



Breakfast in Paris with Julian Schnabel

by Nadja Savey
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The artist Julian Schnabel met up with Whitehot Magazine in Paris at the Musée d'Orsay

Julian Schnabel is eating a chocolate croissant for breakfast, but can't stop pointing at paintings while he talks. The famed New York artist and filmmaker—whose most recent film, *At Eternity's Gate*, is centered around Vincent Van Gogh's final days—is in Paris for his exhibition opening at the Musée d'Orsay. *Orsay Through the Eyes of Julian Schnabel*, which runs until January 13, 2019, features Schnabel's own paintings alongside the great artists in the museum's art collection, from Vincent Van Gogh's *Portrait of an Artist* from 1889 (valued at \$71m in 1998) to Paul Cézanne's *Achille Empeire* alongside works by Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet and Courbet. These masterpieces are shown alongside Schnabel's plate paintings to his *Rose Painting (Near Van Gogh's Grave)* to his velvet paintings from the 1980s and even a bronze sculpture of his father's head. But why? We asked him. Schnabel spoke to Whitehot about Francis Bacon, bullfighters and why he really made a film about Van Gogh.

What's the difference or similarity between the Aarhus exhibit and this one, where you're showing your work among the Old Masters?

Julian Schnabel: This is the different strains of my work, there's this painting I've done from 1978, then one from 1979, 1980, 1997, 1987, 2014, 2017, I'm saying there are specific paintings I thought should go in here, one of my paintings should go with this Cezanne painting. These pictures are speaking to each other.

As far as putting your painting beside a Van Gogh, that's profound.

Yes, exactly.

Not everybody can do that.

You can look at a painting and say 'that's really good' or 'that's not.' I think if you look at this Van Gogh, you can magnify the image and get close to the painting. You can even lean over the fence and get close to the painting if

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you want, the buzzer isn't going to go off! What's really important to be able to see is the blue lines that make the lips.

How many times have you looked at this Van Gogh painting?

A lot. And yesterday, I had to stand still while getting my photo taken and I learned to see the painting again for the first time.

Man interrupts interview [In French] Are you the artist?
[Schnabel in French] Yes, I am Mr. Schnabel.

Interruption guy I like this portrait you did of a woman in a Matador hat, I once went home with a female matador [a woman bullfighter] and once I knew what she did, I couldn't sleep with her.

You missed out on a great experience, man. The woman in this painting is not a matador but she is wearing a matador hat. If you see the shadow under her hat on her forehead, you see it matches the same shadow on Van Gogh's head on his portrait. But they're also different in the different decisions people make in an economy of lines that is painted language. It's not my idea.

With the release of the recent Van Gogh film you directed, you say it's not a biopic, correct?
Right.

Were you saying, in a way, there is a direct relation between his work and yours?

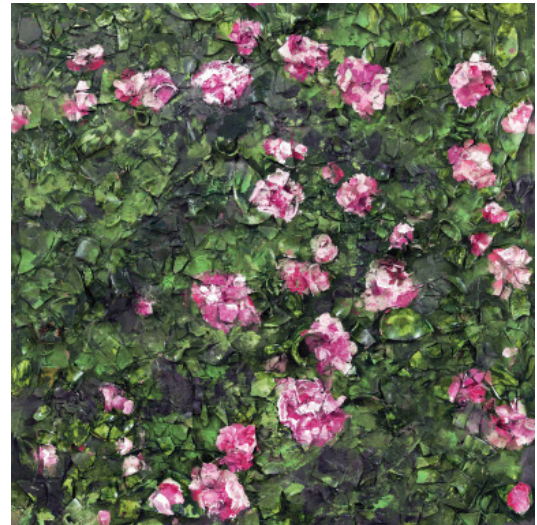
Yes, it's a good reason to make a movie. But I didn't want to make a movie. But I felt I owed it to him somehow to make it. Bacon had written something where he was paraphrasing something Van Gogh said, which is in the movie and ties into all perception, or the way I would approach art, and the way I approach the movie. You know what the quote is, right?

No, but you can tell me right now.

Okay, its: "How to achieve anomalies, inaccuracies and refashioning of reality to what comes out are lies that are more truthful than literal fact."

That's art.

That's what Van Gogh is doing, it's not a realistic painting, its better than realistic. This is energy, something that is turned on when you stand in front of it. Probably when you make an assumption, you don't realize this: He was dissecting all of these ways of seeing so he was creating something where you are observing observation.



He was ahead of his time, in that sense. Then, when you see my plate paintings, you see they're disagreeing with the depth of field of the field and the paint. There's a kind of...

Disruption, in a way.

That's a good word. So you see that, in this painting, then looking back to the Van Gogh, you see a disruption and you break it down, all these marks that make up his face in his self-portrait. But when you back up and stand far away, the plates disappear. There is also, if you look at her eye in the right place, it looks like there is a tear in her eye.

The exhibition entry text says this exhibition is a testament that painting is in fact not dead. Would you agree?

Yeah! Come with me. [Walks to other room with chocolate croissant in hand]. Here are my paintings from the 1980s

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with a Toulouse-Lautrec. You asked me earlier on, 'How do all these paintings work together?' What did Walt Whitman say? "Its okay if I contradict myself, I contain multitudes." If you see Jean-Michel Basquait's work with another artist's work, if you were trying to explain in a way, or be more didactic how painting functions, it would just be one thing that he is saying with each work because they're all kind of the same. What most painters do, is they have different lives over a period of time. They change.

Does that mean painters who don't change aren't risk takers?

Well, it's just human nature, you know?

You're just cut from a different cloth.

Yeah, it suits me; this room is all about drawing painting. You have Toulouse-Lautrec's work where he glued a bunch of canvases together, he didn't care about a pristine surface, he wanted the canvas to breathe through that and drew on top of it. It's the same way Jackson Pollock was using raw canvas and putting marks on it, bringing drawing into painting. So these particular works in this room refers to that. This painting of mine has dirt and rain on it because the material was covering a boat. It's one of 16 paintings I showed in Bordeaux in 1989, the paintings are from 1988. I wanted to show it here with a drawing I made outside, I was standing on a piece of canvas with a long stick and there were rocks underneath, so when you put a brush over the canvas, the line was broken.

Do you feel there is any presence of being intimidated showing your work alongside these masters? It's like me, as a writer, putting my book directly beside one by Ernest Hemingway.

No I don't.

You're just confident?

The paintings will tell you. If they look terrible together and you think 'God, this is shit, why would you do that?' it's a real litmus test, isn't it?

