

VERTICAL

Andrew Schoultz

Published: November 14, 2014



With *Broken Order*, his debut solo exhibition at [Ruttkowski;68](#) gallery, American artist Andrew Schoultz truly opens up to a new setting by providing a thorough insight into his new and early work.

Patriotism and glory may be your first thoughts when you enter the downstairs room of the gallery. Reinterpretations of the American flag as far as the eye can see – sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle. One looks bombed by gold ammunitions, while the metal color drips off another. A coiled snake on one flag is partially concealed by gold paint and yet another is plated with about \$5000 of shredded notes. It quickly becomes clear the

works serve as a critical commentary. Andrew Schoultz started to work on his flag series in 2009, at a time when Americans, filled with fresh hope brought by President Barack Obama, proudly flew the Star-Spangled Banner. With his interest in history, politics and social cohesion, Schoultz analysed the flag's impact throughout time and right into the future. For that, he draws on hard facts such as that American flags are produced largely in China, and combines them to create a comment that is as complex as its fundamental theme. The works are sometimes so striking they obscure their deeper meaning.

Through this approach, Andrew Schoultz challenges norms, conventions and facts that are generally accepted as true. Thus the title of his exhibition: *Broken Order*.

His new works are presented in the upper gallery. Iconic symbols and dramatic scenarios are reinterpreted in his signature style, challenging the conventions and expectations of the art world.

We sat down with him and discussed his early days as well as his works of today.



Wertical: Art tells a lot about the person behind it. With *Broken Order*, you provide a personal insight into yourself. How would you describe yourself with words?

Andrew Schoultz: I am a very obsessive-compulsive individual who takes life pretty seriously. I am very motivated, always chasing after something. When I get into something and I want to do it, I am like a one-track mind and I will do whatever I can to accomplish what I am obsessed with at the moment. For more than 15 years now, I have been addicted to art.

WE: Going back to the beginning, how did your love affair with art begin?

AS: Very naturally, as I kind of grew up with it. My dad was always doodling and drawing, but also, a early thing that happened was that me and my brother, we had a babysitter who was really into comic books. He would come to watch us when we were very young and he would be drawing comic books while basically letting us do what we wanted to do. But we just tried to do what he was doing and copied his comic drawings. I would say this is how I kind of started making art.

WE: Next to comics, you also grew up around a time when graffiti emerged into popular youth culture. Were you into graffiti too?

AS: Absolutely. When I was in the third grade, 'Beat Street' came up. In the movie, there is one character who was known by his pseudonym 'Ramo.' At one point, he said that he was tracing comic books before he got into graffiti. And immediately, that again got me into graffiti.

WE: So your first graffiti was comic inspired?

AS: I did some graffiti like paintings that were comic inspired. My brother and me were into breakdancing. To protect your body from concrete floor, you danced on cardboard. And these boards were my medium: I copied comic and graffiti stuff onto them. But you can't really call them graffiti as they were just our embellishment. But my first real graffiti was actually mimicking some of the gang graffiti that was around my neighborhood at that time.

WE: Did school also shape your encounter with art?

AS: I went to a high school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that had a very progressive art program. But it's one particular experience that shaped me. In my first year, a teacher said: "Art can be anything. You can take your underwear and staple it onto a piece of paper and that can be art." As a young kid, I was astonished. But with time, I realized, art can indeed actually be anything.

WE: True, art is free. But it's also confined by its own sets of rules...

AS: ... which are kind of made to be broken. Growing up in our society generally means sticking to conventions and norms on all levels. Already as a young child, a set of rules will be imposed on you. To keep to the point of art, you are told to draw within the lines. When you manage you will be congratulated with compliments, but if you don't, you just didn't do right, respectively, succeed. So, being in the first year at high school and having a teacher you look up to telling you that you can do anything – that really had a persistent effect on what I suddenly discovered art can be.

WE: How did you manage to break out of the norms?

AS: Skateboarding was really a huge part of my life and I feel like this is what made me break out from a very typical mind frame and structure.

WE: In what way?

AS: You are using your surroundings, respectively, items in the city, in a different way than expected. A bench, for example, was made for sitting, but for me, a bench was my favorite thing to skateboard on. So I started thinking about things differently and ambiguously through skateboarding. I mean, when do you hang out at a parking lot for an hour? When you skateboard that can be normal. Looking back on it now, I really realize that this was a super important part of the process of how it works when I make art.

WE: Looking at things differently is indeed a crucial starting point for your art.

AS: Yes, and I think it was the general attitude at that time. There was a big do-it-yourself mentality. In music as well, for example. I observed it with punk rock and hard core – two music styles going on in Milwaukee and Chicago while there was generally different music being played in the early 1990s. People were doing their own records, and when there was no venue where they could play their music, they would do a show by themselves, if needed, in the basement. From early on, I was seeing people making their own thing happen independently from any establishment. So it was a natural consequence that I just used what was available and started painting walls in the streets. Just as self-evident was an art show in a warehouse. I didn't need any white cube coming up to me, approving my works through sales in order to keep me going.

WE: Meanwhile, you did join these established structures. How did this come about even as you maintained your DIY attitude?

AS: Very slowly – after I moved to San Francisco, where I actually settled for two reasons: it was a skateboard mecca and there was an art school that I attended. While I was already painting murals in the streets, it was in San Francisco where I realized that

there was a greater purpose to painting things in public. Art can serve more than just writing a name in graffiti in that sort of narcissistic way. I was interested in doing murals in the streets that had a little bit more of a social message. And so suddenly, I figured I would paint murals pointing out gentrification. This was in the late 1990s, early 2000s when loads of middle class people had to move out of the city due to rising rents. Media soon took notice and it wasn't long before galleries contacted me asking me to show my works in their spaces.



WE: Today, a lot of artists go out to the streets in order to be noticed.

AS: Yes, it's a very dishonest notion. Everything happened in a very organic way with me. I became a commercial artist without ever really setting out to end up there.

WE: Which was the first gallery to believe in you?

AS: The Luggage Store Gallery. It's a very crucial non-commercial art gallery in San Francisco. They played a huge part in developing San Francisco's art scene.

WE: The gallery offers not only a different space, but audience, too.

AS: Indeed. In the beginning, I was doing very similar work to what I was doing on the streets. As time went on, I started to navigate the differences between the contracts of the gallery space and the public space and the very different audiences that go with it. The audience of the public space is probably the most diverse audience you could potentially even address with art, and that means taking much more responsibility. Outside, your work is like a punch in the face. The public didn't ask to see your artwork. That's why I always think it's important to go into the neighborhood to find out what's going on in this local area – how can I make a piece that resonates with life there. With the gallery, it's different. The gallery audience is placing themselves in a situation to look at art. So a lot of times, I think, you have a lot more freedom to address things in a gallery than in a public space.

WE: What does *Broken Order* capture?

AS: The order of things in the world are constantly being broken. With the title, it's sort of literal and aesthetic in a lot of works that are here. There is a repetitive pattern that continues in some of the works while it's broken and shredded apart in others. With *Broken Order*, I basically comment on change. *Broken Order* alludes to the up-in-the-air sort of uncertainty that's going on right now in the world as there are a lot of wars being fought, conflicts that are going on since many hundred years...

WE: You are also breaking out of your own personal stylistic order.

AS: Character orientated or iconic things are pushed to the background more than they would normally be. I am working with many different layers to express the way I think you should look at everything, for example, and especially, the media: it's never a clear picture. You have to look through many, many layers to fabricate your opinion of what something is or isn't.