

VANITY FAIR

Inside Vito Schnabel's Art Show in One of New York's Most Mysterious Buildings

by Rachel Tashjian
May 29, 2015



Two untitled inkjet and spray paint works by Julian Schnabel in "First Show/Last Show," at 190 Bowery, at Spring Street.
Credit Willie Davis for The New York Times

The Germania Bank Building on the corner of Bowery and Spring in Manhattan has long been the kind of structure that inspires New York real-estate fever dreams: mysterious and historic, seemingly abandoned, and central to a number of subway lines. But over the past two weeks (ending today), its wooden doors were uncharacteristically sliding open and shut with the speed of a camera's shutter, revealing a titillating glance at the enigmatic interior, decorated with works by Julian Schnabel, Harmony Korine, Ron Gorchov, Dan Colen, Joe Bradley, Mark Grotjahn, and Jeff Elrod.

The exhibition was curated by Vito Schnabel in an exhibition he calls "First Show/Last Show," and displayed the artworks in cavernous bank lobby rooms fitted with brawny wood moldings and wood-and-beige tile floors overlaid with the lines of a basketball court. Until last year, it was the home of photographer Jay Maisel, but like all spooky-house legends, it seemed that nobody ever went in and nobody ever went out. Then, in that common Manhattan real-estate *deus ex machina*, developer Aby Rosen bought the place. (They'll barely let him touch the Four Seasons, but he'll have free reign over the graffiti-spattered Renaissance Revival hovel.)



Patrick Carney, Vito Schnabel, Harmony Korine. By Paul Bruinooge/PatrickMcMullan.com.

On a recent Saturday evening, the artists and guests, including Dakota Johnson, who bounced a baby on her lap on a bank bench, and Vito squeeze Heidi Klum, who swanned near the exit in a glittering tuxedo jacket, celebrated the show and got a glance of the building's interior, many for the first time. Outside, a throng of young artist-types craned their necks in vain to get a glimpse of this previously sealed capsule of old downtown, when it was easy to conceive of a photographer converting a bank into a residence, rather than the other way around.

"So, of course, this is my first show in my new role as Vito's senior art advisor," said a rightfully proud Bob Colacello, who also serves as a special correspondent for this magazine and seems to know something interesting about everyone. To wit: he told us that Gorcho, whose works hang in a cavern-like room on the second floor that would be a great place for a 19th-century banking baron to be embalmed with cigar smoke, had been virtually forgotten when Vito put some of his pieces in his first-ever show, which he staged at age 15. "He literally revived him," Colacello said.

The building's mystique had guests pondering other Delphic New York properties. Spring Breakers director

and artist Harmony Korine wondered in what unexpected corner of New York real estate he might like to stage a show. "Probably like my grandma's house, from when I was a kid, in Queens," he said. "It's like . . . actually, it's kind of bombed out, but still it would be nice to put something in there." (Korine was in his usual slacker madcap spirits: an unlikely legend on *The Late Show* with David Letterman, he said of the possibility of returning to the show before its then-impending end: "It would have been fun, like I could have done some serious damage." And after a beat: "It's probably better that I didn't go.")

Abstract painter Joe Bradley, on the other hand, was pleasantly surprised by the building's state. "I sort of expected a wreck inside," he said. "It's pretty regal in here."

The building has finally bent to the gale of gentrification, but Bradley, like many of his contemporaries, has already packed up: he's relocating to—wait for it—the Upper East Side. "It's not getting incorporated into the cleanup that the rest of the city is," he said. "You can still go to a greasy spoon up there."