



THE NEW OLD SCHOOL

Millennial art dealer Joe Nahmad takes up the mantle at his family's namesake gallery.

BY RYAN STEADMAN PORTRAIT BY GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI

It only takes a few minutes of conversation with 26-year-old Joe Nahmad before it strikes you that you might be talking to the “perfect storm” of art dealers.

Nahmad can trace part of his success to his family. His father is former powerhouse Impressionist and early Modernist art-dealer-turned-collector David Nahmad, and much of his extended family also works in the field. But this Nahmad also possesses a wicked skill set that's made him one of the most avidly watched dealers in New York City.

Flipping through a table full of meticulously coiffed catalogs at the Upper East Side gallery for the impressive shows Nahmad Contemporary has hosted since 2013, it becomes clear that Nahmad the younger has been forging a very different path from his father's since day one. “It would've been hard to establish my own identity if I was working in the exact same field as my father did,” he says. “But fortunately there was this completely open genre to go into—and I could go into it while still maintaining the sensibility that I'd grown up around.”

That “open field” was late Modernist and Contemporary art, and whether Nahmad was mounting a show of early works by seminal '60s artist Daniel Buren or a suite of eye-popping collages by hip mid-career artist Piotr Uklanski, he always brought along a hunger for art history that seemed to border on the fanatical. That passion is on full display while he talks about a secondary show of early

monochromatic “joke” paintings by art star Richard Prince that he'd put together three years ago.

“I only worked with Richard near the end,” Nahmad says with a devilish grin. “I had already gathered 12 of the best examples from that series. Then I made a physical scaled model of the exhibition, presented it to Prince and said, ‘I'm opening this show next month.’ He couldn't believe it. He was like, ‘How old are you again?’”

Prince was clearly impressed with Nahmad—impressed enough to loan a joke painting from his own archive to the show and then work with the wunderkind dealer again the following year on an exhibition of the artist's fashion photographs.

But it's not always easy. Nahmad still laments the 11 never-seen-in-the-U.S. Egon Schiele works from the Leopold Museum that were meant for his “Poetics of the Gesture” exhibition but were barred from leaving Vienna at the last minute. “We worked for months to try to make it happen,” he says with a sigh. “It was a shame.” The show was nevertheless a jaw-dropper and included works on paper from a multi-generational supergroup of master scribblers: Schiele, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Cy Twombly.

With so many of his shows utilizing secondary market works, Nahmad's plans can obviously be delicate and subject to change. “I get a lot of anxiety because we are constantly relying on the generosity of collectors,” Nahmad says, “and I put everything into securing these loans, because I really care.”