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**Film review: 'The Social Network'**

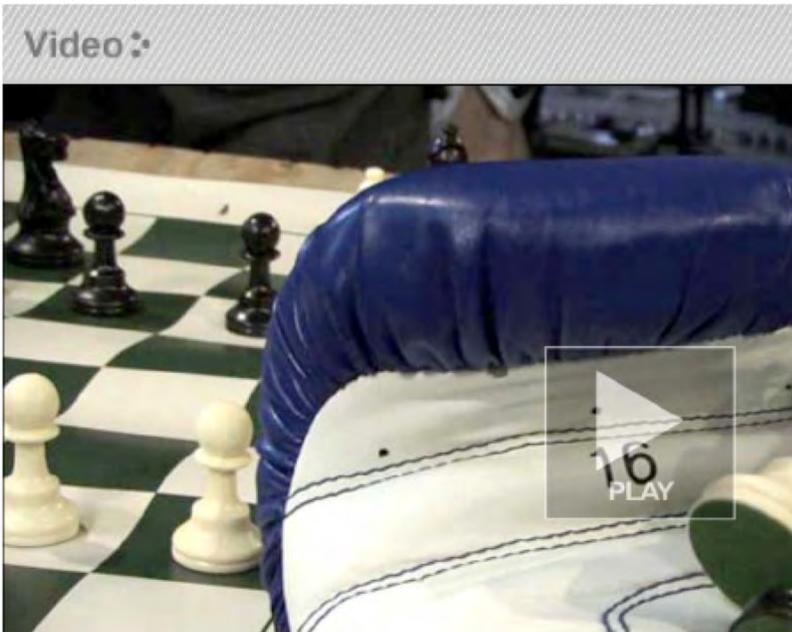


**In print this week: Latina rappers take the mic**

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## Cover story: Andrew McGregor, L.A.'s 'Fighting Philanthropist' »

3:38 PM PT, March 31, 2010



Andrew McGregor is big. In fact, he's enormous. At 6 feet 10 and 280 pounds, his hands are the size of your head and he has a set of shoulders that would make Atlas weep. Then there's the sheer force of his personality, which roils off him in palpable waves. Bring up **chessboxing**, and good luck resisting his gravitational pull. The man thinks big.

"I plan to become the next world heavyweight chessboxing champion," proclaims McGregor with a huge grin that splits his bearded mug.

The next world champion?

"Well, maybe not the next one," he concedes. "But one of the next ones."

McGregor is the founder of the Los Angeles Chessboxing Club, a local outpost for this new mind-body knockout that's gaining popularity across the globe. Chessboxing is touted as the ultimate combination of brains and brawn. Basically, fighters bash the snot out of each other for three minutes until -- ding! -- the bell goes off and they unlace their gloves, catching their breath as refs leap into the ring bearing a full chess set. The fighters then politely shake hands and hunch over their pieces to play a nice 4 minute round of chess, sweat dripping off their battered, bruised faces. Rinse and repeat for up to 11 rounds, or until the match is won by knockout or checkmate.

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The sport has helped McGregor let go of guilt over being so colossal that he can cause accidents by the mere act of standing up too quickly.

"I think I was, like, 6-5 when I was 13. So you're literally a giant amongst pubescent adolescents," he says. "I never, like, really intentionally, soberly hurt someone before, and in boxing you actually have to do that. It helped me overcome apologizing for being large."

The sport has also helped him work through the lingering shell shock from his time spent in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo as a freelance photographer for Reuters and the Associated Press. As the president and founder of the Tiziano Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building collaborative journalism in violent international hot zones including Rwanda, northern Iraq and the Congo, as well as right here on Los Angeles' skid row, McGregor has seen a lot.

Tiziano -- named after Tiziano Terzani, an intrepid Italian war reporter who refused to leave after the fall of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War -- was born midway through McGregor's master's study in journalism at USC. He dropped everything in 2007 to fly to Africa with little more than a burning ambition to put foreign reporting in the hands of the locals left behind when the news world moves on to the next crisis.

"I just thought it was ridiculous to have YouTube and yet still have all this undocumented atrocity in the world. I mean, what if there were YouTube journalists in 1994 in Rwanda?" says McGregor. "And why can't journalism economically benefit the people who actually live in those places?"

McGregor's amiable, gee-shucks vibe belies the deep stubborn streak that drove him to the center of one of the world's deadliest conflicts despite concerns about the danger. While shooting for Reuters and AP, McGregor documented starvation in the Congo and came away from the experience traumatized by the horror he saw inflicted on others.

"Machetes and guns and rape [are] so common that it was no longer an outrage so much as an expectation," he recalls.

"There's always baggage or some kind of decay within you after a very traumatic experience," McGregor says. He credits the support of family and friends for getting him through most of it, but notes that the focus and routine of boxing were part of the process.

Strange as it sounds, the fact that boxing not only allows but requires aggression has aided his strategy in fundraising for the Tiziano Project.

"With a charity you're always kind of a mendicant begging for money, like, 'Please sir, let me help the children,' but ever since I started boxing, my mentality changed and I was like no, this is a moral need," he says. "The world needs journalism. The fact that it hasn't been paid for domestically is irrelevant. . . . You're going to make this work."

Since founding the L.A. Chessboxing Club in 2009, McGregor has been given an appropriate nickname: "The Fightin' Philanthropist." The club also recently received an official sanction from the World Chess Boxing Organization (WCBO), headquartered in Germany. Next up are McGregor's plans to recruit and train female chessboxers for a charity exhibition match in partnership with MARCsMovement, a business based on socially responsible buying practices, slated for June 3 at Hollywood's Les Deux nightclub.

Flush with a \$25,000 grant from the Chase Community Giving contest on Facebook, McGregor also is sending a Tiziano team to northern Iraq in June and is putting together plans to continue work on skid row this summer.

He's also looking to partner with the L.A. Derby Dolls, the philanthropic divas of bone-crushing roller derby, for a pregame exhibition match. The proceeds will go to charity, of course.

With all his impassioned schemes and plots to better mankind, does he ever stop and wonder: Who am I to think I can change the world?

"Everyone can change the world," retorts McGregor. "People don't know how powerful they are."

You can see the bruiser himself doing a demo of chessboxing for KTLA [here](#). For more info on the Tiziano Project, visit <http://www.tizianoproject.com>. To get involved with chessboxing locally, go to <http://lachessexing.com/>.

--Melissa Henderson

Video credit: Don Kelsen and Carlo Rinaldi

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- » Hammer presents: "Flood Tide: Remixed"
- » "Becky's New Car"
- » "Enter the Void" at the Nuart
- » Football season specials at Pink Taco
- » "Love, Loss and What I Wore"

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**Chessboxing, a primer »**

3:28 PM PT, March 31, 2010



A relatively young sport, chessboxing didn't exist until Dutch performance artist Iepe "The Joker" Rubingh created it in 2003. Rubingh lifted the original idea from French comic book writer Enki Bilal's "Froid Equateur." He then applied the principles of Joseph Beuys, a German artist known for his work in "social sculpting," and molded the sport into something completely new.

Not your average meatheads, many chessboxers are writers and artists and all-around intellectuals. "If you look at history, the ultimate warriors -- Alexander the Great, Napoleon -- they took boxing to the ultimate level, the battlefield. Very smart cookies," said Tim Woolgar, a former television producer who went on to create the London ChessBoxing Club.

The WCBO's dedication to the sublimation of aggression through friendly competition is summed up by its motto: "Fighting is done in the ring. Wars are waged on the board."

The WCBO is headquartered in Berlin, but chessboxing clubs have sprouted up even in Russia, as well as McGregor's chapter in L.A.

The WCBO is currently recruiting for pro chessboxers, although potential fighters must possess both the intellectual prowess of a chess master and the physical ferocity of a pro fighter. Want to get involved? Many clubs now offer non-contact classes. "Beginners are absolutely welcome, and why not?" Woolgar said. "You don't have to be a

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professional footballer to have a game of football now, do you?"

In fact, the sport has become so wildly popular in Berlin that there are even tourism-based chessboxing experiences, where fans can stay in chessboxer-themed apartments, furnished with obligatory boxing bag and chessboard.

--Melissa Henderson

Photo credit: Kirk McKay/Los Angeles Times

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So what exactly is chessboxing? This doesn't say how it's played...

Posted by: Lou | [April 05, 2010 at 01:10 PM](#)

Mike Tyson could make his long awaited comeback!

Posted by: Ali | [April 05, 2010 at 06:18 PM](#)

second that...it would have been nice if the article explained a bit more, like how it's played.

Posted by: oc | [April 14, 2010 at 08:16 AM](#)

this is a prime example of how certain things from print to web get lost in translation. here's the cover story, which includes a video/explanation of chess boxing. <http://www.thisisbrandx.com/2010/03/ready-to-fight-by-rook-or-by-hook.html>

Posted by: kristasimmons | [April 14, 2010 at 12:26 PM](#)

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