

MOSS GRAFFITI?

A Look Into Carly Schmitt's Unusual Art

By Samantha Solomon

Carly Schmitt is a 33 year old moss-graffiti artist. It is a very unique art form that doesn't have that many know artists. Carly has been an artist for practically her whole life. She has always been a creative person, so in a way it was inevitable for her to become a part of the art world. Born and raised in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota Carly got her B.A. in studio art and communications at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. She then moved to Seattle. In Seattle she founded her mural painting business called Artists @ Large. Carly then gained her Masters of Fine Arts at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany opening the door for the art that would intrigue most that came upon it.

She has been making moss-graffiti for the past three years. Moreover, Carly has been a professional artist for approximately the past ten years. Her interest in moss-graffiti arose when she moved to a town in Germany outside Munich called Landshut. The climate there was just right for moss-graffiti. With mild winters, wet summers and lots of natural growing moss it was a prime place for this type of unusual art. She was intrigued by moss as an artistic medium,

so the experimentation with moss started and took off from there. Carly did minor moss-graffiti projects around town to give it some flavor. The town was plain and she wanted some nice art to look at while walking through town.

Murals, participatory installations, and community art are Carly's main artistic outputs. These projects are large when it comes to scale. It could take a year or possibly two to complete one of these projects. A project such as this comes with hundreds if not thousands of helping hands to get the job done.

Moss-graffiti became a source of art that gave instant gratification. Carly used this as an outlet to get creative outside of the murals and community work. Most artists, like Carly take on side projects to get their mind off of the larger projects for a little while to get refreshed for the larger scale projects.

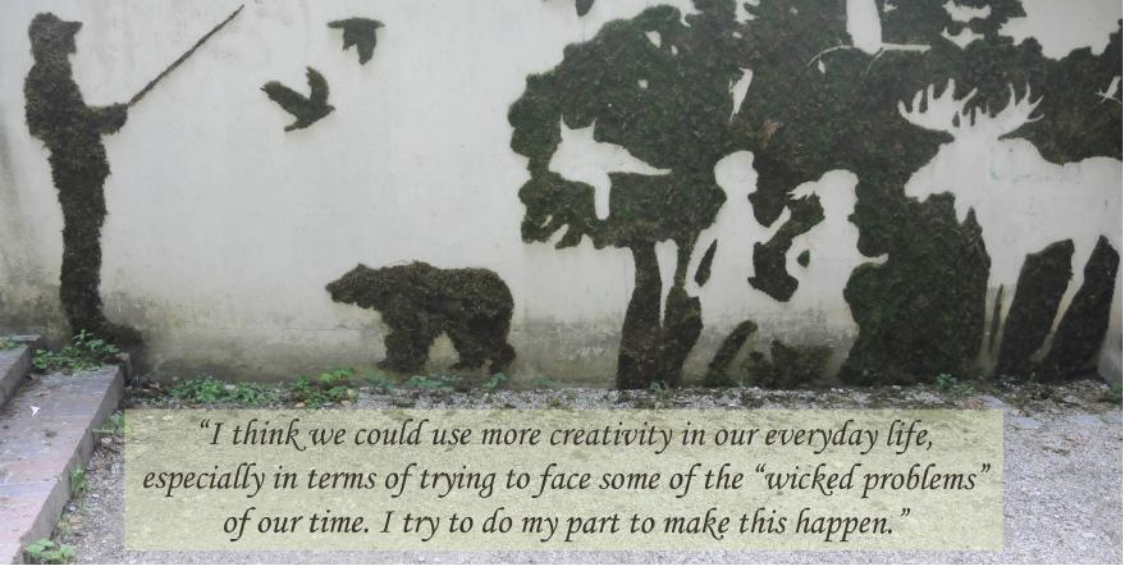
While Carly was in Germany she came across something called guerrilla gardening. Guerrilla gardening is the act

of gardening on land that the gardeners do not have the legal rights to utilize, such as an abandoned site, an area that isn't being cared for or private property. This recipe for guerrilla gardening entails mixing moss, beer and yogurt in a blender to create moss-graffiti paint. You would then use a paintbrush to put this paint on to any surface of choice. This form of moss-graffiti is very timely, you have to wait for the moss to grow and you have to groom the moss as it grows on the surface it was painted upon. Carly became intrigued by this and filed it away in the "future project ideas," part of her brain. She never thought that this "future project" would evolve into what is has in these past three years.

Carly has invited others to help her with her bigger scale moss-graffiti projects, but mainly she puts up the art on her own. Last summer she had a bunch of volunteers help her gather moss and help her to glue the moss onto the wall.

Photo Credit: Sven Brandelius





"I think we could use more creativity in our everyday life, especially in terms of trying to face some of the "wicked problems" of our time. I try to do my part to make this happen."

I asked Carly how long it takes for her to come up with ideas for the moss-graffiti that she places into the world. She replied back with a response that I had anticipated, "Coming up with an idea is always varied; sometimes it takes a few minutes and sometimes a few weeks. It's nice if I have a couple months lead-time on a project so that I can have time to think about the context and what would look best in the space and also be meaningful for the people walking by. Sometimes people approach me with a specific theme or idea that they would like to use as a starting-off point, but usually I have the artistic freedom to decide what it's going to look like in the end."

There are plenty of people in the world that partake in moss-graffiti and they all have their ways of coming to a finished product. Carly stated that, "there are many different ways of working with moss." This is true with every type of art in the world. Every artist finds his or her way of getting to the finished product. Carly found that it is most successful to use mature moss.

When it comes to the process of moss-graffiti, the mature moss is collected, and then the glue must be made that hold the moss on the particular surface. Carly makes the glue herself because it will not poison the moss like store bought glue would. The glue consists of a mixture of

equal parts flour and beer, plus a spoonful of sugar and yogurt. This is an organic mixture that will not poison the moss-graffiti. Carly says that the advantage to this technique is that the moss-graffiti image looks great once it is applied and you don't have to wait weeks or even months for the moss to grow and "fill in," (like guerrilla gardening) only to be disappointed by the end results.

The moss gets cut with scissors to get the shape desired. Stencils are also used to make sure that the correct shape is achieved before placing the moss on a given surface. It is important to have clean outer lines with moss-graffiti. If using a stencil or template, they get taped onto the wall and that would get traced. Then the tracing becomes the area to which the moss will be shaped and placed into creating moss-graffiti.

When working on a large mural Carly can cut one side of the moss piece to give it a clean edge and then bend and work the moss until it fits within the outline that was drawn on the wall beforehand.

Carly says that she never thought, planned or dreamed of becoming a professional artist, it just kind of happened for her. Though it did end up being a good fit for her interests and lifestyle. She has never been interested in making art for your typical art audiences such as galleries or museums. Carly writes in her artist statement, "My public artworks aims to span gaps, build bridges and bring people together through a system of unexpected circumstances and extraordinary contexts."

More of Carly's work is posted to her website at www.carlyschmitt.com. She creates a wide range of art that are both visually pleasing and socially engaging. Should you have any interest in further exploring her work go on and check it out.

