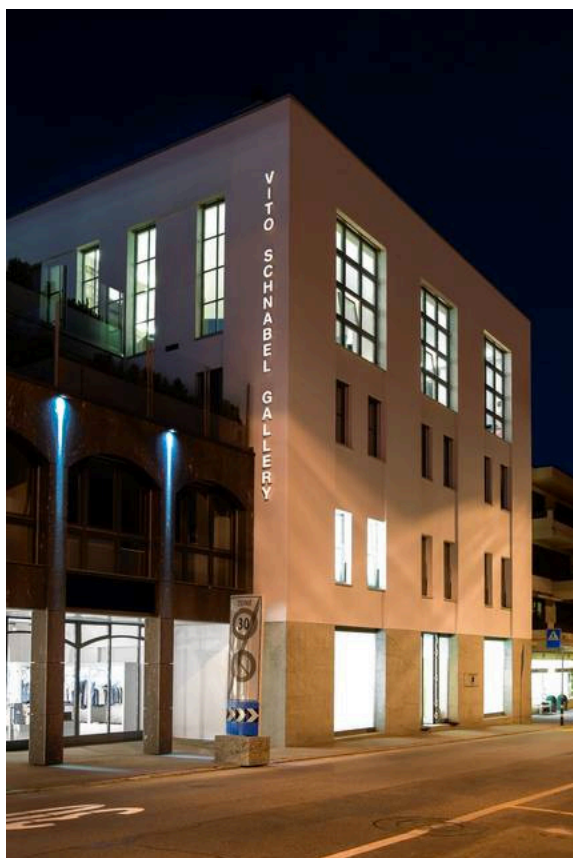


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Vito Schnabel Sets Up Shop in the Alps

by Anna Russell
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Vito Schnabel Gallery on Via Maistra in St. Moritz, Switzerland
PHOTO: ROMANO SALIS/VITO SCHNABEL GALLERY

Google Vito Schnabel and you're likely to learn a lot about his love life, his vacations and what kind of shoes he likes to wear at the airport. The son of artist and filmmaker Julian Schnabel, director of "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly," he has enjoyed a level of attention typically reserved for movie stars, not art dealers.

At 29, Mr. Schnabel has built a reputation for throwing some of the art world's glitziest exhibitions—and parties. At Art Basel Miami Beach, an invitation to the annual party he co-hosts is notoriously difficult to snag. He curated his first exhibition at age 16, and is currently dating supermodel and television star Heidi Klum. "Vito always draws the kind of young, sexy crowd to his

openings," says Constanze Kubern, an art adviser based in London and Hong Kong, who says he "caters to the next generation of collectors. He kind of throws the hardest parties."

Now Mr. Schnabel is bringing the party to St. Moritz, Switzerland, where he will open his first permanent gallery space on Dec. 28. The Vito Schnabel Gallery will occupy the former home of the Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, which opened in that location in 2009 and has long had a presence in the well-heeled ski resort town.

The Swiss Mr. Bischofberger, whom Mr. Schnabel counts as a mentor, is best known for his work bringing American pop artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg to the attention of major European collectors. He later showed painters including Jean-Michel Basquiat and Mr. Schnabel's father, Julian.

"I was looking for a place where I could have more of a permanent platform," says Mr. Schnabel. Mr. Bischofberger "proposed it to me, and I kind of jumped on it."

Opening a permanent space is a major step for the dealer. Since his teenage curatorial debut, Mr. Schnabel has become something of an art world pet, admired for his talent for curating shows of lesser-known artists in unexpected locations—in a Long Island cornfield, for instance, or a cloistered garden in Venice. Last May, his exhibition "First Show/Last Show" featured works by Jeff Elrod, Harmony Korine and Dan Colen at the Germania Bank building on the Bowery in downtown New York.

Like Aspen, Colo., St. Moritz attracts wealthy vacationers with an interest in high-profile art. In addition to Mr. Bischofberger's former space, the city's contemporary galleries include outposts of Galerie Gmurzynska and Galerie Andrea Caratsch. But compared with established art centers like New York or London, the scene here is more low-key—something that appealed to Mr. Schnabel.

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"In New York, there's already so much there," he says. "I was looking for a place that was not totally off the beaten path, but where I could build my own voice and not necessarily have to deal with thousands of galleries in the same town."

The Vito Schnabel Gallery's first exhibition will feature new paintings and sculptures by Swiss-born artist Urs Fischer, including a life-size wax portrait of Mr. Bischofberger and his wife Yoyo, which will burn and melt over the course of the show. Nearby, at the Kulm Hotel, four functional matte-black stoves by Sterling Ruby will be installed outside.

Both Messrs. Fischer and Ruby are rock stars in the field and already have ties to major galleries like Gavin Brown and Gagosian. But Mr. Schnabel and the artists say their arrangement is personal and nonexclusive. It shouldn't be seen as poaching. Mr. Ruby, like Mr. Fischer, says he spoke casually with Mr. Schnabel before being asked to participate in the gallery's opening. "He is right at the beginning of his gallery venture, it feels fresh," Mr. Ruby wrote in an email.

Increasingly, artists are willing to go outside their main galleries to work in smaller spaces with younger galleries, says New York-based art adviser Lisa Schiff. "I think galleries have to be a lot more flexible now," she says.

It's another way the current generation of rising-star artists and dealers like Mr. Schnabel are flexing their clout in an art market smitten with anything new.

Mr. Schnabel hopes to hold four to five shows a year at the St. Moritz space, and already has another exhibition in the works: a solo show featuring recent plate paintings by his father. Despite the permanent space, Mr. Schnabel says he plans to work in the much the same way he has before, eschewing a traditional stable of artists for a flexible, project-based approach.

"I work with artists who I think are the best at what they do," he says. "I think exclusivity is a dated term when you're talking about representing an artist."

As a child, Mr. Schnabel spent time each year in the Alpine town, much of it wandering Mr. Bischofberger's gallery, where his father's works were sometimes on display. He remembers seeing a show of the elder Mr. Schnabel's large bronze sculptures installed on a snowy mountain in St. Moritz as a preteen. "It was something unlike anything

I had ever really seen before," he says.

The visits were part of a childhood steeped in art. Mr. Schnabel attended Brooklyn's St. Ann's school, where Lena Dunham was a classmate. He studied art history for a year at both the New School and Columbia University, before dropping out. Since the age of 14, he's accompanied his father on trips to exhibitions or meetings in cities like Rome, St. Petersburg and Madrid. His mother, Jacqueline Beurang, is a clothing designer who championed Azzedine Alaïa in the 1980s. His sisters now work in creative fields as well: Lola Montes Schnabel is a painter and video artist; Stella Schnabel is an actress, with roles in "Before Night Falls" and "You Won't Miss Me."

Mr. Schnabel's first exhibition, "Incubator," was a New York show of works he knew from childhood by artists including Luigi Ontani and Jorge Galindo. He was 17 when his second show—works by the painter Ron Gorchov, then in his 70s—was well-received by art critics. He has championed artists including Laurie Anderson and Rene Ricard, and worked with the Bruce High Quality Foundation to organize popular alternative survey shows called Brucennials.

Inhabiting the same world as his father has its own challenges. "He's got a big voice, and he knows what he likes and what he doesn't—and he doesn't always keep it to himself, but God bless him," he says. When he was around 13, he told his father about his interest in the art world. "I think he thought I was out of my mind," he says. "Slowly he realized I wasn't kidding."

Beyond the personal connection to St. Moritz, Mr. Schnabel says the idea of a gallery situated in Switzerland—at the intersection of Italy, France and Austria—appealed to him. "I wanted to be in the middle of it, in some sense," he says. Another plus was the opportunity to exhibit work, like Mr. Ruby's "STOVES," outside. "When I walked into Sterling's studio and saw these sculptures, I immediately thought of St. Moritz," he says.