

Yawar

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History of Textile, Fashion and Accessory

Decade Designer Presentation

Jean Michel Basquiat

Jean Michel Basquiat was an American painter in the 1980s. He was famous for his primitive style of painting. He was one of the first well recognized African American artists. He was also friends with the famous pop artist Andy Warhol.

Basquiat was born in Brooklyn, New York on December 22, 1960. His father was a Haitian American and his mother was Puerto Rican. His diverse family background inspired a lot of his work. He could speak three languages, Haitian Creole, Spanish and English

At the age of 6 he was involved in a car accident which caused a lot of internal bleeding. As a result of which his spleen had to be removed. During his stay at the hospital, his mother brought him a Gray's Anatomy book. This book inspired him to draw skulls, human anatomy figures and animals in his work later on.

Basquiat was from a middle class family. His father was an accountant and his mother was creative. But she could never pursue art as a career. So when young Basquiat used to scribble on

the sheets of paper his farther brought home from work, his mother encouraged him to explore his artistic abilities.

However Basquiat never went to an art school and was a self-taught artist. He started Graffiti under the name “SAMO” with his friend Al Diaz in New York City. SAMO included text and drawings that challenged the institutions, religion and class system. SAMO rose to popularity before Basquiat was known.

To make ends meet Basquiat used to sell postcards and sweatshirts, with his art work on them. When he first met Andy Warhol he sold him some of his postcards. Basquiat and Andy Warhol became good friends. They even collaborated on different projects. Usually Warhol would paint first and then Basquiat would layer his work on top of it. The death of Andy Warhol deeply saddened Basquiat.

Basquiat was neo-expressionist painter. His work reflected themes such as violence and racism against the African American community in America, the inequalities caused due to class system and the adversities of mass production.

His work included the use of bright colors, human anatomy figures, animals and text. He worked with different mediums such as spray paints, oil paints, crayons and chalk. In his early career he used almost anything available to paint on be it an old plank of wood or a broken piece of furniture. In-fact he started painting on canvas later in his career when had they money to afford it.

One of the most famous symbols used by Basquiat was his “crown” that he used to celebrate the majestic royalty of black people and to deem them as saints. His work spoke against the oppression of the African American people.

Basquiat rose to fame in a short time period and had gallery shows all over the world. He started earning well and used to buy high end designer suits to wear while he was painting. He was a muse for many designers back in the 80s. He also dated Madonna for a brief time period.

However he had a drug addiction problem and was struggling with it. He used to isolate himself for long periods of time, this behavior concerned his friends. He also went to Hawaii for rehab and returned back as sober. But the sudden death of his close friend Andy Warhol left him deeply affected. He died on August 22, 1988 in New York City, at the age of 27 due to a drug overdose.

His work still holds the record for the highest price for a painting by a American as well as a black artist. In May 2017 a Japanese billionaire bought his work “Untitled Skull” for 110.5 million dollars at an auction. He was one of the first well known African American artists.

His work continues to inspire the art and fashion world. There have been various collaborations between the Estate of Basquait and different designers across the world. His work can be seen on shirts, footwear, watches and makeup products.