

76 GRAND STREET NEW YORK NY 10013



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# JEAN-MICHEL

# BASQUIAT

## 1981: THE STUDIO OF THE STREET

**CURATED BY DIEGO CORTEZ AND GLENN O'BRIEN**

**MAY 4 – MAY 27, 2006**

**76 GRAND STREET**

Deitch Projects is pleased to present Jean-Michel Basquiat, *1981: The Studio of the Street*. Curated by two close friends of the artist, Diego Cortez and Glenn O'Brien, this exhibition focuses on the most important transitional year in his oeuvre: 1981.

1981 was the year that Jean-Michel made the transition from working on the street to working in the studio. After attracting considerable attention in the *Times Square Show* in June of 1980, Basquiat backed up his nascent notoriety with a wall of phenomenal works in Diego Cortez's *New York/ New Wave* exhibition at PS 1 which opened in February of 1981. It was in the middle of that year that dealer Annina Nosei offered Basquiat his first studio space of his own to prepare work for her group show *Public Address* opening in September.

Basquiat first became celebrated for his work on the streets signed with his tag, SAMO. In the late 70s early 80s, much of downtown New York was

like a 24 hour-a-day open art gallery with artists like Basquiat and Keith Haring communicating with each other through concrete poetry and artworks on public walls. Because so many of the artists, musicians and writers lived in close proximity to one another on the borders of Soho, the Lower East Side and the East Village, art was part of a daily interaction on the street corner.

But between the world of spray painted poetry and the world of what Peter Schjeldahl called "New York big-painting aesthetics" lies the fantastic point of charged contact that was Basquiat in 1981. Marrying an exuberant spontaneity and *art brut* sensibility with a firm command of not only art materials but art history, Basquiat would go on to define the eighties neo-expressionist idiom and remains today its most compelling example.

This exhibition examines this charged point of contact by including works that show his progression from text to text and image, from

materials found on the street to large, traditional painted canvasses, and from pure drawing to his uniquely evocative hybrid of drawing and painting.

Many motifs in this exhibition point to Basquiat's early focus of attention on the urban streetscape. Tenement buildings, doors, windows, fire escapes and fender-benders make up most of the content of these early works. Not only did the view from his Brooklyn backyard window shape the characters in these pieces, but also many of the artworks were being made physically *on* things he found on the street as well; scraps of paper, shopping bags, doors, and salvaged wood.

Basquiat's exploration related closely to what was going on in the music scene at the time in New York where New Wave musicians like Arto Lindsay or James White and the Blacks broke sound down

to its basics to reinvent musical expression. Jean-Michel was doing similar things with painting and drawing: deconstructing work into disjointed symbols, paring down meaning to text and image, and uncovering the skeleton of painting by insistently bringing forward the drawing beneath.

Diego Cortez was the first person to bring the work of Jean Michel Basquiat to the attention of the public. He included Basquiat in the important *New York/ New Wave* show he curated at PS 1 and acted as his first agent and promoter. Glenn O'Brien met Basquiat when he made an appearance on Glenn's legendary public access television show, TV PARTY in 1979. O'Brien also wrote *Downtown 81*, starring Basquiat, one of the most important documents of the art and music community at that time.

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