

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARTSIT: Jean-Michel Basquiat (Haiti 1960-New York City 1988)

A poet, musician, and graffiti prodigy under the name "SAMO" in late 1970s New York, Jean-Michel Basquiat had honed his signature painting style of obsessive scribbling, elusive symbols and diagrams, and mask-and-skull imagery by the time he was 20. "I don't think about art while I work," he once said. "I think about life." A self taught artist, Basquiat began drawing at an early age on sheets of paper his father, an accountant, brought home from the office. As he delved deeper into his creative side, his mother strongly encouraged him to pursue his artistic talents.

Basquiat drew his subjects from his own Caribbean heritage: his father was Haitian and his mother of Puerto Rican descent and a convergence of African-American, African, and Aztec cultural histories with Classical themes and contemporary heroes like athletes and musicians. Basquiat's diverse cultural heritage was one of his many sources of inspiration. Jean-Michel was also inspired at a young age when his mother gave him a gray's anatomy book after he was in an accident. He also looked to comic books, pop culture and paintings of other artists.

Jean-Michel had this saying, "boom for real" meaning he would take all the things in his world that inspire him, big or small, interpret them through his own vision and make them explode onto the canvas equally for us to look at and interpret. His art makes political, personal and social statements, often using free association texts, drawings and statements. Sometimes humorous, sometimes disturbing, his art is every bit as fun as it is heavy.

Often associated with Neo-expressionism, Basquiat received massive acclaim in only a few short years, showing alongside artists like Julian Schnabel, David Salle, and Francesco Clemente. In 1983, he met Andy Warhol, who would come to be a mentor and idol. The two collaborated on a series of paintings before Warhol's death in 1987, followed by Basquiat's own untimely passing a year later.

In May 2016, a painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat sold for \$57.3 million. One year later, another painting of his from 1982, Untitled, sold for \$110.5 million, making it the sixth-most-expensive work of art ever purchased at auction, and setting a record for an American artist.