



VILLA MAGDALENA

EL PAÍS

Villa Magdalena, the imposing museum in San Sebastian where Cy Schnabel invites you to his home

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Cy Schnabel, with Hermès jacket and pants, in front of Alejandro Garmendia's 'Untitled' (2004).
ANTONIO MACARRO

He grew up surrounded by famed names, was trained in New York and knows like no one else the emerging art of half the world. However, when it comes to giving shape to his vital project, the curator has chosen an atypical and captivating location: his mother's home on Mount Igueldo.

"I intend to bring something new and fresh". Cy Schnabel (New York, 28 years old) has a purpose in life and, to fulfill it, he has opened an art gallery in Villa Magdalena, the home of his mother -designer, actress and model Olatz López Garmendia- in San Sebastian. There she exhibits Spanish and international creators of different generations: this year's program includes the Korean Mie Yim, whose first individual exhibition in Spain has just opened, and the

Sevillian Cristina Lama, who will take over from her in the summer.

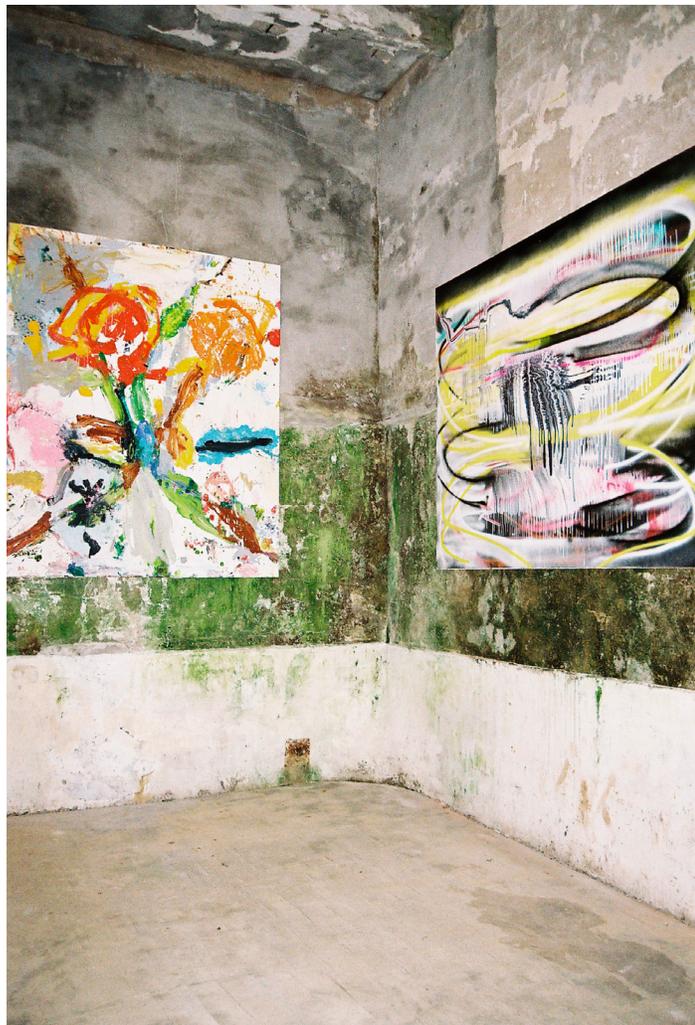
And in the future it will also function as an artists' residence. Surely there will be no shortage of requests: it must be said that visitors -who always come by appointment- find it difficult to focus their attention on the art once they have reached the house, perched on Mount Igueldo and with breathtaking views of the city and the sea. "The space is incredibly unique," he admits. "But I thought that doing my project here would distinguish it from the others. The idea was to create a different kind of experience where I invite you into my home."



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He's sought out well-documented precedents, and they're postcard-worthy: "There's gallerist Gavin Brown, who before he opened his New York gallery began holding exhibitions in his Upper West Side apartment and Chelsea Hotel rooms, such as the one he organized for Elizabeth Peyton in 1993."

He is named after the painter Cy Twombly, who, like Andy Warhol or George Condo, was one of the totems of 20th century American art that hung on the walls of the palazzo Chupi, the house designed by his father, the painter and filmmaker Julian Schnabel, where Cy spent most of his childhood. Julian turned it into the unabashedly postmodern architectural monument it is now, which The New York Times has described as "Citizen Kane's Xanadu floating high above the wreckage of the West Village." But not so long ago it was a modest three-story industrial building that had had previous lives as a doll factory and police stables.



Jorge Galindo and Felicidad Moreno in the exhibition 'Some tendencies in spanish painting now'. ANTONIO MACARRO

This metamorphosis in some ways symbolizes the very evolution of that and other Manhattan neighborhoods over the past two decades: "When I was growing up my parents had a very close relationship with the cultural elite, the intelligentsia of New York," he recalls. "I'm not much for naming names, but our neighbors were Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson, with whom they had dinner almost every night at Wallsé, an Austrian restaurant in the neighborhood. At that time there was a very organic and natural sense of a community of artists. It wasn't a 'look at these famous people getting together.' My best memories are of what New York was like then, more communal and neighborhood-oriented. Now it's losing that edgy essence to become very commercial."

Perhaps that is why he has sought new horizons in San Sebastian, where he spent the summers of that same golden age. Villa Magdalena could be for him, more than a professional matter, a life project: "Here I have family and I spend a lot of time with my friends. Many of them I met through surfing or skateboarding. I also have others who are young local artists, like Gabriel Coca, Iñigo Sesma or Sebas Velasco. It's a pretty good mix."



Some of the works, from Grillo Demo (left) and Julian Schnabel (right). ANTONIO MACARRO

He also values the city's culture and gastronomy, or the nearby Chillida Leku museum, but when I mention the term Noñosti, with which the locals themselves refer to it affectionately (or sometimes not so much), he finds it very familiar: "Yes, I've heard it, and I guess it refers to the fact that they are bourgeois here, or that they are very proud of their things. It's a small city and maybe there's not a very active art scene and not enough young people presenting new curatorial projects. That's why I thought I could do it thanks to my experience, which is international but also has local roots." And he cites his mother as an example of a Donostian with a broad outlook: "She was born here,



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grew up in Paris and then came back, then she was in Barcelona, Italy, New York.... I like that combination of appreciating what is local and keeping a more open point of view to the world and other cultures. Thanks to her I have a multicultural background: I feel Basque and Spanish, and also New Yorker, rather than American”.

Olatz now lives in Mexico, like Cy’s twin brother, Olmo (after Olmo Dalcò, Gérard Depardieu’s character in Novecento). He often visits them there. Mexico City, where he took his first steps as an exhibition curator after studying political science in New York, has also become a quarry for the gallery. There I’m seeing a lot of exhibitions and visiting studios with the idea of deciding on the next ones,” he says. It seems then that Villa Magdalena is not going to be an ephemeral project. Or so we can interpret his words: “I feel at home here.