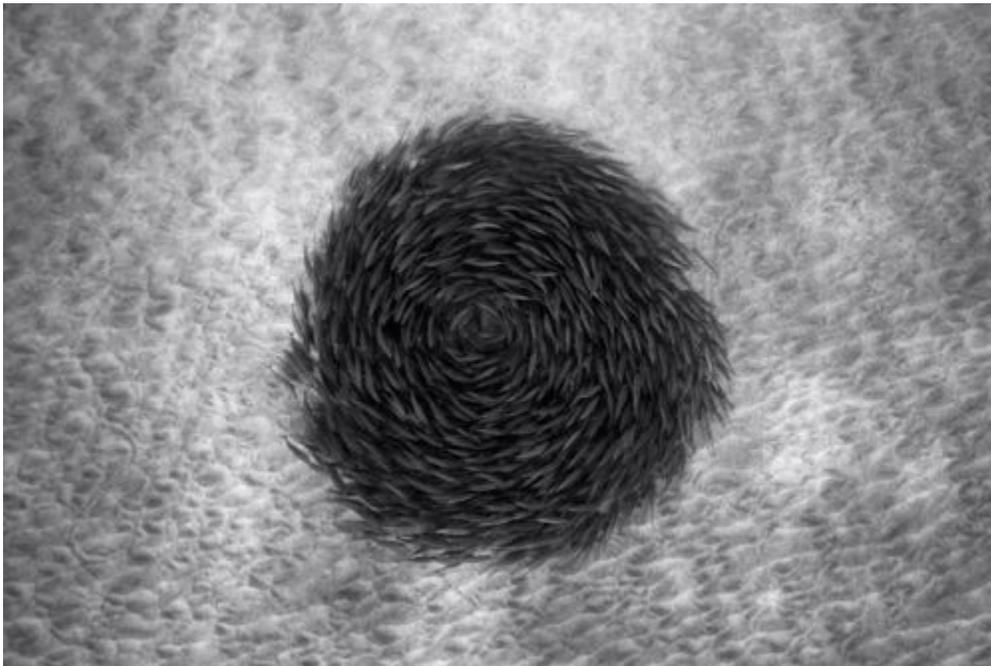


# Washington City Paper

## ARTSDESK

### Photos Capture Schools of Hawaiian Fish in Hypnotizing Shapes

Posted by [Louis Jacobson](#) on August 11, 2015 at 11:30 am

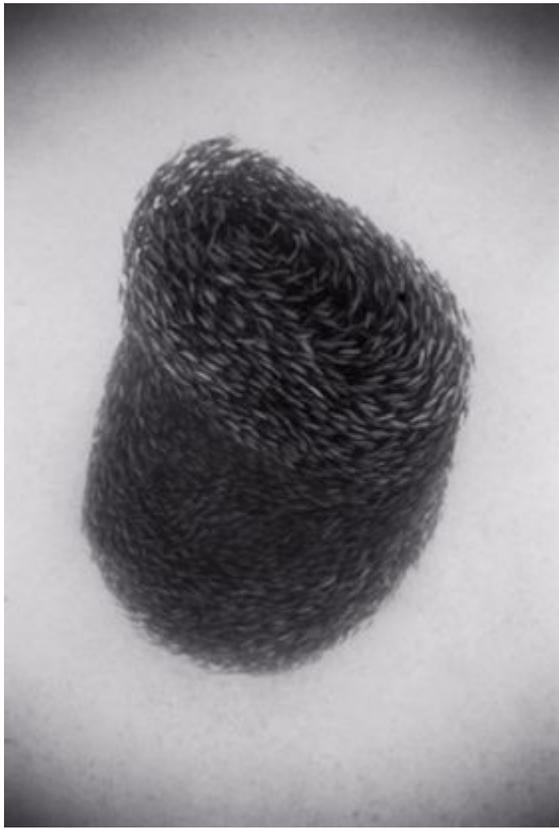


Photographer **Wayne Levin** is fascinated by synchronicity, and considering the artistic muse he's found—the humble Hawaiian fish known as akule—it's really hard to blame him.

It's not really right to refer to akule as "a fish." Single members of the species aren't the point; schools swim in multifaceted unison, swooping, unfurling, encircling, and elongating with seeming randomness—unless you're apt to perceive anthropomorphism, in which case the schools of fish are organizing and morphing simply for fun. The akule's penchant for surrounding divers and underwater photographers in a seemingly friendly tunnel suggests there may be something to the latter view.

Levin's images of the fish in Kealakekua Bay, published in a 2010 book and now on display at the National Academy of Sciences, are made in old-school black-and-white. His use of low-key

grayscale puts the focus, as it should be, on the notion of movement rather than color. And what movement it is.



Sometimes akule schools exude a centrifugal force; other times they rest in harmonic balance. In “Column of Akule” (middle) the fish take the three-dimensional form of a tightly woven basket. In “Pattern of Akule” (bottom) they unite into an undulating form that looks a lot like animal fur. In other photos, the schools resolve into the shapes of tornadoes or coral reefs or tumbleweeds, or masses so thick no human eye could see through them.

Levin’s finest image, however, is “Akule Pinwheel” (top), which depicts the fish spinning tightly into a near-perfect circle, approximating the design of the Japanese flag. For a group of who-knows-how-many hundreds of fish, the creation of a shape as minimalist as this is nothing short of remarkable.

*Through Jan. 8, 2016, at the National Academy of Sciences. 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W. Open Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.*

