

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

PEEK INSIDE ONE OF NEW YORK'S MOST MYSTERIOUS BUILDINGS

by Stefanie Waldek

Photography by Argenis Apolinario/Courtesy of Vito Schnabel
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The iconic 190 Bowery is the site of the art exhibition First Show/Last Show, curated by Vito Schnabel.

The massive, seemingly abandoned building at the corner of Spring and Bowery has long been an enigma to the residents of lower Manhattan. Built in 1898 as the Germania Bank, the 35,000-square-foot property has been closed to the public since 1966, when photographer Jay Maisel purchased it (for just \$102,000) and turned it into a 72-room private mansion. But he has recently sold the building, and for a short time, the curious have the opportunity to enter the hallowed halls of 190 Bowery, which is currently hosting the contemporary art exhibition First Show/Last Show, curated by Vito Schnabel.

The building is no stranger to art. Maisel used the first three floors as gallery spaces for his projects and once leased the fourth floor to Roy Lichtenstein. And back when Keith Haring ruled the New York street art community, he drew on the building's walls with chalk.

This exhibition, featuring works by such artists as Mark Grotjahn, Harmony Korine, and Julian Schnabel, is perhaps less about the art and more about the building—at least to some visitors. “We’ve lived across the street for three years,” said one patron. “Getting inside is a dream come true.”



The exhibition occupies the first floor and mezzanine of 190 Bowery.

While its graffiti-covered exterior recalls the Bowery's grittier days, the building's interior is a grand example of Gilded Age architecture. Temporary white walls built for the exhibition cover much of the space, which was designed by architect Robert Maynicke, but some original details peek through, including marble pilasters, elaborate crown molding, and detailed tilework.

Though the exhibition is technically open to all, viewers must secure an appointment first. Hundreds of excited New Yorkers were turned away from the May 16 opening, which was originally billed as public and later limited to VIPs. But for the many people who have walked past 190 Bowery's mysterious façade and wondered what hides behind it, the minor hassle is certainly worth it.



An installation view of the exhibition.