

## The Cabinet of Artist Julien Segard

by Rosalyn D'Mello 14/06/12 6:58 AM EDT

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A watercolor by Julien Segard

(Julien Segard)

"I like to do something with nothing," French artist **Julien Segard** told **ARTINFO** a week ago. At the time, the 32-year-old artist was busy installing his work in the vast sun-lit lobby of the **The Rose Hotel** in Hauz Khas Village. "Just your hand and your brain," he added in his thick French accent. Segard's affair with India began about two years ago and at the moment shows no signs of letting up. His show "Between the Shelter and the Temple" opens tomorrow at 4pm. It's an unusual hour for an opening, but when we visited the space a little past noon, we understood why. Constructed on the edge of the vast green forest that lines the village, the Hotel is almost entirely illuminated by sunlight during the day, which makes for an extremely pleasant and unintimidating viewing experience.

Segard's hands-on approach to the process of art making is influenced by the "Arte Povera" movement that had sprung up in Italy in the '60s. Literally, the term, devised in 1967 by the Italian critic Germano Celant, translated to poor or impoverished art. The movement represented a radical stance taken by artists against the institutionalization of culture. The artists associated with the movement championed the appropriation of found objects in their artworks. It is to this degree that Segard's practice is inspired by this modern movement. "I also like that when you find some piece of paper on the floor with something written on it, or a piece of wood, there is a story behind it, there's lots of information," he said.

The best of Segard's work consists of paintings done instinctively and compulsively on found plywood. The show features one such work, a moonlit scene depicting the neighborhood in Delhi where the artist lives. The plywood that is meant to act as a canvas is not a singular piece. The painting is spread over various chunks of plywood that do not, ultimately, resemble a definitive geometrical shape. "It's more like a map than a window," is how Segard describes the effect of his approach. "I lay down my material like carpets, on the floor," he said, in his makeshift English. "Once I put down different materials, I choose the size freely. I don't plan at the beginning that I want to do something specific within this frame or this kind of canvas. My drawing is like that, I think, more linked with mental maps than window representations," he said, his fingers gesticulating towards the glass windows next to where we were seated.

Another excellent drawing plays with the idea of the sketchbook. Segard pulled out all the pages that made up the sketchbook and arranged them one beside the other to form a largish paper canvas.

Segard knew he wanted to be an artist when he was 10. "I drew for myself then," he said. He started out in his hometown, Marseille. "It was a way to just travel, to look around me and spend some time with people, a kind of communication, and spending time in the streets lets the information come to you which you can then work out in your sketchbook." Segard went on to formally study art for four years, but the street as muse remains in some of his work, for instance, his series of watercolors of makeshift street structures, like food carts, in which he also incorporates found items like parking tickets and other paraphernalia. There's finesse in these drawings and an almost masterful handling of the brush, as if it comes too easily to the artist. Segard later told us that his watercolors are quick sellers. "My first show in Paris was a series of watercolors and I managed to sell all of them, so I decide to do some more since they are popular," he said. Each watercolor is underpriced at Rs 20,000, and Segard has already managed to sell a few.

What Segard is most excited about, though, is his ambitious cabinet constructed out of assembled strips of wood and bamboo, resembling a series of shelves. The structure has been installed in a small room adjacent to the small strip of corridor that connects the lobby to the café area. While the door to the room will remain closed, visitors can peep at the cabinet through the glass counter. The shelves will contain exactly 365 glass jars, each filled with completely random items, which will be on sale for Rs 500 each. Segard hopes that each jar will find a buyer. His master plan is to then create an online community consisting of the individual buyers in the hope that he can one day have something like a flash mob where he brings together all the 365 buyers in a single venue.

This work is an extension of the same cabinet display that Segard had arranged at an open studio night at his residence a few months ago. Another body of work that Segard has extended for this show is his series of sketches of heads. Arranged in a cluster and seen together, it's like sitting at the back of a concert hall, all you can see is differently sized heads with varied hairstyles. "I want to sell this as a set so that I'm done with it and can start on another series," Segard said.

"Between the Shelter and the Temple" is Segard's India debut, and from the way things are going, the artist is likely to stay on in India for a while. He has a show planned at Latitude 28 later this year, and will soon start work on an installation in the parking lot of the **Alliance Française**. "There's a lot of energy here, and lots of space to do things," he said. Meanwhile, he's planning an art workshop with the inmates of **Tihar Jail**, which sounds to us like an Indian version of Arte Povera in the making.