

Basquiat

Boom for Real

2	Introduction
4	New York New Wave
9	SAMO©
11	Canal Zone
14	The Scene
19	Downtown 81
21	Beat Bop
24	Warhol
27	Self Portrait
30	Bebop (Wall)
34	Bebop (Vitrine)
35	Art History (Vitrine)
37	Art History (Wall)
40	Encyclopaedia (Wall)
49	Encyclopaedia (Vitrine)
51	Notebooks
53	The Screen
58	Interview

Jean-Michel Basquiat was one of the most significant artists of the 20th century. Born in Brooklyn in 1960, to a Haitian father and a Puerto Rican mother, he grew up amid the post-punk scene in lower Manhattan. After leaving school at 17, he invented the character 'SAMO©', writing poetic graffiti that captured the attention of the city. He exhibited his first body of work in the influential group exhibition New York/New Wave at P.S.1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., in 1981.

When starting out, Basquiat worked collaboratively and fluidly across media, making poetry, performance, music and Xerox art as well as paintings, drawings and objects. Upstairs, the exhibition celebrates this diversity, tracing his meteoric rise, from the postcard he plucked up the courage to sell to his hero Andy Warhol in SoHo in 1978 to one of the first collaborative paintings that they made together in 1984. By then, he was internationally acclaimed – an extraordinary feat for a young artist with no formal training, working against the racial prejudice of the time.

In the studio, Basquiat surrounded himself with source material. He would sample from books spread open on the floor and the sounds of the television or boom box – anything worthy of his trademark catchphrase 'boom for real'. Downstairs, the exhibition unpicks this encyclopaedia of references – from early cinema to black cultural history to jazz. As the writer Glenn O'Brien wrote following Basquiat's death in 1988: 'He ate up every image, every word, every bit of data that appeared in front of him and he processed it all into a bebop cubist pop art cartoon gospel that synthesized the whole overload we lived under into something that made an astonishing new sense.'

Above

Basquiat dancing in his studio, 1985

© Tamra Davis

Opening wall

Edo Bertoglio

**The Whole Livery Line, Jean-Michel Basquiat
on the set of Downtown 81, 1980–81**

© New York Beat Film LLC

New York New Wave

In February 1981, the landmark exhibition New York/New Wave opened at P.S.1 in Long Island City. Curated by Diego Cortez, co-founder of the famous Mudd Club, the show featured over 1,600 works by more than 100 emerging and celebrated artists, musicians and writers, including Andy Warhol, Nan Goldin, Robert Mapplethorpe, David Byrne and William Burroughs. Cortez wanted to convey the downtown countercultural scene of the time, capturing the sprawling energy of New and No Wave music and its reach into visual art.

Basquiat was the only artist in the show to be given a prominent space for painting. Reunited for the first time in this room are 15 of the works he exhibited, which were made on canvas, paper, wood, scrap metal and foam rubber. They depict the ominous skyscraper-laden skyline, complete with soaring planes and cartoon-style cars – his response to the noise of Manhattan life. Basquiat and Cortez placed the works at surprising heights and in unusual configurations, which has been evoked in the hang here.

New York/New Wave launched Basquiat's career, as he quickly won the admiration of fellow artists, collectors and dealers. Despite being almost entirely unknown, Basquiat was singled out and lauded by almost every critic, with Peter Schjeldahl writing in the Village Voice: 'I would not have suspected from Samo's generally grotty defacements of my neighbourhood the graphic and painterly talents revealed here'.

**Marc Miller interviewing Diego Cortez,
'New York/New Wave' at P.S. 1, The Armory Show
of the 80s, Nineteen-Eighty One**

From the series ART/new york, produced by Paul Tschinkel

Video footage transferred to DVD, Two min Thirty-six sec

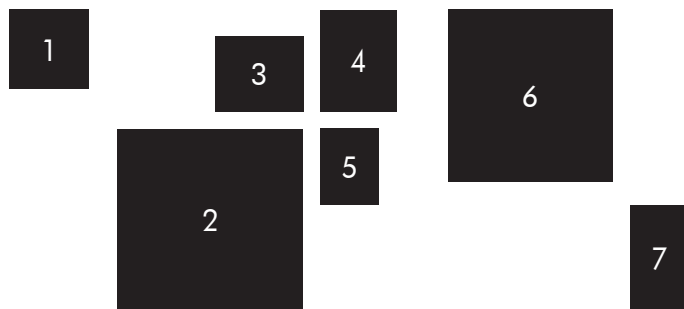
© Inner-Tube Video

'Untitled', 1980

Enamel, spray paint and oil stick on enamelled metal

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,

gift of an anonymous donor



1 Plush Safe He Think, 1981

Acrylic and oil stick on board

Private collection

2 Untitled (World Trade Towers), 1981

Acrylic, oil stick and paper collage on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

3 Untitled, 1981

Acrylic, oil stick and tape on paper mounted on canvas

Editions Enrico Navarra

4 Untitled (Varios), 1981

Spray paint on foam rubber

Collection of Alba and Francesco Clemente

5 Untitled, 1981

Acrylic, oil stick and paper collage on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

6 Untitled, 1981

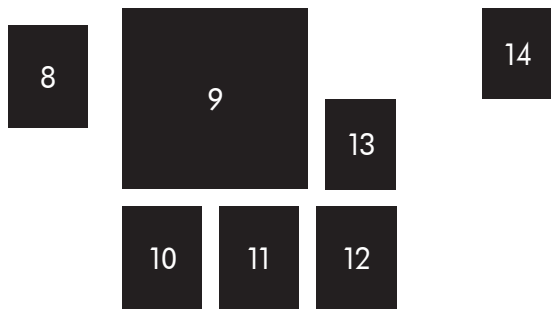
Acrylic, oil stick and paper collage on canvas

The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat

7 The Box, 1980–81

Acrylic, oil stick, spray paint, paper collage
and plaster on wooden box

Collection Dorian Navarra



8 Untitled, 1981

Silver paint on canvas

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

9 Untitled, 1981

Oil, oil stick and spray paint on canvas

Mugrabi Collection

10 Airplanes, 1980

Oil stick on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

11 AO AO, 1980

Oil stick on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

12 Lechón, 1980

Oil stick on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

13 Untitled, 1981

Oil stick and paper collage on paper

Editions Enrico Navarra

14 Untitled, 1981

Acrylic and oil stick on wooden panel

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

SAMO©

Basquiat had left home in June 1978. At the time, New York was on the brink of ruin. President Gerald Ford had denied federal assistance to save the city from bankruptcy. Violent crime had doubled, while areas such as the Bronx were nightly lit up by flames, as landlords disposed of buildings that they could no longer let or maintain. It was in this context that he teamed up with Al Diaz, a friend from the alternative high school City-As-School, to invent the character SAMO©, a play on the phrase 'same old shit'.

The city was awash with graffiti, but the tone of theirs was different – surreal, witty statements designed to capture the attention of the burgeoning art world around SoHo and the Lower East Side where the pair focused their activity. The avant-garde artist Henry Flynt took 57 photographs of their work: from 'SAMO© AS A CONGLOMERATE OF DORMANT GENIOUS' to 'MY MOUTH / THEREFORE AN ERROR'.

SAMO© became a sensation. On 21 September 1978, the SoHo Weekly News published an appeal for the artist responsible to come forward. The Village Voice beat them to it, with an article on 11 December that revealed the identities of 'Jean' and 'Al'. The story forced an end to their collaboration. Keith Haring delivered a eulogy at Club 57 and Basquiat wrote 'SAMO© IS DEAD' over their former territories, even though he would continue to use both the name and the hype generated by the project for years to come.

Henry Flynt

'The SAMO© Graffiti Portfolio', 1979–91

Fifty-seven C-print photographs

Private collection

'Jimmy Best', 1981

Spray paint and oil stick on metal panel

Private collection

Canal Zone

The Canal Zone was a 5,000-square-foot loft at 533 Canal Street, rented by British artist Stan Peskett. In 1979, he and Michael Holman (of glam rock band The Tubes) invited the graffiti artists Lee and Fab 5 Freddy to create a series of murals for the space. On 29 April, they threw a party to publicise their work to the downtown scene and encourage other aspiring graffiti artists. Amid the excitement of this occasion, Basquiat, who had recently parted ways with Al Diaz, decided to spray-paint live on camera for the first time as SAMO©.

That night he met many friends and future collaborators, notably Fab 5 Freddy, Michael Holman (later a fellow co-founder of the band Gray) and Jennifer Stein, an artist working as an apprentice to Peskett. Stein had been following SAMO© ('the buzz travelled like electricity') and was delighted when Basquiat suggested that they start making postcards together. He demonstrated how they could divide a standard sheet of paper into four, create compositions in each quarter, colour photocopy it, spray-mount it onto cardboard and then cut it into individual postcards.

They drew inspiration for their collages from their surroundings: street detritus, newspaper headlines, cigarette butts, advertisements. Colour photocopying was relatively new – Xerox released the first electrostatic colour copiers in 1973 – and they frequently used the machine at Jamie Canvas art supply store. They sold their postcards for a dollar each on the street, targeting the crowd outside The Museum of Modern Art, where they would be chased away by the museum guards.

Robert Carrithers

**Jean-Michel Basquiat outside Todd's Copy Shop,
New York, 1980**

© Robert Carrithers

Courtesy of Stan Peskett

'Untitled (Map)', 1980

Mixed media collage, photographs, negatives,
ink and pencil on paper. Collection of Larry Warsh

**Michael Holman interviewing Basquiat
at the Canal Zone Party, 29 April 1979**

VHS transferred to DVD, Thirty-three sec

Courtesy Michael Holman

'Untitled (Duchamp)', 1980

Mixed media collage, ink and paper on paper

Collection of Larry Warsh

**'We Have Decided the Bullet Must Have
Been Going Very Fast', 1979–80**

Acrylic, blood, ink and collage on paper

Collection Enrico Navarra

'Untitled (Black)', 1981

Acrylic, oil stick and collage on black paper

Private collection. Courtesy of Lio Malca, New York

Back wall

The Canal Zone Party crew, 1979

Left to right: Slave, Fab 5 Freddy, Roanne Rogers,
Stan Peskett, Michael Holman

Courtesy of Stan Peskett

The Scene

The Mudd Club was intended to be a haven for the underground scene. Films were screened, fashion shows were staged, a roster of No Wave bands played and DJs spun an eclectic mix of funk and punk records on a sound system set up by British musician and composer Brian Eno. As *People* magazine described, this was where 'New York's fly-by-night crowd of punks, posers and the ultra-hip... flaunt its manic chic'. Basquiat could be found at the Mudd Club almost nightly, often with fellow members of his band Gray.

The artist Maripol captured a cross-section of this scene on Polaroid: from the experimental performer Klaus Nomi to the unsigned singer Madonna. These portraits offer a vivid counter-point to Basquiat's own drawings of friends, such as the artist Keith Haring, with whom he made a series of collaborative works, and the writer Rene Ricard, who anointed Basquiat as a 'radiant child' in his article for *Artforum* in December 1981.

When the Mudd Club closed in 1983, it was quickly followed by the opening of Area, which became famed for its themed parties. Basquiat was a regular guest and DJ, creating an installation for the 'Art' night in 1985 and designing the invitation for his joint 25th birthday party with founder Eric Goode in December that year. These clubs offered a vital space for connection and inspiration, where Basquiat went to see and to be seen.

Maripol

'SX-70 Polaroids', 1979–84

Collection of Maripol

'Rene Ricard', 1984

Oil stick, coloured pencil and charcoal on paper

The Kasper Collection

Rene Ricard was a well-known critic, writer, poet and artist, whose 1979 book of poems was highly influential in New York. Ricard brought Basquiat to the attention of an international audience with the first major critical text on his work, 'The Radiant Child', for 'Artforum' in December 1981. In the article he proclaimed: 'If Cy Twombly and Jean Dubuffet had a baby and gave it up for adoption, it would be Jean-Michel.'

In this fractured portrait, Basquiat captures the provocative, expressive personality for which Ricard was throughout draw attention to Ricard's prolific authorship. His acerbic tongue, shown leaping in a serpentine flicker from the profile at the top left of the work, is also suggested by the collection of statements in quotation marks at the bottom of the composition.

'Sketch of Keith Haring', 1983

Wax crayon, acrylic and gouache on paper

Private collection, New York

Keith Haring was a close friend of Basquiat and a fellow downtown artist. This drawing presents two distinct perspectives, from the front and the side, perhaps inspired by medical texts such as 'Gray's Anatomy' (a favourite source for Basquiat). Sporting a T-shirt emblazoned with one of his 'Radiant Babies', Haring is presented with admiration and humour. By incorporating the word 'FAMOUS' inside an angelic halo above Haring's head, Basquiat establishes his status. He also includes 'KEITH HARING IN MILAN OCT .83' to indicate when the work was made. At the time, Haring was working in

Milan with his friend LA2 (Angel Ortiz) to decorate the flagship store of fashion designer Elio Fiorucci. The project was broadcast on television and attended by a group of downtown artists, including Basquiat and Warhol, who travelled especially to support Haring.

'Untitled (Area)', c. 1985

Mixed media on paper

Collection of Eric Goode

Excerpts from Glenn O'Brien's TV Party, episodes One, Six, Eight, Twelve, Twenty, Twenty Four and Thirty-three, 1979–82

VHS transferred to DVD, Thirteen min Fifteen sec

© Glenn O'Brien

TV Party was a public-access, late night television show, hosted by cult downtown writer Glenn O'Brien. Basquiat first appeared on the programme in April 1979, when he was interviewed as SAMO©, and went on to feature in a number of subsequent episodes. Other notable guests ranged from David Bowie to Iggy Pop, Kraftwerk and Arthur Russell.

Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring

'Untitled (Symphony No. 1)', c. 1980–83

Spray paint and paper on plywood

Collection of Larry Warsh

**Jean-Michel Basquiat with Fab 5 Freddy, Futura,
Keith Haring, Eric Haze, LA2, Tseng Kwong Chi,
Kenny Scharf and others**

Untitled, 1982

Acrylic, spray paint and ink marker on vase

Collection of Larry Warsh

Downtown 81

At the Mudd Club, Basquiat met Glenn O'Brien, who was known for his music column for Andy Warhol's Interview magazine, as well as for his show TV Party. O'Brien was writing a script for a feature film about the downtown scene and he decided that Basquiat should play the lead role.

Produced by Maripol and directed by Edo Bertoglio, the film would be based on a day in the life of a down-and-out artist, enriched by a live musical soundtrack from Mudd Club favourites including the Lounge Lizards and Kid Creole and the Coconuts, with a few whimsical touches, such as a cameo appearance from Blondie's Debbie Harry as a fairytale princess. Originally titled New York Beat, the film faced financial struggles for years before being released as Downtown 81 in 2000. Because the original dialogue audio was lost, the actor Saul Williams dubbed Basquiat's voice.

Today, the film survives as a remarkable document of the run-down city that gave rise to the vibrancy of downtown culture. The story was also uncannily prescient. When shooting began in December 1980, Basquiat was 19 years old and had only exhibited a single work. The canvases that were bought for him to work on as props for the film became some of his earliest paintings, while the production office at 54 Great Jones Street became his first makeshift studio, directly opposite the loft at 57 Great Jones Street that he would rent from Andy Warhol at the height of his career.

'Downtown 81 (New York Beat)', 1980–81, released in 2000

Writer: Glenn O'Brien

Director: Edo Bertoglio

Producer & Art Director: Maripol

Executive Producer: Michael Zilkha

HD DVD, One hour Thirteen min

© New York Beat Films LLC, all rights reserved

Beat Bop

A vital force in 1980s New York was a new movement known as hip-hop. In the late 1970s, Fab 5 Freddy played Basquiat cassette recordings of live rap performances from parties in the South Bronx and Harlem. He also introduced him to emerging figures from this scene, including experimental artist-musician Rammellzee and graffiti artist Toxic.

In November 1982, Basquiat made an extended trip to California, while preparing for his 1983 show at Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles. Rammellzee and Toxic came to join him on the West Coast, jokingly referring to themselves as the 'Hollywood Africans' in reference to the inescapable racism in the film industry. Basquiat made this the title for his powerful portrait of the trio.

Back in New York, Basquiat and Rammellzee produced the single 'Beat Bop' (1983). Originally released as a limited test pressing, the record features K-Rob and Rammellzee on vocals, and was produced on Basquiat's one-time Tartown record label. He also produced the cover art for the sleeve, featuring anatomical drawings and his iconic crown. Over ten minutes long, the track is typical of rap records released before the pop-song structure of 'hook and chorus' was introduced, resulting in an experimental and abstract sound.

Christopher Makos

Jean-Michel Basquiat and Toxic at Studio 54, 1982

© Christopher Makos, 1982. Courtesy Makos Archive

Jean-Michel Basquiat with Fab 5 Freddy, Futura 2000, Keith Haring, Eric Haze, LA2, Tseng Kwong Chi, Kenny Scharf and others 'Untitled (Fun Fridge)', 1982

Acrylic, spray paint and ink marker on refrigerator

Collection of Larry Warsh

This tagged fridge originally belonged to the FUN Gallery. Patti Astor, famed for her role in films such as 'Underground U.S.A.' (1980), opened the East Village gallery with her partner Bill Stelling in early 1981. Crucially, it offered a space for graffiti artists to exhibit works in a gallery setting. In November 1982, Basquiat was given a solo show here, one of the most significant of his career. The fridge is covered in signatures, not only by graffiti artists, but also by a variety of hip-hop artists and those active in the downtown scene. Basquiat's tag is identifiable as 'SAMO©', while Astor stylised her name with a star, 'STOR'. The fridge is also decorated with drawings of characters from children's television shows including the Hanna-Barbera cartoons, 'The Flintstones' and 'The Jetsons.'

'Untitled', 1982

Felt-tip pen and oil stick on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Norman Dubrow, 1986

'Hollywood Africans', 1983

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Gift of Douglas S. Cramer

This remarkable painting features portraits of Basquiat alongside fellow artist-musicians Toxic and Rammellzee ('RMLZ'). The title relates to a trip they made to California, when the trio flippantly referred to themselves as 'Hollywood Africans'. The provocative title offers a comment on the entertainment industry's limited opportunities for black actors. The statuette in the top left corner, coupled with references to '1940' and 'HOLLYWOOD AFRICANS FROM THE NINETEEN FORTIES', perhaps relates to the actress Hattie McDaniel, who in 1940 was the first African American to receive an Oscar, for playing 'Mammy' in 'Gone with the Wind', a role that was a clear racial caricature. The inclusion of the phrase 'MOVIE STAR FOOTPRINTS ©' refers to the deeply commercialised aspects of the industry, while suggesting that the trio should be given a place within this Hollywood tradition.

Rammellzee vs. K-Rob, produced and with cover artwork by Jean-Michel Basquiat

'Beat Bop', 1983

Vinyl record and slip cover

Collection of Jennifer Von Holstein

Collection of Larry Warsh

The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection,

Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

Warhol

Like many artists of his generation, Basquiat greatly admired Andy Warhol. As a teenager, he treasured his copy of *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (1975). Their first encounter was in 1979, when Basquiat spied Warhol and curator Henry Geldzahler having lunch in the SoHo restaurant WPA and summoned the courage to show them his work. While Geldzahler dismissed him as 'too young', Warhol bought one of his postcards for a dollar.

On 4 October 1982, art dealer and collector Bruno Bischofberger took Basquiat to visit Warhol's Factory for the first time. Basquiat rushed back to his Crosby Street studio to paint a dual portrait, *Dos Cabezas*, which captures a likeness of both artists: Warhol with his wild wig and Basquiat with his crown of dreadlocks. Much to Warhol's delight, Basquiat delivered it back two hours later, still dripping with paint. In 1983, Warhol leased Basquiat an apartment at 57 Great Jones Street and, at Bischofberger's suggestion, the pair began collaborating – first with Italian artist Francesco Clemente, and then alone.

In September 1985 many of these collaborations were exhibited at Tony Shafrazi Gallery. A harsh review in *The New York Times* dismissed Basquiat as Warhol's 'mascot', demonstrating a common misconception of the pair. In fact they shared a remarkable friendship. Basquiat convinced Warhol to return to painting by hand, while he started to use the silkscreen technique for which Warhol was famous.

Michael Halsband

Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1985

© Michael Halsband

**Outtakes from Basquiat segment of 'Andy Warhol's T.V.',
season 2, episode 9, 1983**

Videotape, 22 min

The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection,
Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

Andy Warhol

'Jean-Michel Basquiat', c. 1982–86

Eight gelatin silver prints

The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection,
Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

**'Foto' (Jean-Michel Basquiat being photographed
by Andy Warhol), 1983**

Oil stick and watercolour on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol

'Arm and Hammer II', 1984

Oil stick and watercolour on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

Warhol set the tone for this collaborative work by hand-painting two enlarged logos of the brand Arm & Hammer. Appropriated from the trademark of the American manufacturer Church & Dwight, this household brand of baking soda was present in almost every home in the US. The motif – a muscular arm poised with a hammer in hand – has its origin in Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and metalworking, and the symbol became popularly associated with industry. Basquiat reclaimed one of the logos, painting black bars over the brand name in a gesture suggestive of censorship. A black musician and his saxophone completely obliterate the logo, identifiable as musician Charlie Parker by the inscription '1955' – the year of Parker's death. Basquiat proposes Parker as an alternative hero to Vulcan, while offering a critique of the brand-like commodification of jazz.

'Dos Cabezas', which translates from Spanish as 'two heads', is a historic portrait of Basquiat and Warhol. Like many New York artists of his generation, Basquiat held the so-called 'King of Pop' in high esteem. On 4 October 1982, Bruno Bischofberger took Basquiat to Warhol's studio to have his portrait taken on his large-format Polaroid camera. Basquiat chose not to stay for lunch, dashing back to his Crosby Street studio to paint this work. Later that afternoon he had his studio assistant Stephen Torton deliver it to Warhol before the paint was even dry. Warhol recorded in his diary his admiration for Basquiat's speed, which for him was the ultimate accolade.

Self-Portrait

Basquiat was inspired by the creative possibilities of identity. The name Aaron, for example, which is written on a number of early works, could connect to the black baseball player Hank Aaron (who beat Babe Ruth's home run record in 1974). But Basquiat may also have been referencing the black antihero of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and the brother of Moses in the Old Testament, who frees the Israelites from servitude.

When asked in an interview about the figures in his paintings, Basquiat was clear that 'a lot of them are self-portraits', though in a number of different guises. In *Untitled* (1982), painted for his first solo exhibition at Annina Nosei Gallery in March 1982, a boxing figure, with fist held aloft, is depicted with a skull-like head, reminiscent of the Voodoo spirit-god Baron Samedi. These powerful, existential figures were followed by several more direct self-portraits from 1983 to 1984.

Basquiat mocked the art world's tendency to reduce artists to their biography (date of birth, schooling, influences), but he was also self-conscious of his youth and the stereotyping of black artists. He questioned the relationship between an artist's identity and their reception, probing the renewed fixation on celebrity in 1980s New York. As Rene Ricard wrote in his article on Basquiat: 'one must become the iconic representation of oneself in this town'.

Edo Bertoglio

Jean-Michel Basquiat wearing an American football helmet, 1981

© Edo Bertoglio, courtesy of Maripol

'Untitled (Football Helmet)', c. 1981–84

Acrylic and human hair on football helmet

Mugrabi Collection

Basquiat customised this American football helmet with white and blue paint, as well as human hair, which could be his own. It is likely that he was influenced by Marcel Duchamp's 'readymades' (artworks created with existing manufactured objects) as well as the artist David Hammons, who was known for his sculptures incorporating hair. Black sporting heroes were an important theme for Basquiat. He celebrated their achievements in many of his works, focusing on figures such as baseball star Hank Aaron, whose name he often referenced. This helmet was used by Basquiat in a number of early performances.

'Self-Portrait', 1983

Oil on paper and wood

Collection Thaddaeus Ropac

'Untitled', 1983

Acrylic and oil stick on paper

W&K – Wienerroither & Kohlbacher, Vienna

'Famous', 1982

Acrylic and photocopy collage on canvas mounted on wood Private collection. Courtesy of Lio Malca, New York

'Self-Portrait', 1984

Acrylic and oil stick on paper mounted on canvas

Private collection – Yoav Harlap

'Untitled', 1982

Acrylic and oil on linen

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Bebop (Wall)

Music was a powerful source of inspiration for Basquiat, and he rarely worked without something playing in the studio. The cultural historian Robert Farris Thompson recalled him creating a single collage to the soundtrack of 'four styles of jazz – free, mambo inflected, hard bop, and, at the end, fabulous early bop'. Although his tastes were diverse – ranging from David Byrne to Donna Summer to Bach – his paintings and drawings were dominated by the history of black jazz musicians and his hero Charlie Parker in particular. Parker was instrumental in the development of 'bebop', referenced in the title of the one record Basquiat produced in 1983, 'Beat Bop'.

Basquiat's works abound with references to his collection of jazz and blues (among the more than 3,000 records that he owned) as well as the library of books that he collected on the subject. His obsession was such that he would trade paintings for rare blues and bebop LPs. He cherished Ross Russell's biography *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker* (1973) so dearly that he kept a box of copies in his studio to gift to friends. Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine's publication *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz, 1920–1950* (1982) was also an important source.

The musicians whose lives and music Basquiat admired and addressed suffered extreme racial prejudice during their lifetimes. As well as serving as tributes to these artists, his compositions offer a critique of their treatment in society.

Ben Buchanan

Jean-Michel Basquiat DJing at Area, New York, 1985

© Ben Buchanan / Bridgeman Images

'Plastic Sax', 1984

Acrylic, oil stick, photocopy and collage on canvas
agnès b. collection

The fractured picture plane of 'Plastic Sax' is dominated by a vivid blue, the colour perhaps referencing 'the blues'. This genre originated from American folk music fusing with the musical traditions that African slaves brought to America. The title of this painting comes from the inscription 'CHARLIE PARKER'S PLASTIC SAXOPHONE', which was a cream-coloured plastic version of the alto instrument. Parker famously played the instrument at the legendary Massey Hall in Toronto in May 1953 alongside jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, who also features in name and portrait in this work. The repeated snippets of Japanese script visible across the canvas translate as 'origami' and 'Toyo' (a well-known Japanese origami paper brand), linking to the origami cockerel and elephant nearby. Basquiat travelled to Japan in 1983 for an exhibition at Akira Ikeda Gallery in Tokyo and these references likely connect to this trip.

'Untitled (Charlie Parker)', 1983

Oil stick and ink on paper
Schorr Family Collection

This drawing pays tribute to Charlie Parker, whose pioneering experiments in jazz greatly influenced Basquiat. The depiction of Parker dressed in a polka dot necktie with his saxophone has a striking resemblance to the photograph on the front of Parker's historic 'Koko Sessions' record, released in 1945 by Savoy. Another

possible source is a promotional photograph included in Basquiat's beloved copy of Ross Russell's 'Bird Lives!' biography, displayed nearby. The 'Koko Sessions' recording was Parker's first session as a bandleader and the phrase is inscribed, outlined and then crossed out on 'Untitled (Charlie Parker)' to draw particular attention to its importance. The first bars from the beginning of the theme of the song 'Red Cross', one of the great examples of early bebop recorded by Parker and guitarist Lloyd 'Tiny' Grimes, are also drawn below the staves.

King Zulu, 1986

Acrylic, wax and felt-tip pen on canvas

MACBA Collection. Government of Catalonia long-term loan.

Formerly Salvador Riera Collection

The floating fragments in 'King Zulu' were sourced from 'Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz' (1982) by Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine. Basquiat's original copy is included in the facing display. The title of the painting (inscribed beneath the grinning mask) relates to Louis Armstrong, who was crowned 'King Zulu' at the Mardi Gras parade in 1949. While Armstrong deemed it a great honour, Basquiat treats the exaggerated blackface costume with clear ambivalence. Barely legible beneath the paint is the phrase 'DO NOT STAND / IN FRONT OF / THE ORCHESTRA', which appears within a photograph of Armstrong's orchestra in the book. The gothic 'G', meanwhile, belongs to Gennett Records, which recorded Armstrong's first solo as second cornet in Joe Oliver's Creole Jazz band in April 1923. In underlining these references, Basquiat connects to the practice of citation or 'licks' in the performance of jazz.

Self-Portrait, 1981

Acrylic, oil, oil stick and paper collage on wood

Private collection

The two silhouette heads in this work, one embellished with menacing red crayon around the eyes and mouth, the other silenced with a blacked-out mouth, convey an image of a divided self. To the left is the repeated name of Ben Webster, the jazz tenor saxophonist, and to the right are lyrics from Thelonious Monk, the pianist and composer who was among those to pioneer the new sound of bebop. Placing himself in the lineage of these musical heroes, Basquiat seems to question the limited recognition of the achievements of black artists.

Untitled (Estrella), 1985

Oil stick, graphite and coloured pencil on paper

Collection of Jonathan Schorr

King of the Zulus, 1984–85

Acrylic, oil stick and photocopy collage on canvas

[mac] musée d'art contemporain, Marseille

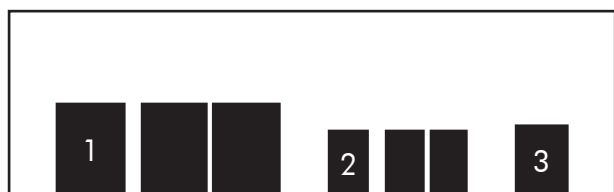
Bebop (Vitrine)

Above

Nicholas Taylor

**Jean-Michel Basquiat dancing
at the Mudd Club, 1979**

© Nicholas Taylor



1 Giles Oakley

The Devil's Music, 1976

Publisher: BBC Books, London

Private collection

2 Basquiat's original copy of:

Ross Russell

**Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times
of Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker, 1973**

Publisher: Quartet Books, London

Private collection

3 Basquiat's original copy of:

Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine

**Black Beauty White Heat: A Pictorial
History of Classic Jazz, 1920–1950, 1982**

Publisher: William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York

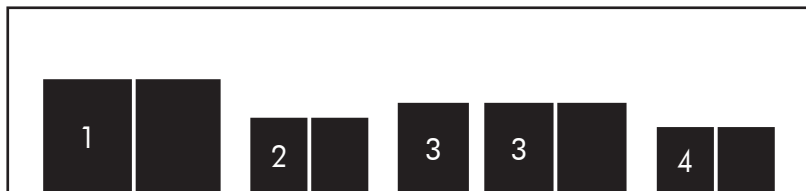
The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat

Art History (Vitrine)

Basquiat drew upon a collection of artistic heroes. While growing up in New York, he visited museums with his mother Matilde, and he remained an avid exhibition-goer. The retrospective of the late abstract expressionist Cy Twombly at the Whitney in 1979 had a formative influence, and he attended the controversial Primitivism in 20th Century Art in 1984 both at MoMA and when it travelled to the Dallas Museum of Art. He was also a frequent visitor to New York's vast Metropolitan Museum, making drawings directly from its collections.

Basquiat took it upon himself to consume the mainstream 'canon' of western art, but he also looked beyond this conventional narrative. He owned a copy of H. W. Janson's *History of Art*, as well as Burchard Brentjes' *African Rock Art* (1969) and Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (1984), often taking inspiration from their pages. He had an extensive collection of artist books and catalogues that he used as source material, some of which are displayed here.

Like his taste in music, Basquiat's art historical references were eclectic, encompassing the Venus of Willendorf (an 11 cm statuette believed to date from between 28,000 and 25,000 BC), African masks, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Édouard Manet, Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and African American folk artists Sam Doyle and Bill Traylor. Perhaps what connects these diverse figures for Basquiat is an interest in the idea of a signature artistic style and a determination to acknowledge the importance and influence of non-Western art.



- 1 Basquiat's original copy of:
Leonardo da Vinci, 1452–1519, 1966**
Publisher: Reynal, New York
Collection of Kevin Bray

- 2 Burchard Brentjes
African Rock Art, 1969**
Publisher: JM Dent & Sons Limited, London
Private collection

- 3 H. W. Janson
A History of Art, 1962**
Publisher: Thames and Hudson, London
Private collection

- 4 Jean Dubuffet:
A Retrospective Glance at Eighty, 1981**
Publisher: Guggenheim Museum Press, New York
Private collection

Art History (Wall)

Untitled (Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Duchamp, Pollock), 1986–87

Coloured pencil on brown paper

Private collection

Young Picasso – Old Picasso, 1984

Oil stick, pastel and watercolour on paper

Private collection, USA. Courtesy of

Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art, New York

Matisse Matisse Matisse, 1983

Oil stick and ink on paper

Collection of Pierre Cornette de Saint Cyr, Paris

Henri Matisse's surname is repeated three times at the bottom of this drawing, which is punctuated by several of the French artist's key themes. All three motifs – the goldfish, the female portrait and Notre Dame – were likely taken directly from three works in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art in New York: *Goldfish and Sculpture* (1912), *The Blue Window* (1913) and *View of Notre Dame* (1914).

Basquiat visited MoMA from a young age with his mother Matilde, and continued to return to the museum throughout his career.

Untitled (Titian), 1982

Oil stick on canvas

Private collection

This drawing is titled after the 16th-century Venetian painter Titian. His name appears several times across the page, in one instance accompanied by a copyright symbol to indicate his place in the art-historical canon. A small portrait of him, with skullcap and beard, suggests that Basquiat worked from Titian's Self Portrait (1565–67), which was reproduced in the Titian entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Other art-historical references include the phrases 'LEG ANATOMY' and 'STUDY OF FEET', which relate to drawings in his monograph of Leonardo da Vinci (1966). Basquiat's original copy of this book is included in the facing display. Titian and Leonardo both relate to the concept of the 'Renaissance man', a term that describes someone with exceptional skills across a wide range of fields. Basquiat may have been drawn to these characters given his own plurality of interests.

Untitled (Pablo Picasso), 1984

Oil, acrylic and oil stick on metal

Private collection, Italy

This work honours one of Basquiat's most important artistic heroes. 'PABLO PICASSO' is written seven times across the canvas, the name repeated as if it were sacred. 'PICASSO AS A FIFTEEN YEAR OLD' is inscribed on the subject's chest, as a reminder that both were considered prodigiously talented at a young age. Although Picasso's face appears relatively young, he is depicted wearing a striped Breton jumper characteristic of his later years. By conflating these two parts of Picasso's life Basquiat contemplates the entirety of the artist's career.

Boone, 1983

Collage on paper, marker and oil crayon on Masonite on wood

Private collection, Switzerland

Encyclopaedia (Walls)

Basquiat liked to sample from an extraordinary array of material. As he described: 'I get my facts from books, stuff on atomizers, the blues, ethyl alcohol, geese in Egyptian glyphs'. Delighting in the clash between supposedly 'high' and 'low' culture, he assembled an arsenal of words, images and symbols that connected to his favourite subject matter, whether ancient myth, cartoons or Beat poetry.

Books had a particular appeal, perhaps because of the authority they possessed for an artist who was self-taught. This status was a badge of honour, as seen in the 1983 work on paper Untitled (World Famous), in which he proudly announces, like a certificate, his 'THESIS' in 'VARIOUS STUDIES OF HUMAN ANATOMY AND WORLD HISTORY', signed with his classic copyright symbol.

Many of the paintings that Basquiat made for and immediately after his exhibition at the Fun Gallery in November 1982 (widely considered to be his most successful show) are gathered here alongside a selection of the books that inspired them. Working against the backdrop of semiotics, the study of signs and their interpretation, Basquiat was obsessed with symbols and the question of how meaning is conveyed. Displaying some of his beloved books, such as his original copy of Leonardo da Vinci or Henry Dreyfuss' Symbol Sourcebook, allows us to decode his complex fields of reference.

Untitled (World Famous), 1983

Crayon on paper

The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat

Excerpt from State of the Art, filmed 1985, broadcast on Channel 4 on 11 January 1987

Writer: Sandy Nairne

Director: Geoff Dunlop

Producer: John Wyver

Video footage transferred to DVD

© Illuminations Television

Untitled, 1984

Work on paper

Private collection, London

Basquiat made this drawing while in London in 1984 and the powerful combination of imagery suggests him considering his relationship to Britain's colonial past. The figure in the lower left, with uplifted arrow hands, is taken from Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit* (1983) and is said to denote 'all of this country belongs to me'. The frequent appearance of 'BRITISH WEST INDIES', as well as lists of the word 'SUGAR', refer to the British use of indentured labour in sugar cultivation. The word 'BREADFRUIT' enhances this link by conjuring the figure of Captain William Bligh, who embarked on a six-year journey to Tahiti in 1787 to seek out this tree, which was used as a cheap source of food for the slave population. A 'HALF NELSON' is a wrestling move in which an opponent's arm is locked behind their back – a metaphor perhaps for the colonial subject.

Untitled (Crown), 1982

Acrylic, ink and paper collage on paper

Private collection

Untitled (Charles Darwin), 1983

Oil stick on paper

Private collection

Charles Darwin, Gregor Mendel and T. H. Huxley were three influential individuals, who each developed theories on the origins of humans. Their finely executed portraits are accompanied by a concise caption, as if taken from an encyclopaedia. Darwin's repeated presence underlines his importance. While Mendel pioneered ideas on genetics and inherited traits, Darwin and Huxley both proposed that our earliest ancestors lived in Africa. The inclusion of the redacted phrase 'ORIGIN OF COTTON' (a recurring expression in Basquiat's work) raises questions about how human development links to slavery and capitalism. Basquiat was particularly interested in African history and read key texts popularised by Afro-centrists of the time, including W. E. B. Du Bois' *The World and Africa* (1946).

Jawbone of an Ass, 1982

Acrylic, oil stick and paper collage on canvas mounted on wooden

supports The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat

The title of this work comes from the Bible: 'And Samson said, with the jawbone of an ass... have I slain a thousand men'. Samson was gifted with supernatural strength, which Basquiat suggests with the names of ancient warriors. Alexander and Cleopatra are mentioned as well as obscure figures, such as 'SCIPIO', a Roman general nicknamed 'Scipio the African'. He was famed for defeating 'HANNIBAL', which offers a secondary allusion to the serial killer Dr Hannibal Lecter, who

first appeared in Thomas Harris' thriller *Red Dragon* in 1981. The connection is endorsed by the rhyme with 'HECTOR', who was renowned for his role in the Trojan war. These fighters are interspersed with philosophers, such as Virgil and Socrates, alongside the phrase 'Rodin's Thinker', referring to the famous sculpture which is often used as an icon for philosophy. The two strands of warriors and philosophers, suggest that the work could be read as illustrating the 'war of the mind', often considered the theme of the story of Samson.

Tuxedo, 1983

Silkscreen on canvas

Private collection

Untitled, 1985

Cut-and-pasted paper and oil stick on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Acquired in memory of Kevin W. Robbins through funds provided by his family and friends and by the Committee on Drawings

The date 1863 and the words 'BOSTON – TREMONT TEMPLE' are written toward the top of this drawing. This was the church where the abolitionists gathered to celebrate President Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that slaves 'are and henceforth shall be free'. The announcement swept joy through the crowd and a black preacher led the gathering in an Exodus hymn by the Irish poet Thomas Moore, which Basquiat references with the line 'O'ER EGYPT'S DARK SEA©'. Below is the enigmatic list 'WINTER / SPRING / GARDEN BLOOMING / BARREN TREE / SWEETER RELAXATION'. These words are distilled from the song 'I'm Growing Fonder of You', recorded in 1934 by Fats Waller, himself the son of a Baptist minister. The vertical piano keyboard reinforces these

musical allusions, while the racially loaded history of jazz is indicated by the list of the word 'IVORY'.

Ishtar, 1983

Acrylic, wax crayon and photocopy collage on canvas, mounted on tied wooden supports Collection Ludwig, Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen

Basquiat was fascinated with mythology, naming this work after the Egyptian goddess of fertility and war. The background is pasted with photocopied drawings, which read like hieroglyphs on a wall. Among them, in the upper left, is a small drawing of a pig beneath the words: 'HWCH, ZOG, SYR, SUSTER, SOS'. This list comes from 'The Lost Language of Symbolism' (1912) in which Harold Bayley explains that 'in Egypt the Sow was held sacred to Isis... The Welsh for sow is 'hwch', the Dutch is 'zog' and the Icelandic is 'syr'... The root sos in Cornish, meaning 'Friend' and 'Comforter', reappears in the name Jesus, the Ever-Existent Sos or Sus'. This rich connection between Egypt and the Bible is developed elsewhere, with 'KINGS VII, 21, 22', denoting the story of Samson's temple, while 'SIDE VIEW OF AN OXEN'S JAW' relates to the 'jawbone of an ass' with which Samson is said to have slain a thousand men.

Jesse, 1983

Acrylic, oil stick, pencil and collage on canvas
Courtesy of John McEnroe Gallery

'Jesse' relates to Jesse Owens, the black athlete who won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics. His name features alongside two Nazi swastikas, referencing the Berlin setting of the games, which Hitler saw as an opportunity to promote his concept of racial supremacy. Owens thwarted this idea by setting extraordinary world records. The

impression of supernatural talent is emphasized by multiple allusions to Superman, including 'PERRY WHITE' and 'JIMMY OLSEN'. These act as a reminder of the anti-Nazi sentiments of the Jewish originators of Superman, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, whose character first appeared in 'Action Comics' in June 1938, two years after the Olympics and a year before the outbreak of the Second World War. The fist that appears twice links Owen's courage to that of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the two-hundred-metre runners who raised their gloved fists in the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico.

Alto Saxophone, 1986

Oil stick, coloured pencil and pencil on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

Moses and the Egyptians, 1982

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas

Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa. Gift of Bruno Bischofberger

The title of this work relates to the Old Testament, in which Moses frees the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The picture plane is dominated by a mass of striking pink paint, representing the two stone tablets 'inscribed by the finger of God', which were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The name 'MOSES' is written five times to the left, referencing the Ten Commandments written on the tablets. To the right, the name 'MOSES' stands alone, as if to underline the singular importance of 'His chosen one'. In the middle is the profile of a head with an Egyptian-style eye, which seems likely to have come from Jean Carlu's cover design for the 1967 edition of Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In this text, Freud argues that the primal desire of individuals is to trace their bloodline back to royalty.

Jack Johnson, 1982

Acrylic and oil on canvas

Private collection

Jack Johnson was the first African American world heavyweight champion. The unusual format of this work, with the canvas draped and fixed to an industrial pallet, makes it like a shrine to the boxer. Johnson is delineated in a simple portrait, his arm raised in a moment of triumph (and a possible gesture to the raised fist of the Black Power movement). The crown hovering above his head, a repeated icon in Basquiat's work, acts like the regal titles given to distinguished jazz musicians, such as 'Duke' Ellington. Basquiat may well have been interested in Johnson's complex personal life: he dealt with significant racial prejudice and was often profiled in the media for his relationships with white women. Figures from black sporting history, particularly boxing, were a recurring theme for Basquiat, who watched important fights from a young age.

Five Fish Species, 1983

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas mounted on wooden supports

Private collection

This triptych is devoted to the cult Beat author William Burroughs, who Basquiat often visited at his apartment, 'The Bunker'. To the left, is the partially obscured phrase 'TAKE BACK THE KEYS TO THE SHIT HOUSE', a quotation from 'The Place of Dead Roads' (1983). Above are two bullets, explicitly referencing Burroughs' accidental killing of his wife Joan Vollmer in September 1951. In a William Tell-inspired 'game' in Mexico, he aimed to shoot a glass of water balanced on her head but misfired. Basquiat's detailed knowledge of this incident is indicated by 'thirteen', which is the number of days Burroughs spent in prison before his brother paid his bail. Other references include the

downward triangle, which is the alchemical symbol for water. These biographical excerpts are pertinent given that much of Burroughs' fiction was auto-biographical and it may be no coincidence that Basquiat's work was made the same year that 'Burroughs: The Movie' was released.

Glenn, 1984

Acrylic, oil stick and photocopy collage on canvas
Private collection

Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits, 1982

Acrylic, oil stick and paper collage on canvas
Collection of Jonathan Schorr

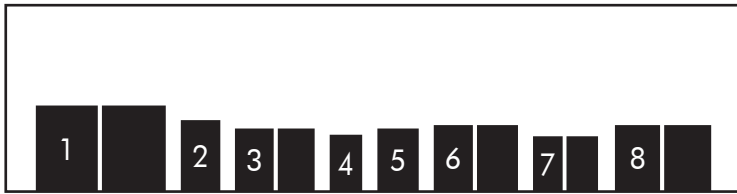
Near the top of this work, Basquiat identifies a key source, 'STUDIES OF HUMAN LEG PLUS THE BONE OF LEG IN MAN AND DOG', which relates to a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci from 1506. The delicate chalk and ink form is suggested in the figure sketched in red paint to the left, while the title is echoed in the word 'HUESO', Spanish for bone, written twice to the right. References to limbs appear frequently elsewhere, including 'CALVES', which is crossed out and written above backwards, 'SEVLAC', in a nod to Leonardo's mirror writing. In the top right, a kneeling leg is captioned 'RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL', a reference to the parable told by Jesus about a profligate son, who seeks forgiveness from his father, demonstrating God's redemptive grace. Basquiat may have been inspired by Rembrandt's painting of the story from c. 1665, which was reproduced in his copy of Janson's History of Art.

Piscine Versus the Best Hotels, 1982

Acrylic, oil stick and photocopy collage on canvas mounted on wooden supports Schorr Family Collection

The dense, textured surface of this multi-panel work features painting, drawing and collage. Originally exhibited at the Fun Gallery in November 1982, the work hung as a pair with *Jawbone of an Ass*. The energy of the paintwork is matched by the frenetic writing in the upper left, which references a number of prominent accidents, perhaps taken from Basquiat's copy of Ripley's *Believe it or Not! Great Disasters* (1979). 'RACING CAR HURLED INTO GRANDSTAND' relates to the 1955 Le Mans disaster, in which a crash between two cars sent debris flying into the crowd of spectators, while 'ANTON CERMAK' refers to a Chicago mayor who was killed in 1933, supposedly in an attempt to assassinate Franklin D. Roosevelt. These incidents add a sense of morbid drama to the composition, furthered by the ominous figure in the bottom right.=

Encyclopaedia (Vitrine)



1 **Henry Dreyfuss**

Symbol Sourcebook, 1984

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, London

Private collection

2 **Robert Farris Thompson**

Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy, 1983

Publisher: Random House, New York

Private collection

3 **Henry Gray**

Gray's Anatomy, 1858

Publisher: Magpie Books Ltd, London

Private collection

4 **Ripley's Believe It or Not!**

Great Disasters, 1979

Publisher: Pocket Books, New York

Printed book

Private collection

5 Jack Kerouac

The Subterraneans, 1958

Publisher: Grove Press, Inc., New York

Private collection

6 Sigmund Freud

Moses and Monotheism, 1967

Publisher: Vintage Books, New York

Private collection

Notebooks

Basquiat populated the pages of his notebooks with poems and word experiments, almost always writing in neat capitalised lettering, as if he intended for them to be seen. Here was a space to craft enigmatic phrases imbued with poetic rhythm, such as 'FAMOUS NEGRO ATHELETES' – three stark words, the last deliberately misspelt to suggest a possible pronunciation.

His interest in the musicality of text is evident in many of these works, some of which are even labelled as a 'PSALM' or 'PRAYER'. The word psalm comes from the Greek psalmoi, which can be defined as instrumental music and, by extension, the words that accompany music. When filming Downtown 81, Basquiat performed a reading of the opening verses of Genesis, which connects to his love of rhetoric, from the Bible to the Beats. Juxtaposed against these compositions are jotted names and telephone numbers, mostly in the back of the notebooks, indicating their functional use too.

In 1981, Basquiat was living with his bandmate Nick Taylor at 39 East 1st Street on the Lower East Side. He asked Taylor and writer Rene Ricard to certify the authenticity of one of his many notebooks, two of which are presented here. Ricard wrote that 'this book is absolutely and uniquely the product of Jean-Michel's hand' and dated it 6 September 1981. Written more than a month before Basquiat's first US solo exhibition at Annina Nosei Gallery, the certification shows the humour and confidence he had in his artistic ability as well as the significance of these notebooks to his wider practice.

Basquiat reading from Genesis, c. 1980–81

Tape recording transferred to CD

Produced by Coati Mundi Hernandez

Courtesy of Maripol

'Notebook 1', 1980–81

Cover: mixed media on board

Pages: ink marker, wax crayon and ink on ruled paper

Collection of Larry Warsh

'Notebook Five', 1987

Cover: mixed media on board

Pages: ink marker, wax crayon and ink on ruled paper

Collection of Larry Warsh

'Untitled (Series of Poems)', 1979–80

Ink on paper

Private collection. Courtesy Enrico Navarra, New York

The Screen

In 1985 a British film crew shot footage of Basquiat drawing in front of the television. Crouched over reams of paper with a tool kit of drawing supplies, the artist translated the imagery on screen into a frenzied drawing, shown nearby. This rapturous response was indicative of Basquiat's way of working – as he reflected, 'I'm usually in front of the television. I have to have some source material around me to work off.'

Basquiat embraced the moving image in all its forms, including early Hollywood classics by Alfred Hitchcock; cartoons such as Popeye and Felix the Cat; sci-fi films like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1961); David Lynch's surreal work; and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which he apparently saw at the cinema ten times in one week. He surrounded himself with his favourite footage, amassing over 1,000 videotapes at a time when a home video set-up was incredibly rare.

Basquiat was particularly interested in the complex histories of film and television. The word 'VITAPHONE' appears on many of his works, referencing the pioneering sound-disc technology for 'talkies'. He may have learned about this from the book *The Warner Bros. Story: The Complete History of The Great Hollywood Studio* (1979). He became obsessed with the 1927 film *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature film to use synchronised dialogue, starring white actor Al Jolson in 'blackface'. Basquiat understood the power of television and cinema to capture collective consciousness, remaining acutely critical of the explicit racism in these areas of popular culture.

**Excerpt from 'State of the Art', filmed 1985,
broadcast on Channel 4 on 11 January 1987**

Writer: Sandy Nairne

Director: Geoff Dunlop

Producer: John Wyver

Video footage transferred to DVD, Forty-five sec

© Illuminations Television

'Untitled', c. 1983

Ink, masking tape and photograph on paper

Private collection

The photograph that acts as the focal point of this work features American child actor Matthew Beard, best known for playing the character of Stymie in the television series 'Our Gang (The Little Rascals)' from 1930 to 1935. Beard's trademark accessory as Stymie was his derby hat, which he was gifted by the comedian Stan Laurel when he was five years old. Basquiat tears the hat to resemble his own trademark – a crown of dreadlocks – accentuated with ink markings. Surrounding Beard are a number of unusual phrases, including the ingredients copied from a pack of 'DUCK SAUCE' and collaged fragments with the phrases 'PELO MALO' (Spanish for 'bad hair') and 'BRACCIO DI FERRO' (the Italian title for Popeye, translating literally as 'trial of strength' or 'arm wrestle'). Basquiat may have been inspired to make the work following the death of Beard in 1981.

'Untitled (Alice in Wonderland)', 1983

Graphite, paper collage and masking tape on paper

Private collect

Iconic characters from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' punctuate this composition, including the Mad Hatter (complete with teacups and sugar as if in the middle of his famous tea party), the Cheshire Cat, the Caterpillar and Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. Their cartoon style suggests that they originate from the Disney film adaptation from 1951, the title song of which became a jazz standard. Basquiat had aspired to be a cartoonist as a child, an ambition that can be traced in the playful drawing of these characters. Each of the collaged fragments are secured with masking tape to create a complex design, intended to be photo-mechanically enlarged into a silkscreen. Basquiat used this work as the basis for 'Wine of Babylon' (1984), in which he gave the Mad Hatter a black face, a transformation that challenged the overwhelming dominance of white characters within popular culture and in Disney productions in particular.

'Untitled (TV)', 1980–81

Collage and pen on paper

Collection Luigi Bonvicini Quina

'Untitled (Self-Portrait)', 1985

Oil stick, coloured pencil and pencil on paper

Guarded by Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

'Untitled (All Stars)', 1983

Oil stick, ink, acrylic, graphite and paper collage on paper
Schorr Family Collection

The title of this work, which appears on a torn fragment of pink paper at the top of the sheet, refers to Charlie Parker's All Stars, the band that he played with in his famous Savoy and Dial studio sessions in 1948. Max Roach was the drummer for these recordings and his name and portrait feature on the same pink paper. Elsewhere, Basquiat includes a half-white, half-black portrait with Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll written below. These are the names of the two white actors who wrote and voiced the American radio show 'Amos 'n' Andy'. This Harlem-set sitcom (1928–60) had a charged racial history. It was one of the first radio comedy series to feature primarily African-American characters. However, Gosden and Correll voiced the lead roles and continued to do so when a cartoon was made of the programme in the 1930s. When the show moved from radio to television in 1951, black actors played the majority of the roles.

'Untitled (Greenish Skin)', 1983

Acrylic, coloured crayon, oil stick and pencil on paper
Collection of Daniel Schorr

'A Panel of Experts', 1982

Acrylic, oil stick and paper collage on canvas with
exposed wooden supports and twine

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of Ira Young

Created for Basquiat's solo exhibition at the Fun Gallery in November 1982, 'A Panel of Experts' reflects the artist's interest in film, cartoons and television shows. The work is composed on canvas stretched over wooden supports bound together by twine, a technique that became

a trademark of the artist's work during this period. The inclusion of cartoon characters – such as the Road Runner from the 'Looney Tunes' cartoons, with his catchphrase, 'BEEP BEEP' – reminds us of Basquiat's early aspirations to be a cartoonist. The drawing of an explosive volcano perhaps references the eruption of the presumed dormant El Chichón in 1982, which was widely reported on television news at the time. Basquiat also includes several text elements, notably 'SATURDAY MORNING CARTOON©' which relates to his interest in morning television shows. 'VENUS' and 'MADONNA©' carry art-historical connotations, as well as connecting to Suzanne Mallouk (nicknamed Venus) and the unsigned singer Madonna, who were girlfriends of his at the time.

Interview

Becky Johnston and Tamra Davis interviewed Basquiat at the L'Ermitage Hotel in Beverly Hills, California in June 1985. The three friends had gone to a club the night before and discussed the possibility of doing an interview as part of the film Davis was shooting on Basquiat.

They had been friends since the early 1980s and Davis had been filming Basquiat intermittently in his studio since he had visited Los Angeles for his first exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery. They first met at an opening at Ulrike Kantor Gallery, where Davis worked. Basquiat said to her, 'Hey, let's put some music on' and transformed the back room into an exclusive dance space.

Basquiat agreed to very few formal interviews, making this film with Johnston and Davis a rare opportunity to enjoy an intimate conversation between friends.

'A Conversation with Basquiat', 1985

Directors: Tamra Davis and Becky Johnston

DVD, 21 min

© Tamra Davis