



Basquiat, 1983

Photograph: Lee Jaffe

Basquiat was [interviewed in 1982 at age 21](#) on the cusp of his rising international fame. He explains his interest in books and history, the relationship between words and images, and how he gathers inspiration. [Basquiat's sisters, Lisane and Jeanine, reflected](#) as adults about their brother's genius and legacy, and the sensitive man behind the provocative myth that grew after his death.

[The Brooklyn Museum](#) brought together over 100 works in their 2005 retrospective, showcasing many pieces never seen on U.S. soil and tracing the artist's development, legacy, and lasting relevance.

[Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks](#), organized by the Brooklyn Museum in 2015, gave audiences a glimpse into the mind and reflective process that fueled the artist. Alongside archival material and finished paintings, 160 pages of the deeply personal, rarely seen journals explored the importance of writing, sketching, and reflection in Basquiat's work.

PBS documentary series *American Masters* celebrated the 30th anniversary of Basquiat's death in 2018 with [Basquiat: Rage to Riches](#), an intimate profile compiled from archival footage and interviews with surviving family and friends.

In 2017, gallerist and curator Fred Hoffman, who worked closely with Basquiat for years in California, published [the first comprehensive art historical study](#) of the artist's career, with in-depth analysis of over 150 paintings and works on paper.

The Barbican Gallery, London, hosted [the UK's first large-scale survey of Basquiat's career](#) in 2018 with over 100 works supplemented by archival materials, film excerpts, and photographs. In conjunction with the show, [The Guardian](#) spoke with those closest to Basquiat during his days as a struggling artist and subsequent rise to fame in 1980s New York.

In 2019, [The Brant Foundation Art Study Center](#) opened their new East Village space – comprising 7,000 square feet across four floors – with an immersive and comprehensive homage to Basquiat's relationship with neighborhood and its artistic past. The foundation's exhibition website includes a virtual tour and extensive installation views of the 70 works on view.

[The Guggenheim's 2019 exhibition, Defacement](#), honored Basquiat's engagement with contemporary issues such as the neglect of and hostility towards black artists in a dominantly white art market, and the fragility of black bodies under the force of police and local authorities. The exhibition itself became [embroiled in conversations about equity and discrimination](#).

[Writing the Future](#) runs through spring 2021 at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, exploring Basquiat's relationships and collaborations with the hip-hop community and how his career embodies the artistic and material transition of street art from haphazard graffiti adorning subways and sidewalks, to canvas and paper mounted in galleries. [Digital resources](#) explore the artist and major themes in the show.



Basquiat, 1986

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Self Portrait, 1983

Acrylic, oil, oilstick, and paper collage on three hinged wood panels

Private Collection; L2026:32.1

As a half Haitian and half Puerto Rican artist living in 1980s New York, Jean-Michel Basquiat was critical of the art world's tendency to stereotype artists based on their biography. **Self Portrait** grapples with Basquiat's own identity: in the center panel, fiery red crayon pierces through the artist's eyes and mouth. By contrast, the silhouette on the right is still. This split self-image may point to the artist's navigation of his own dual ethnicities and internal struggle between speaking out and remaining silent about his experience of racism in the institutional art world. The twin portraits are framed by Basquiat's musical inspirations: the left panel is a tribute to soprano jazz saxophonist Ben Webster (1909-1973) and the right panel features lyrics by pianist and composer Thelonious Monk (1917-1982). **Self Portrait** suggests the significant role that music and musicians played in Basquiat's sense of his own identity and creative influences.

On view June 17 – September 20, 2026





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Famous, 1982

Acrylic and xerox collage on canvas stretched on wood supports

Private Collection; L2026:39.1

Jean-Michel Basquiat made the transition from graffiti artist to easel painter in the early 1980s, catapulting his career and solidifying his impact on the development of Neo-Expressionism. As a sharp critic of power structures, racism, and colonialism in the art world, his works confront these systems with intermingled text and imagery. **Famous** is a rare, double-sided painting that features a xerox collage of the artist's signature sketches overlaid with a Black, skull-like face and the word "famous" in acrylic paint. As the artist once said: "I wanted to be a star, not a gallery mascot."

On view June 3 – September 6, 2026

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Untitled, 1982

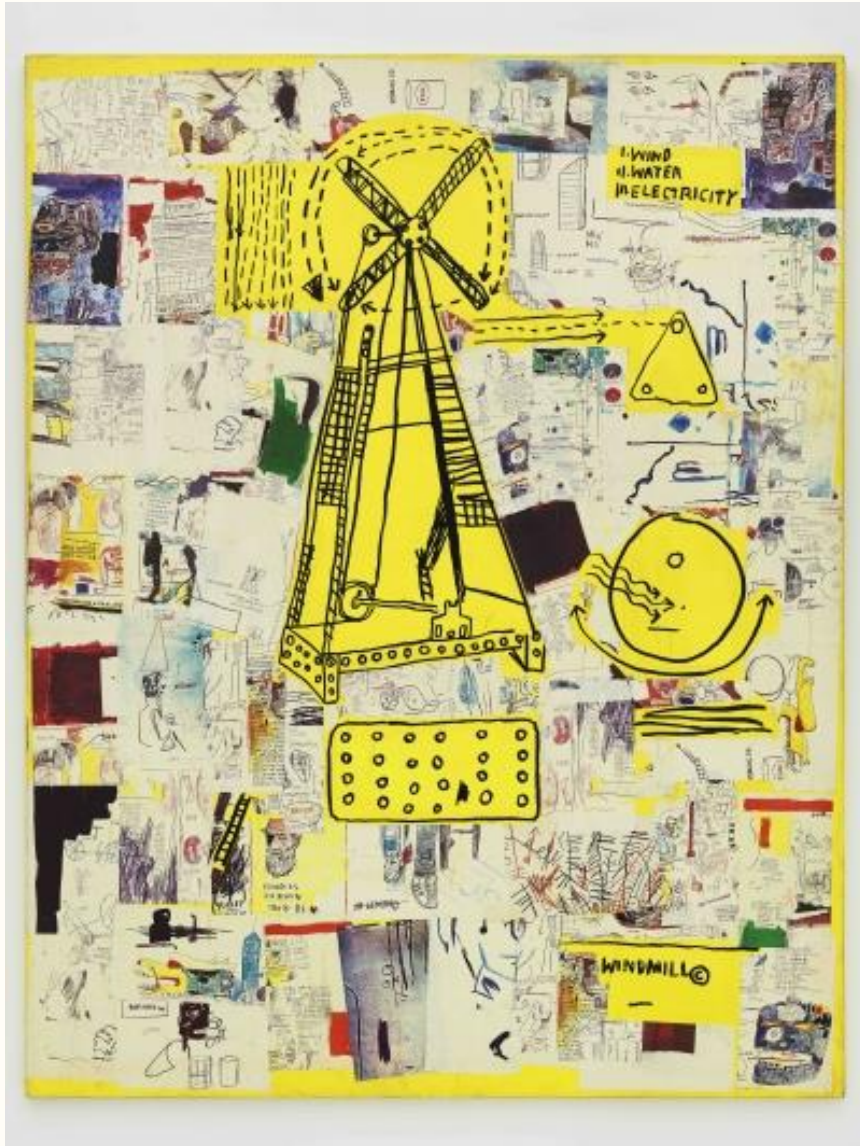
Oil stick on paper

Acrylic and oilstick on canvas

Private Collection; L2026.21.1

On view May 6 – August 9, 2026





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

QUIJ, 1985

Acrylic, silkscreen, and Xerox collage on canvas

Private Collection; L2026:2.1

Born in Brooklyn to Haitian and Puerto Rican parents, Jean-Michel Basquiat grew up speaking English, Spanish, and French. At the height of his rise to fame, the artist took an extensive trip to Europe that culminated in Amsterdam. **QUIJ** takes inspiration from Dutch language and sites, particularly the iconic windmill. The work highlights Basquiat's interest in systems—from the industrial use of wind to harvest electricity to the natural functions of the Water Cycle. These subjects are combined with references to the artist's earlier paintings, which are incorporated into the canvas with collage and silkscreen techniques.

On view February 25 – August 24, 2026

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Untitled, 1982

Oil stick on paper

Stone Hill Collection; L2025:88.1

“Most young kings get their heads cut off.” Born in Brooklyn to Haitian and Puerto Rican parents, Jean-Michel Basquiat burst into the New York art scene in the late 1970s. He was first known for graffiti works amid growing hip-hop culture in Lower East Side Manhattan, but **Untitled** was created when the artist was gaining wide international acclaim. The central figure wears a crown of thorns, with a three-pointed crown hovering at the top of a nearby ladder. Basquiat often used crowns in his work to pay tribute to his family roots and grapple with his meteoric ascension to fame.

On view October 22, 2025 – January 25, 2026



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Untitled, 1984

Acrylic, spray paint and paper collage on canvas

Private Collection; L2025:57.1

Jean-Michel Basquiat made the transition from graffiti artist to easel painter in the early 1980s, catapulting his career to critical and commercial success. His distinctive, Neo-Expressionist style was fueled by complex racial and political themes that made a major impact on contemporary art. **Untitled** features many of Basquiat's iconic motifs, including the three-pointed crown, crocodiles that allude to his Haitian heritage, and written references to rubber and carbon that have fueled colonial violence. As the artist famously described, his work is about "royalty, heroism, and the streets." However, this painting has another layer of fame, as it was part of David Bowie's private art collection until an auction in November 2024.

On view June 11 – September 14, 2025





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Valentine, 1984

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:66.1

On Valentine's Day, 1984, Jean-Michel Basquiat gifted a painting to his then-girlfriend, Paige Powell (b. 1951). Working on the staff of Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine at that time, Powell was immersed in the New York art world; she took thousands of photographs and had mounted an exhibition of Basquiat's work in her Upper West Side apartment in 1983. **Valentine** is Basquiat's romantic portrait of himself and Powell as chimpanzees feeding each other. The painting remained in Powell's personal collection until this year, when it was sold at Art Basel.

Powell loves animals and has volunteered with the Oregon Zoo and other animal rescue agencies in her home state of Oregon since the 1970s. As she describes: "I used to tell Jean-Michel stories about the chimpanzees and show him photographs of them that I had brought with me to New York. He was really fascinated by it all. He eventually started having dreams that we were both chimpanzees. In one dream he told me, he was 10 years old and sitting in the back of a station wagon. I was a chimpanzee sitting next to him and we were going on a road trip with his parents. He felt safe because this tiny chimpanzee (who was me) was holding onto his little finger." – Paige Powell, 2023

On view September 20 – December 31, 2023

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
59 Cents (2 For a Dollar), 1983
 Acrylic on canvas, in 2 parts

Private Collection; L2023:26.2

Jean-Michel Basquiat made a major impact on the development of Neo-Expressionism and graffiti art in 1980s New York. Coming from a Haitian-Puerto Rican family background, the artist was a sharp critic of power structures, racism, and colonialism in the both the art world and in contemporary society; his works confront the legacies of these systems with intermingled text and imagery. **59 Cents (2 For a Dollar)** reflects Basquiat's frequent theme of class struggles and wealth inequality. The artist often incorporated references to commerce and money in his artworks, which began as disregarded street art practices, broke into the mainstream art world, and now represent some of the most expensive works on the market. As Basquiat once said: "I wanted to be a star, not a gallery mascot."

On view May 31 – September 3, 2023





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Untitled (Boxer), 1983
Acrylic on canvas, stretched on wooden pallet

Private Collection; L2023:34.1

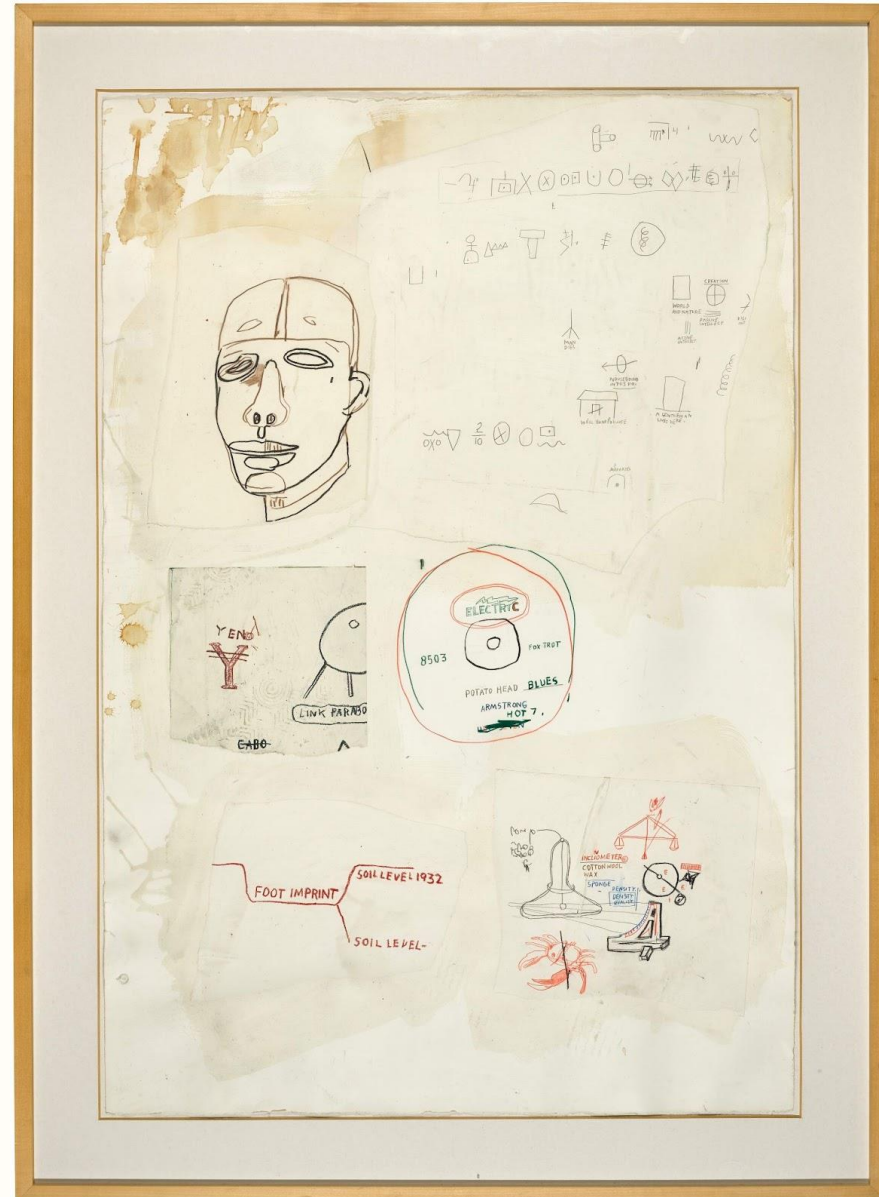
Jean-Michel Basquiat was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. His short but meteoric rise in the late 1970s and 1980s began with graffiti and street art in Lower Manhattan tagged SAMO (“same old shit”). Basquiat passionately rebelled against the predominately white art world, often calling out racist systems of colonialism and embracing black history and culture. **Untitled (Boxer)** features one of the artist’s favorite subjects: the Black boxer. Basquiat identified with legendary athletes Jersey Joe Walcott (1914-1994), Joe Louis (1914-1981), Muhammad Ali (1942-2016), and Sugar Ray Leonard (b. 1956), seeing them as heroes of self-made power. His boxer figures stand victorious, wearing a championship crown, in a pose that reflects the Black Power salute. As the artist once said: “The black person is the protagonist in most of my paintings. I realized that I didn’t see many paintings with black people in them.”

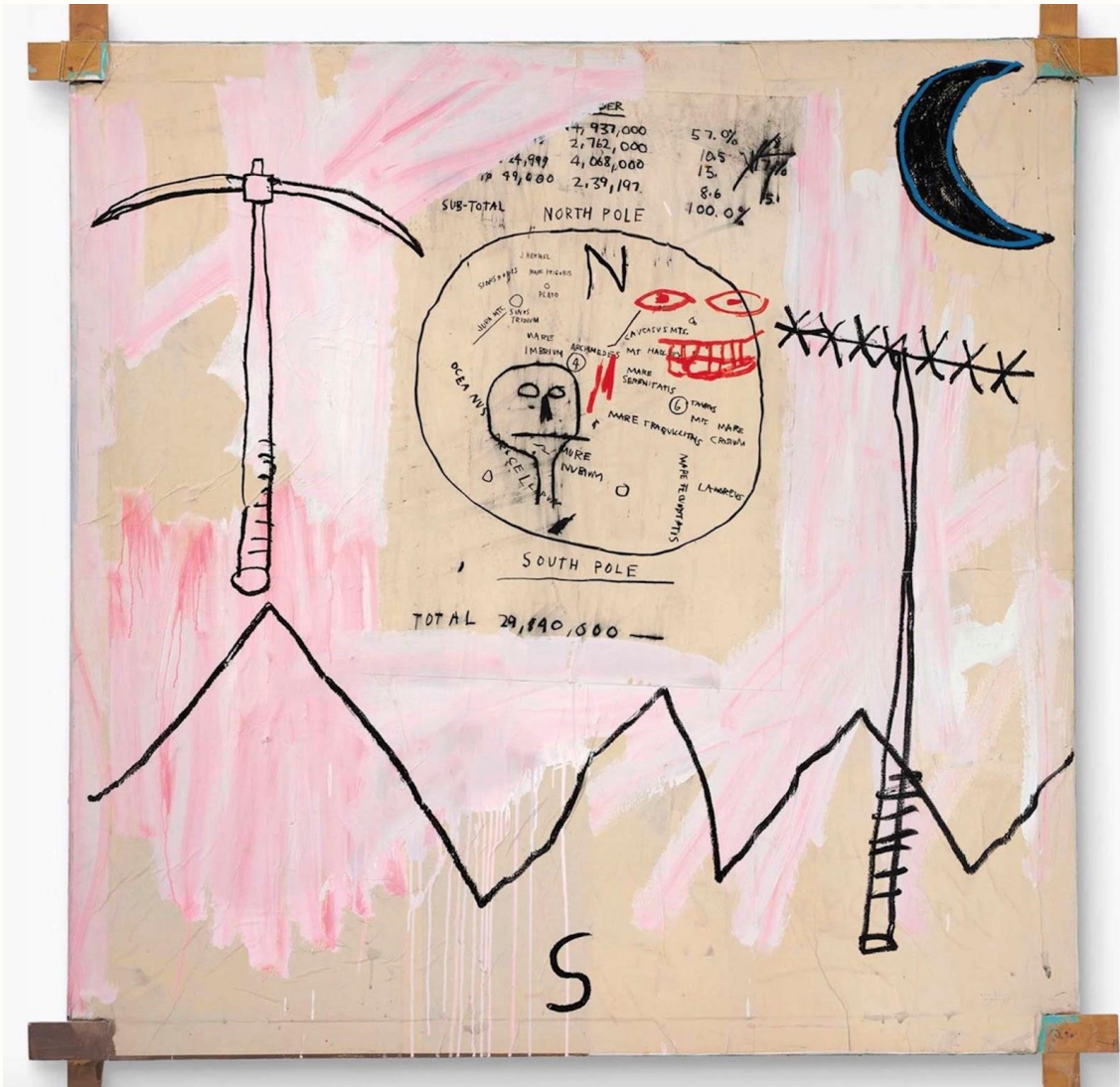
On view May 3 – August 6, 2023

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Untitled, 1988
Crayon and xerox collage on paper

Private Collection; L2022:137.1

On view January 11 – April 16, 2023





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Both Poles, 1982

Acrylic, oil stick, and paper collage on paper mounted on canvas with tied wood supports

Private Collection; L2022:58.1

Jean-Michel Basquiat's short but prolific career made a major impact on the Neo-expressionist movements of the 1980s. Embedded in hip-hop and graffiti culture in New York, Basquiat was interested in dichotomies of wealth/poverty, integration/segregation, text/image, and abstraction/figuration. **Both Poles** evokes this interest in opposition; the mixed-media painting juxtaposes North and South, heaven and earth, and excavation and transmission through signs and symbols evoking mountains, the moon, a pickaxe, and a power pylon. Though these ideas contrast, Basquiat's composition holds them in constant relation to one another. The painting was exhibited in Basquiat's debut exhibition at Larry Gagosian's Los Angeles gallery in 1982, a breakthrough year of commercial success for the young artist.

On view August 17 – November 20, 2022

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

His Glue Sniffing Valet, 1983

Acrylic on canvas

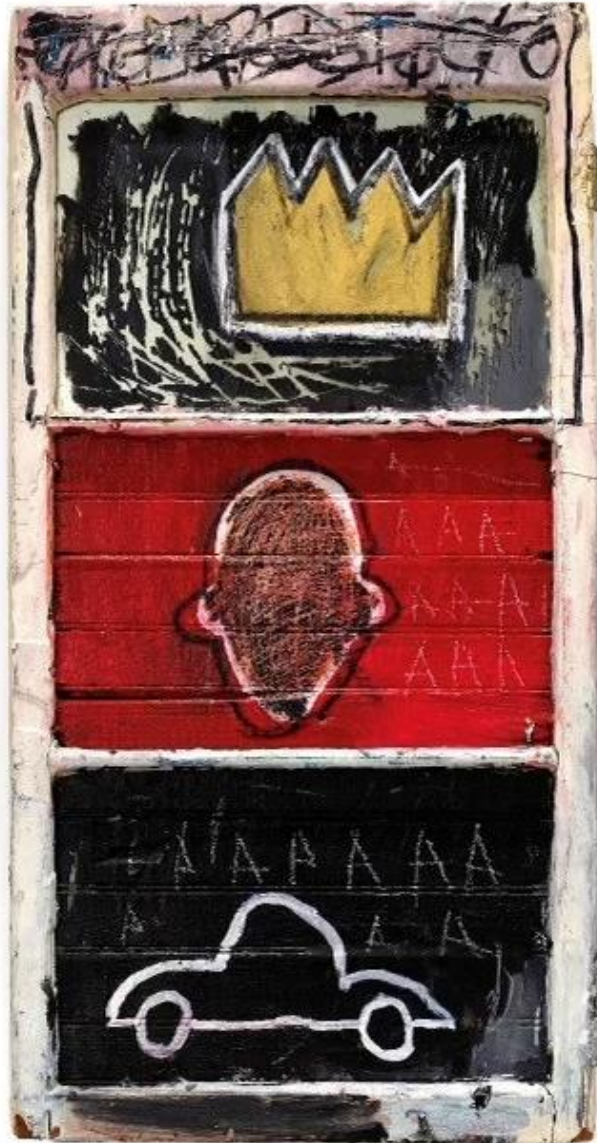
Private Collection; L2022:68.1

“I opened my door one morning last spring at about ten o’clock and there was a guy in a wheelchair, with the chair placed to get the maximum amount of sun. He tells me he’s a Cajun and behind him was his friend, sniffing glue. He was begging money and giving it to his friend. I gave him what he wanted and he tried to draw me close in gratitude. But he was dirty and I refused. Later I felt bad about that. He clearly was a visitation and I had to deal with him in paint.” - Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1985

His Glue Sniffing Valet is a rare painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat that documents a vivid moment in the artist’s life. The painting towers over seven feet tall, depicting the wheelchair-bound Cajun (or Louisiana Creole) man with Basquiat’s signature African mask style. The painting’s namesake, the glue-sniffing friend, hovers behind as a silhouette. As a Haitian-Puerto Rican artist himself—and hence someone whose heritage shared the Creole, French-colonial impact on people of the Caribbean—perhaps Basquiat took the encounter as a prompt for a self-reflection by proxy as he navigated life as a young, but increasingly successful Black artist in 1980s New York.

On view August 17 – December 4, 2022





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Minor Success, 1980

Acrylic, oil stick and gold paint on mirror and wood

Private Collection; L2022:50.1

Born in Brooklyn to Haitian and Puerto Rican parents, Jean-Michel Basquiat burst into the New York art scene in the late 1970s. Basquiat was first known for graffiti works co-produced with Al Diaz (b. 1959), tagged SAMO, in the midst of growing hip-hop culture in Lower East Side Manhattan. **Minor Success** is among the earliest artworks Basquiat produced when breaking into the mainstream art market. The painting features three of the artist's iconic motifs: the car, the mask-like head, and the golden crown. Found throughout the artist's oeuvre, these three symbols evoke Basquiat's childhood experience of a serious car accident, his identity as a mixed-ethnicity artist, and his artistic rule over the downtown New York art scene. The artist once said: "I don't listen to what art critics say. I don't know anybody who needs a critic to find out what art is."

On view July 21 – October 23, 2022

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Hardware Store, 1983

Acrylic, oilstick and paper collage on canvas mounted on tied wood supports

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2021:168.1

On view December 8, 2021 – May 15, 2022





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Self Portrait, 1983

Acrylic, oil paint stick, paper collage and metal hinges on wood

Private Collection; L2021:153.1

As a half Haitian and half Puerto Rican artist living in 1980s New York, Jean-Michel Basquiat was critical of the art world's tendency to stereotype artists based on their biography. **Self Portrait** grapples with Basquiat's own identity in this setting. In the center panel, fiery red crayon pierces through the artist's eyes and mouth. By contrast, the silhouette on the right is still. This split self-image may point to the artist's navigation of his own dual ethnicities and internal struggle between speaking out and remaining silent about his experience of racism in the institutional art world. The twin portraits are framed by Basquiat's musical inspirations: the left panel is a tribute to soprano jazz saxophonist Ben Webster (1909-1973) and the right panel features lyrics by pianist and composer Thelonious Monk (1917-1982). **Self Portrait** suggests the significant role that music and musicians played in Basquiat's sense of his own identity and his creative influences.

On view December 8, 2021 – March 13, 2022

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Untitled, 1980

Two different black and gold markers on pink pin graphed heavy index paper

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2021:140.1

Jean-Michel Basquiat, George Condo, and Keith Haring are three of the most influential artists who pioneered the Neo-Expressionist movement in 1980s New York. In addition to strong friendships, they greatly respected each other's work and often collaborated. Condo later reflected on his friendship with Basquiat: "We basically hung out as artists all the time and would meet up in different parts of the world and get smashed and go out and pull pranks on everyone." Tragically, Basquiat died in 1988 at the young age of twenty-seven. Condo's **George Imitating Basquiat** and Haring's **Untitled** offer an homage to Basquiat's prolific legacy, featuring the artist's iconic crown motif that appears in the upper-right corner of Basquiat's **Untitled**.

On view December 8, 2021 – March 13, 2022



On display with Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1988 and George Condo, *George Imitating Basquiat*, 1989



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Untitled, 1984

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:124.1

On view October 6, 2021 – January 9, 2022

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

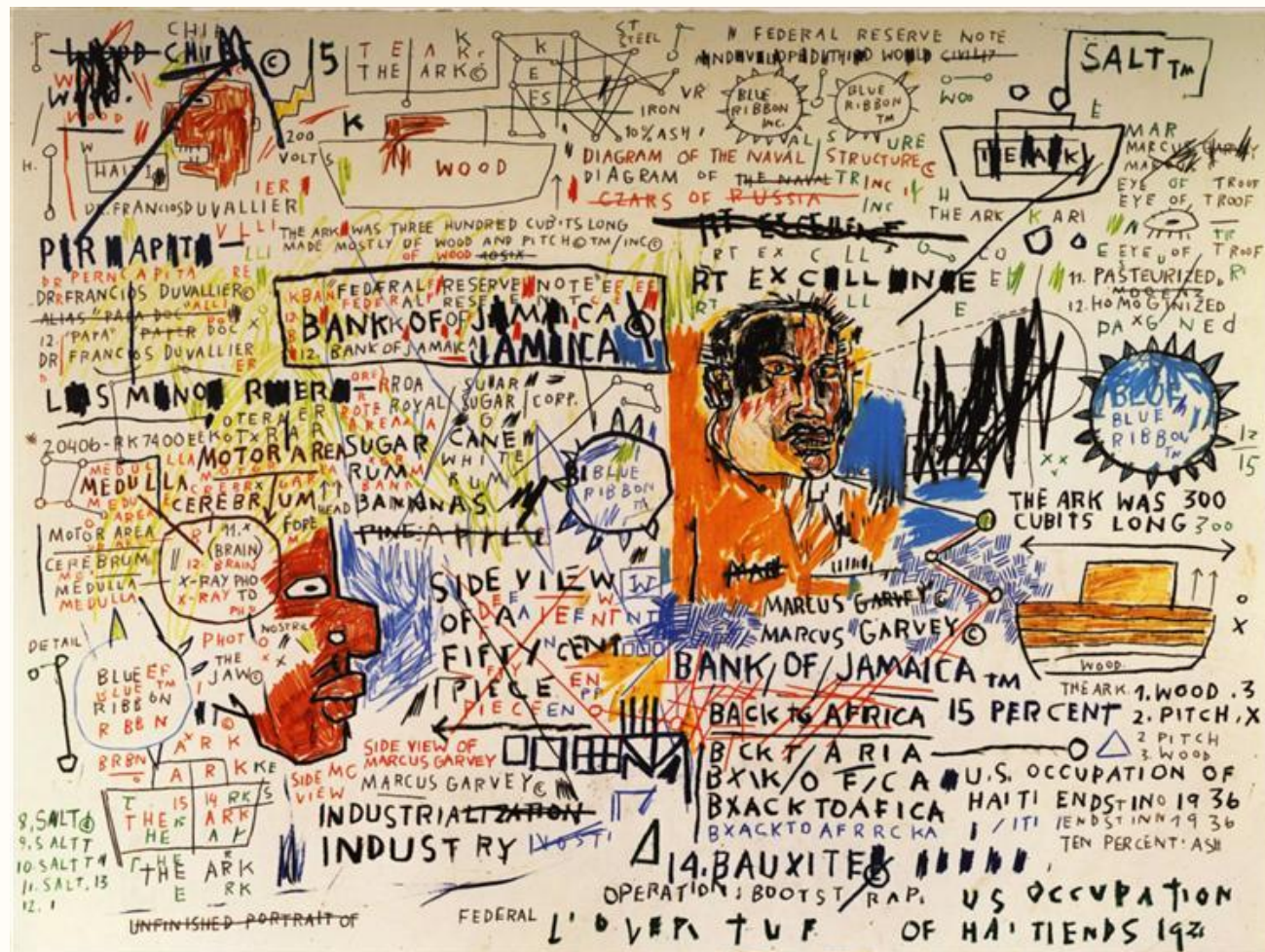
50 cent Piece from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

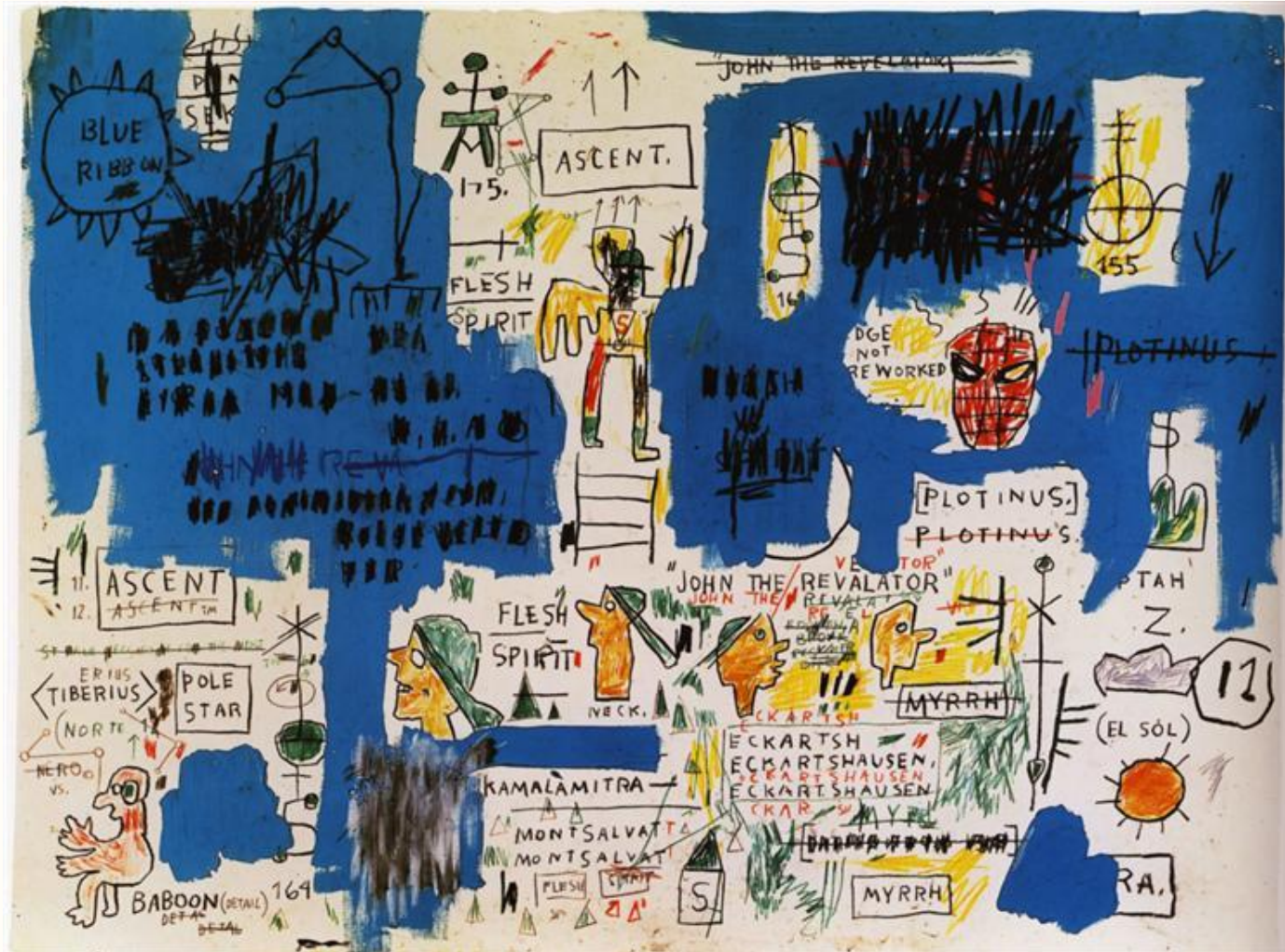
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper;
Suite of 32

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

Born in Brooklyn to Haitian and Puerto Rican parents, Jean-Michel Basquiat burst into the New York art scene in the late 1970s. Basquiat was first known for graffiti works co-produced with Al Diaz (b. 1959), tagged SAMO, in the midst of the growing hip-hop culture in Lower East Side Manhattan. When Basquiat's work was pulled into the 1980s art market boom, he was quickly invited to exhibit in prestigious New York galleries and museums. In response, Basquiat was critical of the institutional racism prevalent in the 1980s contemporary art world he inhabited, and in the United States as a whole. His prolific body of work often addressed the hypocrisy of both excluding and tokenizing artists of color in galleries, museums, auction houses, and scholarship. **The Daros Suite** addresses these themes throughout the history of art and highlights powerful Black historical figures including François Duvalier, Marcus Garvey, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Malcolm X. At the same time, the thirty-two drawings offer Basquiat's commentaries on life, art, politics, and economics in the 1980s United States.

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021





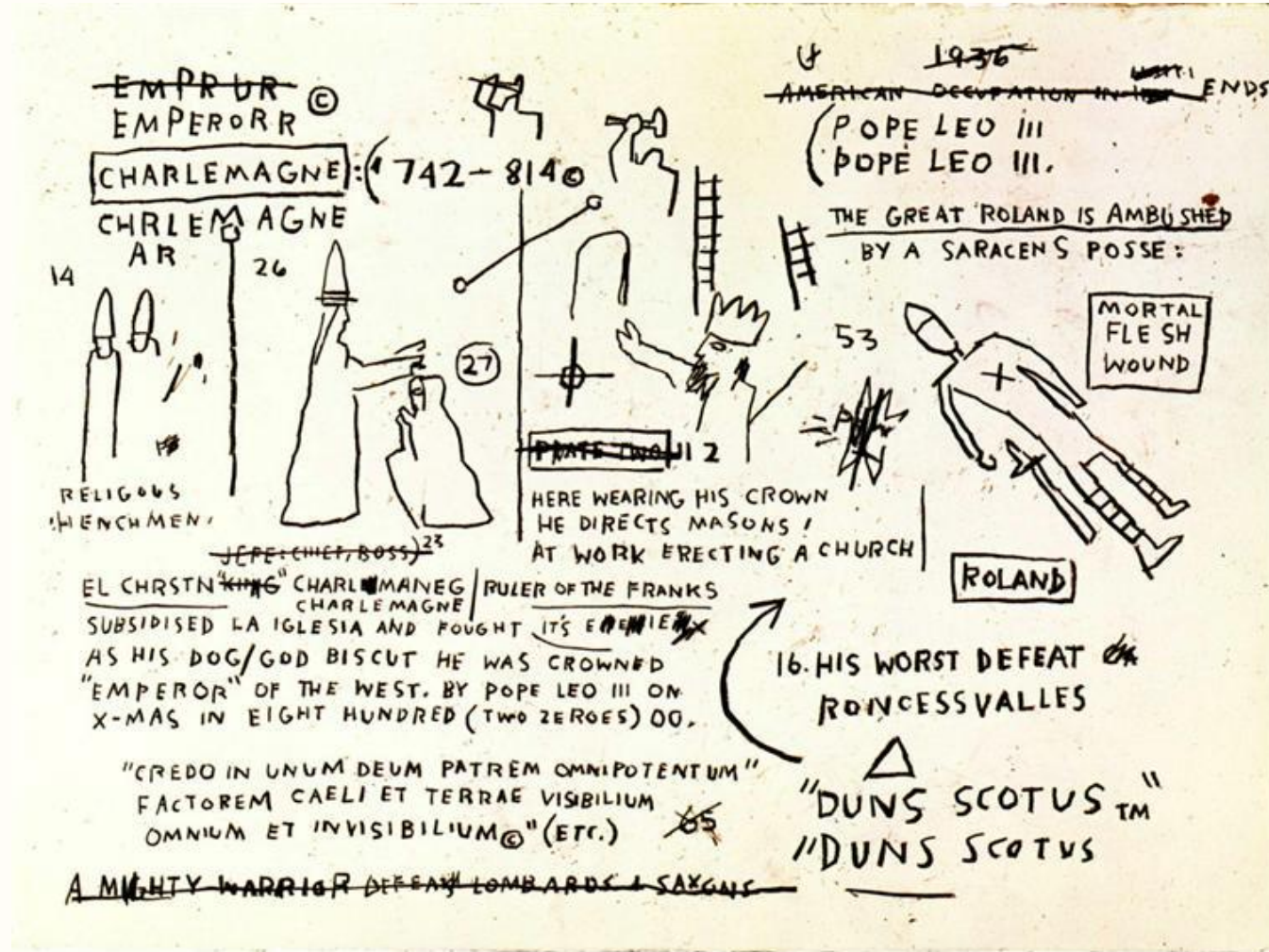
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Ascent from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

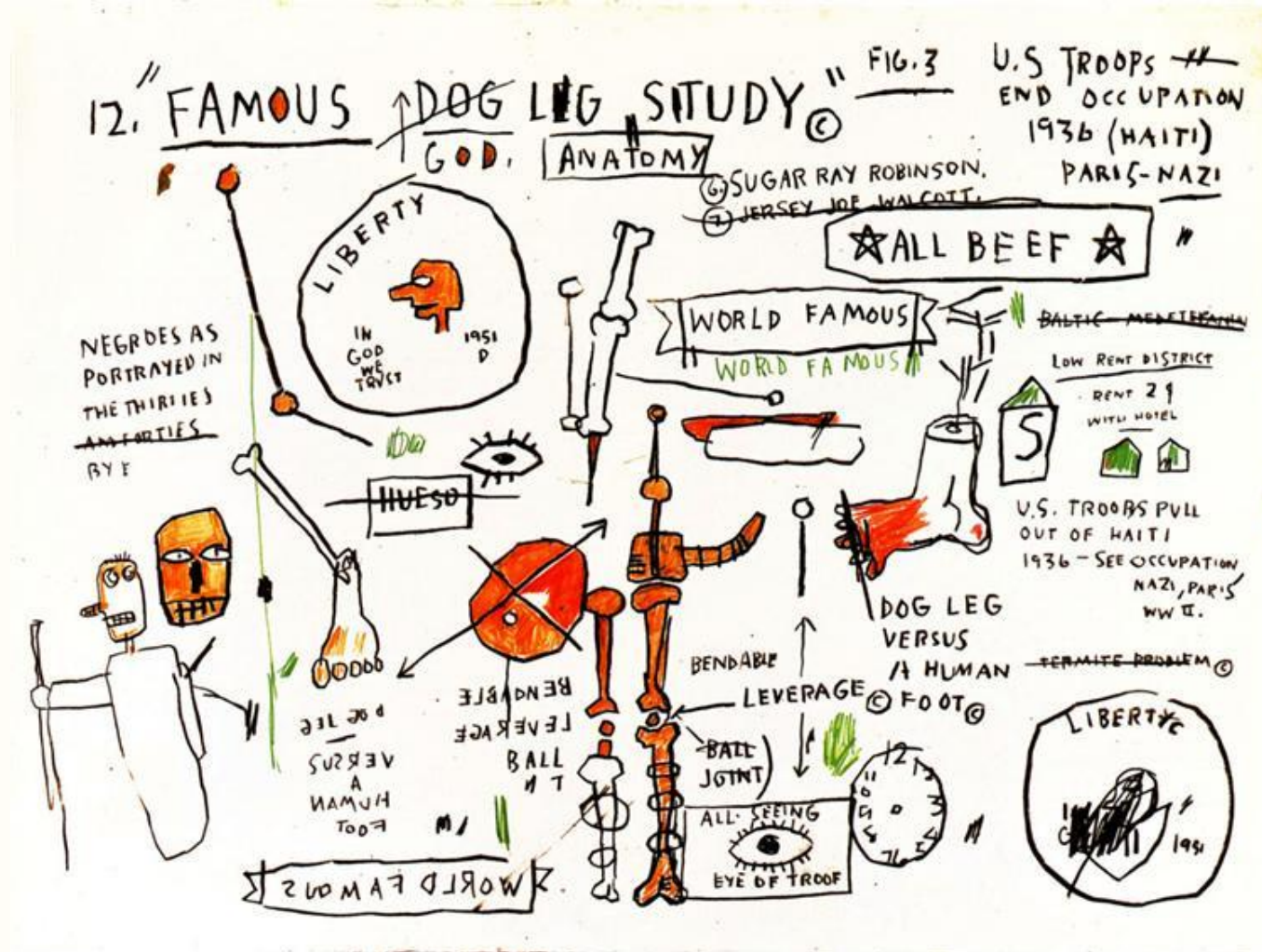


Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Bishop from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

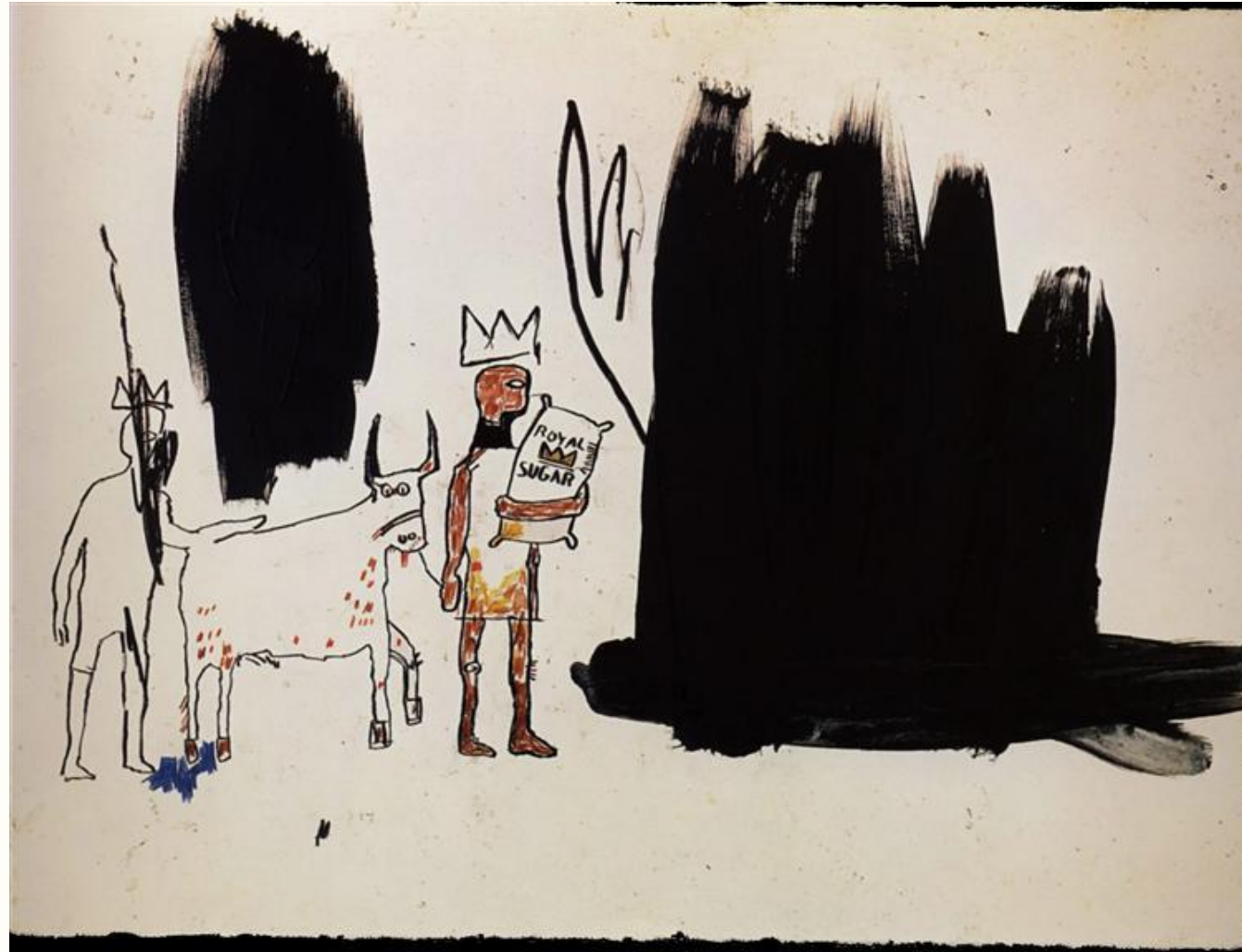
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Dog Leg Study from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
 Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Dwellers in the Marshes from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



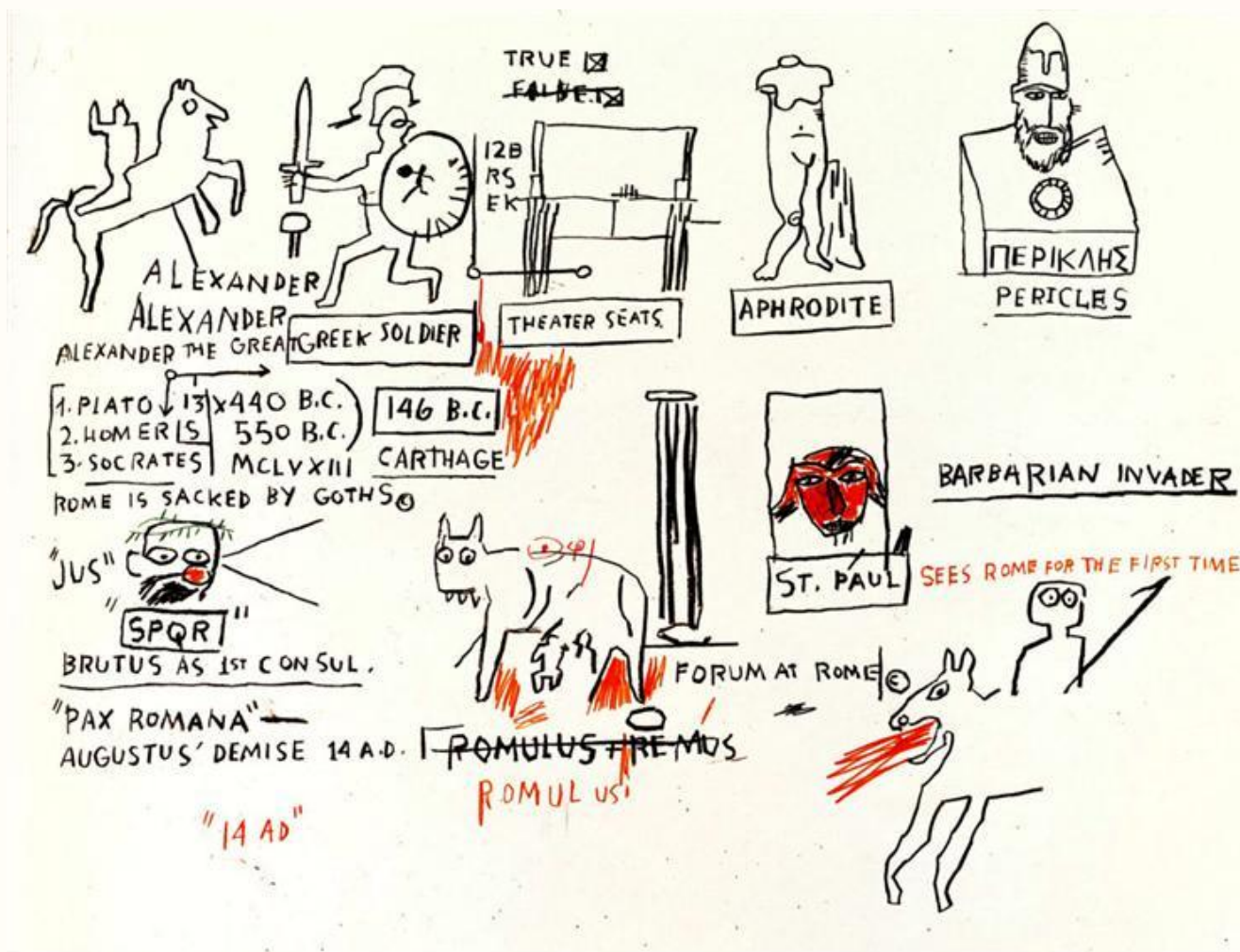
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Formless from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

False from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

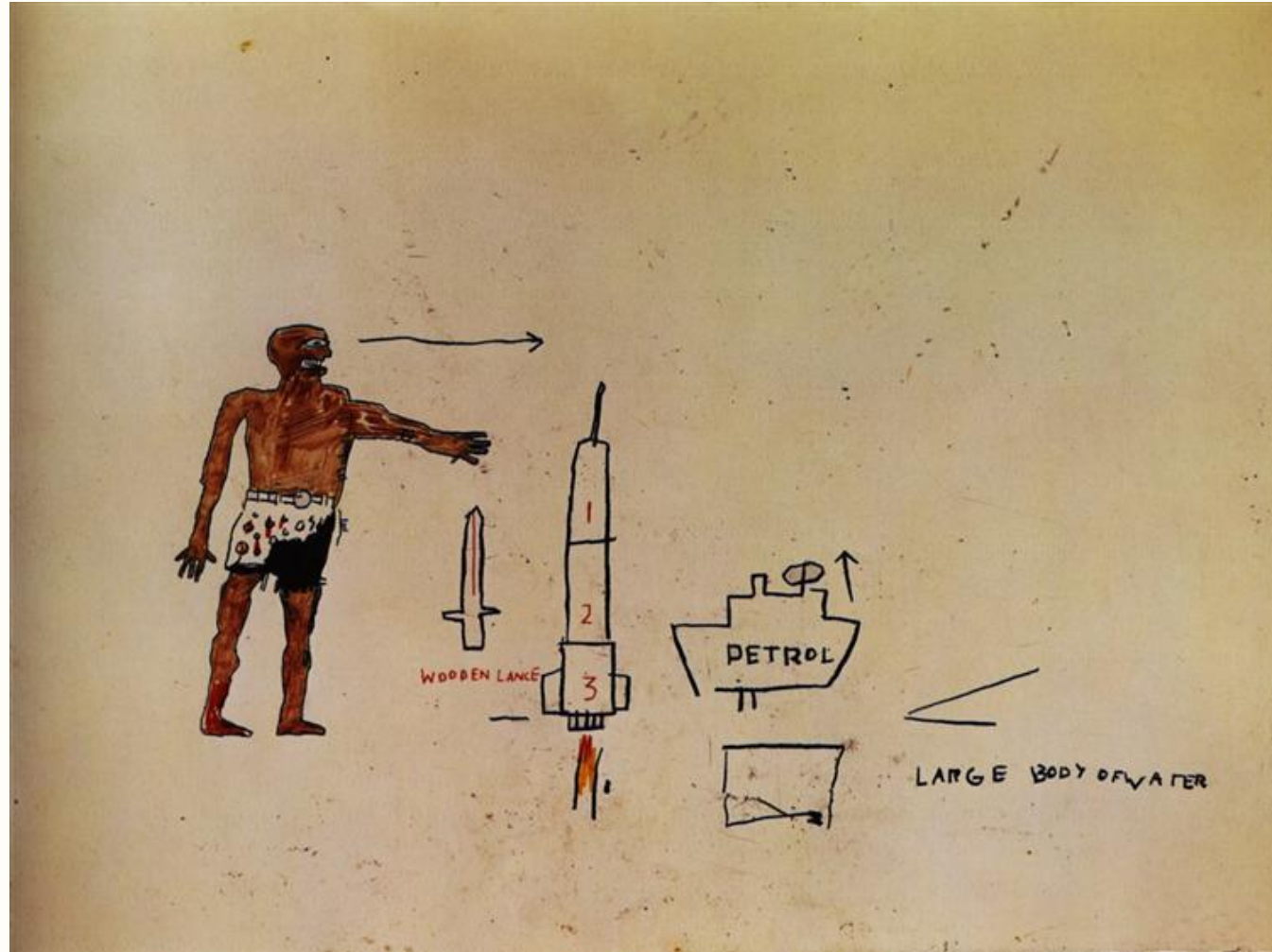
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



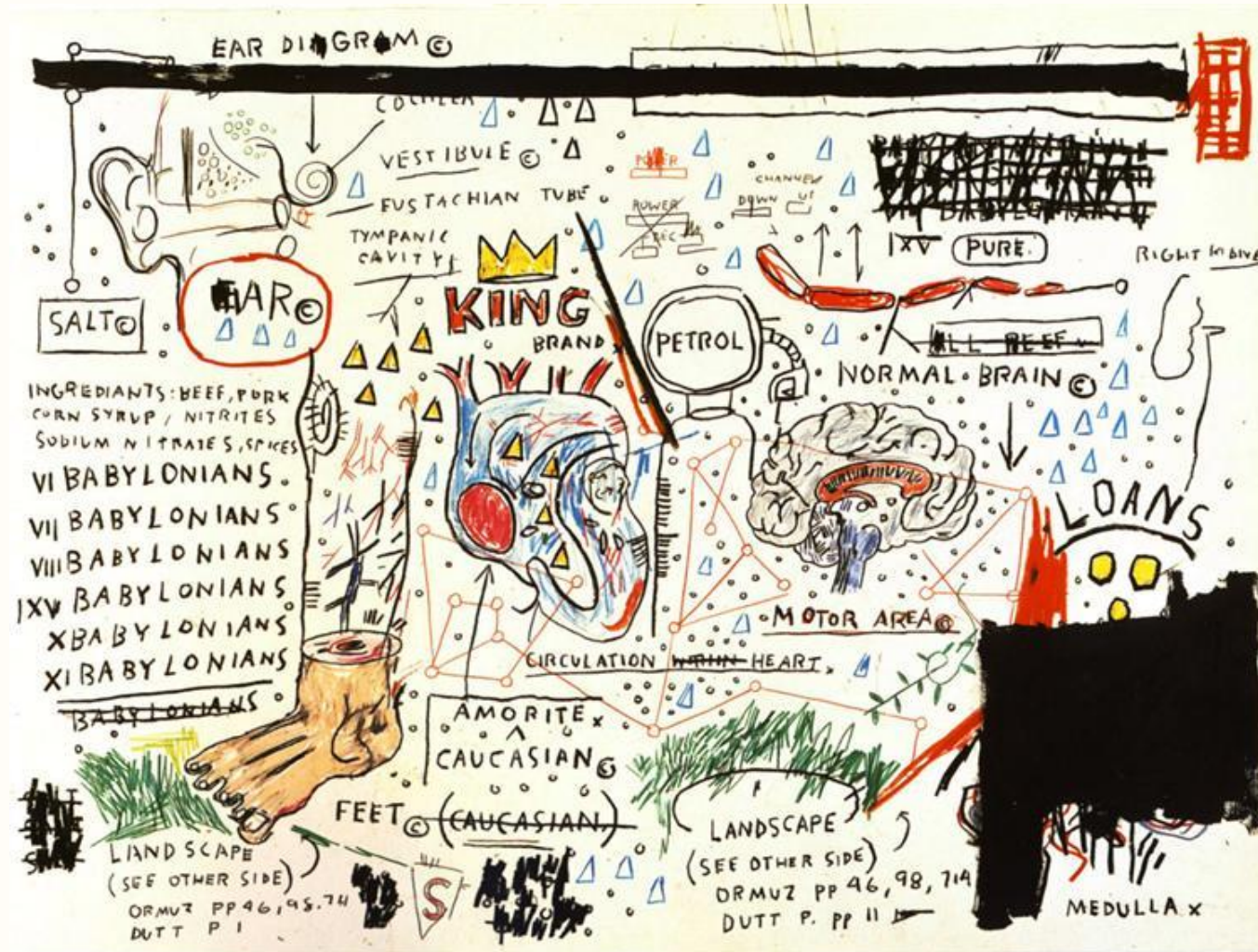
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
King Alphonso from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



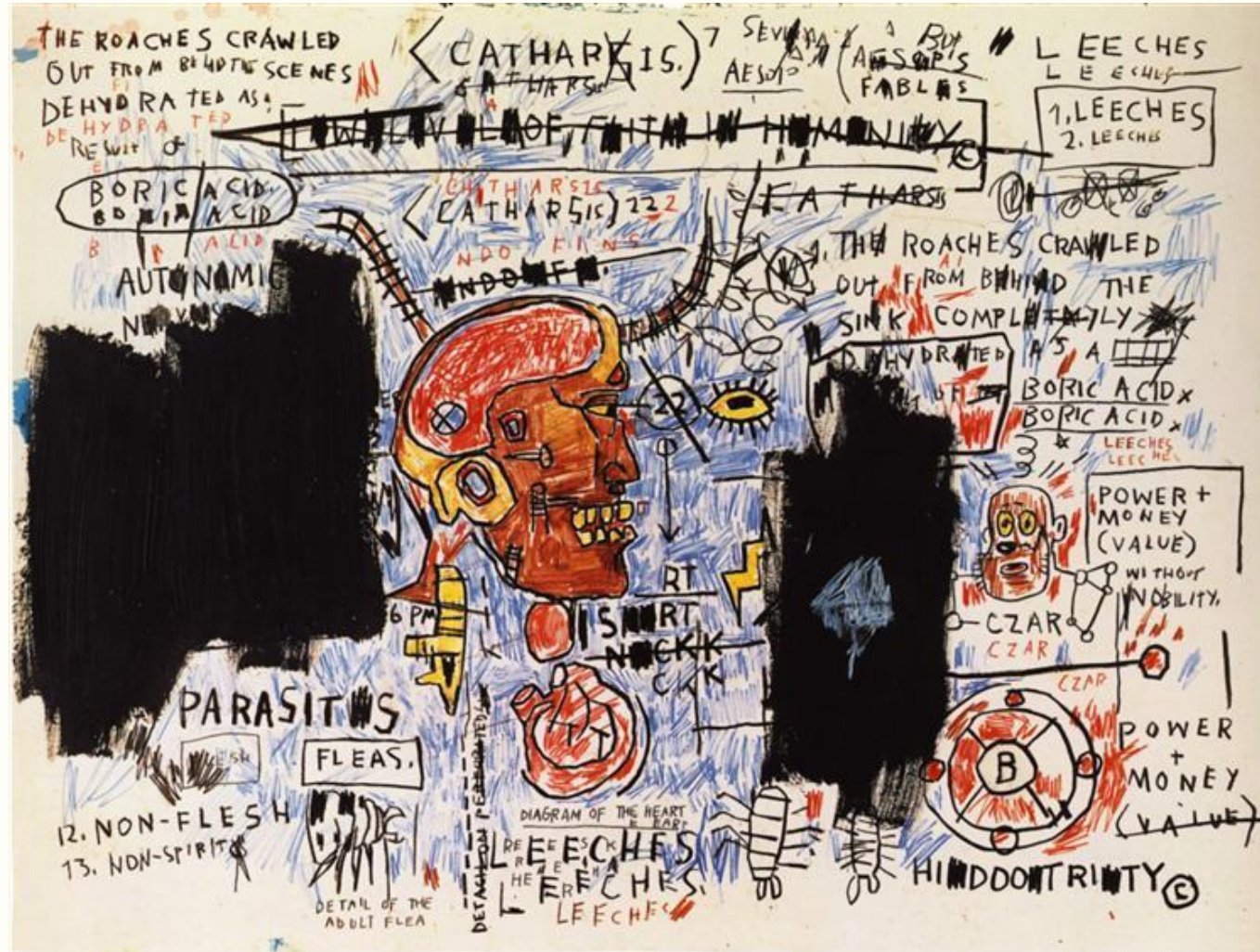
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Large Body of Water from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



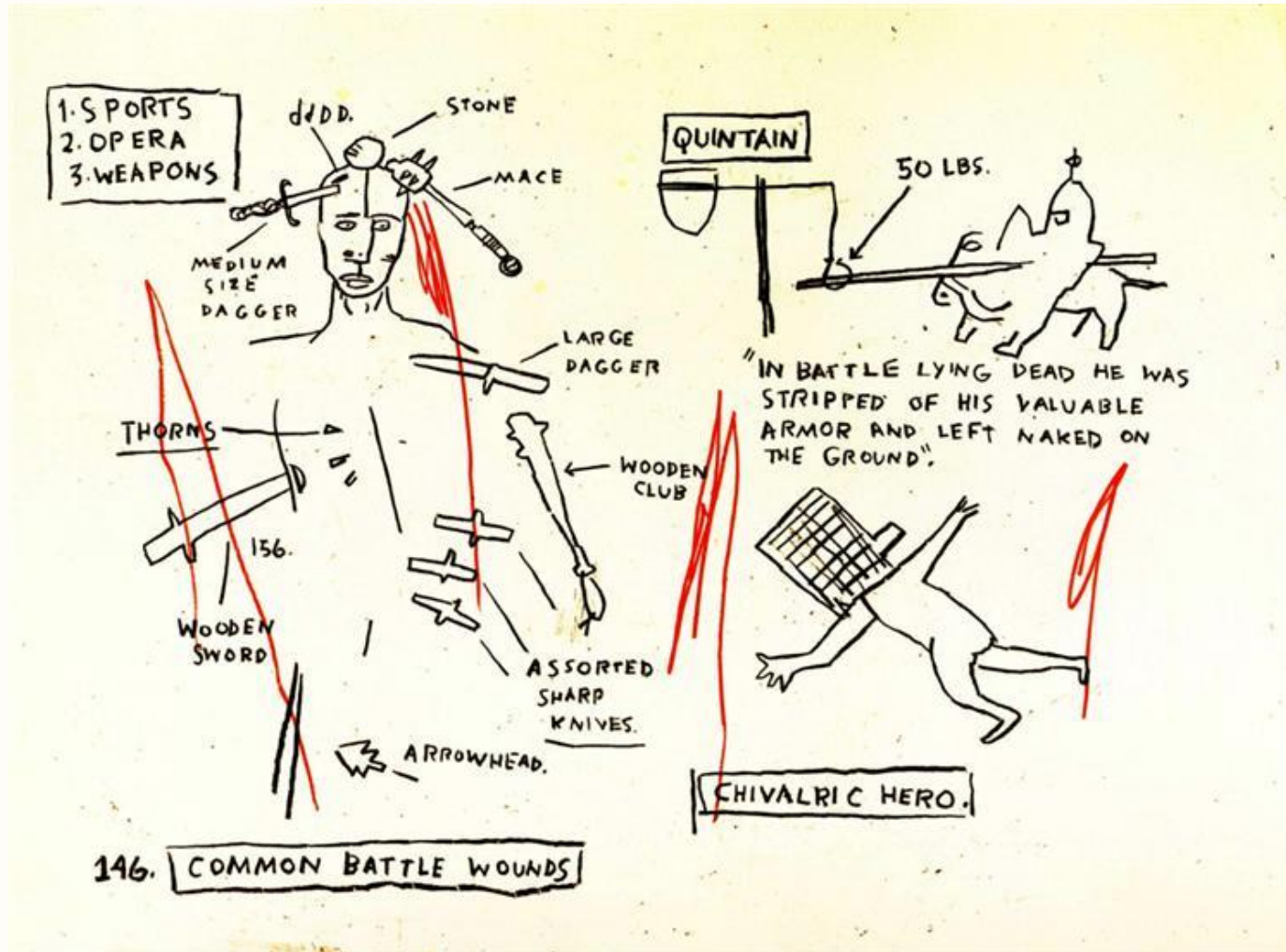
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
King Brand from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Leeches from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

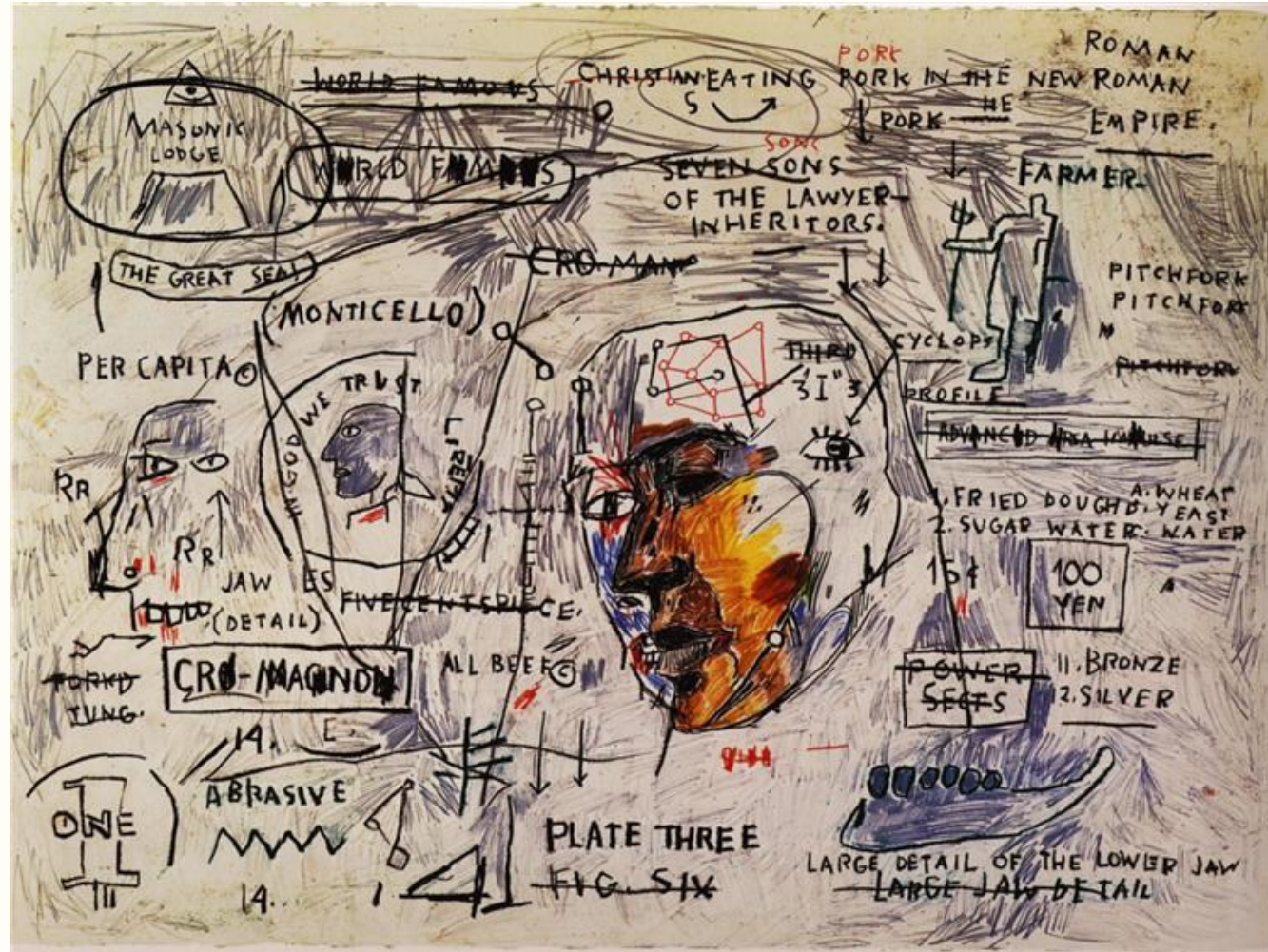


Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Mace from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



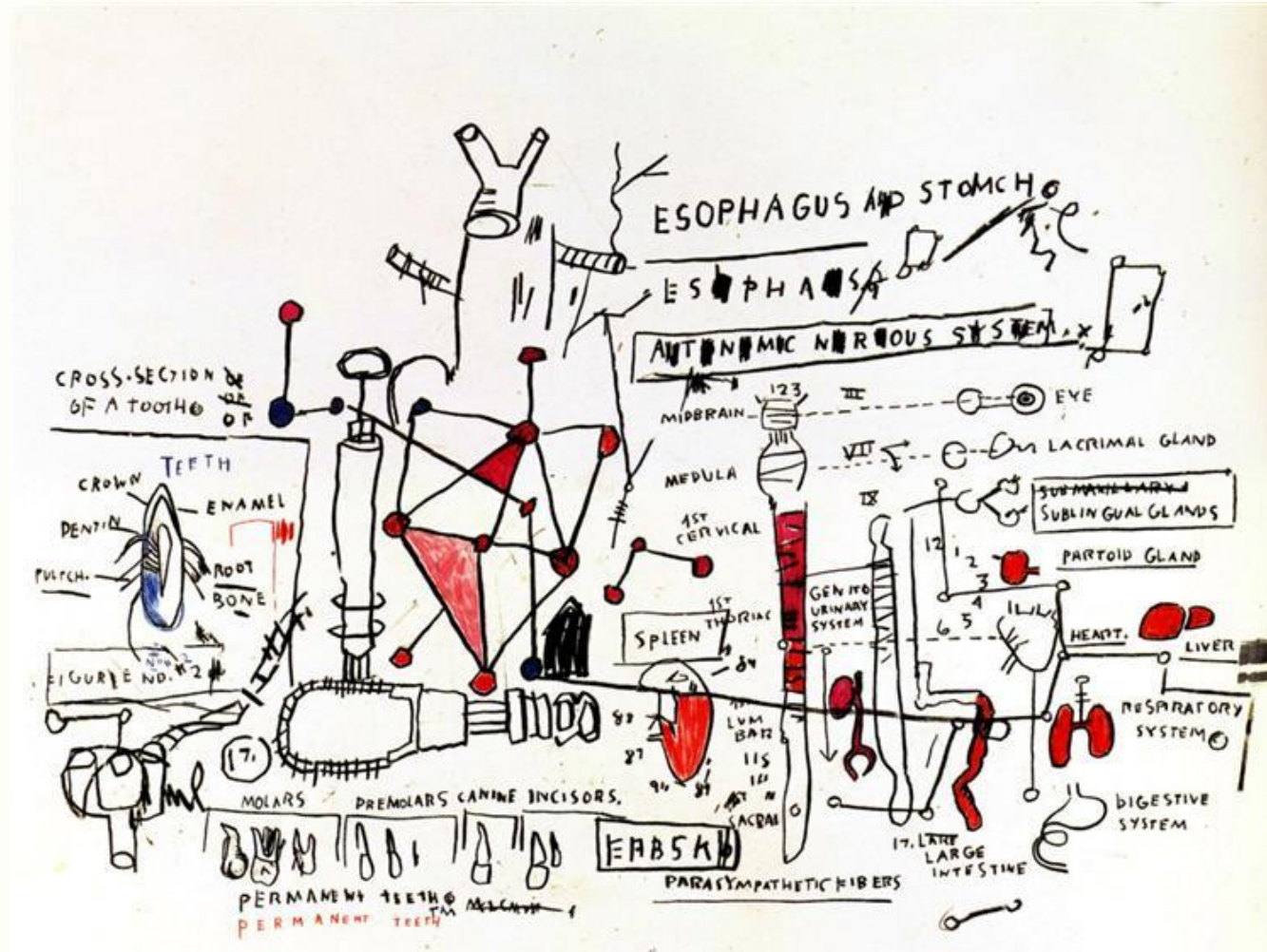
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Monticello from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Napoleon Stereotype as Portrayed from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Pelptic Ulcer from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



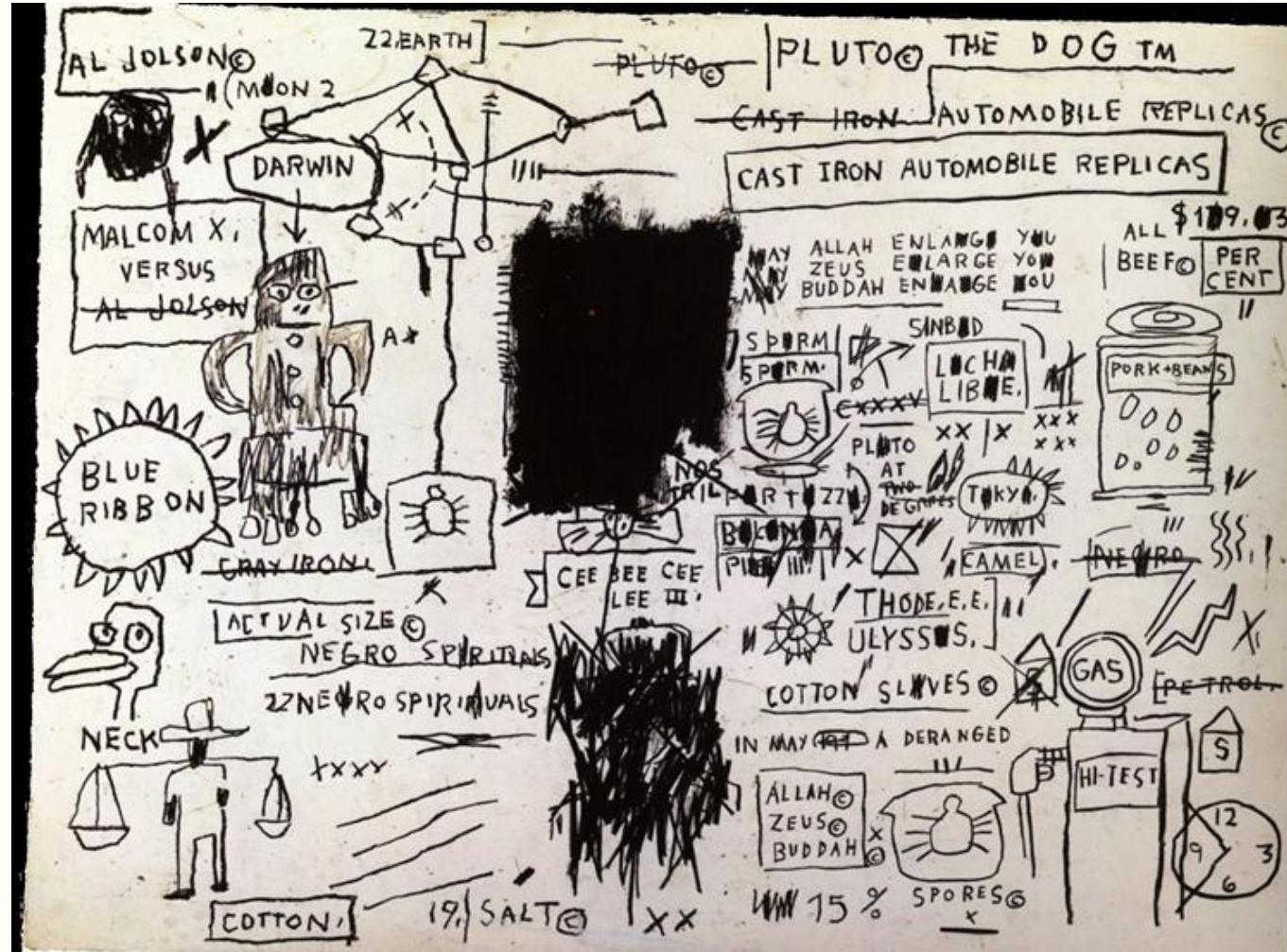
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Skin Head Wig from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



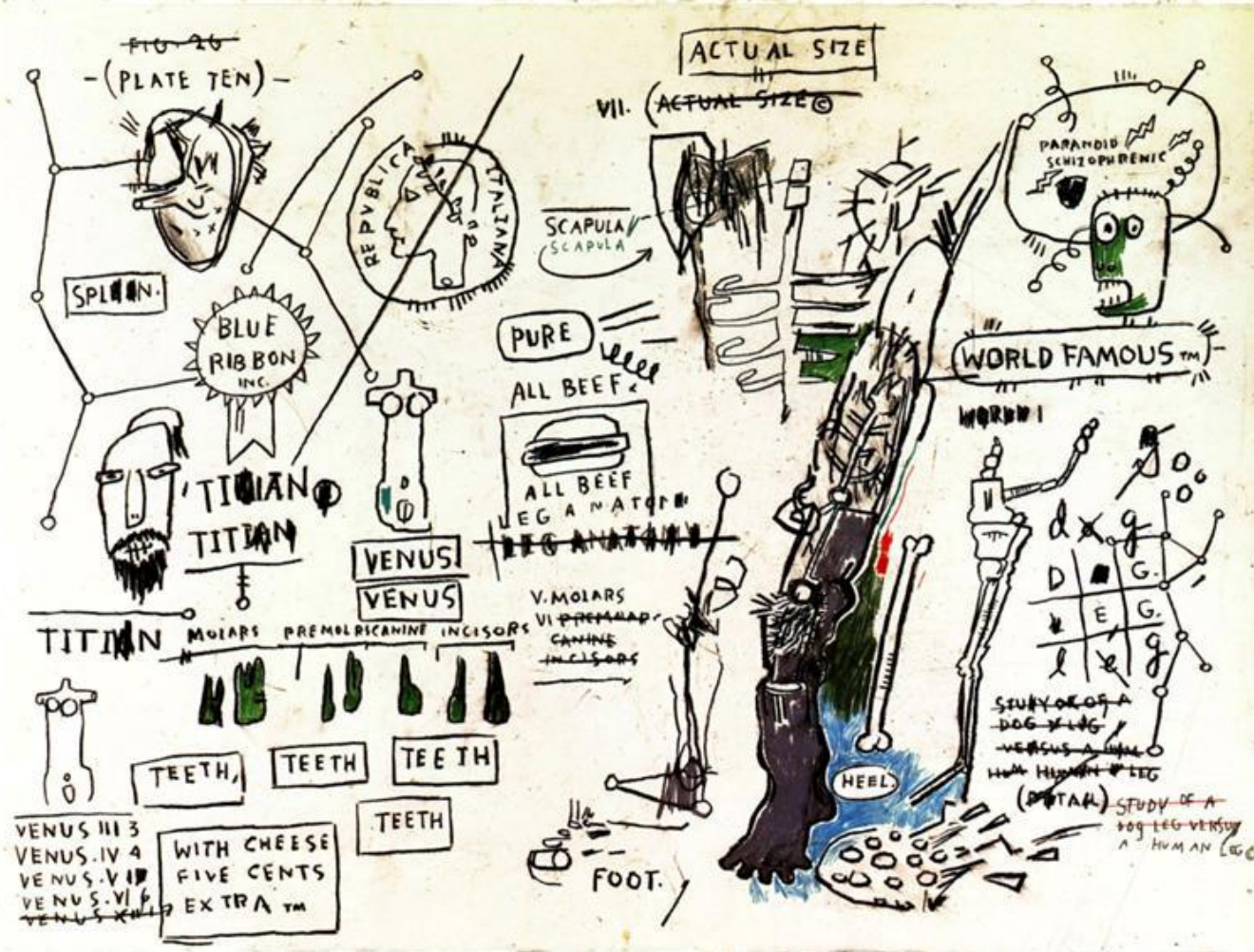
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Replicas from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Titian from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

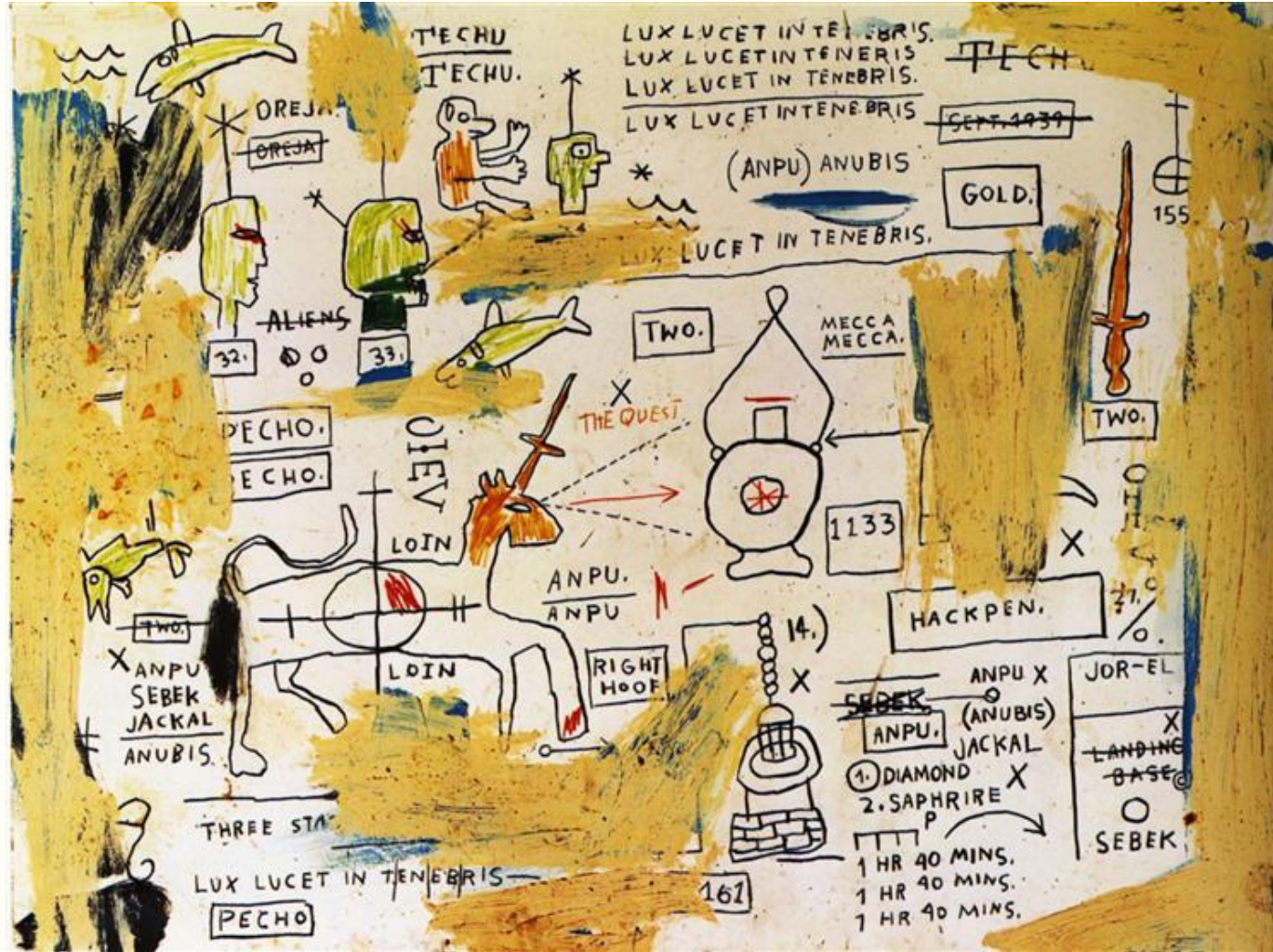
On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Snakeman from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Techu-Anpu from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Wolf Sausage from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

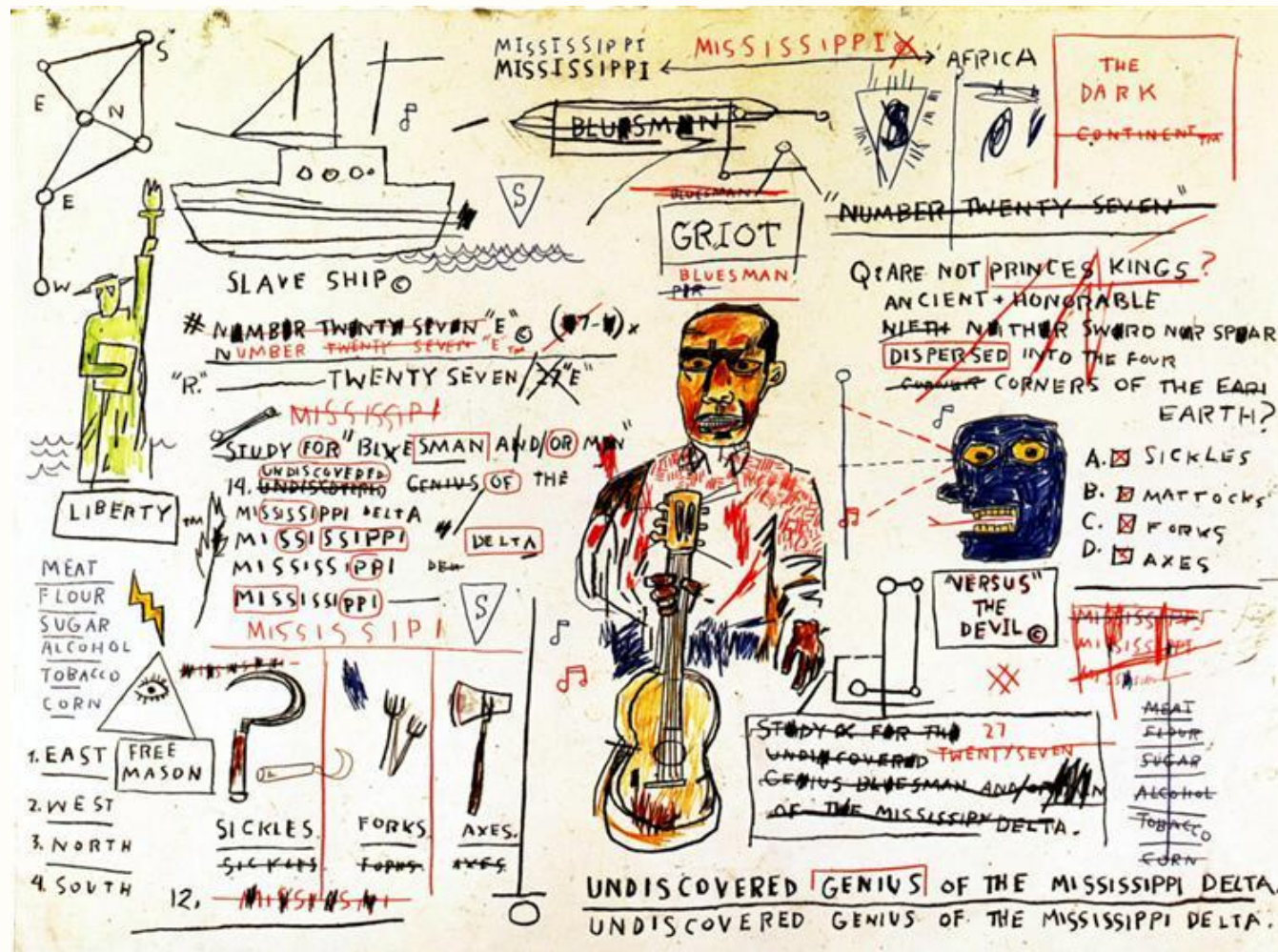
On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Unbleached Titanium from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Undiscovered Genius from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

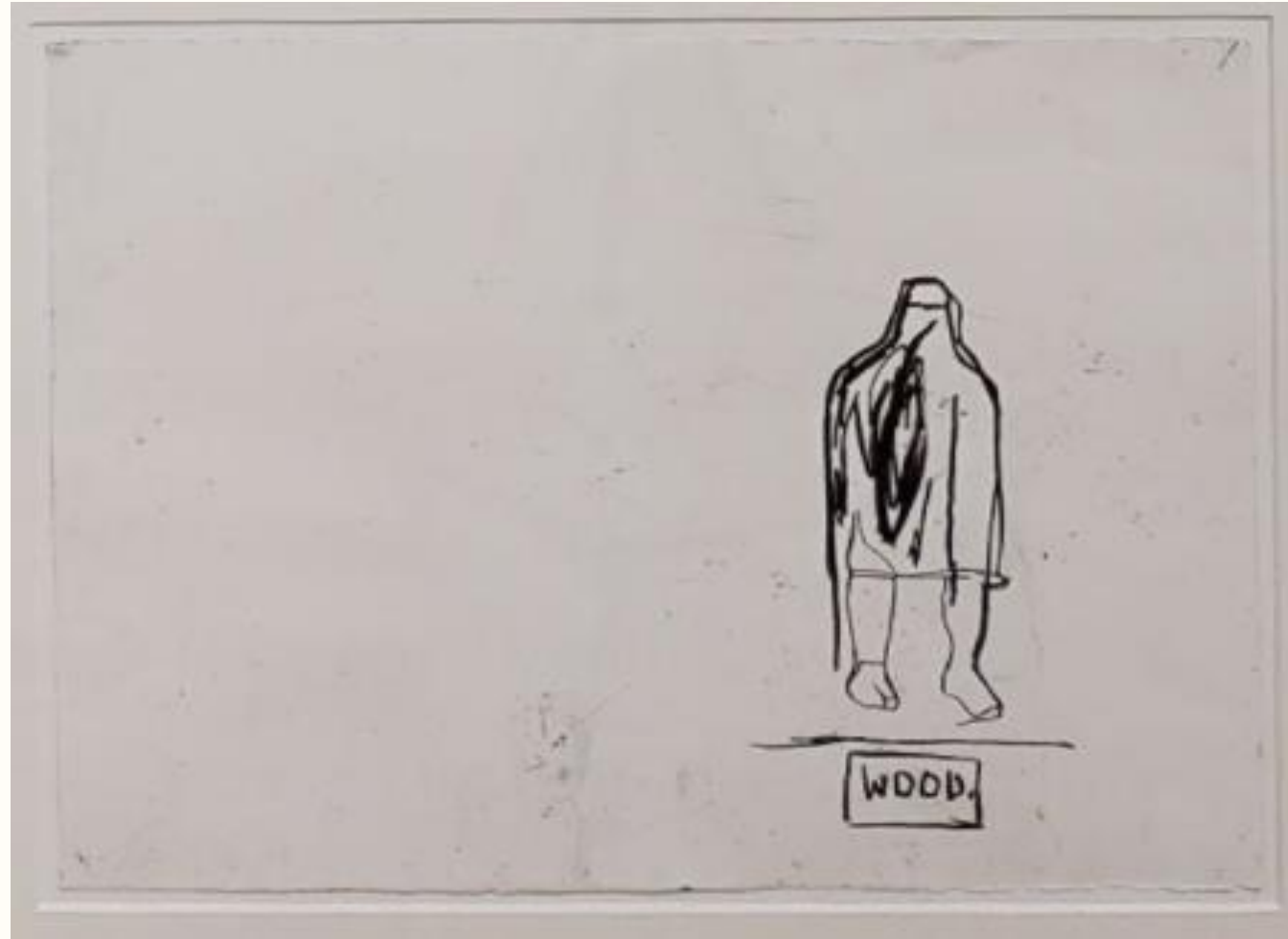
On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32



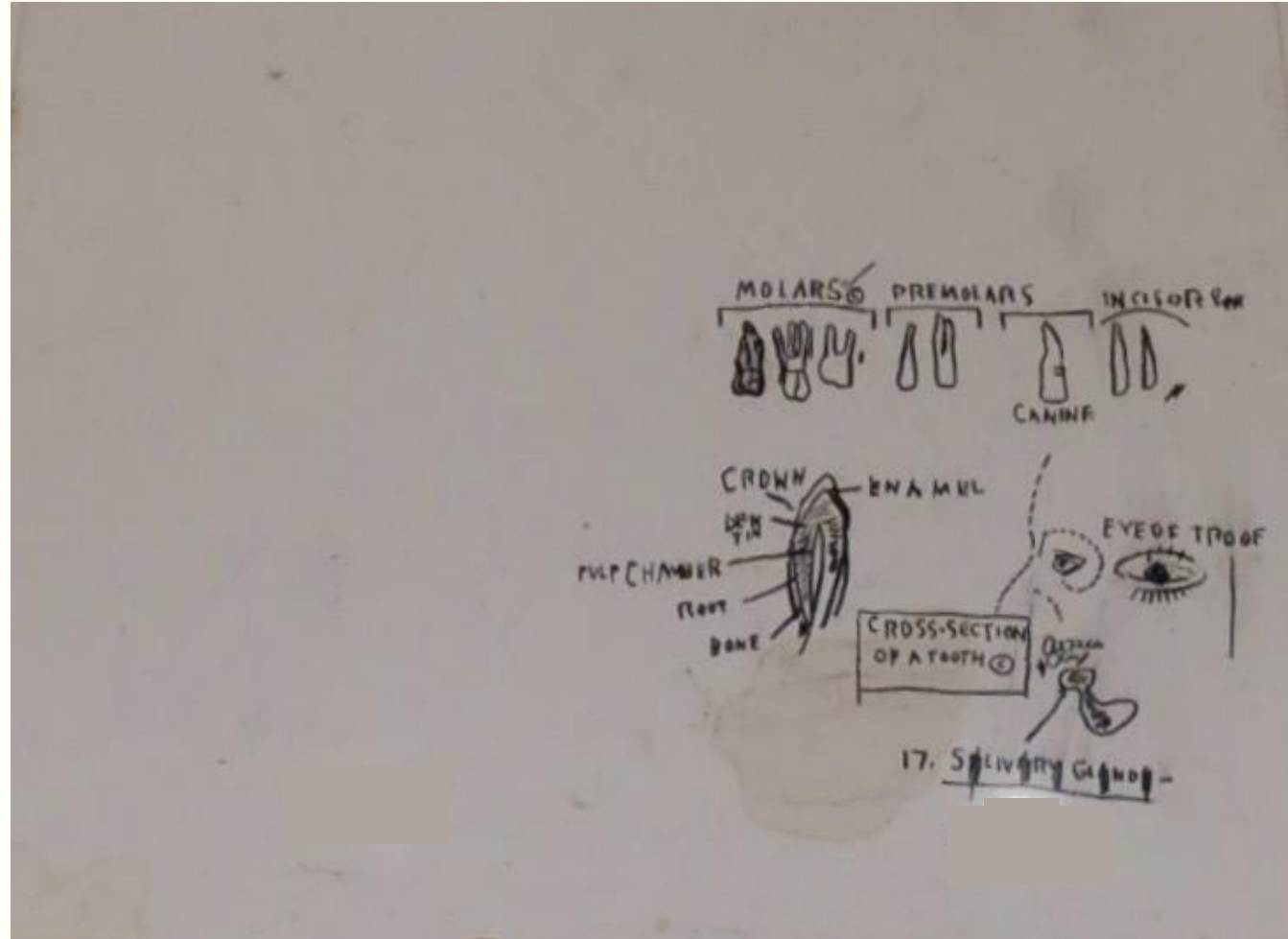
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
PPCD (aka Brooklyn) from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Tree Version from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



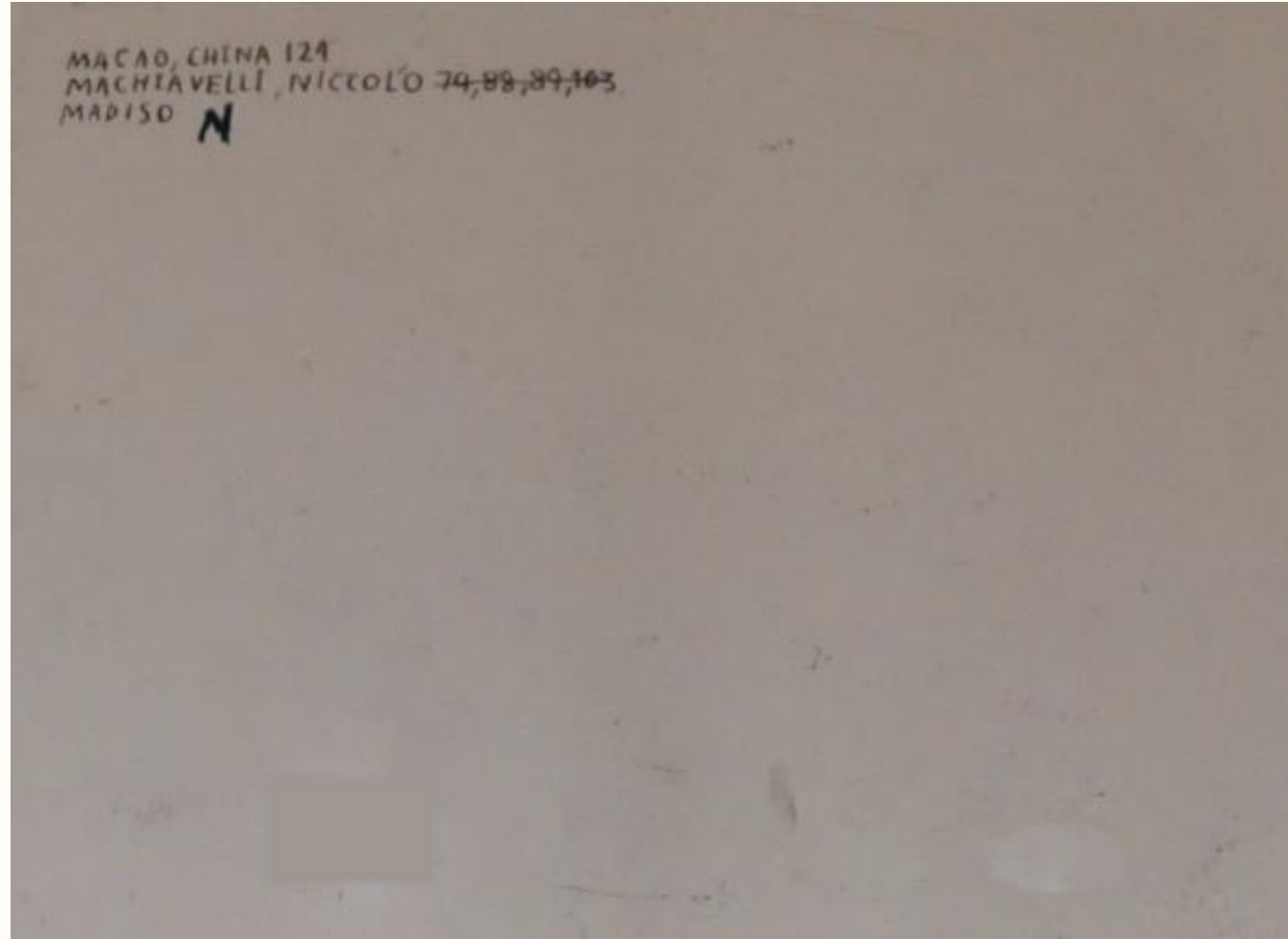
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Eye of Troof from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Savonarola from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

Steel from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983

Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-88)

Untitled. 1988

Acrylic and oilstick on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:20.4

On view April 14 – July 18, 2021





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-88)

Untitled (The Black Athlete), 1982

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:114.1

Jean-Michel Basquiat's interest in the human figure was sparked by a car accident. At the age of seven, the young artist was hit by a car while playing in his neighborhood of Flatbush, Brooklyn. A broken arm and serious internal injuries kept him in the hospital for weeks, where he was kept company by a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*—a gift from his mother, to help her son understand his injuries and recovery. Basquiat counted the medical textbook's detailed anatomical illustrations as one of his greatest influences, the foundation upon which he elaborated with his groundbreaking visual aesthetic. **Untitled (The Black Athlete)** belongs to a series Basquiat completed during his skyrocketing rise to artistic celebrity in the early 1980s. Exploring his own Haitian and Puerto Rican identity, and the segregation he witnessed growing up, Basquiat painted the heroic forms of Black athletes such as baseball player Hank Aaron and boxers Muhammad Ali, Jack Johnson, and Joe Lewis—each adorned with a crown to denote their eternal success, power, and victory.

On view February 3 – May 9, 2021

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-88)

Vincent Van Gogh in a Wax Museum in Amsterdam, 1985

Oilstick on paper

Private Collection; L2020:103.5

The brief career of Jean-Michel Basquiat was fostered through a creatively diverse childhood and the influence of music and street art. Basquiat found professional and popular success in the 1980s alongside Neo-Expressionism—characterized by raw brushwork, intense color, and an embrace of an untrained aesthetic—and was the youngest artist included in the 1983 Whitney Biennial. Grounded in complex racial and political themes and dedicated to highlighting the lack of diversity in the art world, his practice was fueled by asking difficult questions, exposing the divides created by wealth and power, and honoring the value of different experiences. Basquiat's favored medium of oil sticks drawn on paper or unprimed canvas emulates the impulsive expression of graffiti artists, creating images that often challenge viewers with an uneasy ambiguity and deceptive simplicity. Expression, gesture, and sensory impact initially appear to take precedence over compositional structure in his work, producing a raw energy and apparent spontaneity intent on provoking a visceral response. Yet Basquiat adroitly choreographs the space in his works, too, using “empty” areas to stage the drama of his staccato mark-making.

On view December 16, 2020 – March 21, 2021





Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-88)

Untitled (Buck), 1982

Oilstick on paper

Private Collection; L2020:103.4

On view December 16, 2020 – March 21, 2021