



VILLA MAGDALENA

# VANITY FAIR

Cy Schnabel: “Madrid reminds me of New York because of that multicultural mix common to all cosmopolitan places.”

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**He belongs to the aristocracy of art and could develop his projects in any country in the world. But he has chosen Spain. Cy Schnabel arrives in Madrid with his gallery Villa Magdalena—and he is fully integrated.**

He is called Cy after the painter Cy Twombly, and his surname is Schnabel after, well, the painter and filmmaker, one of the most important and highly valued living artists. But Cy Schnabel (New York, 1993) has a clear goal in life: “For people to judge me on the merits of my own work as a curator, writer, and gallerist,” he tells me at Villa Magdalena, his gallery, which has just opened a space in Madrid five years after launching in San Sebastián.

—It seems predestined, but what would you do if you weren’t involved in art?

—I studied Political Science and I really enjoy writing, so I would probably be a writer. Or a journalist.

The gallerist arrives punctually for our meeting—he lives five minutes from the space, located opposite San Nicolás de los Servitas, the oldest church in Madrid—dressed in a loose shirt and trousers. He wears Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses and comfortable Venetian loafers. The first thing that stands

out is his resemblance to Julian Schnabel; the second, that he speaks perfect Spanish. “My mother is Spanish. I’m bilingual; I grew up with both languages at the same time. I’ve been living in Spain for five years. Before that, I spent two years in Mexico City. I developed many projects there: independent curatorial work in collaboration with other galleries, internships at the Centro Cultural de España,” he explains, as his mother, former model and designer Olatz López-Garmendia, walks past Villa Magdalena with her dog, Tuno.

Both she and Cy have settled in the capital, though they will spend time in San Sebastián, where Villa Magdalena’s original space is located. The reason, the young man explains enthusiastically beneath one of the beams that contribute to the gallery’s austere, unpretentious atmosphere: “There are many incredible galleries in Madrid, but I identified a niche for my proposal: international painting, artists who have never exhibited in Spain,” says Schnabel, who believes a good gallerist is a kind of “humanist, because they are interested in artists’ lives, their inspirations, and their preferences. It’s almost anthropological.” He believes an artist should reflect the era they live in, but good art “is conditioned by neither time nor context. It must be



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timeless.” That is what he aims for with his artists, ranging from established figures like the Korean-born, New York-based Mie Yim or his uncle Alejandro Garmendia, who passed away in 2017 and whose work he has catalogued and promoted, to multidisciplinary and emerging artists such as Lucy Mulligan or Louis Jacquot, “who don’t have extensive résumés yet and are long-term projects,” he explains in front of one of the works from Cecilia De Nisco & Richard Tinkler’s *Field Trip*, the exhibition currently on view at Villa Magdalena, which “refers to the historical practice of *plein air*, a notion that now feels romantic, even archaic,” according to the press release he wrote himself. The opening a few days ago was a great success and a major event in a neighborhood where Cy is one of the most popular residents. “Art is social. It’s a way of welcoming people, of being a good host. I do this to share it. Otherwise, it wouldn’t make much sense,” he admits.

“I was very lucky to grow up in New York within an artistic community. Everything was bohemian and authentic. I distanced myself because it was difficult to establish myself there and find my own voice.”



*Apparenze mutevoli senza compromesso* (2025), one of Cecilia De Nisco’s works.



Details of the space, located at Plaza de San Nicolás, 2, Madrid.

Madrid is undoubtedly Cy Schnabel’s home. “I’ve come often since I was a child. I have many friends here; I feel at home. I love the museums. I’m half Spanish,” he insists before listing his favorite places in the capital, confirming him as a true Madrileño, not just a passerby. “I love Madrid Río, Matadero; Usera and Carabanchel for their food and galleries. There are very beautiful areas like El Viso and Chamberí. Or Casa de Campo. I really enjoy that green space,” he says. “Madrid reminds me of New York because of that multicultural mix common to all cosmopolitan places. In that sense, the atmosphere is similar,” he adds.



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High praise, considering Cy Schnabel grew up in Manhattan in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time that words like vibrant or effervescent hardly do justice to. He grew up alongside his twin brother Olmo, now a filmmaker, in Palazzo Chupi, Julian Schnabel's iconic building in the Village, named after his mother's affectionate nickname: Chupa-Chups. "Actually, I grew up there before it became Palazzo Chupi," he clarifies, "in what was first a stable that later became a perfume factory and then a doll factory. There were many spaces like that in Manhattan, especially downtown: former warehouses, textile workshops... Buildings with high ceilings and open layouts that an entire generation of artists first used as studios and, over time, as homes once they had children. That was the case with my father. It happened organically and improvisationally. Everything was bohemian and authentic. I was very lucky to gain that cultural education through painting and film, to be surrounded by a community of artists. That's not typical.

But at a certain point I distanced myself from New York because it was difficult to establish myself there, to have my own voice."

—For someone who grew up around Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, or David Bowie, who is the most impactful famous person you've met?

—What interests me are the projects they've developed and what they're like as people—their intellectual complexity or their point of view, whether they're actors, painters, or writers. I always try to look beyond fame. Yes, they are famous because they are public figures, but that's not the aspect that interests me most.

—With a life like yours, do you feel like you've seen everything?

—No, not at all. I'm constantly surprised by everything—visiting an artist, going to an exhibition, getting used to living in different cities and traveling, another way of gaining experiences and connecting with people. For me, everything is a continuous learning process.

—Seeing you, I'm reminded of your father, even in your clothing. Is that intentional?

—It depends on the day. I'm not that interested in fashion; I just want to be comfortable.

**\*\*The importance of being named Schnabel\*\***

Cy Schnabel is one of the twins of painter and director Julian Schnabel and his second wife, Olatz, to whom he was married between 1993 and 2010. The artist has three children from his first marriage to Jacqueline—Vito, also a gallerist; Stella, an actress and poet; and Lola, a painter and filmmaker—and he now shares his life with his third wife, interior designer and writer Louise Kugelberg. Together they form a large, bohemian, and close-knit family that appears on the red carpet at Cannes. "My father believes in my ambitions," Cy once told us in one of his first interviews in Spain—a country he hasn't returned to, because it is his own.