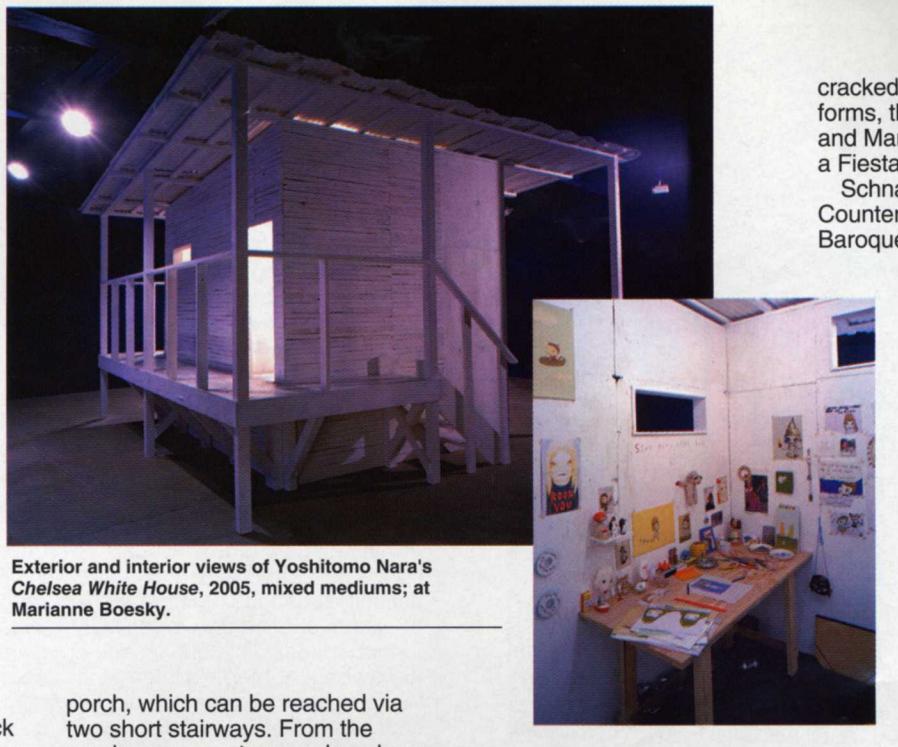
on view at the same time as Burckhardt's. The conclusion that the anxiety of influence is a central subject for Burckhardt is supported by the installation's centerpiece: propped on a big cardboard easel is a cardboard canvas that is utterly blank, as indeed are all those stored in racks and hung on walls.

In the gallery's second room are the enamel-on-wood paintings that Burckhardt subsequently made, which as before are gracefully eccentric geometries. What is new, and deftly amusing, is the introduction of little men in work clothes who perch on the various swirls and lattices of paint as if they are scaffolds, or lug them around like Sheetrock and lengths of pipe. That art-making is a kind of blue-collar labor was an article of faith for some Post-Minimalists, including several painters tacitly acknowledged in Burckhardt's work (Mary Heilman, Thomas Nozkowski, David Reed, Jonathan Lasker). Burckhardt's willingness to make a joke at his own expense—and not without some cost to those he honors—suggests the infectious optimism of an artist whose dark night of the soul produced an installation of such good cheer.

—Nancy Princenthal



Exterior and interior views of Yoshitomo Nara's *Chelsea White House*, 2005, mixed mediums; at Marianne Boesky.

Yoshitomo Nara at Boesky

Yoshitomo Nara is a very successful artist by any standard, and wildly popular in Japan. Like Takashi Murakami, with whom Nara is often associated, he is responsible for a range of products from paintings to plush toys (Nara-designed items currently available on eBay include refrigerator magnets, bed linens, ashtrays and T-shirts, as well as limited-edition prints; bids range from $2 to $500). In other words, it is very hard to accept as his the working environment *Chelsea White House* (2005), a lonely little whitewashed wooden shack that was the centerpiece of this exhibition. It is mostly boarded up, like the refuge of a backwoods survivalist; enhancing the effect of isolation is the surrounding room's primeval darkness, achieved with low lighting and indigo-painted walls.

Running around the sides of the shack is a roughly constructed porch, which can be reached via two short stairways. From the porch, you can stoop under a low doorway to peer down on a humble studio, small and bleak. There are a couple of squashed cans of Heineken on the floor; many more empties have been lined up furtively behind the desk. A kitschy clock in the shape of a cat swings its tail on the wall. In the corner slouches the saddest looking stuffed animal in the world. And tacked with some care to the bare Sheetrock walls are a few dozen drawings, most featuring Nara's trademark figures—winsome big-headed cartoon girls with ghoulish ideas of fun. Lettered crudely on the wall above a work table is the advice, "Stay Out Stay Back."

Elsewhere in the gallery were *Crated Room #3*, a short stack of wooden crates with sleepwalking figures inside, visible through peepholes, that makes perfunctory reference to current art's nomadism and, on the walls, roughly a dozen framed drawings. There were also two big paintings, each featuring a single little red-headed girl, one on heavy paper, the other on a round, concave support that is the size and shape of a first-generation TV satellite dish. Starry-eyed with incipient tears, the girls are professional emotional extortionists, using industrial-strength sentimentality to make you feel just perceptibly shaky about their obvious irony. It is instructive to compare Nara and others involved with manga imagery to Western artists whose cartoon-based work has also entered the mass market, from Kenny Scharf to Keith Haring. The relative innocence of the American work, its madcap energy and straight-ahead commercial appeal, are very different from the insinuating seductions of Nara's work, whose cheesy charms keep viewers stirred up, but obliquely. Similarly, the lonely artist struggling with inner demons implied by *Chelsea White House* solicits both reflexive sympathy and a knowing snicker. Though we can be fairly sure that this model of creativity is oceans away from Nara's working life, the question of its psychological reality is both harder and more interesting to come to terms with.

—Nancy Princenthal

Julian Schnabel at C&M Arts

Consisting of 20 pieces ranging from 1978 to 2001 and accompanied by a 60-page color catalogue with an essay by Robert Pincus-Witten, the recent Julian Schnabel exhibition at C&M Arts would have made a fine small museum survey.

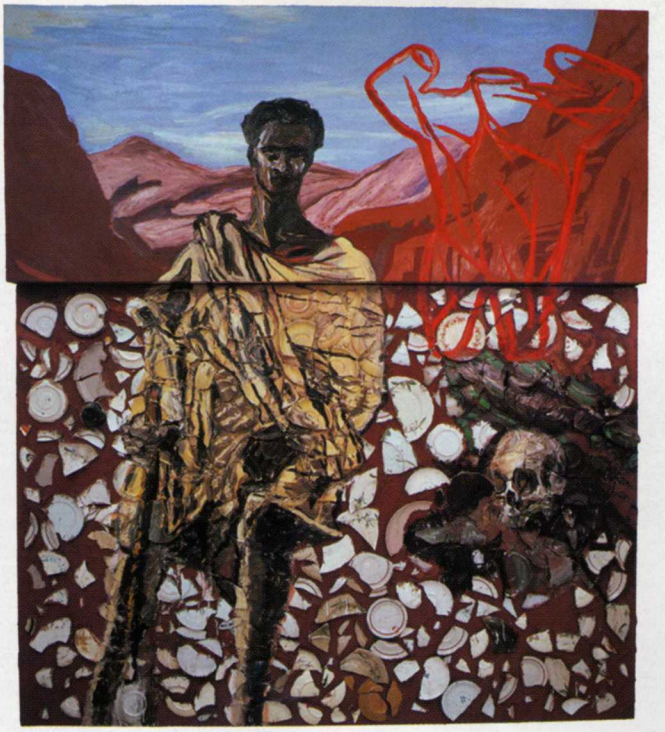
The show included some of the artist's most important works, such as the early, and still stunning, smashed-plate painting *The Patients and the Doctors* (1978). Inspired by a visit to Barcelona, where the artist saw the work of Antonio Gaudí—who is noted for his use of pottery-shard embellishments—the large boxy piece is covered in white and green broken plates, Bondo and Mars pink oil paint. Marking the surface are black lines that look like wrought iron. The lines, as well as the picture's title, bring Antonin Artaud's drawings to mind. *Divan* (1979) makes a nice companion piece and alters the color order; cracked plates and truncated forms, thickly painted in blue and Mars red, are embedded in a Fiestaware-green ground.

Schnabel often draws from Counter-Reformation and Baroque sources and themes (ecstasies and martyrdoms especially), using them as springboards from which to launch explorations of the formal possibilities of painting. The 1979 canvas *St. Sebastian—Born in 1951* (the title refers to Schnabel's year of birth) features a headless, limbless fire-pink torso enmeshed in a broken lattice fatly painted in cadmium red; the red marks resemble lacerations. I was reminded of the strange and beautiful "bloodwork" effects in Spielberg's recent *War of the Worlds*.

In *St. Francis in Ecstasy* (1980), the saint is accompanied by a skull and a truncated torso, all backed by a mountain range. Here Schnabel mixes materials, textures and techniques, such as painted versus relief illusionism, to maximum effect. The artist creates the most pleasing results, as with *St. Francis*, when in *malerisch* fashion he renders an object—vessel, flower, face or skull—against the obtrusive thingness of his heavily built-up grounds. In such cases, in spite of his macho fist, he pulls it off with the lightest, most tasteful sense of touch.

The mingling of strength and delicacy is also apparent in two enormous mixed-medium works on velvet: *Ethnic Types #15 and #72* and *Resurrection: Albert Finney Meets Malcolm Lowry*, both 1984. These paintings combine "vulgar" materials—animal hides, modeling paste, spray paint—as well as sacred and profane imagery in ways that are comparable to the best examples of Greenbergian formalist painting. Squint your eyes a bit in front of the large velvet and tarpaulin works and something like a Frankenthaler appears.

This timely show made evident the brilliant ways Schnabel took up the high-modernist call to medium specificity, developing and extending the semiotic possibilities of painterly facture. The exhibition also afforded us the opportunity to appreciate the complex ways that he references popular culture, music, film, litera-



Julian Schnabel: *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, 1980, oil, plates, wax and Bondo on wood, 96 by 84 inches; at C&M Arts.

ture and other paintings, creating works that are esthetically powerful while at the same time parodic. *The Sea* (1981), a massive diptych conglomeration of unglazed Mexican pottery on a thick ultramarine blue surface with a large charred wood prosthesis, can be considered a campy send-up of Richard Serra's 1968 *Prop*. At the same time it calls to mind one of Marsden Hartley's heartbreaking and lovely North American seascapes. It is one of the most beautiful paintings of at least the last 25 years. —*Peter Gallo*

Robert Morris at Castelli

In the mid-1950s, Robert Morris produced gestural paintings, a practice he abandoned as he turned to reductive forms and materials in the construction of simple objects. During the 1960s, Morris became associated with social concerns and the performative, process-oriented massing of found objects, poor materials and earthworks. In the mid-1980s, he produced a series of encaustic "firestorm" paintings whose concern is nuclear holocaust; these Turneresque paintings are framed in elaborately horrific, cast Hydrocal that recalls the convoluted imagery of Rodin's *Gates of Hell*. In 1996, Morris exhibited a series of enormous grid-based paintings in encaustic on wood panel, named "Horizons Cut: Between Clio and Mnemosyne," suggesting the interface between memory (Mnemosyne, mother of the muses) and history (Clio). Their individual titles, imagery and style refer in passages to familiar paintings by Cézanne, Ryder, Inness and Church.

Morris returned to encaustic, to history and to memory for this most recent Castelli exhibition, "Small Fires and Mnemonic Nights." Each work is approximately 30 by 40 inches, and all are based on or refer to specific paintings by Edward Hopper or René Magritte, but with virtually no sign of a living figure. Two quiet, threatening interiors of 2001 capture a moment, perhaps in the early 1940s, from those sources. In the Hopperesque shadows of *War News*, a long slab of light falls through a window, turning a teal-green wall pale. A radio cabinet casts a bomb-shaped shadow across the floor, while the specter of a tank shimmers in the room beyond. The ominous anteroom of *Red Chair* reveals an old-fashioned locomotive beyond an unpopulated sitting room with a single chair, the ensemble an allusion to Magritte's *Time Transfixed* (1939), in which a similar locomotive enters a sitting room through a fireplace. *House and Bombs* (2004) is a surreal conflation of Magritte's *Golconde* (1953), the shower of bowler-hatted men transformed by Morris into falling bombs across a quotation of Hopper's gabled Cape Cod cottage from *High Noon* (1949).

The figures of Hopper's *Nighthawks* (1942) disappear in Morris's spare recasting, *9th St. Café* (2003-04), an interior with a circular counter and red stools. An empty coffee cup and a clock inhabit a room flooded with light. The encaustic-on-wood *Flag* (2004) alludes in medium and title to Jasper Johns's *Flag* (1954-55); the titular subject hangs in the corner of a room, a wedge of light falling across its surface conveying the threat of the fires burning outside an open window. Multiply referential in their imagery, these paintings address history and its loss. They are also, and characteristically, concerned with the handling of a difficult, sensuous medium, here troweled, curdled and repetitively fanned across distinct passages. It may be that Morris's interest in these matters derives to a significant extent from his earlier Minimalist exhibitions, in which carefully sited works engender a play of light and shadow that survives in occasional reinstallations and in documentary photographs. —*Edward Leffingwell*

Monique Prieto at Cheim & Read

In departing abruptly from the vocabulary of abutting, eccentric shapes for which she is known, Monique Prieto has apparently decided that it is time for a change, and it is not hard to agree. Likable enough, the earlier work consisted of animated, rambling or bunched forms, each in a single, usually chipper hue, looming over, sidling up to or otherwise engaging one another in a stridently flat, airless space. These shapes were drawn on a computer and transferred to canvas but had less to do with software than with hardware, as Prieto found drawing with a computer mouse a useful procedure. The artist deserves credit for acknowledging that the results, based on a process that might be endlessly repeated, were growing stale.

Establishing contours and filling in colors resembles the sign-painter's technique, and the artist's new paintings are, in fact, text-based. Acrylic-on-canvas and dated 2005, they feature evocative phrases lifted from the diaries of Samuel Pepys, the ambitious 17th-century English bureaucrat and naval administrator whose descriptions of governmental machinations and the minutiae of daily life are uncommonly vivid. Rendered in clunky letters, as if made of rough blocks or slabs varying widely in size, the words are given a rudimentary illusion of depth by means of black borders at the top and right of each character. There is a little conceptual sizzle in the realization that the shapes constituting the letters—the ostensible subject of the painting—are the only untouched areas of canvas. The traces of paint clinging to the letterforms sometimes read as candy-colored mortar, sometimes like an aura that acts as visual liaison between them and the expansive ground colors.

In the 6-by-11-foot *walking*, the phrase "WALKING BOTH FORWARDS AND BACKWARDS" lumbers across the canvas in three lines, the characters jostling for position within the confines of the canvas's edges in a manner reminiscent of the earlier, abstract work. The cerulean-lined, orange-yellow ground suggests a legal pad, and the letters are haphazardly outlined in the same cerulean, magenta, ochre and a beautiful, warm gray. That same gray grounds another painting, *our eyes*, the largest work in the show at 6 by 13 feet.

Robert Morris: *War News*, 2001, encaustic on wood panel, 30 by 48 inches; at Castelli.