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*Stephen Janson (Known to some as Stephan Gluck)*, 1988

Oil, ceramic and bondo on wood

72 by 60 inches (182.9 x 152.4 cm)



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Provenance: Waddington Galleries, London  
Fredrik Roos, Stockholm  
Christie's, New York, *Contemporary Art from the Estate of Fredrik Roos*,  
May 5 & 6, 1992, Lot 113A  
Private collection, United States  
Private collection

Exhibition: London, Waddington Galleries, *Julian Schnabel*, November 23 -  
December 23, 1988, pp. 14,15, illustrated

Malmo, Rooseum, *Jean-Michel Basquiat / Julian Schnabel*, April 8 – May  
28, 1989, p. 71, no. 49, illustrated

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## Julian Schnabel (b. 1957)

### *Stephen Janson (known to some as Stephen Gluck), 1988*



*Stephen Janson (known to some as Stephen Gluck), 1988*, is a painting of substantial bearing and painterly effect, created in Julian Schnabel's breakthrough Plate Paintings that electrified the art-world of the 1980's and re-focused the trajectory of contemporary painting. Striking in scale, this portrait is an exceptionally successful example of artist's signature style, innovatively using a roughly fractured ground of broken earthenware as a painting support. The sculptural nature of the ground, a field of household ceramics broken, re-configured, and glued with Bondo to a wooden panel. These works are as powerful and evocative today as when first exhibited over four decades ago. Schnabel's unique process engenders a dynamic tension between abstraction and figuration,

materiality, and illusion, the archaic and the modern. The tapestry-like style in which Schnabel's brushwork, in concert with the jagged texture of the ceramic ground, create a densely composed surface, whose elements coalesce to form a remarkably resonant portrait of the renowned French couturier Stephen Janson. Advantageously using the flashing, reflective white of the ceramic base, Schnabel creates a compelling sun-drenched portrait that perceptively captures the casual elegance of the designer, celebrated as much for his unique fusion of Provencal and Moroccan influences, as the quiet discretion of his work. In this portrait, sunlight bathes Janson's soft, unstructured white hat and casual light chemise, while the warmth of the day radiates from the deep red shadows of his visored face and neck. Known for his luxurious garden in Tangiers, and fashion studio in Milan, there is an exoticism to this portrait, seen in the quiet ease of Janson's gaze, and the luminous, shimmering light that captures the subject's essence.

Schnabel's iconic Plate Paintings, which launched his career as a leading figure of the Neo-Expressionist movement of the 1980's, are deeply informed by the European tradition, and initially conceived after returning from a European trip in 1978-79 with friend and fellow artist Ross Bleckner. While in Barcelona, Schnabel discovered Antoni Gaudi's ceramic mosaics, of which he wrote, "I was in Barcelona for a while that summer and looked at Gaudi's work; it had a certain

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kind of reflective quality and density of color and light that I felt hadn't really been used in painting, that was sort of off the ground and had a ... pictorial possibility besides the psychological one." (Carter Ratcliff, *New Again: Julian Schnabel*, Interview Magazine, January 2016). Returning to New York, Schnabel created his first *Plate Paintings* which were rapturously received as an irreverent response to the intellectual coolness of Minimal and Conceptual Art of the 1970's. These heroically scaled paintings willed the return of a physical materiality and humanity to painting that had been absent since the height of Abstract Expressionism. "The plates seemed to have a sound, the sound of every violent human tragedy, an anthropomorphic sense of things being smeared and thrown. I was trying to tear the mosaic out of its own body to make a bridge to something just outside of my own body. All of this was happening before I even started to paint the painting." (Julian Schnabel, *CVJ Nicknames of Maitre D's and Other Excerpts from Life*, 1987, New York page 149)

Julian Schnabel's presence on the international stage as an artist and filmmaker of great acclaim is undeniable but he resolutely maintains that he is first and foremost a painter. Examples of Schnabel's Plate Paintings can be found in major collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.



Julian Schnabel *Ithaca*, 1983, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Julian Schnabel, *Portrait of Agnes Gund*, 2021, Museum of Modern Art, New York