

Where Delusion Meets the Sun

JULIAN SCHNABEL, LOTTIE CONSALVO, WAYNE MAGRIN. CURATED BY JAMES DRINKWATER.

The enormity of existence

Recently, I went swimming in San Sebastián with Julian Schnabel and his son Olmo. Somehow, we found ourselves at a boat ramp and seawall. It took a while to time our entry between swells, but eventually, one by one, we entered into the sea. I was amazed at how swiftly Julian melded with the water, seamlessly transitioning from human to part-sea creature. Completely at ease, he flowed and swayed with the tide's rhythm, in surrender, understanding, and grace. I'll never forget it.

Now, in Newcastle, I stand above a rugged, almost biblical sea. I feel as though I've stepped into the canvas of a Julian Schnabel painting. Despite the ominous tones of both sea and sky, something beckons me to the water. Summer has come to an end and this evening marks the onset of winter, heralded by the first storm to bring with it a chilling cold, after a series of tropical squalls.

Descending the rocky cliff face down to the Commandant's Baths, affectionately known as the Bogey Hole, I enter a jagged sea pool carved out by convicts in 1820 under the direction of the volatile Lieutenant James Thomas Morisset. It's a place to bathe while witnessing the relentless clash of ocean and rock, a stage for both geological and historical drama. I know Julian would love it.

Ascending once more to the cliff's peak, I confront a powerful, anthemic southerly gust and, with my arms spread, I feel that I could almost take flight. From this vantage point, overlooking the edge of a continent, I survey the vast expanse of the ocean. My mind drifts to my childhood spent surfing, and how very different a way this is to experience the ocean. Surfers experience the deep water amongst and between sets of waves, legs dangling either side of a sun-stained piece of fibreglass. It is a view Julian knows well.

Contemplating these contrasting viewpoints and immersing myself in the elements, I think about Julian's map paintings with renewed depth. For me, these paintings are made from above, presenting a vast surveyed landscape. Over this, however, are Julian's marks, like a bird carving a line, at the same time drawing the viewer's attention to the mark of paint, and the tactile way in which it was applied. With their competing forms and viewpoints, the paintings evoke a disquieting sense of space, both grounding and disorienting, filling me with an indescribable yearning. This yearning transcends any single person or place, embracing multiple perspectives and understandings. Julian's paintings, simple yet confounding, gesture towards the overwhelming enormity of existence.

I shared some pictures of The Lock-Up with Julian, which prompted him to send a painting from his own collection by artist Will St. John. Julian mentioned that he wanted to suggest a narrative

where the exquisitely painted young trickster and criminal had possibly created the map paintings while incarcerated: a defiant crossing out of official ordered space.

The exquisite and the damned

I thank Julian for introducing me to the art of Wayne Magrin. Wayne's art came into my life at an intersection where I needed to learn to see again, and his works renew my vision every time I see them. His paintings, original and unclassifiable, defy current trends and resist the pressures of popular culture and transient idioms. They embody a naturalness in every sense, with Wayne's mastery evident in his handling of form, color, and tone. His art offers insights into the human condition that transcend traditional avenues of learning, surpassing the confines of art schools, Master's degrees, or residency programs.

In his latest series, medieval imagery and narrative saturate the canvas, inspired by Daniel Kehlmann's 2017 novel *Tyll*, which revolves around the folkloric figure Tyll Eulenspiegel amidst the Thirty Years' War. Wayne's paintings transport us into foreboding interiors, scenes of debauchery in towns, and chilling landscapes, introducing a new dimension of subjectivity and sensitivity to his oeuvre. Oscillating between beauty and horror, the exquisite and the damned, the celebrated and the downtrodden, Wayne skilfully balances on a tightrope. Tyll Eulenspiegel, the jester and trickster of widespread lore, serves as a central motif. In works like *That's my shoe*, Tyll's antics spark chaos as locals, in a comical frenzy, engage in a quarrel over tossed shoes, oblivious to their rightful owners. It's a scene both profoundly odd and subversive, providing fertile ground for Wayne's artistic exploration.

There is a relaxed correspondence with art history at play, but it is never obvious. One thinks of Pieter Bruegel – maybe Sidney Nolan – but these citations require teasing out, should you decide to take that route. What sets the art of Wayne Magrin outside such categorisation is his ability to avoid the usual doubt and self-conscious affectations almost synonymous with such referencing and visual quoting. In the end, the paintings are undeniably his own: unaffected and pure. His brain and his heart are fused together. When his vision flows from his mind, through his heart, and onto the canvas, it resonates with an undeniable truth.

Desire, longing & loss

On a property an hour or so outside of Toulouse, France, an artist is crafting a video. Lottie Consalvo orchestrates a series of gestures and actions with an indestructible and elegant French woman named Mary Ellen. Amidst old structures standing stoic, nestled amidst plowed and awaiting fields, winter covers this landscape. In a short span, Lottie and Mary Ellen forge hours of connection, surpassing the norms of typical acquaintanceship and transcending conventional friendship structures. Indeed, there's

nothing conventional about their bond. Despite Mary Ellen's limited English and Lottie's fledgling French, language proves inconsequential. There exists a profound understanding between them – a compelling, weighty connection forged from intelligence and integrity.

La Femme is a new and incredibly thoughtful video work produced by the artist for this exhibition. I'm watching it again now. At times I'm out of breath: I'm making my way through myriad emotions, some of which are familiar, others which are new to me and have no name. After my first viewing, I closed my eyes for an extended period squinting and releasing. A galaxy of muted colours, like a sculptor's palette, surged and flooded behind my eyelids, and I could feel my consciousness expanding. Lottie's work provokes responses and actions such as this, some kind of attempt to access the Other. She reminds us that we are all in the same visual field, and that there are unimaginable places and unnamable frequencies available to us all, if only we simply made ourselves available. There is a leaning and a tuning in that occurs in *La Femme*, with some exquisite and considered hiccups. They provide a sweet disorientation and 'ahhness'; it's an intimate encounter with the Feminine, and its counterparts Nature and the Mystic. There's a delicate balance of softness mingled with a hint of feminine masculinity, intersecting with desires, longings, and losses that envelop us in profound emotional resonance.

'Lottie, you create the paintings Richard Serra might have made if he were a painter.'
- Julian Schnabel, 2020

In this exhibition, we see Lottie return to sculpture with a series of hewn and inscribed emblematic works of great scale and intellectual density. With considerable self-reference, she riffs with her own history of thought and making. These new sculptures are indebted to her own body of work (*hear silence. now*), made in 2023 in response to the incoherent graffiti found on billboards in New York. They then ricochet back through her own catalogue of video and performance works from 2011 to now, launching into the sculptures we see today. Lottie moves across media with confidence and ease; there is a composting, reusing, and mining going on, and a coherency in the syntax that we can distinguish immediately as a Consalvo. These Leviathan objects place our hands in the dirt and will us to be receivers of the sacred, to survey the magnitude and rich complexity of questioning and imagining.

James Drinkwater
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