid on a series of rectangular boxes that get smaller and smaller — a fractal pattern that's the foundation for many of the canvases in "Blown To Bits."

"This order falls apart, and what's exposed are these gold bricks," Schoultz says as he stands before *Broken Pattern (Exposed Wall)*. "It's related to real estate and real estate speculation. What you have to do is bow to it — that this is an ongoing cyclical thing. The shape of the gold is supposed to represent a historic bust of a person. The whole thing with my use of gold is that it references American currency being backed by gold, and how it's supposed to make American currency more valuable."

Still, most of the works in "Blown To Bits" aren't overt references to real estate speculation. They reference the creative process — how, sometimes, the best way to finish a work is to tear it apart and see what happens next. To the dismay of Hosfelt Gallery owner Todd Hosfelt, Schoultz ripped up half of one of the show's largest works and put the shards on the ground, behind a plastic cordon that pokes fun at the canvas and also turns it into a kind of crime scene.

In his artwork, Schoultz often celebrates chaos and congestion, though that's part of his works' appeal. You sift through the layers of undulating clouds, circles, and lines — through the haze of colliding shapes and colors — and you find viable figures, like men from the Muslim world, and horses inspired by centuries-old Persian miniature paintings. You also find facsimiles of historic maps that were made for governments to conquer other lands.

Schoultz, in other words, layers his art with narratives about war and once-great civilizations that have disappeared but are still revered in history books. He embraces the past but sees it for what it is: a continuing lesson about the cyclical forces of life.

"Living in the United States, it's easy to forget how much crazy-ass shit is going on in other parts of the world," Schoultz says. "It's easy to maintain your morals and ethics when you live in a very comfortable society, have a very comfortable life. You can have this extreme belief system in place. Oftentimes these belief systems are the first things that go out the window when you're put in a chaotic situation. That's a theme in 'Blown To Bits.' These bowing men that have appeared in these works, and I've used them a lot, are a loaded image. But it's also about maintaining your spirituality amongst total chaos."

A native of Milwaukee, Schoultz graduated with a bachelor's in illustration from Academy of Art University in 2003. His intent was to stay in San Francisco as long as possible. But even as Schoultz's

career was taking off, and he was earning kudos and commissions from galleries and museums around North America and abroad (including Milan, Cologne, Copenhagen, and Rotterdam), he was constantly being squeezed by San Francisco landlords. He was evicted from an apartment, then saw his Mission District studio threatened as high-tech firms paid top dollar to move into similar studios. (Schoultz titled one of his paintings in Clarion Alley, *F#?KIN" Dot Com.*)

When Shoultz and his partner had a child two years ago, and he needed a studio he could count on to make the work that sustains the family, they looked to the more affordable rents of Los Angeles. In his downtown studio and Eagle Rock home, Schoultz has found the bohemian culture that once personified San Francisco.

"My work space [in San Francisco] was in constant jeopardy," he says. "As an artist, I want to grow. And I realized that as an artist in this city, it was becoming impossible for me to grow. In fact, I was going to be pushed back. I couldn't stay ... Los Angeles has been an area I've shown at for 10 years. You start to make friends. And a lot of people you see here were showing up down there."

"I miss San Francisco," adds Schoultz, who lived in the city for 18 years. "I miss the Hetch Hetchy water. I miss being able to ride my bike to my studio. I miss all these things. But the last couple years I lived here, I found myself always complaining. For me, I don't want to complain. I want to be proactive, and change my situation into something good. In Los Angeles, I'm at the park with my kid, and you ask [another parent] what they do, and they say, 'Oh, I'm a painter.' Or, 'I play in a band.' It's weird. It has this vibe that existed in San Francisco 10 years ago."

For anyone who knows Schoultz's work, "Blown To Bits" will be bittersweet. San Francisco helped form him as an artist, and in turn, Schoultz helped form San Francisco's art scene. He paid back the city with culture and political involvement. The art is still here but not the artist. Schoultz is just a visitor now — someone who stays with a good friend in his old neighborhood when he's back for his own exhibits, but who then leaves. Schoultz's CV now reads "former San Francisco artist." That just doesn't seem right.