

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTFORUM

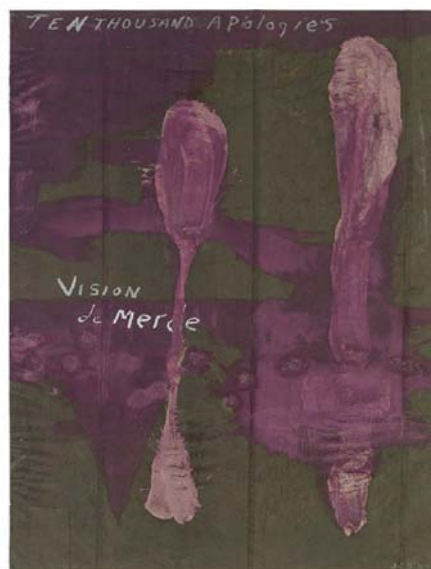
JULIAN SCHNABEL

The Rothko Chapel was a staple of my consciousness. When I was at school in Houston, I could go there at different times of day and physically engage those works—the way the paint was put on the canvas, the thickness of the stretchers, the edges of the paintings. I learned a lot there. Yet in the early 1970s when I arrived back in New York, the cathedral of Abstract Expressionism, I felt like an outsider. The legacy of AbEx at that time was the pervasive question as to whether figurative imagery was still viable. Could it still be modern? I didn't want to make work that was manneristic, didn't want to just draw a figure in a way where people would recognize my style, the way they could Richard Lindner's, say, or Lester Johnson's. Rather, I tried to make the painting itself into the figure, to shape the painting and put materials other than paint and canvas into it. For me, there was an anthropomorphic quality to painting. It was like a body intruding into the room, and somehow the object, the painted thing, had to have an outside and an inside that I could draw on top of. And in so doing, I developed my ideas of pictoriality.

At a certain moment when one looks at the Rothkos, they start floating. For my own paintings, I needed something to transgress that sensation. I realized I had to do something to the surface of the painting that contradicted what was already there. I couldn't find myself in one configuration, one irreducible image or so-called signature style that represented me. What I have done over the course of the past thirty years is to assemble a new architecture for painting, making the physical fact of painting into something that is more than pictorial. The battle between the object and the picture is what my paintings came to be about. I discovered that the physical support could be the architecture of a painting but so too could an illusionistic image (a pictorial image) provide that architecture. In both cases, I paint on top of these things to meld the notion of illimitableness into an accumulation of painted decisions that could be seen as time maps. In the repetition of making things, I search for something ineffable, using materials and gesture—seeking an unfathomable equality of marks where time ceases to matter.

I always need to obliterate the image, as with the intervening purple shapes that obscure the preexisting face of the "Big Girl" paintings, 2001. The added abstract glyph implies another temporality. It annotates and becomes a new ground that commandeers the painting's prior set of meanings. If you think of Franz Kline's work where he painted directly on Homasote walls, or Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, or the Rothko Chapel, maybe you start to think about the Springs studio of Pollock as a chapel: I needed to put the walls and the floor into my painting, too. It wasn't enough to have simply one layer of meaning—one surface, one image. □

JULIAN SCHNABEL IS A NEW YORK-BASED ARTIST.



Julian Schnabel, *Vision de Merde*
(10,000 Apologies), 1989, oil on
green tarpaulin, 8' 1/4" x 10' 6 1/2".