

Roth, David M. "Andrew Schoultz @ Hosfelt." Squarecylinder.com , January 14, 2015.



Andrew Schoultz's paintings, drawings, sculptures and installations eerily affirm the pervasive sense that everything is broken. Crumbling buildings, flying debris, sinking ships, shredded currency, turban-clad soldiers and U.S. flags populate his current exhibition, *Blown to Bits*. It's political art that succeeds without didacticism, a rare thing. Schoultz not only sidesteps that pitfall, he brings dazzling draftsmanship and imagination to the task of symbolically representing the current zeitgeist.



The show opens with a series of paintings on wood panels. They appear as jigsaw puzzles, their sliced-open edges revealing Day-Glo colors. They're suitably toxic-looking but only a preface to the main event: *Blown to Bits (Exploding Wall)*, a 20-foot long painting that is the exhibition's title piece. It shows horses invading an exploding edifice surveilled by floating eyeballs. They're the same eye-of-God symbols that appear on the dollar bill; only here they're cast as emblems of the security state we've become. Frozen in space, these elements combine in a seamless mix of comic, graphic, muralist, minimalist and Pop styles, making the painting feel chaotic. The effect is multiplied by Schoultz's "framing" of the piece in concentrically shaped rectangles. These he paints on the wall outside the piece in the manner of Frank Stella, creating the illusion of a screen or a proscenium. This effect is further enhanced by the painting's position between two of the gallery's concrete support pillars — and by the artist's stationing of two wood benches in the foreground, spray painted in Play Dough colors. The installation achieves cinematic impact at a scale perfectly suited to the space.

Structurally and conceptually, early Stella plays a key role. His imagery provides Schoultz with eye-grabbing backdrops for recognizable imagery (waves, buildings, currency, gunmen, boats) and some very potent abstract iconography, especially in

places where Schoultz fractures it to look like shrapnel or minimalist confetti. But where Stella used such shapes to drain his art of content, Schoultz uses them to pour meaning back in.



*Floating Ship in Chaos (Blown to Bits)* is a good example. It's one of the densest, most complex works in the show. Here, Schoultz paints interlocking rectangles over a flag stretched across a wood panel. At a distance it resembles a thick tapestry. Up close it's a gluey looking slurry of paint and shredded bills, the flag all but invisible except at the sides. Meaning arrives in the form of a slave ship that Schoultz buries just below the surface. Rendered in the manner of a woodcut, and with sails crosshatched on swatches of currency, it speaks powerfully of human bondage and of the moral quagmire of raw Capitalism. I was also moved by the quartet of drawings Schoultz executes on antique copper plate prints. They're of Babylon. Onto each he draws a snarling beast with swirling curvilinear stripes reminiscent of those Munch used in his lithographic version of *The Scream*. In other works, Schoultz hints at environmental degradation, war and technology; the latter signaled in several works in which narrow geometric lines, like those in electronic circuit boards, rest on surfaces.

Schoultz is, in a sense, a history painter. Therefore, one could ask for greater specificity, but to what end? As Leonard Cohen observed of criminality, one needn't name the culprits. ("Everybody knows.") Schoultz recognizes this fact, and by following his intuition he's fashioned art-historical imagery into an original and compelling synthesis, one that, like William Wiley's, captures the dissolute, disturbing state of human affairs.