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Is the Julian Schnabel Renaissance Officially a Thing? The '80s Art Star Gets Another New Museum Show

by Sarah Cascone
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Artist installation proposal of "Julian Schnabel" at the Legion of Honor. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

The show at San Francisco's Legion of Honor will pair Schnabel's paintings with Classical art from the museum's collection.

The Julian Schnabel revival continues, with the '80s art star slated to have a solo show at the Legion of Honor at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco in April 2018.

Since rejoining the Pace stable in May 2016, after a 14-year stint with Gagosian Gallery, Schnabel has had a very busy year. In addition to this triumphant return to his old gallery, with a show of new plate paintings (a series of works that first catapulted him to fame back in 1979), Schnabel has had major exhibitions at the Aspen Art Museum; the Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut; and currently has a show at the Schloss Derneburg Museum in Germany, as well as an opening this week at the Almine Rech Gallery in New York.

In San Francisco, Schnabel will present a site-specific project, with four distinct bodies of work installed in as many galleries. Much like the institution's current Sarah Lucas show, "Good Muse," which pairs her erotic sculptures of the female form with late 19th- and early 20th-century statues by Auguste Rodin, Schnabel's work will be juxtaposed with historic works from the museum's classical painting and sculpture collection.

"These paintings might be the culmination of my entire painterly practice since 1977, as they epitomize so much of what had been the essential characteristics of the smallest and most nascent proposals of how imagery, drawing, and material could be called a painting," said Schnabel of the

exhibition in a statement. "It seems to me this is as far as I could go and as far as I can currently take painting; this week."

The museum lauds Schnabel, a leader of the 1980s Neo-Expressionist movement, as "one of the defining painters of our time" in its preliminary description of the show. Over the course of his 40-year career, Schnabel has developed a highly experimental approach to his work, straddling the line between abstraction and figuration.

He has explored such varied themes as sexuality, death, and obsession, and utilized found materials such as broken plates and textiles from Kabuki theater. Schnabel is also known for his work in film, directing notable movies such as *Basquiat* (1996) and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). Schnabel's next film project is a Vincent van Gogh biopic starring Willem Dafoe.

The Legion of Honor show, provisionally titled "Julian Schnabel," is part of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco's contemporary art program. Director and CEO Max Hollein, who took the helm in June 2016, has taken measures to expand the institution's programming in an effort to re-engage today's museum-goers.

Serving double duty as the exhibition curator, Hollein praised the artist in a statement, saying "the sculptural physicality, complex materiality, unique pictorial language and unorthodox painterly process of Julian Schnabel's works create an emotionally charged and poetic environment for the viewer, which is simply revelatory."