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## Shoot (For) The Stars

Celebrity photographer Tyler Shields dominates the art world of the Internet age

BY MARIA SEDA-REEDER · OCTOBER 10TH, 2012 · VISUAL ART



"Mouth Full of Glitter" by Tyler Shields, 56 x 84, digital chromogenic print (Edition of 3) - Miller Gallery

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Tyler Shields' Klout Score is probably through the roof.

"I can take a photo, post it online within five minutes, and watch it go around the world," he says. "In a matter of an hour, a million people have seen it. Within two hours, 10 million people have seen it."

Although he is prone to superlatives, someone less familiar with his work might find this statement mere braggadocio. But Shields credits his online presence as the reason he is so successful as a multi-disciplinary artist.

The self-made celebrity photographer, author and supporting cast member of El's *Mrs. Eastwood and Company* has been covered by outlets like ARTINFO and *The Huffington Post*, and his work collected by such prestigious contemporary art institutions as the Tate Modern. And he has his first show outside of New York or L.A. this month, at Miller Gallery as part of FotoFocus.

The Jacksonville, Fla. native gets a lot of flack for being so popular. *Newsweek/Daily Beast* columnist Chris Lee wrote, "Shields remains something of a joke in fine arts circles and is written off as a star-fucker by his vocal detractors."

To hear him tell it, he's just a guy who never went to art school (or high school, for that matter), taught himself how to edit skate videos (he was a professional inline vert skater in his late teens early twenties) and took a picture with his roommate's camera that got really big on MySpace.

"Without the Internet I would not be a photographer," Shields said during a recent video interview from Paris. Nowadays valuing online digital media representation is de rigueur for everyone from fast food chains to rising Hollywood starlets. But prior to the current cultural zeitgeist, editors for print publications rarely let their photographers leave the confines of the studio.

Andy Warhol's name is often thrown around when speaking of Shields, and when asked about the comparison he seemed to think his particular union of art and celebrity had a lot to do with it.

"It's flattering," he said. "A lot of the art world doesn't translate into the celebrity world and a lot of the celebrity world doesn't translate into the art world. I translate both."

Shields resists the idea that he chases celebrity, however.

"People are people.

I don't ever want to shoot somebody just because they're famous."

Yet he doesn't photograph ugly people. The young and beautiful of Hollywood, who serve as his primary models, might do ugly things, but they're doing it all while looking effortlessly gorgeous.

"When I started, no magazines could wrap their head around me," Shields said.

The world traveler wanted to shoot outdoors in the places he visited — he didn't want to be a studio photographer. "Now people understand how important it is to have imagery and how much that can do for you. Without the Internet there would be no audience for me."

But eventually publications had to take notice: Shields consistently gets hungry, young, up-and-coming actors to pose for him. He's photographed everyone from Lindsay Lohan to the entire cast of *Revenge* — often in nothing more than their skivvies.

And technically his photographs are beautiful. Black and white or color saturated, Shields uses movement and overt suggestions of commercialism, sex and violence that are simple, iconic and visceral. He shoots thematic series like those of girlfriend Francesca Eastwood's mouth or silhouetted figures against breathtaking cinematic widescreen outdoor views, and they're exhibited and sold on his website in larger-than-life, 7-by-4.6-foot glossy prints.

As an artist, Shields is clearly interested in performance. He's directed music videos for Ghostface Killah, included installations of bloody actors and "emergency medical procedures" at past gallery shows — which go well with his oft blood-spattered photographs — and appears on his girlfriend's *E!* reality show, where he seems equally comfortable in front of as behind the camera.

His website features short, tension-filled video clips from his shoots with actor/models who often look to be poised on the brink of some climactic event. Next month he begins filming to direct Abigail Breslin in Prospect Park's thriller, *Final Girl*, about a pack of feral teenagers who take pleasure in

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Visual Art Tyler Shields

Adrian Breslin in Prospect Park's thriller, *Final Girl*, about a pack of rural teenage boys who choose the wrong girl to be the victim of their final "initiation."

"I care about talent," Shields insisted. "Whatever the mass opinion of (the actors I shoot) is, they have extreme talent."

And he's right in many ways. Shields' photographs of *Glee* actress Heather Morris received a lot of controversy owing largely to her fake bruised eye and the set's housewifely theme. In her controversial photo shoot, the tall blonde leans seductively on an ironing board, is tied-up with the cord of an iron and cloyingly holds the iron to Shields' crotch and face while the two feign surprised expressions at the camera.

But Morris does more than make sexy-face at the camera, and her physical talent has a lot to do with the series' most interesting shots. The actress-singer-dancer does "something I've never seen any other human being do before," Shields said, "only she could do it."

When asked if he worries that his work may propagate the tropes of sex and violence, he said, "If you don't want to propagate sex or violence, you should duct tape your eyes shut."

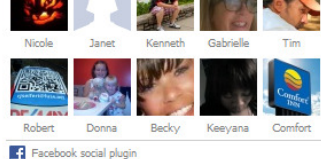
Shields insists he's just "finding talent within talent," but he also acknowledges that the fame of his models "amps it up even more" for his audience. So shooting beautiful famous people not only helps to build his models' careers — being controversial is part of the deal.

The difference between Warhol's "15 minutes of fame" and Shields' particular interpretation is that Warhol was referring to a break down of the hierarchy that only allowed *certain people* recognition, while Shields' work reinforces that chain of command by photographing the already famous — despite the fact that he himself was originally an outsider.

Whether or not you like Shields' work, the artist's provocativeness will likely bring out a large crowd of people to see him attend his exhibition opening for *Controlled Chaos* at Miller Gallery on Friday. See the artist in action yourself to make up your own mind ... or just wait to see it on his blog.

Tyler Shields' **CONTROLLED CHAOS** opens Friday at Miller Gallery in conjunction with FotoFocus. Receptions and exhibit details: [millergallery.com](http://millergallery.com).

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