

Brian Cypher's science-fueled lines, spaces and shapes at Bushwick's new Schema Projects

By [elizabeth johnson](#)

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—Elizabeth tells us in this post about a self-taught artist whose work grows from his fascination with science and the natural world. His show is in Bushwick.—the artblog editors—

Brian Cypher's works are a perfect fit for the new Bushwick, NY, gallery Schema Projects, started by artist Mary Judge. Cypher's organic shapes, repeated undulating lines and allusion to the natural world echo the long-time focus of the gallerist, whose work was featured at Gallery Joe in 2005 (see [Roberta's review](#)). Cypher is primarily a draftsman who uses color, in his own words, "as a singularity." You would expect to see numerous ways of working with materials and a diverse yield of drawings in a show that combines work from the past 15 years, yet, Cypher's working method itself best explains the plethora of styles found here. Since he identifies himself as a process artist, I resist fixing specific meaning to the myriad lines, signs and symbols in his drawings and instead think of his finished works as products of chance and expressive moments that arose from his dialogue with material. Talking about his process in our interview, he said, "The act and process of creation is directly correlated to achieving meditative balance."



Photo credit to Brian Cypher

top left: "Untitled" (yellow box), 2012, acrylic on paper, 15" x 22".

top right: "Untitled," (branching form) 2013, acrylic and ink on paper, 30" x 22".

middle: "Untitled" (13 paths), 2012, acrylic and ink on paper, 24" x 19".

bottom: "Untitled," (white coil) 2011, acrylic and graphite on paper, 13 3/4" x 9 1/4".

Maps, systems, fossils, parts lists and diagrams



Photo credit to Brian Cypher

two on left: "Untitled" (linked form) and "Untitled" (self portrait), both are: 2012, acrylic on paper, 15" x 11".

two right top: Untitled drawings on graph paper, 2010, 5 1/4" x 7" and 5 1/2" x 8 1/2".

two right bottom: Untitled acrylic and ink drawings on manila file folder, 2012, each 11 1/2" x 8 3/4".

Cypher has always been fascinated by maps, scientific illustrations, systems schemata, fossils, parts lists, and instructional diagrams. He conceives images as information, filtering the visual world through systems that condense and codify specific information. He draws on the backside of graph paper to soften the strict grid effect and paints or “fills” file folders with color instead of documents. *A self-taught artist, Cypher blends street art, graffiti and an innate scientific sensibility, making what he calls images of “unknown specificity” that feel “known but unfamiliar.”*

His serendipitous last name is the tag that pulls it all together. Working like André Masson and other Surrealists à la Automatic Drawing, Cypher is content in that sweet spot of action without a plan; humorously, he parses fragments of the analytical, plan-based sciences and math and subverts their official purpose by dismantling order from within. Snipping, morphing and recombining parabolas, ellipses, triangles and squares, Cypher experiments with repeated line and color like a chemist. If the Surrealists rebelled against rational and political power through messing with image and “the real,” then Brian Cypher, as an Abstract Surrealist, unties the shoelaces of Big Science.



Photo credit to Brian Cypher
“Fabric Form,” 2012, fabric on paper, 36” x 30”

During our interview he said that some drawings take a long time to complete and others resolve suddenly. I was struck when he told me some phrases that pop into his mind when he’s working. For example, the drawing/painting says “I like you now” when it is done. He says the drawing asks, “What do I do next?” and “Where are you?” Clearly, he relates to the working surface as an equal. How Cypher makes lines curbs this subjective temperament, he has firm control over the width of each mark and, with very few exceptions his lines are consistently drawn. He likes to draw with graffiti mops and markers, or pens that have reservoirs of ink so he doesn’t have to move his hand to dip and replenish. He creates depth with line and color, sometimes allowing himself to stutter inside a firm outline. Efficient, clean, repetitious gestures evoke chalkboards and rulers.

Even if Cypher is completely engaged in “the drawing laboratory,” he’s in touch with Formalism—that low voice in the lecture hall next door.



Photo credit to Brian Cypher
“Long Division,” 2011, acrylic and collage on monotype, 11” x 15.5”

Also on view, Indian Devotional Paintings – a good pairing with Cypher’s works

In tandem with Cypher’s show, Mary Judge is also exhibiting medium-sized and very small—so small that you may need to borrow the magnifying glass—Indian Devotional Paintings. Judge was inspired in showing these pieces with Brian Cypher’s meditative art as both bodies of work repetitively use dots, line, color, signs and symbols to embody the trust and worshipful attention of their makers. The Hindu god Krishna appears in these delicately and methodically painted paper souvenirs as the black, stone god Shri Nathji. With his arm crooked over his head at a dynamic angle, the mountain-lifting posture, Nathji is said to bring the world into bloom. The stylized format of the Shri Nathjis, springing from a long tradition of anonymous artists working from copies, resonates with the absence of ego

and a pervasive, sensual openness I take away from Cypher's work. Just as behind Indian Folk art stand generations of anonymous artists, so behind Cypher stand generations of scientists, architects, Modernists, and technicians who made exactly the same graphic gestures as Cypher, albeit with different ends in mind.

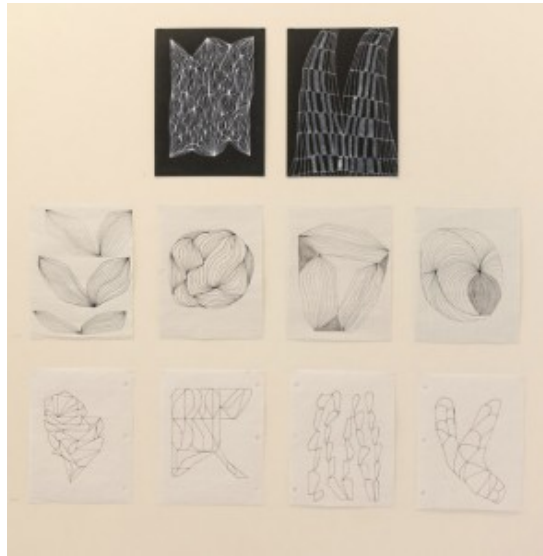


Photo credit to Brian Cypher
two Untitled Ink on black paper drawings, 12" x 9"
eight Untitled drawings on graph paper, 11 x 8.5"

Mary Judge's new space, [Schema Projects](#), is in the outer reaches of Bushwick. It's not too far from Manhattan because, as Mary likes to say, "When you stand in the middle of the street (St. Nicholas Ave.) you can see the Empire State Building." The Greek word schema means shape, plan or model, and Judge will be exhibiting drawings, prints, diagrams, sketchbooks, artist's books, limited editions, models, and all manner of paper works that aren't paintings or sculptures. Cypher's works and the Indian Devotional Paintings will be on display until April 28.