

JULIAN SCHNABEL
CURATED BY BRUNO BISCHOFBERGER
MAY 2 - JULY 26, 2024

PAINTINGS FROM 1978 - 1987
455 WEST 19TH STREET, NEW YORK

VAN GOGH'S TREES OF HOME FOR PETER BEARD 2020
43 CLARKSON STREET, NEW YORK

Bruno Bischofberger, April 2024

Julian Schnabel is one of the most significant American painters of the last 45 years. In the 1970s when painting was no longer possible because painting was said to be dead, he embarked on a new path that changed everything. And with this, a whole new chapter in art history began.

Since then, Schnabel and his work have been the subject of many texts, articles and commentaries, he has been highly praised and equally excoriated. Some authors later penitently amended their misjudgement: they only became aware of his impact at a later stage. He literally was the figurehead of a new generation of artists, and he bluntly brought back what had been lost, often provocative though not without sensitivity.

The significance of Schnabel's output can best be expressed with the words of art critics, curators and close friends who have accompanied and followed the artist for decades, from his first artistic steps to the present. The following quotes thus provide a greater awareness and understanding of the refinement of the differences as well as a contextualisation and illustration of Schnabel's importance. We should all bow down.

Schnabelogy with quotes:

Ivan Nagei: "Von Schrecken und Aufruhr, Julian Schnabels Gemälde in New Yorker Galerien" (Of Horror and Turmoil, Julian Schnabel's Paintings in New York Galleries), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, No. 113, May 16, 1981, p. 25.

"The 'random' presentation of everything that the young New York painter has just produced looks more like provocation, or an explosion of wild, expressive demands, than a quest for stylistic unity. **The huge pictures are individually intent, each for itself, on shattering the silence.**"

Rene Ricard: "Not About Julian Schnabel," *Artforum International*, Vol. 19, No. 10 (Summer 1981), pp. 74-80.

"People want to remember you as they first met you. [...] Even after the example of Picasso the worst thing a painter can do is change styles. Critics are merciless then. Julian is lucky enough to have developed a method whereby anything can be encompassed in his oeuvre, making himself and not the viewer the ultimate authority."

"Rauschenberg seemed to despair over the limits of pictorializing, whereas Schnabel enthuses over its limitless possibilities."

"When I saw the first plate painting at his studio, I knew immediately that no matter what I thought, I was looking at one picture that would reinvent everything, that a point had been made in history and that the art world was finally back. Edith Wharton's reminiscence of Henry James' response to *Swann's Way*, 'He recognized a new mastery, a new vision, and a structural design as yet unintelligible to him but as surely there as hard bone under soft flesh in a living organism'."

Rene Ricard: Typescript, dated January 1, 1982, from catalogue text "About Julian Schnabel," *Julian Schnabel*, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1982.

Citing Julian Schnabel's diary from 1978, *CVJ: Nicknames of Maitre D's & Other Excerpts from Life*: "I want my life to be embedded in my work, crushed into my painting, like a pressed car. If it's not, my work is just some stuff."

Henry Geldzahler: "Guest Speaker Henry Geldzahler on Breaking the Rules," *Architectural Digest*, February 1984, pp. 30-32.

"The admiration, anger, and general stimulation that surround the name, work, and aura of Julian Schnabel have been growing steadily in intensity for the past four years. He is a big boy and bears the brunt of it with equanimity. I am impressed with his ability to develop in the glare of publicity, much of it negative and ill-informed. The fact is that through Schnabel's work, in large part, we have become aware of a new generation of artists: Germans, such as Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, or the late Blinky Palermo; and the Italians Francesco Clemente and Enzo Cucchi... He has provided American art with yet another important link to Europe. It is this identity of impulse and need developing concurrently in Europe and America, that is for new aesthetic affinities in large, expressionistic canvases—work signaling to us that something new and valuable is afoot in painting today."

Rudi Fuchs: "Forest on forest / hung about his head / like cloud on cloud." *Julian Schnabel: Versions of Chuck and Other Works*, Germany: Derneburg Publications, 2007, n.p.

"... the appreciation of art is always tinged with nationalism. But everywhere in Europe, American art had attained a status of unique preference, as real international art. Was is better art? Such was the situation when we began discussions about our *Documenta* [1982]."

"Even with all his glamorous renown, he was a dangerous outsider. I should have credited that position. At the time, however, the rough disorder one sensed in his paintings made me uneasy. [...] I thought (wrongly of course) that the abundant paintings of Schnabel would be a disturbing distraction. [...] Then I began to like them more and more because slowly I had found access to the high tragic sentiment that vibrates in his art. [...] That sentimental pathos is there, as a manner of expression, and you must accept it."

"The paintings, as grand orchestrations of emotional modes, identify the narrative and theatrical nature of Schnabel's art: expansive and exuberant and dramatic."

"Schnabel makes paintings, or rather resounding images, with no holds barred. His work is the amplification, so to say, of Robert Rauschenberg. Schnabel is unrestrained and sentimental. Whatever grandiose or complex image gets into his head, in whatever emotional mode—he will try to make it: breaking every rule of style and decorum, bending art where it has to go."

Thomas Kellein: *The Eighties Revisited - From the Bischofberger Collection*, Cologne: Dumont / Kunstmuseum Bielefeld, 2011, p. 50.

"The vastly enlarged formats, the endeavor to make pictures as big as wardrobes, later as big as rooms you could live in, probably has something to do with the artist's ongoing struggle to simulate his own history and time. [...] ... any kind of significant vestige of the past that can be salvaged fleetingly, full of mourning and with its dignity bruised—all of these serve to save the conventional picture. For it is the world with all the images which is in danger in the face of the media industry and it may well perish."

John Richardson to Bob Colacello, 2013

"I didn't get Julian's work in the beginning, but now, with the passage of time, I have come to see him as the most significant artist of his generation, the breakthrough artist who made painting on anything—plates, tarps, velvet—legitimate."

Alison Gingeras: "An Extreme Figure," *Julian Schnabel*, Greenwich: Brant Foundation Study Center, 2014, pp. 5, 12.

"The roots of the present-day painting Zeitgeist can be traced precisely to the last years of the 1970s, when Schnabel began to forge a pictorial language that employed unconventional methods and materials fused with emotive, optical, and tactile impact. Visceral (as opposed to cerebral), his position was at the opposite end of the aesthetic-political spectrum from Donald Judd and Robert Smithson, the discursive darlings who had defined and framed the avant-garde of the previous decade."

"Much has changed since the long lost days of caustic ideological divides and politico-aesthetic debate. Long-standing oppositions are now defunct, and Schnabel's painterly ambitions no longer need to be seen as in conflict with his more pure conceptual gestures... the iron curtain between 'painting' and 'conceptualism' has fallen."

Rudi Fuchs: "Und er ist doch der Grösste!" (And yet he is the greatest!), *Die Welt*, Feuilleton, December 10, 2015, pp. 33-34.

"When I imagine him working and wielding his large brushes (often outside in the fresh air), I see him looking at the canvas before him the way a restless sailor gazes at the sea [...] Schnabel's pictorial spaces are wide and open [...] Restrictions are not permitted. Schnabel's art is as formidable as the last untamed spots on earth—with the unlimited freedom and unconditional imagination that great art strives for. In its wild, idiosyncratic way, Julian Schnabel's painting searches for the unimaginable—or at least for things that have never been seen before."

"Imagine how the sound of the music, vague and melancholic, hangs in this silence. And imagine the moments of silence before the music begins. In the centre of the melancholy painting, we see a strange, horizontally elongated white form emerging. Slowly, as if in a procession, it floats into view like a ghost.

[...] Time is a decisive aspect here. The observer imagines Schnabel actually waiting for the white shapes to emerge and brighten the darkness. And when they arrive, he paints them quickly, as if they might pass by and fail to stop."

"The visual language of his paintings emerges from the various strands and fragments of what transpires in his thoughts and memory. All of this is then stirred together like a good soup. And with a bit of luck, this master chef of the imagination will then find his subject."

Rudi Fuchs: "Julian Schnabel Observations." In: *Julian Schnabel: Plate Paintings 1978-1986*, published on the occasion of the exhibition *Julian Schnabel: Plate Paintings 1978-1986*, Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, 2016, pp. 7-10.

"He let all the energy flow to find out where the turmoil might lead. They were unpredictable and thus exciting. That is how I came to see them: as paintings that make a spectacle. First, one sees the expanse of their boisterous surface. The paintings have wonderful bravura. The surfaces look physically quite turbulent. As we will see a lot is going on there, with a lot of stuff. That makes the surface restless and adventurous. They also seem impatient. Julian is an eager painter who cannot wait to finish a painting. Such urgency increases the restlessness of their appearance."

"He is not a story-telling painter. His paintings create particular turbulences and visual disruption. The paintings' imagery grows from the material condition of the surface—preparing the spectacle. In Julian's case that condition is dense, abrupt, interrupted. They do not flow. They are rugged and heavy and hard."

"[...] in 1982 I had begun to argue with the paintings because I felt that, by being so rough, they threatened other art. [...] one looks at those paintings which had never been seen before with the general state of affairs in art in one's mind."

"I wanted to explain things, but forgot that an artist at work is not at all concerned with the state of art in general. That is art that already exists. Julian in his studio, however, was looking for a painting that had never been made before. Nothing less. There are no rules for new paintings. Maybe there is an instinct. Ezra Pound said: "Make it new." To obey that sacred command, the artist must first find a brutal and irreversible intervention in current practice. What then? Surely the first decision, when he begins, is how to make the basic surface: size, shape, physical conditions and in what ways to use it. [...] Julian's answer to Pound was resolute: make it heavy. That is how his art became outrageous."

Max Hollein: "I See Painting Everywhere." *Julian Schnabel*, Cologne: Taschen, 2023. (A version of this text first appeared in *Julian Schnabel: Symbols of Actual Life* under the title "Seeing paintings everywhere," San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2018), p. 477.

"Emerging from an American artistic tradition that deliberately challenged reigning ideas of surface and form in paintings, since the late 1970s the artist has sought to transform the realities and possibilities of the medium: what a painting is, what it can be, and how it can be done."

"Free of precisionist or calculated formulas, Schnabel's works become receivers for a poetry that is both personal and universal. In his case, intentionally painting the unknowable yields a more faithful representation of experience than any attempt to realistically depict the physical world ever could. [...] In that context few artists have a better sense of a particular moment than Schnabel does; his understanding of the feeling, sentiment, or story embedded in a serendipitously encountered object or idea is nearly unparalleled. Banal objects, randomly uttered words, vague notations on a wall, even constellations in the sky: all carry a sensuality, a poetry that he can use, absorb, and express via painting."

Laurie Anderson: "I barely knew him and then or the migration of the Duck-Billed Platypus to Australia," *Julian Schnabel*, Cologne: Taschen, 2023, p. 7.

"It was the late '70s and New York, like now, was dark and mysterious. ... Artists, however, were beginning to think big. Very big. ... Julian was one of the artists at that moment who was inventing a whole new scale, his own iconography, wild imagery, and an energy that was blasting off."