

POSSESSED | DAVID COLMAN

Goes Well With Swagger

DURING THIS BRIEF LULL between New York's two dueling monster art fairs, the recent Armory Show and the forthcoming Frieze, one wonders about the accuracy of the genteel, old-fashioned term, "the art world."

In New York, the fashion business is called the fashion industry. In Los Angeles, showbiz is called "the industry." Given the reported \$8 billion in annual sales of art in New York alone, isn't it reasonable that the art world call a spade a spade — and itself an industry?

But perhaps that's too forthright, given how the art world, even more than the illusion-peddling worlds of fashion or film, likes to play its cards close to the vest. After all, the art world loves to bluff, a truth evident, however murkily, in both the cryptic, covert sales in art galleries and the stage-managed math of auction prices. Artists and artworks do it, too, a truth evident in "White Col-

lar Crimes," an exhibition of abstract-ish painting now up at Acquavella Galleries, put together by the art industry curator-cum-connector Vito Schnabel.

According to a statement by Mr. Schnabel in the catalog, the works' abstract appearance is a bluff, hiding more literal meanings revealed by closer observation. He draws a parallel to white-collar crimes as "concealed, silent crimes veiled by wealth, higher education and social status that eventually emerge as vivid public scandal." At least that's the hope.

Mr. Schnabel, 26, the son of the artist, hotelier and filmmaker Julian Schnabel, knows the art of the bluff, having grown up playing the brand of poker known as Texas Hold 'Em. His enthusiasm for the game took on material shape in the summer of 2005 when he decided to join, and film, an artist friend, Stefan Bondell, on a trip to Texas to get some dirt from then-President George Bush's ranch in Crawford, Tex., to put in a painting. (Mr. Bondell is one of the artists in the Acquavella show, but the painting he made with Crawford dirt is not.)

Along with soil procurement, the trip provided other memorable moments. They visited museums, like the Kimball in Fort Worth, where "The Cardsharps," a painting by Caravaggio, circa 1595, made quite an impression.

Vito Schnabel, the curator of "White Collar Crimes," has a lucky shirt, a souvenir of a Texas trip. "I like what it represents — that time of my life," he said.

represents — that time of my life. It's just a lucky shirt that I like coming across when I put on another shirt."

As it turns out, Mr. Schnabel doesn't have any special fondness for Texas Hold 'Em.

"It's just what I grew up playing," he said. "I don't know, I like backgammon, games that have luck and skill involved. Anything can happen, you get to read people, interact with people in a way you don't normally. Things come to the surface. You start seeing what the other person's really like. But I'm not that obsessed with poker. I just like playing cards. Can you ask me something else, please?"

Citing anxiety about a space for his next show, Mr. Schnabel cut the interview short. As the song goes, you gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em. That's what bluffing is all about.

Of course, the best bluff is when you've got the hand to back it up. Sometimes mementos don't stand up to the scrutiny of strangers. This one appears to be no more than a pair of deuces in cotton gabardine.



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