

Julian Schnabel

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Considered to be a figurehead in the resurgence of painting in the late 1970s, Schnabel continues to create gestural and highly charged work that appropriates ancient and modern literary and cultural references, while conflating the boundary between figuration and abstraction. The exhibition at the Hall Art Foundation held at its Schloss Derneburg location brings together 7 large-scale bronze sculptures installed both indoors and on the adjacent property, together with a series of monumental paintings on found tarpaulin.

In the five part series, *Untitled (Treatise on Melancholia)* (1989), Schnabel paints on olive green tarpaulin, a material traditionally used by the military, and first sourced by the artist in 1985 while he worked in Mexico. Bold applications of vinyl paint (gesso) are juxtaposed against horizontal bands of heavy and opaque fabric that have been sewn together. With no discernible foreground or background, the intersecting white shapes that might otherwise suggest a landscape or still life, are abstracted. *Untitled (Treatise on Melancholia)* (1989), presents a solitary abstract form floating within an undefined field spread over 5 panels. The found tarpaulin is marked with various stains and indentations, traces from its earlier life in Mexico. This untraditional selection of material and use of vinyl paint highlights the notion of gesture as both a physical act and as idea.

The Cuartel de Carmen in Seville, Spain is a monastery that was built in 1492 and had been occupied by the military in the beginning of 20th century and abandoned in 1978. For this exhibition Schnabel made 24 tarp paintings which he considered to be 24 stations of the cross. In 1979, Schnabel began to incorporate bronze elements in his paintings, and later progressed to monumental sculpture in the early 1980s. *Idiota* (1989) was first assembled in situ at the Cuartel de Carmen. This cruciform (or battle standard) was built entirely from material collected from the barracks. A large piece of bronze cast from a slab of wood acts as the standard and displays the title, "IDIOTA" above a series of Spanish names, "Carmen Romero", "Manuel Benitez," among others, are the names inscribed on the cross and bronze flags that hang from each arm. The work signifies Schnabel's affinity for linguistic reference, and for the formal and pictorial quality of the letters themselves, besides being an appreciation for those who helped him make the sculpture.

Several bronze sculptures include autobiographical or literary references. *MacBeth* (1989) is a somber figure cast from a weathered wooden log, bluntly carved into a sulking head and torso and placed on a planked platform. The title of the sculpture, *Si Tacuisses* (1990) is a shortening of the Latin phrase that continues "...philosophus mansisses" (If you had kept your silence / you would have stayed a philosopher). Or, in other words, "If you had kept your mouth shut they wouldn't know how dumb you are". The bronze is cast from the stump of a palm tree, a common icon in Schnabel's work, realistically rendered with tiny roots on its base and upward growing branches at its peak. A speech bubble assigns an anthropomorphic quality to the work. The declaration, "I went to Tangiers and had dinner with Paul Bowles", references the American expatriate poet and author, then living in Morocco.