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# Art on His Own Terms

New 24-foot-square works by Julian Schnabel will be displayed outdoors, exposed to the elements.



KATHARINA POBLITZKI VIA FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO



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JULIAN SCHNABEL STUDIO, VIA FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO

From far left, Julian Schnabel in his studio last year; a rendering of "Julian Schnabel — Symbols of Actual Life" at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco; and "Untitled," 2017. Below, Mr. Schnabel's studio in Montauk, N.Y., 2017.

By SCOTT JAMES

SAN FRANCISCO — On a Friday in Costa Rica, the artist and filmmaker Julian Schnabel was waiting for his surfboards. They were tied up in customs, but finally arrived that January morning.

"It makes a big difference when you're surfing on your own board," he said.

Mr. Schnabel, 66, is still catching waves and leading the rest of his life as he always has: on his own very particular terms, whether surfboards or art.

Noted initially for his broken plate paintings, he headlined the star-studded art scene of the 1980s, becoming a larger than life pajama-clad persona often associated with, and derided for, the excesses of that decade. He never stopped painting, and later added award-winning films to his repertoire.

Today he is in the midst of an American renaissance of sorts. His work was feted at shows in New York and Aspen last year, a new movie is expected later this year, and next month there will be an unusual exhibition of new paintings in San Francisco. The works are enormous and will be displayed outdoors for months, exposed to the city's famously foggy climate.

The six abstract paintings, measuring 24 feet on each side, will surround the columned Court of Honor at the Legion of Honor Museum in the city's Lands End area. The exhibition is expected to create a dramatic contrast to the museum's Eurocentric collection and stately neo-Classical design (the building is a replica of the Musée National de la Légion d'Honneur in Paris).

The giant paintings will surround and dwarf a casting of Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker," the popular permanent centerpiece of the courtyard. The scale of the exhibit is expected to envelop visitors, making them feel inside the art.

"You're standing in this other world, a dif-

ferent relationship with the art," said Max Hollein, the museum director who also curated the exhibit. "It's a fairly physical experience to see these works," he said.

At the behest of Mr. Hollein, who had worked with Mr. Schnabel before, the artist visited the courtyard last year.

"I looked at the columns and I said, yeah, I think I have to make something specific to this place," Mr. Schnabel said in a telephone interview from Costa Rica.

As Mr. Schnabel often does, he used found materials for the canvas, this time repurposing lonas, a type of gabardine tarpaulin he discovered covering a traveling fruit

market in the Lagunillas area of southern Mexico.

"The sun bleaches this material to an extraordinary color that you just can't mix," he said, adding that the vendors were, "I guess, amused by the fact that someone would be interested in something that to them is utilitarian and probably even discarded. To me the bleaching of the sun is the treasure of Sierra Madre."

It also means the materials come with their own story before the artist adds his. And in the San Francisco exhibit, another chapter will be added as the work is exposed to the elements.

"The sun bleaches this material to an extraordinary color that you just can't mix."

"I don't think they'll change that much out there," Mr. Schnabel said.

Because of their size, the paintings were created outside at his indoor/outdoor studio at his home in Montauk, on Long Island, where he has long painted large-scale works. But these new paintings were so big they required additional riggings to reach their height, and were painted both horizontally and vertically.

"You can't take it inside when it rains," he said. Once dry, however, the gesso paint is durable.

Inside the museum will be additional works, including others on found materials, like the so-called Jane Birkin series painted on used felucca sails that Mr. Schnabel obtained in Egypt. Inscribed on them is the name of the actress and singer who has been a muse for musicians and the eponymous Hermès handbag.

The Legion of Honor exhibit is part of what promises to be a high-profile year for Mr. Schnabel.

A well-known workaholic, while in Costa Rica he was immersed in editing his next movie, "At Eternity's Gate," about Vincent van Gogh in Arles, France, starring Willem Dafoe with Oscar Isaac as Paul Gauguin. Mr. Schnabel was delighted that a portable Avid editing system allowed him to work on the film wherever he traveled.

"We're so engaged in what we're doing, we really don't want to stop," he said.

He felt that same thrill when creating the San Francisco paintings, and with those surfboards having just been delivered, he drew an analogy.

"It's like paddling out in big surf. There's a wall there, and you are a certain size and the sea is a certain size and these paintings are a certain size," he said. "It happens so quickly you just want to relive that and be in that sensation again. Painting for me is like that. The joy of just doing it and being lost in the experience of that is compelling to me."

**JULIAN SCHNABEL**

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Timothy Rub, the Philadelphia Museum's director, said, "We're very sad to see it go, but grateful to have had it here for so long."

"Painted Bronze," which will be on display at MoMA occasionally and will come into the permanent collection at the Kravises' deaths, was one of several acquisitions approved last week by the museum's committee for painting and sculpture that mark firsts or unusual forays by a museum that has helped define Modernism but has sometimes struggled to incorporate more contemporary art.

Among the new additions is the first painting to enter the permanent collection by Kerry James Marshall, the Chicago-based artist whose complex, mural-size paintings have depicted the lives of black Americans in the heroic terms of European history painting. The work the museum purchased, "Untitled (Club Scene)," from 2013, is a dim view of a nightclub, where the stage that would normally be occupied by musicians is empty.

The museum has also acquired its first painting by Julian Schnabel – "St. Sebastian," from 1979, a work of oil and wax on canvas – with the help of several donors. The addition of the painting is notable if only for the fact that the museum has taken so long to acquire the work of Mr. Schnabel, a major figure in the 1980s Neo-Expressionist movement and an outsize personality in the New York art world. William Rubin, who was for many years the Modern's powerful curator of painting and sculpture, had a position against Mr. Schnabel's painting so fixed that he wrote a 1984 letter to The New York Times suggesting a correction to a sentence in an article that said "the Modern has not yet acquired" a Schnabel. He said the sentence should not have included the word "yet."

But Ms. Temkin, the curator, noted that Mr. Schnabel's work has a relevance with younger artists that is increasing. "We're always looking at art, inevitably," she said, "with today's eyes."