

“Ryan Wallace and Andrew Schoultz at BLK/MRKT Gallery”

Politically charged and surreally stimulating, the recent show at BLK/MRKT Gallery in Culver City serves as a political platform for artists Ryan Wallace and Andrew Schoultz. *Carpe Cras* (“seize tomorrow”) parallels a closing line of a political campaign speech or a TV commercial encouraging young adults to vote. It sets the stage for a subtle political message during the tumultuous pre- and post-election campaign days. Its implications hide behind innocent-looking characters and mountainous landscapes, but reveal themselves in small details throughout the show.

Caramel-colored snowflake silhouettes dance on the wall around Wallace’s paintings, mimicking the imagery in his works on canvas. Both artists blur the line between artwork and exhibition space by using the gallery walls to extend their creative visions. Wallace’s uses of mixed media, loose style, and unidentified figures are much more ambiguous than Schoultz’s consistent narrative. Schoultz combines a series of paintings featuring Dr. Seuss-like characters and a unique assemblage installation. From afar, the vibrant, haphazard installations seems quirky and harmless. However, appearances are deceiving because both artists critique substantial sociopolitical crises using whimsical, often childish imagery that speaks to an art-lover’s inner child.

In form and technique, Wallace’s works echo David Hockney’s California series from the early 1980s, and the way he breaks up space using different patterns recall Gustav Klimt. However, unlike Hockney’s wall-size landscapes, Wallace’s paintings are intimately smaller and more detailed and earth tones dominate his palette. In *Base Camp for a Super Conductor Super Collider*, a surreal canyon landscape is bombarded with bright solid-colored figures. An upside-down red squirrel cavorts among dead white trees. Most of these objects are paper cutouts glued on the surface—a deliberate intrusion on the serenity of nature. A bright orange tent resting on a bluff, a ski lift next to a river, and a pair of flying airplanes hint at the invasion of humanity and technology on a natural landscape colored with earthy greens, blues, and beige. The terrain, crammed with intricate figures, suggests an uneasiness in the artist. Using decoupage, pencil, paint and, occasionally, crayon, Wallace’s technique and simple figures are reminiscent of a grade-school art project. Despite this cunning façade, his inconspicuous

draftsmanship and simple forms create an eloquent surrealism that foreshadows an era when technology will eventually destroy nature.

On Schoultz's side of the gallery, the viewer is introduced to a dense, unwavering elephant with big, dopey ears. Sound familiar? Resembling a Dr. Seuss illustration, Schoultz's graphic characters are placed in a simple landscape—a single horizon line breaking up the space. Throughout the paintings, this elephant (and his buddies) threatens a group of bluebirds by cutting down their trees where they live. The birds flee in panic, but later rally together to defeat the pachyderm oppressor. Obviously, these innocent seeming cartoon characters are politically motivated and, like Wallace, he deviously uses nature and earthy colors to convey his aggressive, influential message.

Schoultz's side of the gallery contains two parts: a narrative and an installation, which is the real treat of the show. Here, the artist has compiled old wood panels on top of each other, painting them so that colors and images cross over from panel to panel creating a flowing wall collage/assemblage. Violently twisting tornadoes (described by a black spray-painted spiraling line) and erupting volcanoes (its lava a neon orange spray paint) loom ominously over tiny houses. A few panels stand out from the others, particularly a panel featuring a cartoon fight cloud with hands and feet sticking out. Simple Indonesian phrases written above the scene read "Tidak Apa Apa. Tidak Minta Bush!!" The anti-Bush statement is blatantly obvious. Reading these tiny half-inch words transforms the entire show by affirming the dark political message behind the whimsical illustrations in Schoultz and Wallace's paintings which exploit innocent childlike imagery to deliver ominous opinions.

- *Christina Balch*