

**BOOM FOR REAL: THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT PRESENTS THE ART OF JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT IN GERMANY**

## **BASQUIAT BOOM FOR REAL**

**FEBRUARY 16 – MAY 27, 2018**

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) is acknowledged today as one of the most significant artists of the 20th century. More than 30 years after his last solo exhibition in a public collection in Germany, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting a major survey devoted to this American artist. Featuring more than 100 works, the exhibition is the first to focus on Basquiat's relationship to music, text, film and television, placing his work within a broader cultural context.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Basquiat teamed up with Al Diaz in New York to write graffiti statements across the city under the pseudonym SAMO©. Soon he was collaging baseball cards and postcards and painting on clothing, doors, furniture and on improvised canvases. Basquiat collaborated with many artists of his time, most famously Andy Warhol and Keith Haring. He starred in the film *New York Beat* with Blondie's singer Debbie Harry and performed with his experimental band Gray. Basquiat created murals and installations for New York nightclubs like Area and Palladium and in 1983 he produced the hip-hop record *Beat Bop* with K-Rob and Rammellzee.

Having come of age in the Post-Punk underground scene in Lower Manhattan, Basquiat conquered the art world and gained widespread international recognition, becoming the youngest participant in the history of the *documenta* in 1982. His paintings were hung beside works by Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter and Cy Twombly. Basquiat's raw, vibrant imagery is matched by a startling erudition, seen in the extensive fragments of bold, capitalized text that abound in his works. These bear witness to his encyclopedic interests and his experience as a young artist with no formal training. Basquiat maintained a playful approach to language and rebelled against political indifference through his searching texts.

This exhibition at the Schirn traces Basquiat's journey from his beginnings as an artist to his early death, aged 27, in 1988. Thematic sections illuminate the context in which his works were made and the story of their reception. It discusses questions such as the role of SAMO© and the influence of Downtown New York scene on Basquiat's artistic development and the significance of his interdisciplinary art production, which has seldom been considered before. At the Schirn, an outstanding selection of paintings, drawings, notebooks and objects by Basquiat are presented from public and private collections, together with rare films, photographs, music and archive material, which capture the range and dynamism of his practice over the years.

The exhibition *Basquiat. Boom for Real* is made possible by the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne.

"Basquiat's myth still overrides the scientific examination of his artistic oeuvre. And frequently the historic and cultural context in which his unusual works were created is neglected as well. The exhibition *Basquiat. Boom for Real* starts out from this premise, demonstrating the vitality and diversity of the artist's entire oeuvre and telling of the wide-ranging influences. Because Jean-Michel Basquiat's art is closely linked with life itself: social, political and art-historical subjects flow together in his work. It is a mixture which dissolves the boundaries of the disciplines and those of

his own identity. More than 30 years after Basquiat's last solo presentation in a public collection in Germany, the Schirn is dedicating a major overview exhibition to his oeuvre. It is a unique event", comments Dr. Philipp Demandt, the Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

Lisane and Jeanine Basquiat, the artist's sisters, on the exhibition: "If you want to know what there is to know about Jean-Michel, the place to go is to his work. Presenting it now to the public both in London and Frankfurt in this major survey is a great opportunity and very special to us".

## ARTWORKS AND SUBJECTS OF THE EXHIBITION

At the beginning of his artistic career, Basquiat created politically charged graffiti. In 1978, at the age of seventeen, he and his high-school friend Al Diaz operated under the pseudonym SAMO©, writing cryptic statements in black capital letters on the walls of buildings in New York. The graffiti were satirical attacks on the banality of American culture; their playful and rhythmical use of language soon made them unmistakable. This exhibition at the Schirn presents a large number of photographs by Henry Flynt, who documented this period. The staging within what was then the new artists' district of SoHo was decisive for the success of SAMO©. Papers such as the *SoHo Weekly News* and the *Village Voice* started campaigns to reveal the identity of SAMO©.

Basquiat had a sense of humour about his status as an artist. He was an autodidact who left school at the age of 16 and who never had any formal art training. Growing up in a cultured Brooklyn family, he regularly visited the New York museums as a child. He owned a comprehensive collection of artist's monographs which he used as sources. Even in his earliest paintings and drawings Basquiat showed that he knew how to borrow from the visual vocabulary of twentieth-century Western painting, while developing a style distinctively his own.

Basquiat achieved his breakthrough with the presentation of his works in the group exhibition at P.S. 1 *New York/New Wave*. Works such as *Untitled* (1980) – a sheet of metal over two metres high with spray-painted text: NEWYORK NEWAVE – are brought back together again at the Schirn for the first time since their original display. The enthusiasm of his contemporaries and the encouragement Basquiat received from his fellow-artists and critics can be experienced to this day. The works from his first solo exhibition in 1982 were full of explosive energy – layers of paint in intensive shades and scribbled, scratched arcs which resemble the movement lines in action cartoons. The Schirn also presents works from this period including *Untitled* (1982) showing a victorious boxer with his fists raised and a thorny halo.

Basquiat was not only a painter and graphic artist; he was also a performer, actor, poet, musician and DJ. He was thus a direct disciple of the collective tendencies of the international art scene of the 1970s and early 1980s to work in a multidisciplinary way. Together with Michael Holman, Vincent Gallo and Nicholas Taylor, Basquiat played clarinet and synthesizer in the band Gray. Jazz and blues play an important role in his oeuvre. In many paintings he studied the history of black jazz musicians – as, for example, in the work *King Zulu* (1986). He was an early protagonist of the hip-hop movement alongside Fab 5 Freddy, Toxic and Rammellzee. Under his own label *Tartown* he produced the record *Beat Bop* (1983), for which he also designed the cover. In the independent film *New York Beat* written by Glenn O'Brien (later released as *Downtown 81*), Basquiat was chosen for the main role and played the artist he would later become. The exhibition in the Schirn brings this era to life once more with the films *New York Beat* (1980-81), excerpts of Basquiat's appearances in the programme *TV Party* (1979–1982) as well as photographs of key figures from the Downtown scene such as Madonna, Debbie Harry, Grace Jones, Maripol and Andy Warhol. In the early 1980s Basquiat produced numerous collages, postcards and objects

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together with Keith Haring, Jennifer Stein, John Sex and others. The exhibition also shows a refrigerator *Untitled (Fun Fridge)* (1982) and a vase – also *Untitled* from 1982. On the initiative of Bruno Bischofberger, Basquiat made the acquaintance of Andy Warhol; they would create a series of joint works with Francesco Clemente. Basquiat and Warhol continued to cooperate between 1984 and 1985. The Schirn presents their collaborative piece *Arm and Hammer II* (1984) as well as and the double portrait *Dos Cabezas* (1982), which Basquiat painted immediately after his first meeting with Warhol.

Basquiat drew from his surroundings and experimented with different supports and materials. In the style of copying and pasting foreign content he took over material he had found and changed it to suit his sense of aesthetics. His approach was based on the cut-up technique of the Beat authors who experienced a revival during the early 1980s. He structured the picture surface with the conventions of quotations – footnotes, numbers, indexes – as well as grids, lines and vectors which recall mind maps and flow diagrams. His particular preference lay in the schematic representation of complex interconnections – from Leonardo da Vinci's codices to star charts to illustrations from encyclopaedias and reference works. It was here that Basquiat found the raw material for his art. He referred repeatedly in his works to those of famous artists, including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Titian and Leonardo da Vinci. The Schirn is also presenting his works *Untitled (Pablo Picasso)* (1984) and *Leonardo da Vinci's Greatest Hits* (1982). Basquiat recorded his thoughts and ideas in lined notebooks. The exhibition has assembled a selection of these books with poems, sketches, quotations, text fragments and addresses which served as both diaries and sources of inspiration.

Exhibition curated by Barbican Centre, London, in cooperation with the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

**CATALOG** *Basquiat. Boom for Real* edited by Dieter Buchhart and Eleanor Nairne with Lotte Johnson. With a foreword by Philipp Demandt and essays by Dieter Buchhart, Eleanor Nairne, Christian Campbell, Carlo McCormick, Glenn O'Brien, Francesco Martinelli and Jordana Moore Saggese; also including comprehensive archive and photo material, some of it published for the first time. German and English edition, each 296 pages, 312 illustrations, 24 x 28 cm (portrait format), hardcover; design: A Practice for Everyday Life; Prestel Verlag, Munich, ISBN 978-3-7913-6752-1 (German museum edition), ISBN 978-3-7913-5636-5 (English edition), approx. € 35 (Schirn), € 49.95 (German trade edition).

**DIGITORIAL** The Schirn provides a digitorial for use with the exhibition. This digital educational service is responsive and is available free of charge. It is supplied in both German and English and can be accessed under <http://www.schirn.de/basquiat/digitorial/en>.

**WIFI SPECIAL** The educational programme specially developed for use with the free SCHIRN WIFI can be accessed via the user's own smartphone or tablet under [www.schirn.de/wifi](http://www.schirn.de/wifi).

## **CROWN CLUB – SUPPORTING PROGRAMME**

Within the framework of the exhibition, the New York underground club scene of the 1970s and 1980s is celebrating a revival in the SCHIRN: Every Thursday from 7 p.m. the CROWN CLUB opens its doors. Inspired by the New York Mudd Club, talks, parties, film screenings and readings take place in a club atmosphere that is partly authentic and partly a new interpretation. The original Mudd Club was a place where the creative scene of Lower Manhattan would come together: it was here that Jean-Michel Basquiat met musicians and bands like Madonna, Lou Reed, DNA and the Talking Heads, as well as designers and performers like Betsey Johnson and Klaus Nomi and young independent film makers like Glenn O'Brien. An exchange took place which is still visible to

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this day in his artistic work. Basquiat's art was knowledge-based and drew on everything around him. The exhibition *Basquiat. Boom for Real* is open until 10 pm. Admission to the CROWN CLUB with valid exhibition ticket. The complete programme of events can be accessed under [www.schirn.de](http://www.schirn.de).

David Roth and Carl Jakob Haupt of **DANDY DIARY** – one of Germany's best-known men's fashion and lifestyle blogs – will organise the **opening of the CROWN CLUB on 22 February 2018 at 7.00 p.m.**, which will also be the great social media event, the SCHIRN MEETUP. DANDY DIARY are notorious for their parties accompanying the Fashion Weeks in New York, Berlin and Copenhagen.

**VENUE** SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **DURATION** 16 February–27 May, 2018 **INFORMATION** [www.schirn.de](http://www.schirn.de) **E-MAIL** [welcome@schirn.de](mailto:welcome@schirn.de) **TELEPHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **FAX** +49.69.29 98 82-240 **ADMISSION** € 12, € 9; free entrance for children under the age of eight **ADVANCED BOOKING AND EARLYBIRD TICKET** Tickets are available online under [www.schirn.de/tickets](http://www.schirn.de/tickets) **GUIDED TOURS** Wed. 8 pm, Thu. 7 pm, Sat. 5 pm, Sun. 4 pm **TOUR BOOKING** individual tours or group tours can be booked under Tel. +49 69 29 98 82-0 and E-Mail [fuehrungen@schirn.de](mailto:fuehrungen@schirn.de)

**MEDIA PARTNERS** Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Sleek, Rolling Stone **CULTURAL PARTNER** HR2 **TECHNOLOGY PARTNER** Samsung Electronics **CURATORS** Dr. Dieter Buchhart and Eleanor Nairne, Barbican Art Gallery, London **SCHIRN PROJECT MANAGEMENT** Matthias Ulrich

**THIS EXHIBITION IS MADE POSSIBLE BY** Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne

**SOCIAL MEDIA** The Schirn communicates about the exhibition in the social web with the HASHTAGS #Basquiat #BoomForReal #Schirn **FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE, INSTAGRAM, PINTEREST, SNAPCHAT** [schirnsnaps](https://www.instagram.com/schirnsnaps) **SCHIRN MAGAZINE** [www.schirn-magazin.de](http://www.schirn-magazin.de)

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