

BROOKLYN RAIL

*Julian Schnabel: The Sad Lament of the Brave,
Let the Wind Speak and Other Paintings*

by David Rhodes
October 2020



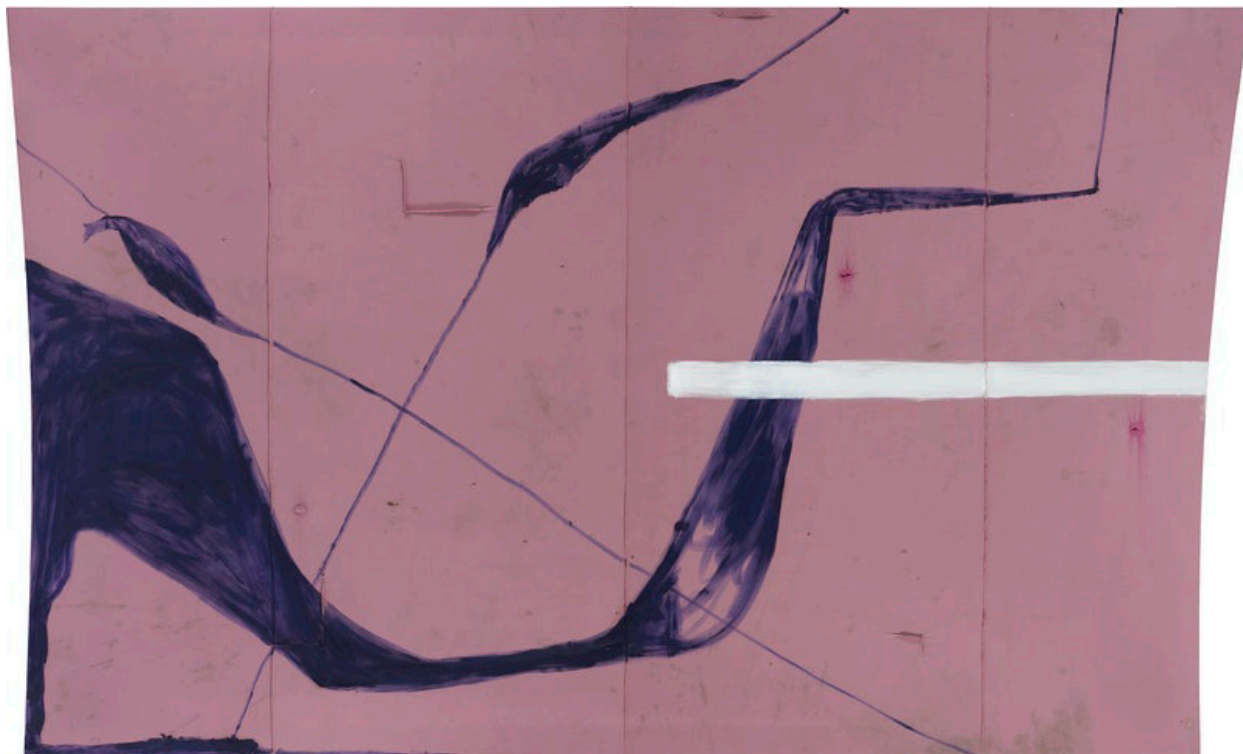
Installation view: *Julian Schnabel: The Sad Lament of the Brave, Let the Wind Speak and Other Paintings*, 510 West 25th Street, New York, September 18-October 24, 2020. Photography courtesy Pace Gallery.

The Sad Lament of the Brave, Let the Wind Speak and Other Paintings is an enlarged iteration of the exhibition presented by Pace earlier this year, and postponed days later due to the surging pandemic. Included are 11 recent paintings made at the artist's studio in Montauk, six of which have not been exhibited before. The largest paintings here envelope the viewer and establish a place or environment in the gallery somewhat like the outdoor walls the artist created as a studio to surround himself with the works in progress. The scale is that of Abstract Expressionist or European history painting. Yet there is ease in an often-sparse painterly gesture that is more familiar in small scale in rapidly made works as opposed to the usual progressive accumulation of marks in large-scale gestural painting. These contradictions are interesting.

There is something in Julian Schnabel's work that recalls

Francis Picabia's *Transparencies* series, paintings from the 1920s in which Picabia experimented with Dada and abstraction, and Joe Overstreet's 1960s exploration of canvas stretched out into three dimensions. More distantly, they evoke the use of found materials as painting support with the Catalonians Anthony Tàpies and Joan Miró. The paintings aim for a transcendent communication beyond a simple articulation of self or statement of content. Apropos this, James Nares quotes Antonin Artaud in the exhibition catalog, "gesture is itself an idea." Picabia said of his own work, "I want my painting where all my instincts may have free course." The trust in intuition when pursuing a fleeting impulse, the spontaneity, and responsiveness to material on a scale that precludes correction are typical of Julian Schnabel's approach to painting. Abstraction like this is both visceral and transcendent—using material, image, and text (the titles in this case) to communicate.

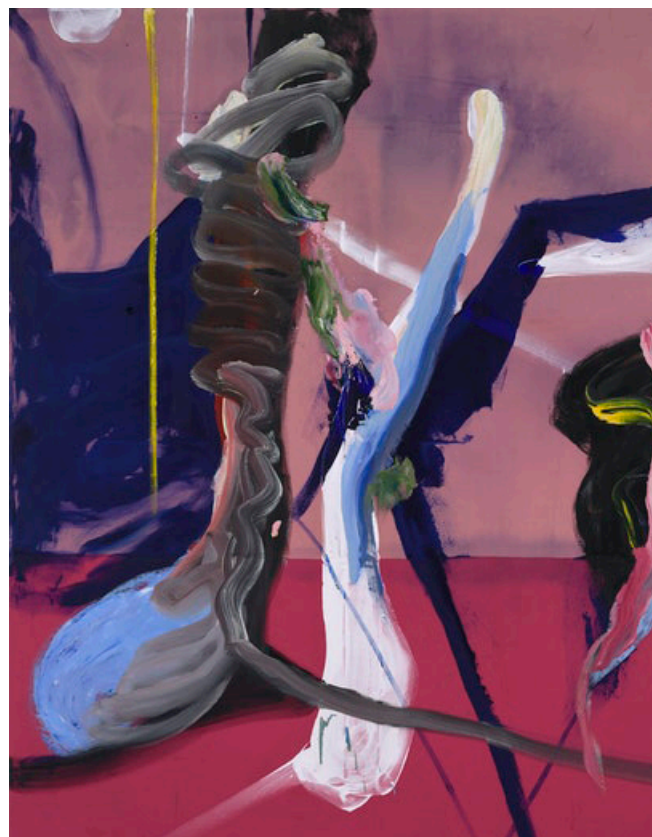
JULIAN SCHNABEL



Julian Schnabel, *Preschool and Afterschool*, 2018. Oil and gesso on found fabric, 128 x 213 inches. © Julian Schnabel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The paintings are made using lonas cotton fabric sourced from a Mexican fruit market, where they were placed to protect vendors and customers from the fierce sun that weathered and discolored the fabric. Held aloft with tent poles, which have left their marks, the fabric is re-stretched over frames that shape the painting support. Already marked, stained, and repaired, the fabric offers a non-neutral, activated ground on which to work. Thinking about the origin of these grounds from a different culture or class is one reading, ultimately depending on the viewer. Miro's use of worker's sackcloth as a support for some of his modernist anti-painting compositions is comparable. The class politics of the exploitation of this particular found material may be relevant, although that is not always the case—for example, consider David Hammons's use of found building site tarps with abstract gestural painting.

Preschool and Afterschool (2018) is 128 by 213 1/2 inches in size. The dark pink, torqued rectangle of fabric, with seams, discoloration, and patch repair is traversed by violet biomorphic shapes in oil paint that cross each other, overlapping, and a wide white gesso line that acts like a pictorial redaction—which doesn't hide anything itself—rather it disrupts by being assertively on the surface without contributing to the otherwise painterly spatial illusion. *Why not I* (2019) is one of four paintings from the *Why not* series, all made this time with the same fabric on regular rectangular stretchers. It comprises a group of



Julian Schnabel, *Why not I*, 2019. Ink and oil on found fabric, 84 x 65 inches. © Julian Schnabel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

JULIAN SCHNABEL

painterly shapes that dance before a horizon, or before a wall. The illusion of abstract, surreal space is clear, whilst the paint is direct and unfussy with the addition of ink that stains a shadow like form.

The Road (2020) has along its top edge a protuberance, partially painted red, like a volcano or a wound. The other shapes in the painting also read ambiguously, inviting different constellations of meaning whilst remaining explicitly painterly events. For example, is the white gesso shape—brushed and spilled—a bird on a wire or a ghost on a tightrope? Most likely neither. Despite the undeniably heroic scale and boldness, the paintings have as much to do with self-effacement in the circumstance of unknown experience as an adventure or foil, a falling into form and a finding of balance however precarious, or transitory. A new place is acknowledged via intuitive responsiveness and not calculated construction—painting as a concrete shadow, fugitive and yet fixed.



Julian Schnabel, *The Road*, 2020. Oil and gesso on found fabric, 122 x 96 inches. © Julian Schnabel / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.