

Charles Andresen

Guest Editor **Chris Byrne** explores the creative process of his long-time friend, once a precocious art critic and now a fine artist whose paintings garner critical acclaim of their own

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MONICA BUCK



Above: Artist Charles Andresen constantly evolves his technique of throw painting to create color-drenched, textural canvases that he calls “a fluctuating dance between surface and depth.” Above right: The artist impresses gridded dots onto the paint, which distort into different patterns when thrown onto the surface.



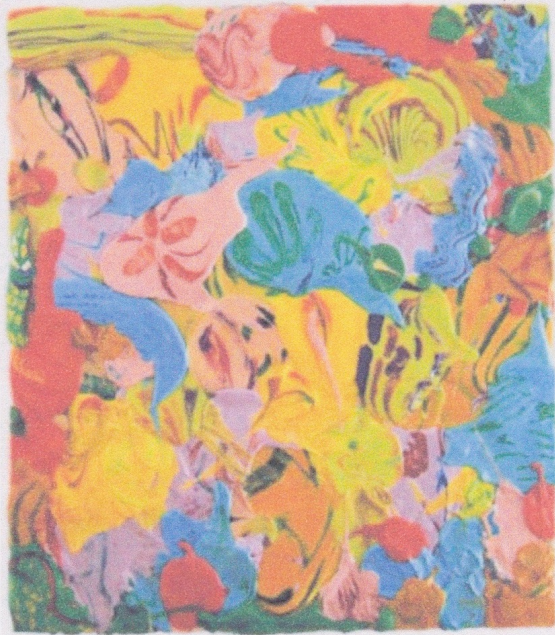
I first met Charles Andresen while taking studio classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. As a student, you tend to learn the most from your contemporaries, and this was especially true of Charles. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of art history, Native American ethnology, and pretty much everything else. It was no wonder, then, that when he was just out of high school, his hometown alternative weekly newspaper, the *Phoenix New Times*, picked Charles to be their art critic based on his submitted sample writings, only to be astonished to discover that he was only 18 years old.

Charles has the greatest visual memory of any artist I’ve ever known. Before there was Google, it was Charles who would settle factual disputes at any hour of the day or night. Most noteworthy, though, was his ability not only to retain the information—there are many people who display pedantic intelligence—but also to use what had been made available.

Even before Charles developed his current approach to painting, his work was always interesting. He thought and looked at things in a very fluid, often humorous way, which has translated into his lively and inventive picture making. It seemed natural that he would discover a process that utilizes “happy accidents”—controlled experiments—and chance results to propose endless permutations for his work. His technique, which he stumbled across while still a student of figurative art, is aptly named “throw painting,” and he continues to explore its countless possibilities in his studio on New York’s Upper East Side.

Initially, he would hurl spoonfuls of unmixed, viscous, black and white acrylic onto a nonporous screen. When the blobs dried some days later, he would peel them up and adhere them to wood

IN THE STUDIO



panels, like a mosaic. As his technique developed, Charles began directly depositing dark-tinted polymer gel into a plastic trough. Smoothing off the top with a putty knife, he would then apply lighter colors from squeeze bottles in parallel lines, and scoop the whole up from beneath with a spatula. Depending on how the wet mass was poured or flung, his vocabulary of swirling, squiggling, curving lines came into being upon hitting the canvas.

Each series brings new color schemes: bright prismatic rainbows, earth tones, iridescent metallics, and single hues. Reversing his previous procedure, now the paint tub is filled with gel mixed with the lighter pigments, and the smoothed off surface is inscribed with darker lines from a fork or knife. When scooped from beneath and hurled, small marks made in the tub splay out upon splatting the canvas, creating incredibly detailed lines and gradations. Then Charles stamps the still wet paint with plastic letters which, when troweled up and tossed, come down on the canvas as stretched words. Likewise he impresses gridded dots onto the paint, which hit the surface as distorted patterns. "It's like assembling a puzzle, the image of which could not have been foreseen beforehand," he says. "I'm excited by the hallucinatory

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early James Ensor, early and late Jackson Pollock, and the '70s and '80s work of Malcolm Morley. If I were to simply state my goal, I'd echo Morley's remark that he wanted to depict reality as if 'the world were made of paint.'"

Charles' paintings are nothing if not rhythmic, and like a jazz musician, he creates his work in sessions of improvisation. He's always had a keen ear for interesting sounds regardless of their genre—everything from Bad Brains to the Beastie Boys to Béla Bartók; Morton Feldman to the Minutemen; and Arnold Schönberg to Guided By Voices. I've always looked to Charles as a divining rod for the good stuff.

When not at work in his studio, Charles can be found in the halls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he generously shares insight into his favorite works with visitors through his day job as senior security officer. It might surprise those same visitors to know that his own work hangs on the Met's walls during the employee art show and that it has captured the attention of collectors such as Julie Reyes Taubman and curators such as Klaus Kertess and has been exhibited at world-renowned galleries such as Mary Boone, James Fuentes, and Susanne Hilberry. Charles' unassuming manner would probably prevent him from revealing too much. But his paintings encourage all who encounter to step in and take a closer look. *

**Top: *Apterix* (38 by 34 inches, acrylic on canvas, 2008).
Above: *Yaqui Sword* (36 by 32 inches, acrylic on canvas, 2005).**