

ARTNEWS

Walter Robinson, Artist, Is Feted in Basel for Upcoming Show at Vito Schnabel Gallery

by Nate Freeman
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Walter Robinson, *Live for Today*, 2017.
Courtesy the Artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery

Walter Robinson, the artist who in another life was the founding editor of *Artnet* magazine, was standing in a tan suit at Chez Donati in Basel on Thursday afternoon, fanning himself with a Japanese hand fan at a lunch in his honor. I didn't have to ask him how he was doing, but I did, and he said he was doing pretty fantastic.

"I'm here, but I don't have to do any work!" he said, continuing to fan himself.

Well, he was working, sort of, because the lunch was to celebrate his show that's opening in July at Vito Schnabel Gallery in St. Moritz, Switzerland, "The Americans," which features new paintings, freshly made pulp-aded portraits of dames, drunks, and nogoodniks. But what

he meant was that he didn't have to *work*, like he used to work in Basel—writing and editing and pounding the pavement chasing stories, covering everything going on.

"I would just be in the hotel working until midnight, one in the morning—there were no lunches, no dinners or parties," he said.

In the past few years, Robinson's art has been embraced in a way it hasn't in decades. He was a pivotal guy in the Pictures Generation orbit way back when, but stayed focused on the editorial side of things. Then, two years after *Artnet* magazine closed, Barry Blinderman set up a retrospective of Robinson's work at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Two years after that, Jeffrey

WALTER ROBINSON



Walter Robinson, *The Executioner Blood Vendetta*, 2017.
Courtesy the Artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery



Walter Robinson at Chez Donati.
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Deitch, who was in attendance at the lunch, brought that retrospective to his rechristened space in New York. In *The New Yorker*, Peter Schjeldahl called Robinson "a Manet of hot babes and a Morandi of McDonald's French fries and Budweiser beer cans." High praise! And soon after, the Whitney acquired his 1986 sheet painting *Baron Sinister* and put it smack dab in the middle of the main room of its show "Fast Forward: Paintings from the 1980s."

The show at Vito Schnabel Gallery, which opens July 30, includes some work from the '80s, but also new stuff from 2017. And from the looks of the catalogue Robinson hasn't stayed too far from his usual subjects. The cover work, *As Tough as They Come* (2017), is an acrylic-on-bedsheet painting depicting a handsome brawler, shirtsleeves rolled up, green tie flailing, arm cocked back ready to toss a broken bottle of booze.

Robinson even wrote the text for the catalogue, which takes the form of a short noir sketch. A taste:

A sharp crack of a pistol report sounded. "I am only a girl, and not a good girl," she said. "So I shot him."

During the lunch of veal scaloppine and risotto and champagne and, yes, french fries, Schnabel got up to praise Robinson, and thank Deitch for his help, as Foundation Beyeler director Sam Keller, dealer Jeff Poe, and a slew of collectors looked on. By the time espresso came around, I had to head out to another interview, to pound the pavement. I went to say goodbye to Robinson and asked how he was liking being on the other side of things.

"I'm getting pretty used to it!" he said.