

# Meet Master Abstract Expressionist, George Schulman

SCHULMAN IS BRONX-BORN AND ELITE-BRED.

BY DEBRA ROTHBERG



George Schulman *Inside the Artists Studio 2016* after finishing "Debra, She's One Kool Kat" Acrylic & 24Kt Gold Leaf Collage 75" x 84"

## GEORGE SCHULMAN Artist

An artist's artist, master abstract expressionist George Schulman took a lifetime to achieve his well-deserved success. Schulman, now 69, comes from generations of creatives, including—perhaps most notably—his second mother, Freda Diamond, the Martha Stewart of the 50s. By 23, he was already an active member of New York's vibrant art scene. He showed on Madison Avenue, managed SoHo's Jamie Canvas art supply store, and advised and befriended scores of artists—from a not-yet-discovered Jean-Michel Basquiat to Knox Martin.

Listening to Schulman's stories today, it is easy to lose oneself in his tales of studio visits and adventures with 20th-century art icons. But for decades, Schulman could not revel in the New York artist lifestyle.

Married young and desperate to keep his family far from the street gang and thugs of a changing Bronx, he used his art sales to move his family to Huntington, Long Island. Family responsibilities forced him out of the New York art scene. Though he stood shoulder to shoulder with his contemporaries, Schulman convinced himself that it was not his time.

Schulman opened Schulman Custom Stretchers and taught at the Art League of Long Island in Huntington for a decade, but he lacked the volume he needed to support his business. He needed a corporate job. While it paid the bills, taking the position meant spending 40 hours a week at his desk without painting. Schulman's luck changed when Home Depot closed its luxury chain and gave Schulman a large payout and pension. This fortunate occurrence finally afforded him the time and money he needed to paint full time. It even allowed him to pursue an artist residency at the prestigious Vermont Studio Center, where he was surrounded by a community of international artists. After years of experimentation, Schulman is back to market with a vengeance and enjoying the accolades from fellow artists, gallerists and buyers. Last December, Artsy.net voted him a "Top 80 Artist" at Miami Art Week. Schulman's more recent paintings and collages—some painted with 24-karat gold—tell stories of love, disappointment and false security. They show escapes to scenic locations, as well as the decaying Bronx streets.

"I love to paint," says Schulman. "To understand anything, you must live with it, you must observe it, you must know all its content, its nature, its structure, its movement. One of the most difficult things in the world is to look at anything simply. In the end, [looking] is a lifelong process, so you need innocence, humility and courage."

Schulman's exaggerated forms, colors and textures take his viewers on a crazy ride. Yet they exist in flattened spaces, not unlike the synthetic cubism of Picasso. That is not to say

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Fugue Series 2002 "Discovering Columbus" Acrylic on Canvas. 6'x 5'

that Schulman's work is flat. It is far from flat. His paintings are emotionally explosive linear dances on twisting whirlwinds in unexpected palettes. Underlying everything is a golden section of grid work, which establishes a foundation of mathematical harmonies much like music chords. Shapes and patterns sometimes appear to be a spider web of strings, a lathe of dots or a colorful patchwork.

"As I paint, I am constantly examining things," says Schulman. "I paint in strokes, but I see in patches. I also use grid systems. There is something programmatic within. As shapes occur, I look for their rightness, their

harmony. Color creates its own sensation, reacting as the painting progresses and takes shape. The magic is in discovery."

Wildly colorful, kinetic, exuberant and at times visually tense, the master abstract expressionist's body of work is his personal alphabet of mark making. The painting itself dictates the moves Schulman makes as he works, allowing color to create mood and light within the painting. He takes some of his cues from nature—how shadow naturally defines light—and uses white to define form within the painting. This process involves many layers of paint. Schulman is constantly

referencing the "golden mean" in the making of his paintings, in part linking himself to the old masters, particularly Titian and his dynamic use of space.

Today Schulman works out of his penthouse studio at Artspace Patchogue Lofts, which has tall ceilings and natural light that stream from floor to ceiling. With the Long Island Rail Road just around the corner and Southampton and MacArthur airports a mere car ride away, Schulman is well situated to enjoy his explosive success. "The 'new' is just around the corner," says Schulman. "The beauty is discovering the unknown."