Artist Resources – Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)

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.

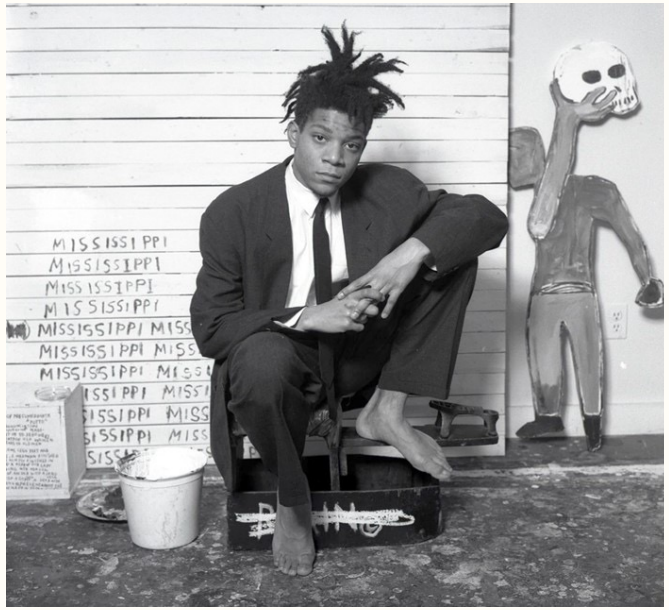
In 2017, gallerist and curator Fred Hoffman, who worked closely with Basquiat for years in California, published the first comprehensive art historical study of the artists career, with in-depth analysis of over 150 paintings and works on paper.

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 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 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 artists and major themes in the show.



Basquiat, 1986

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-88)
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, 1960-88)
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, 1960-88)
Untitled, 1984
Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:124.1

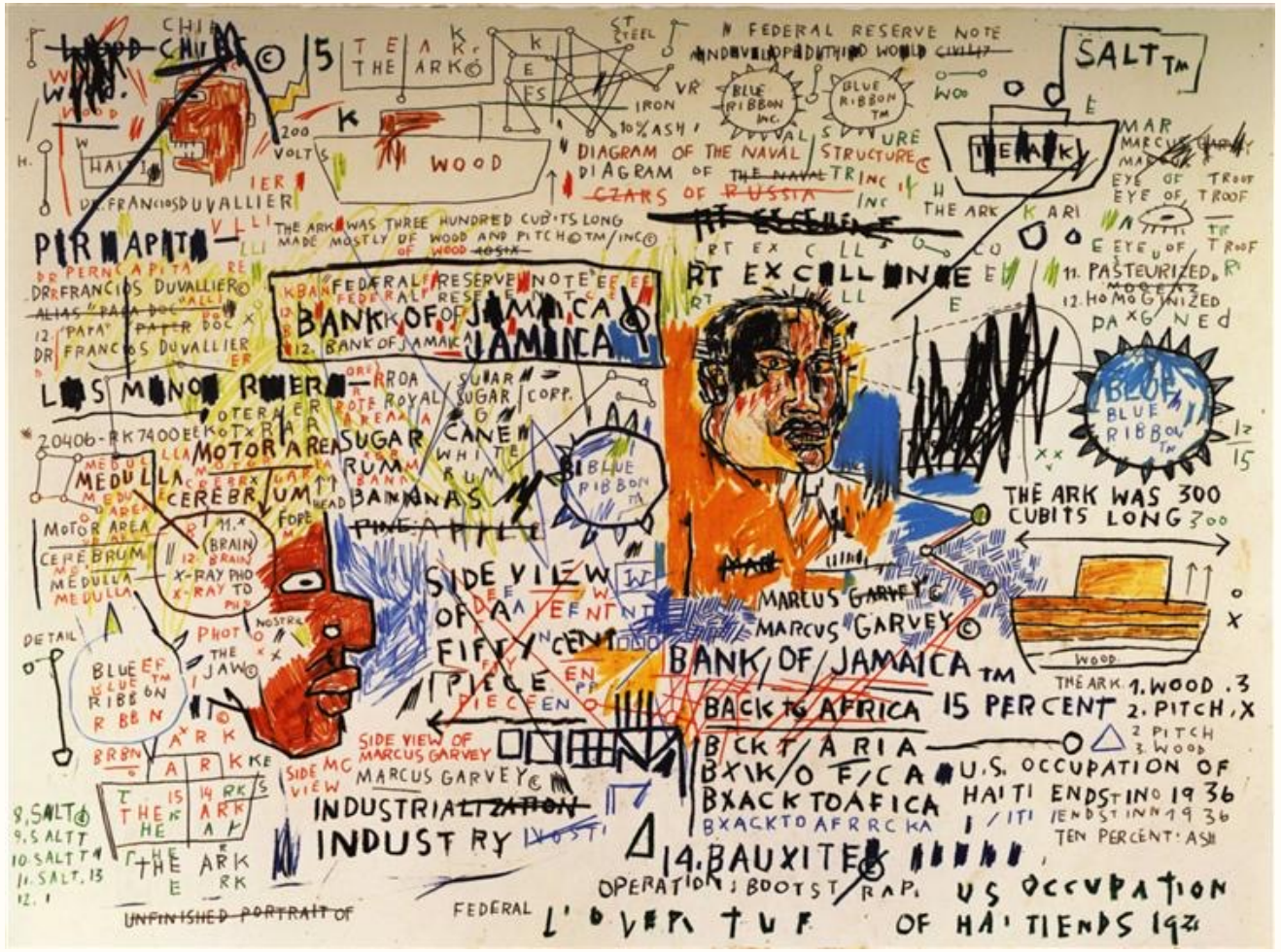
On view October 6, 2021 – January 9, 2022

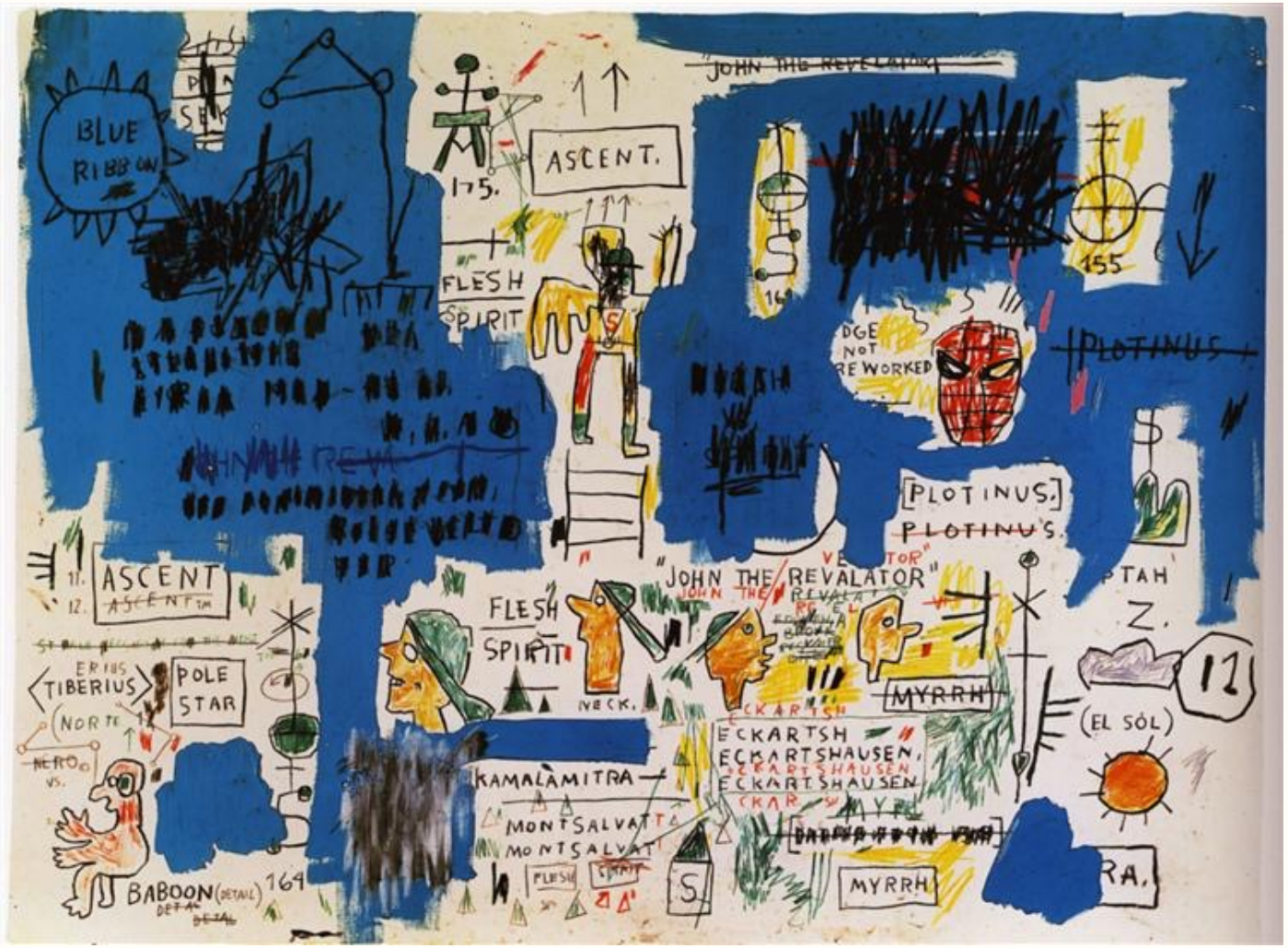
Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
50 cent Piece from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper;
Suite of 32

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

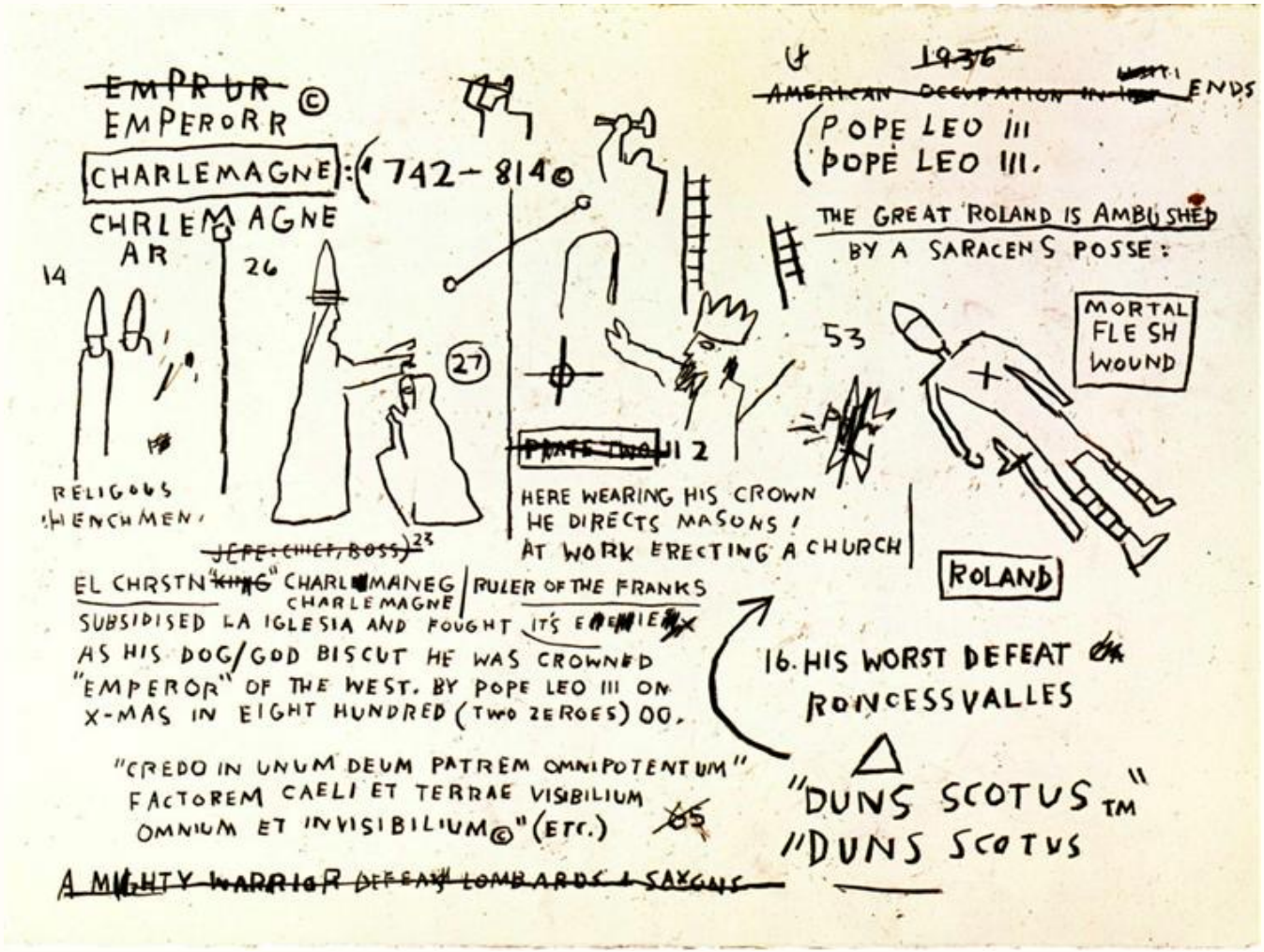




Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Ascent from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

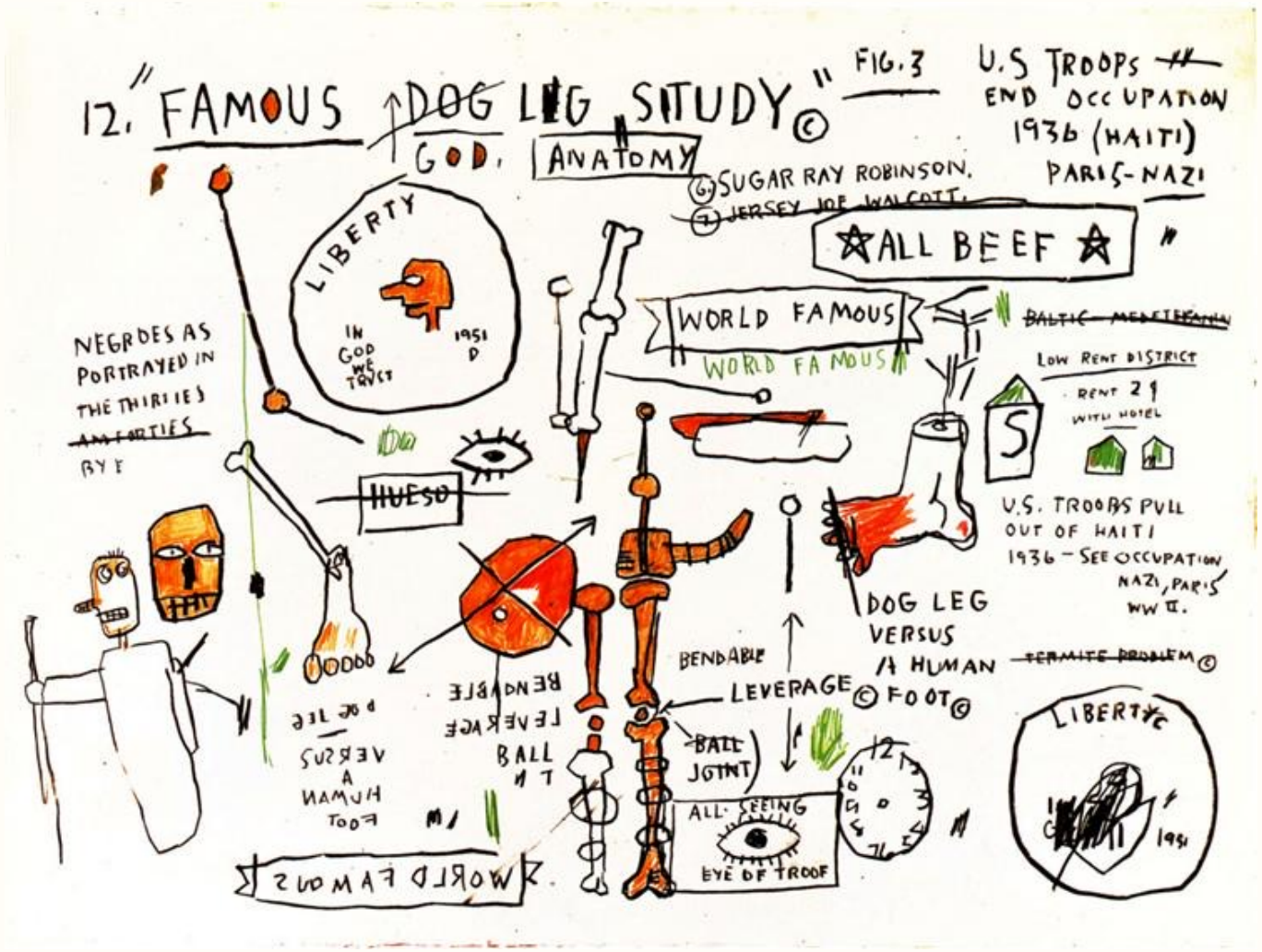
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

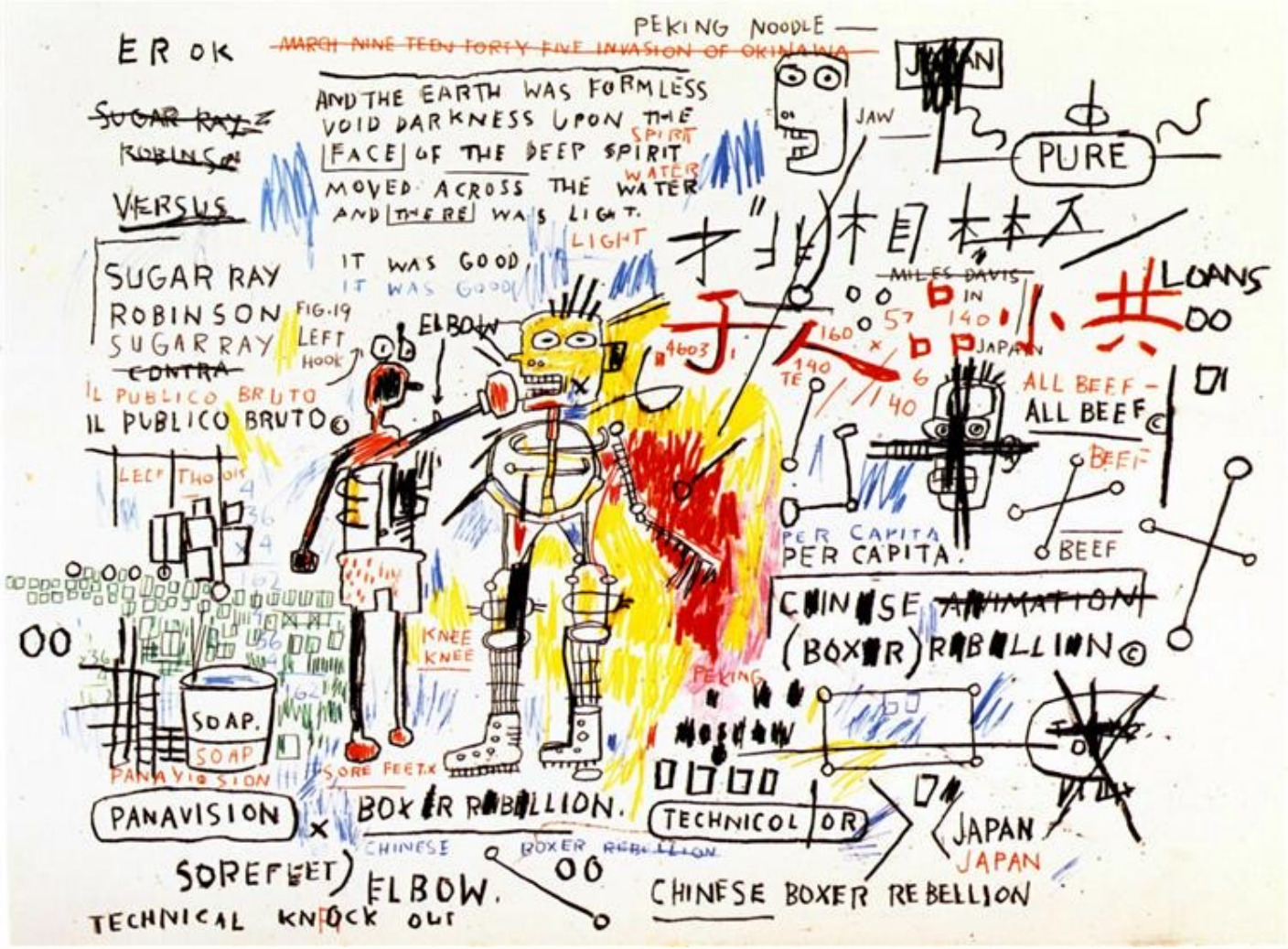
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

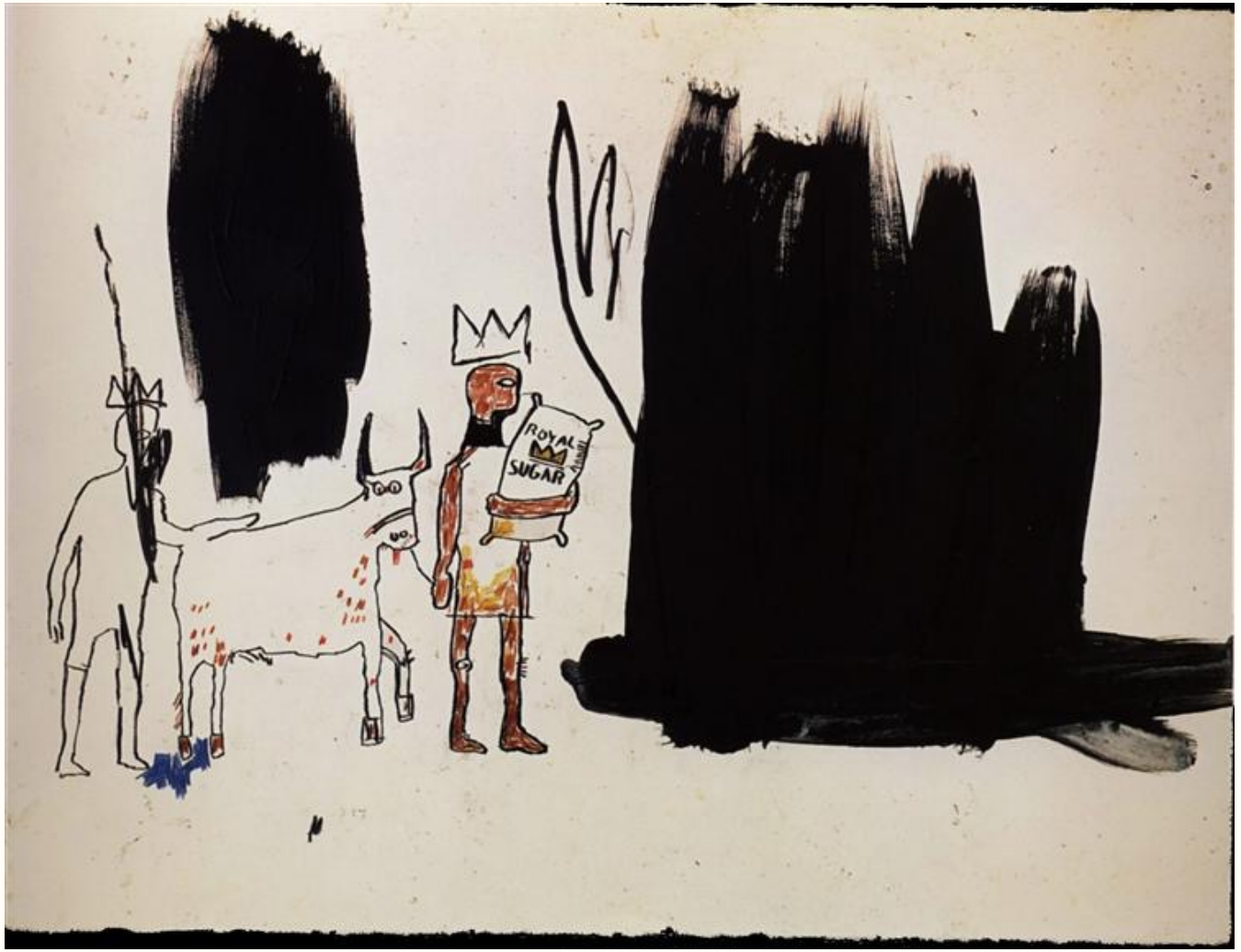
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

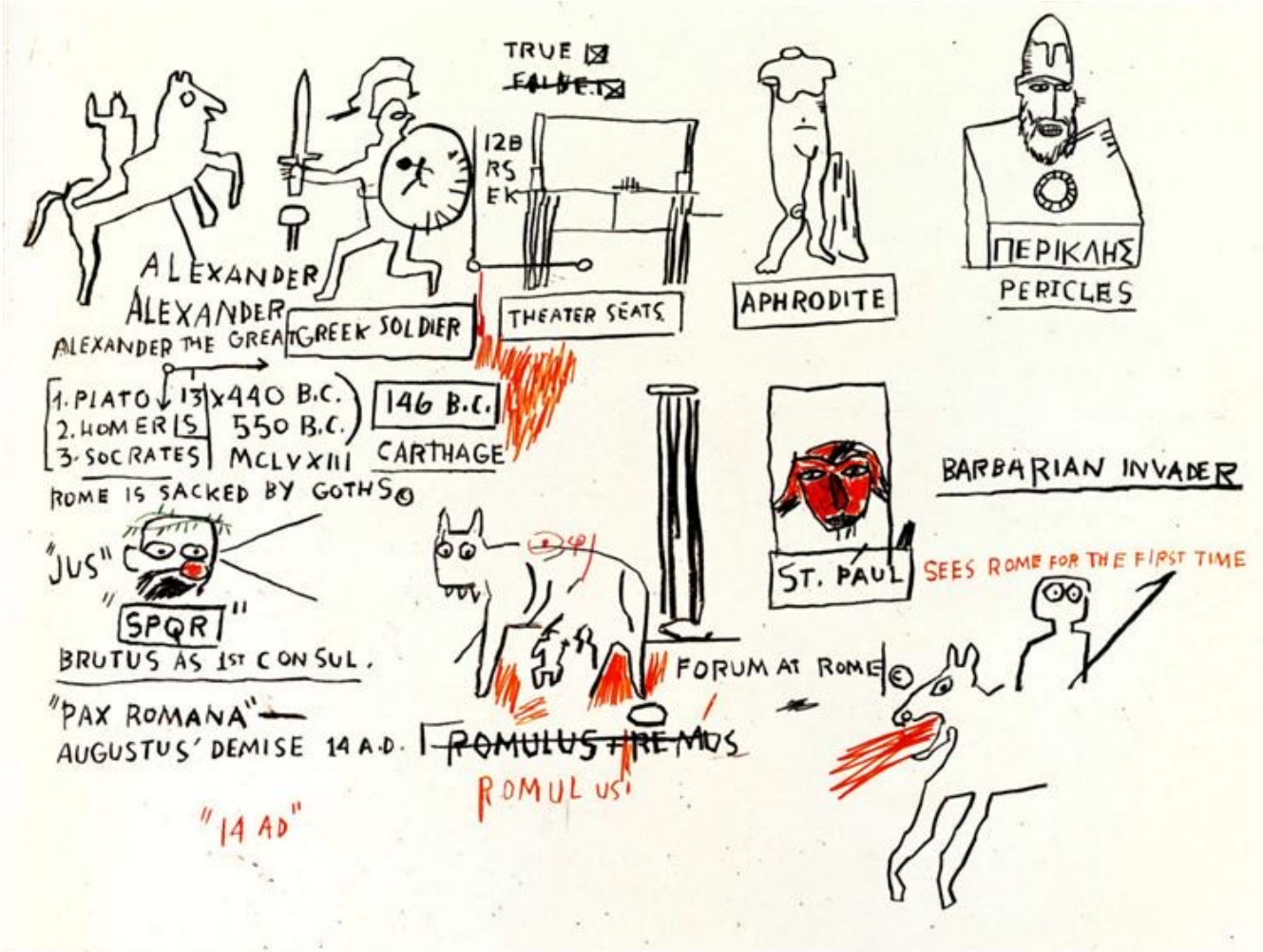
On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

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

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

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

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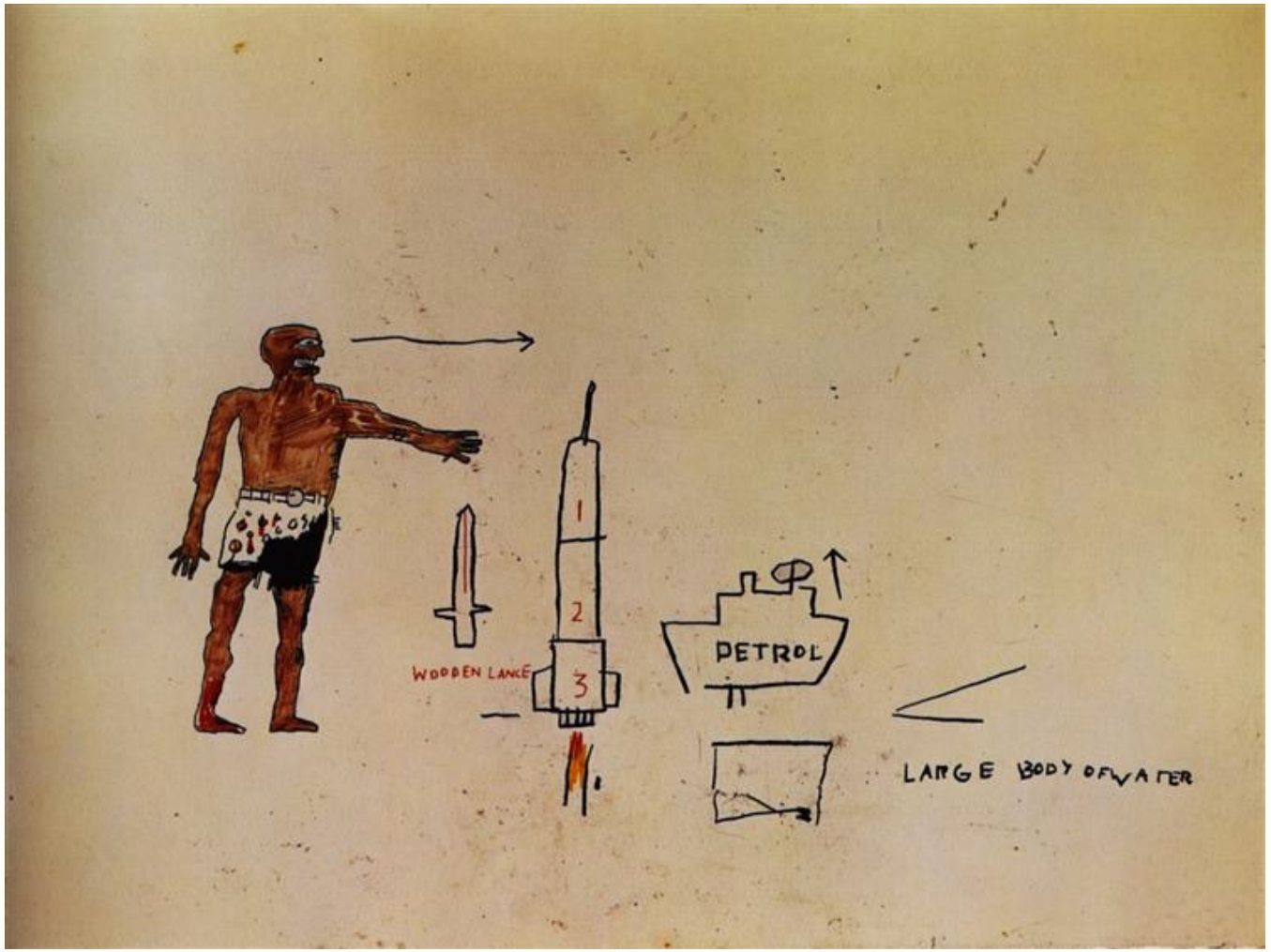
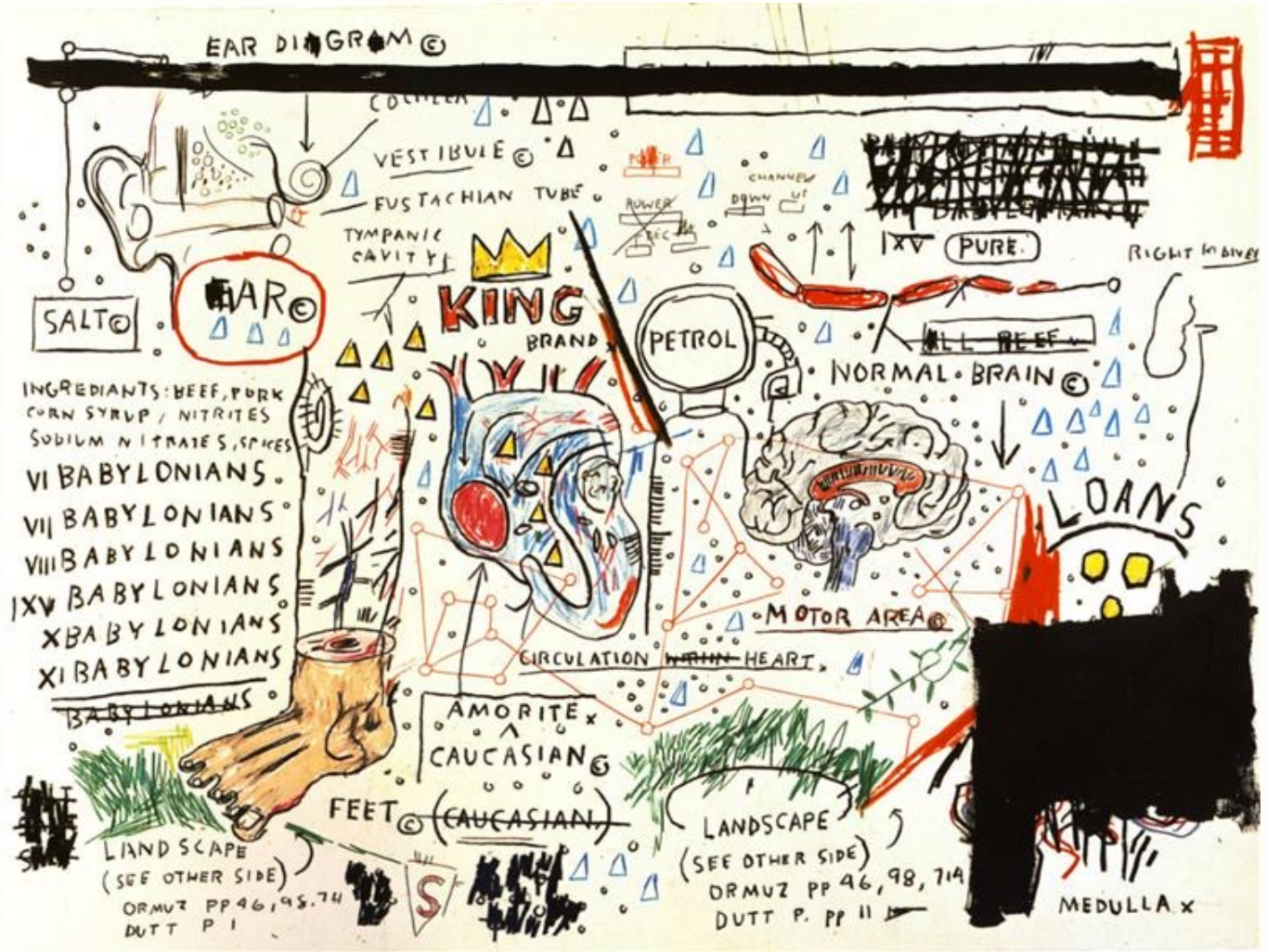


Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Large Body of Water from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

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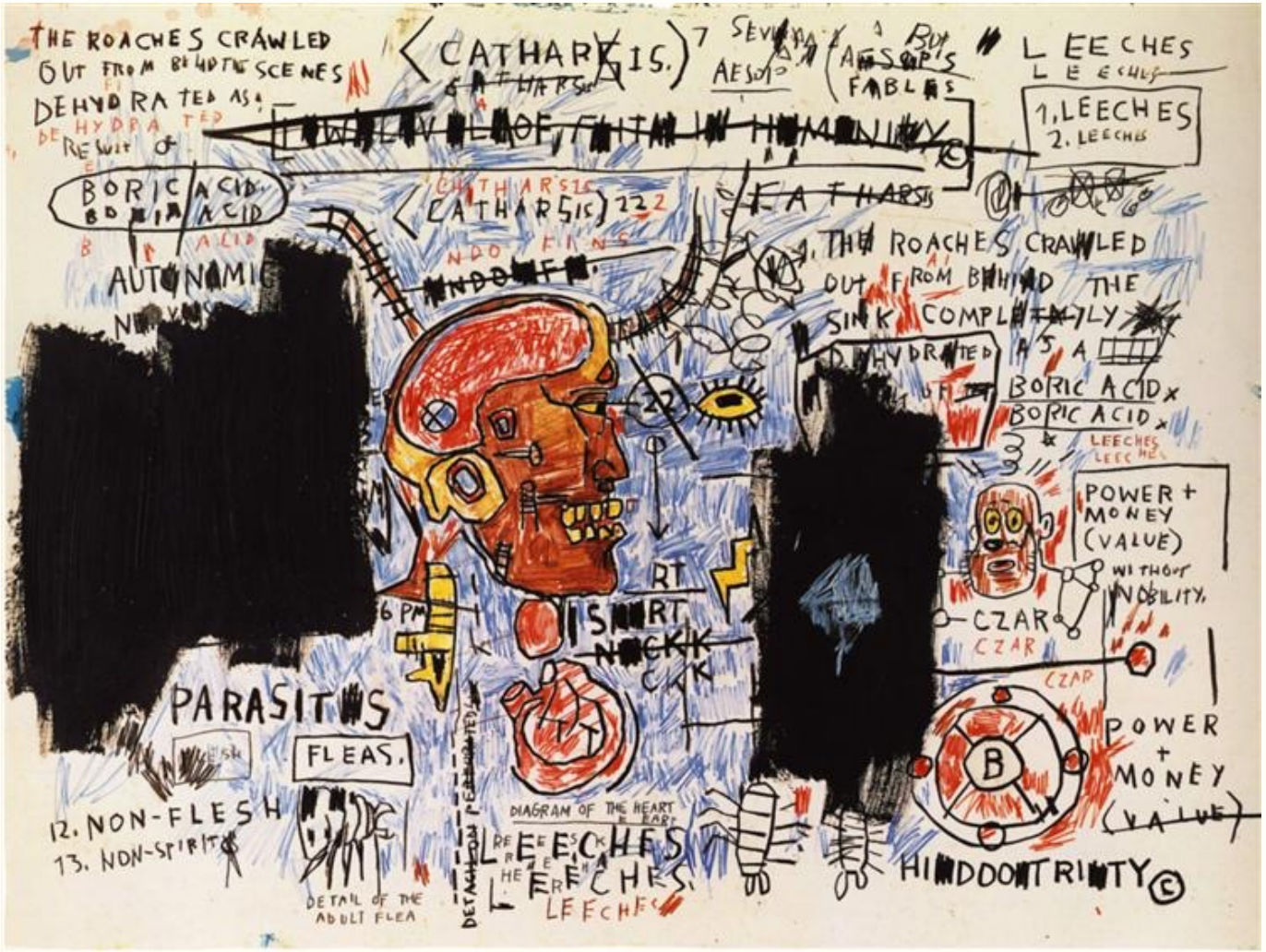

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Leeches from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

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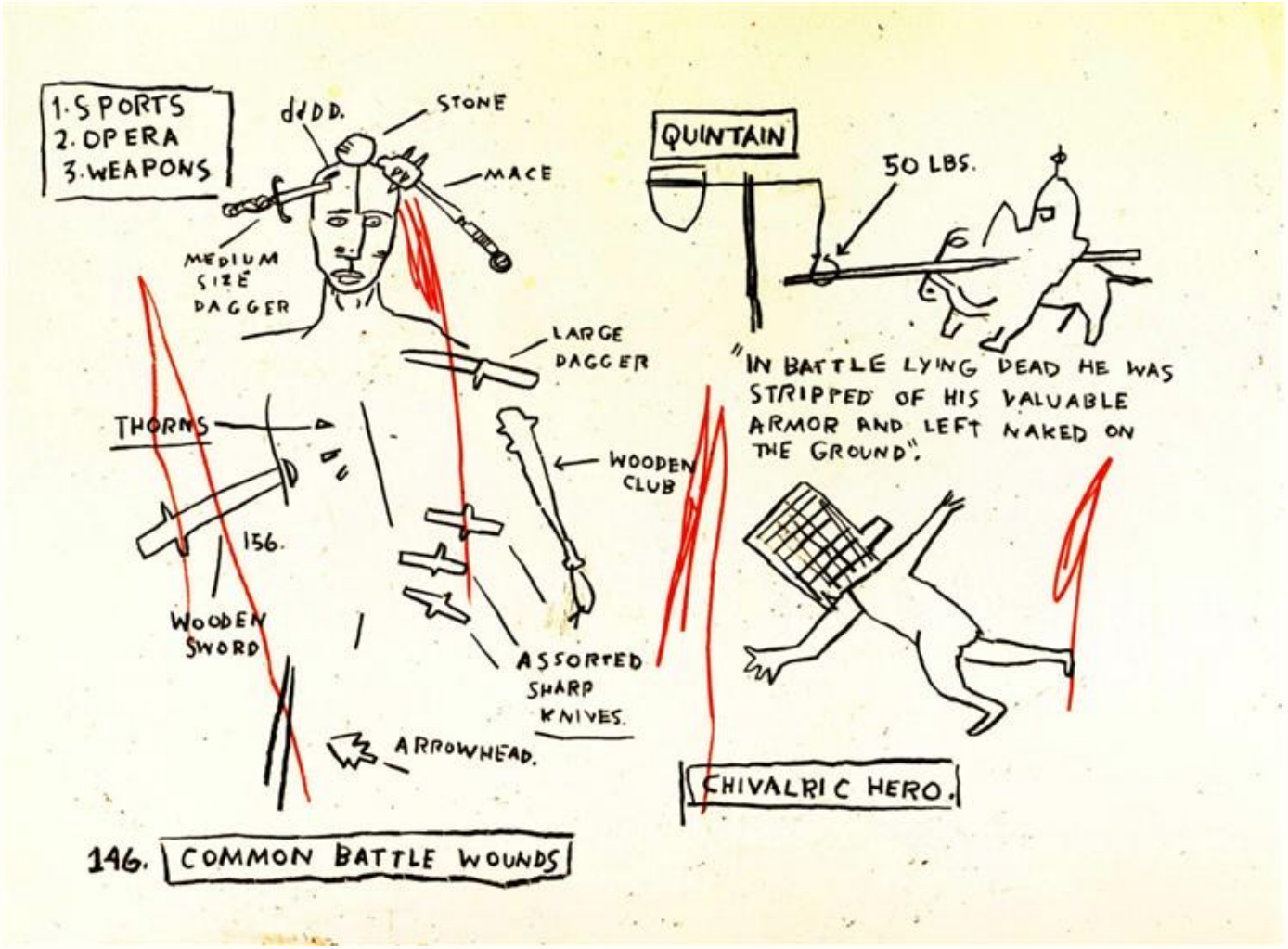
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

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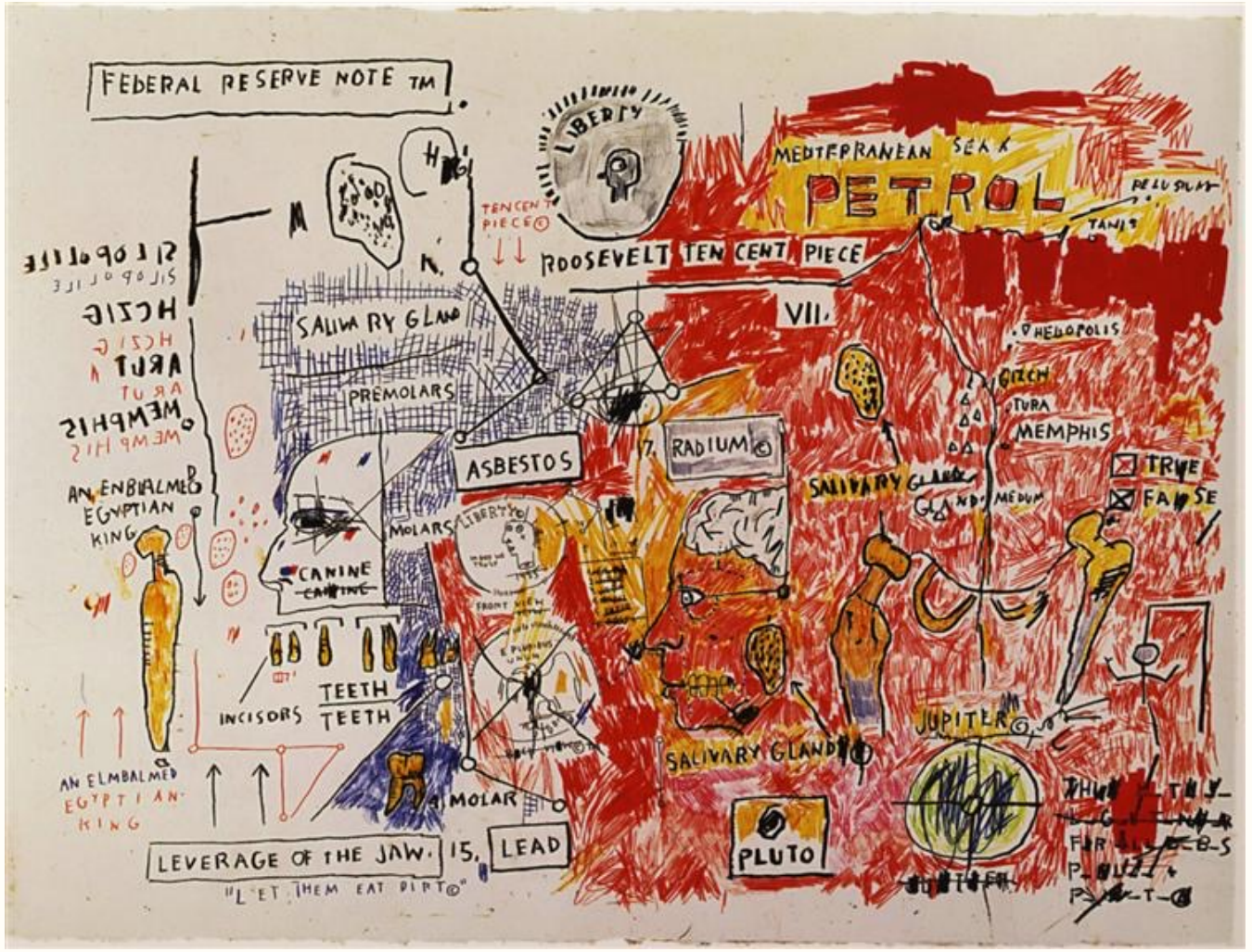

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Liberty from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

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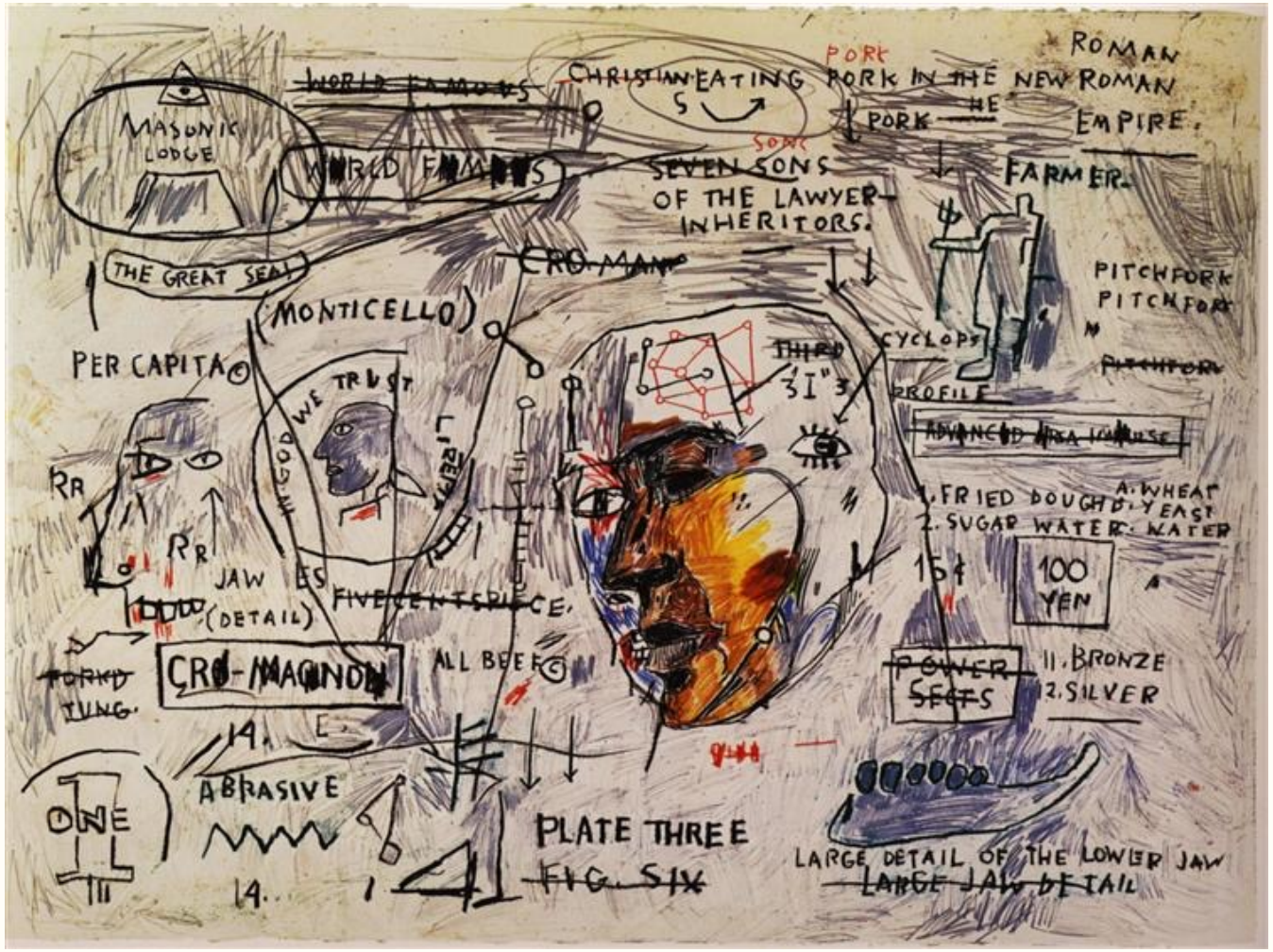

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Monticello from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Napolean 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

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

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

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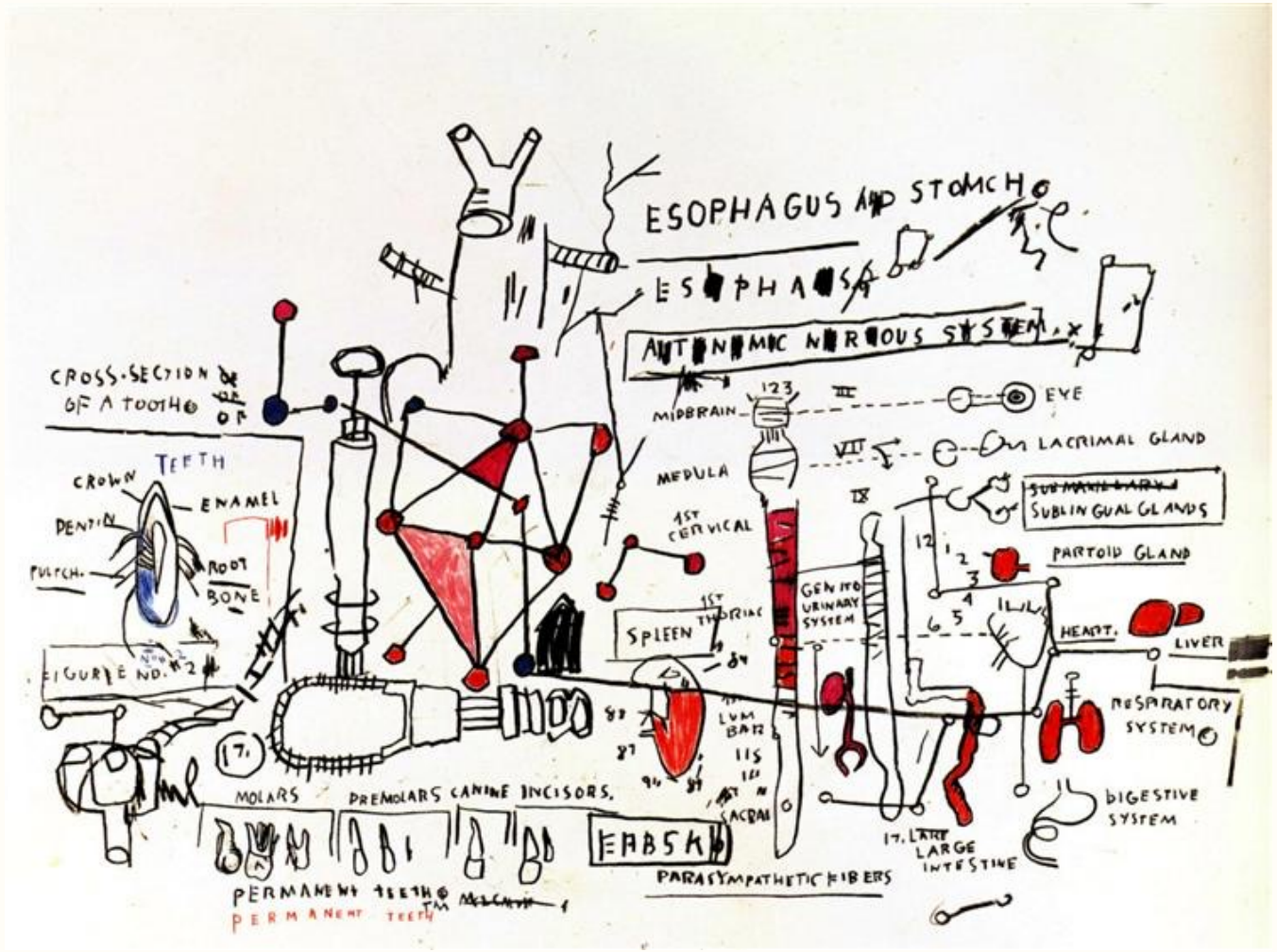

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Pelptic Ulcer from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

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

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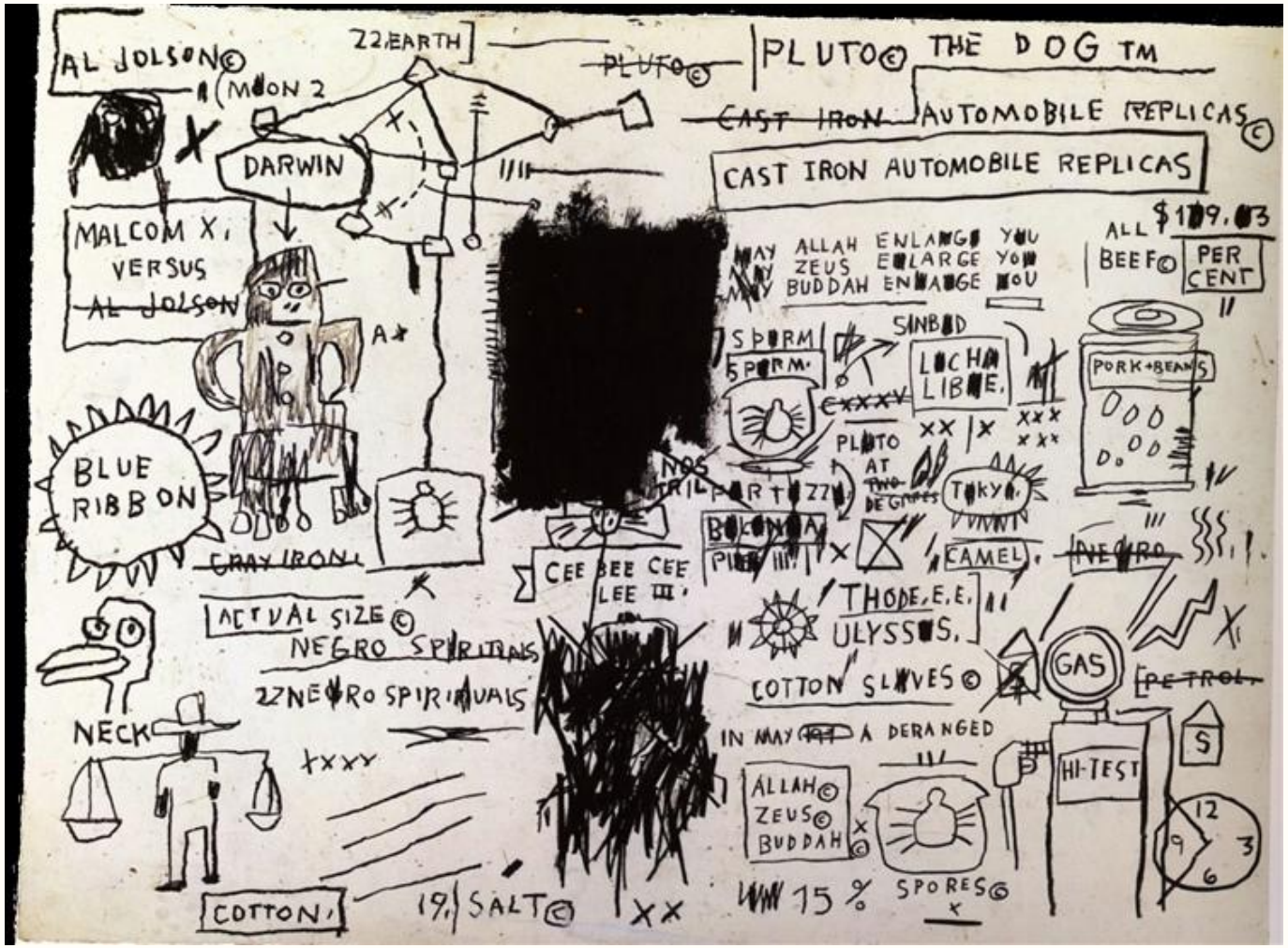

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Replicas from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

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

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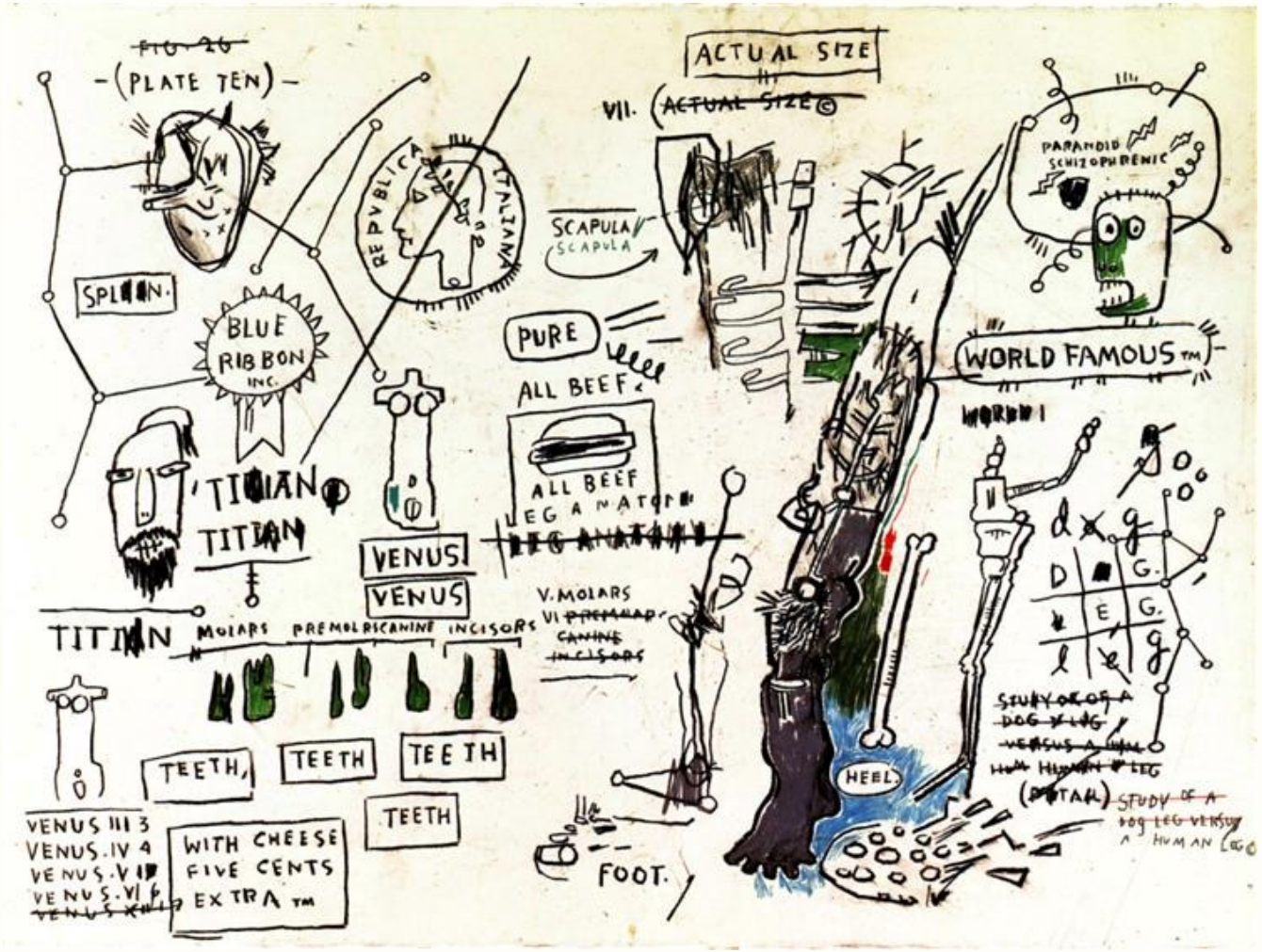

Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Titian from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

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

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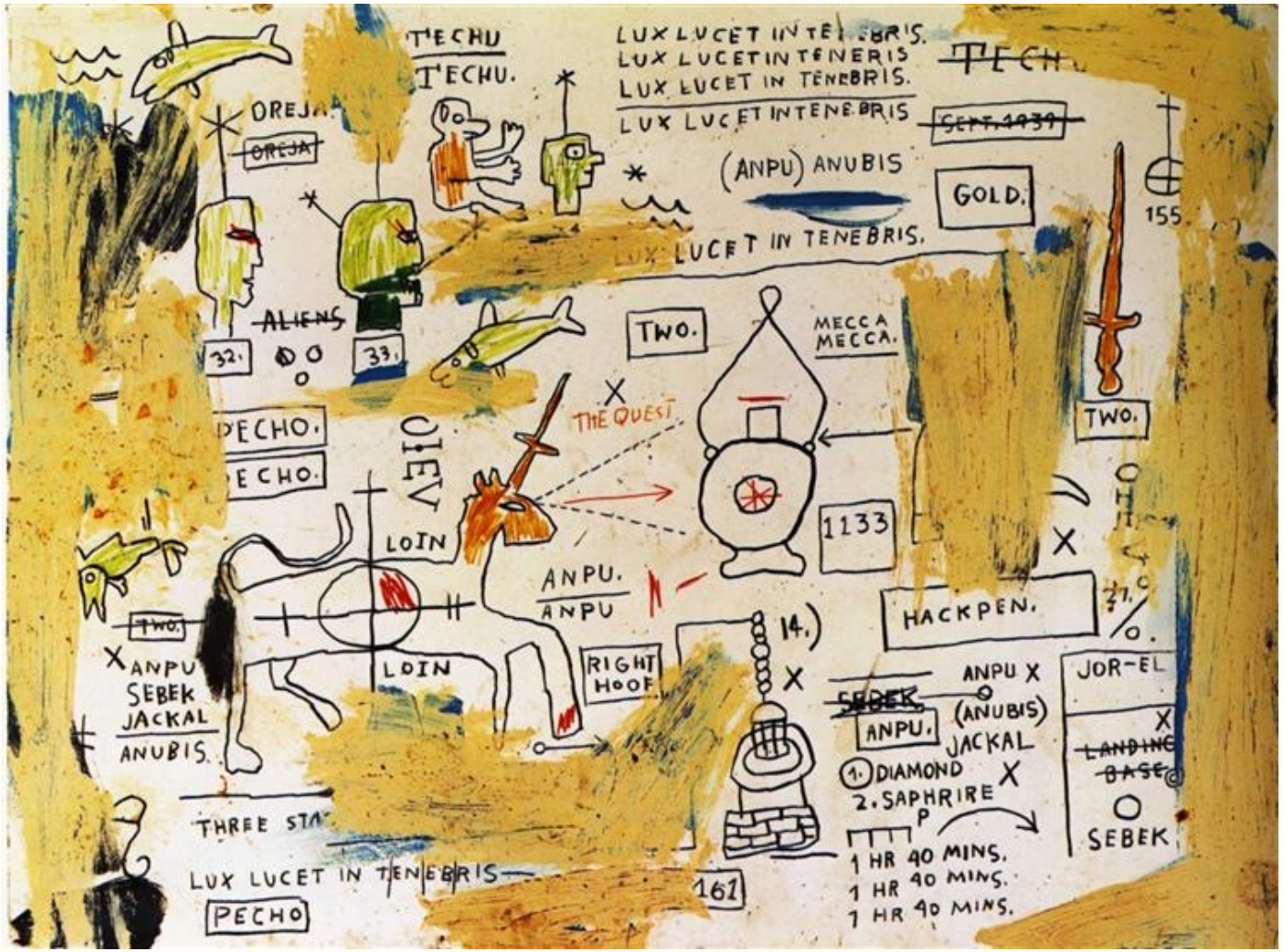
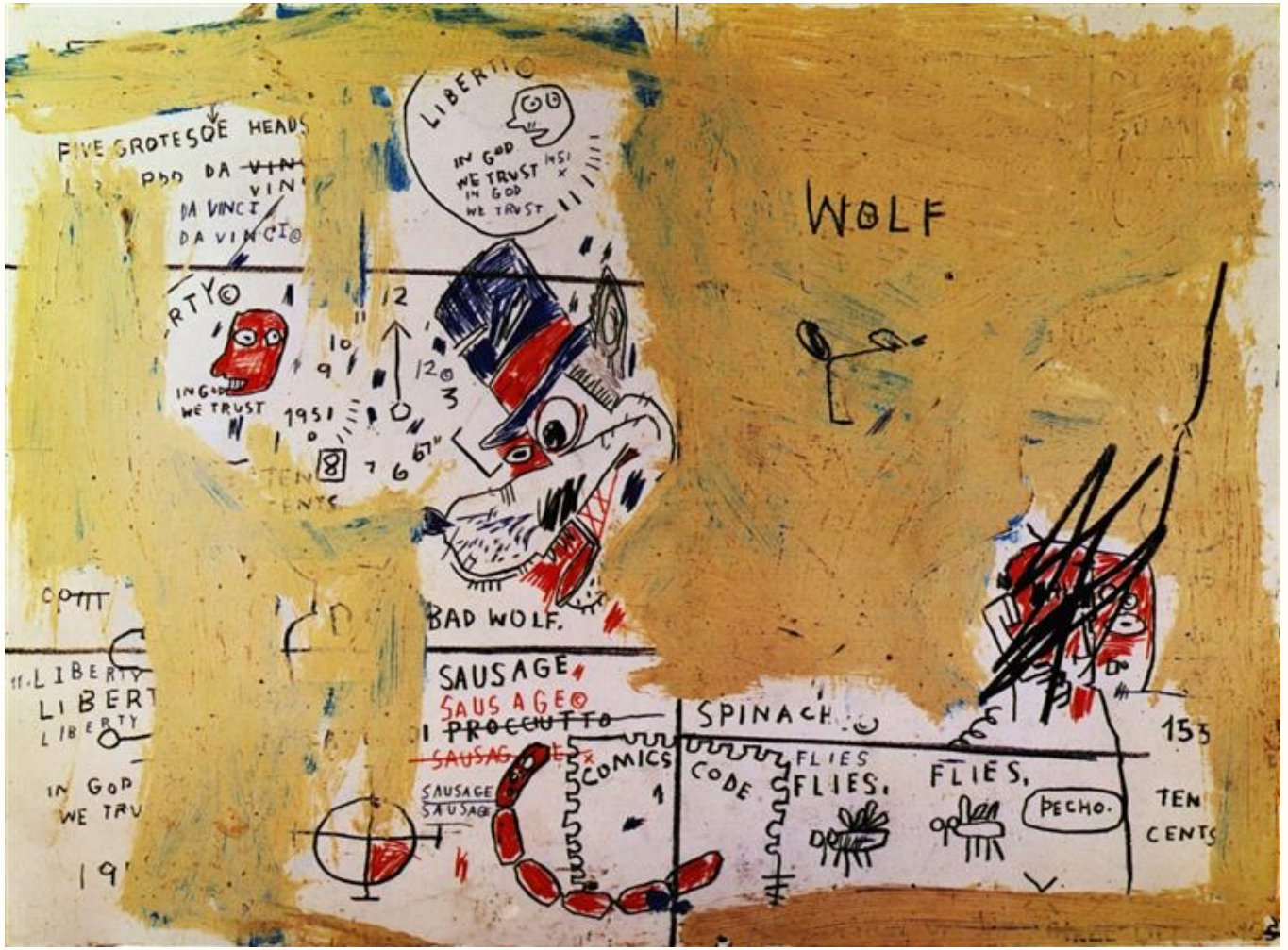


Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Techu-Anpu from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

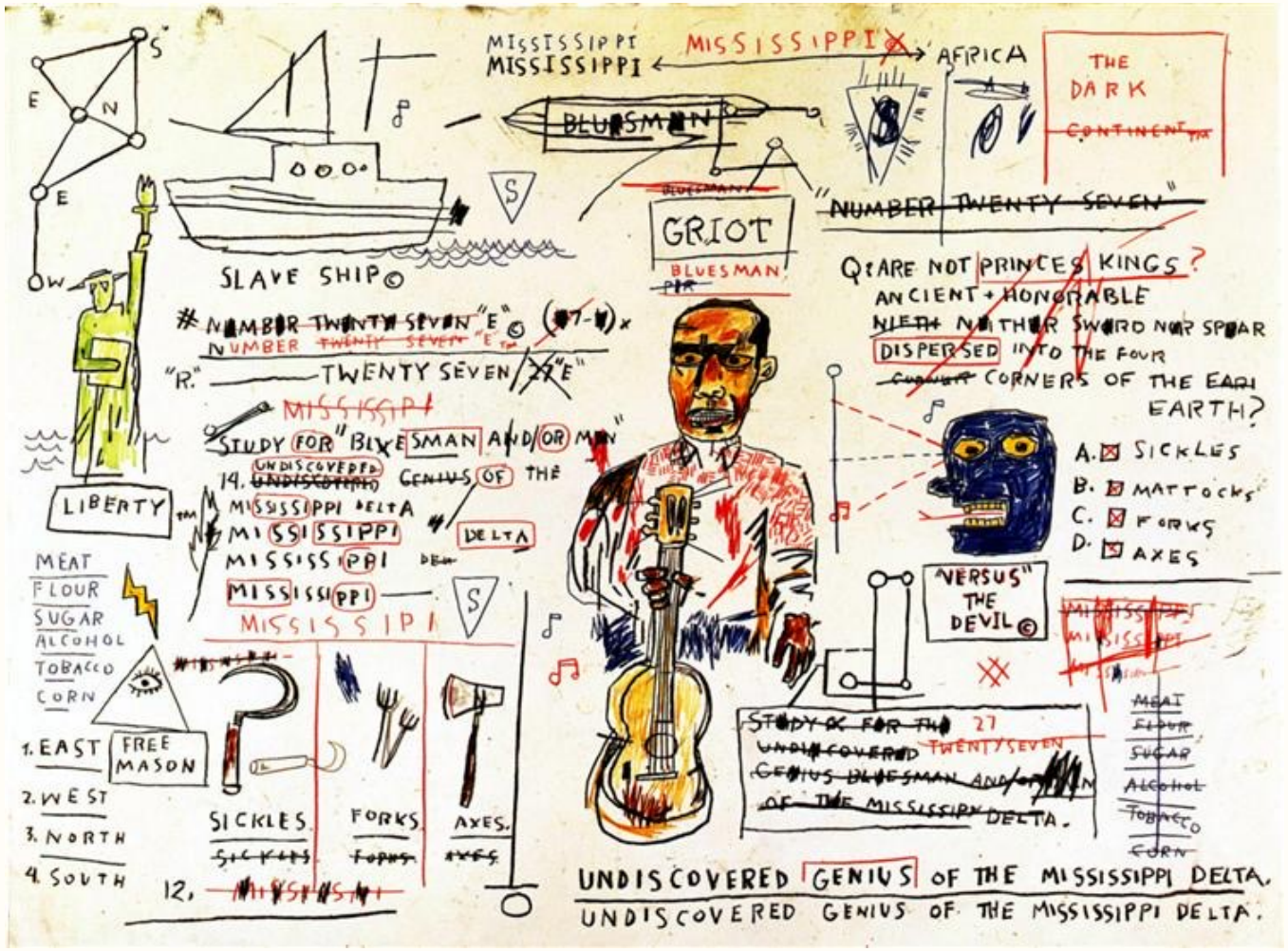
On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32

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

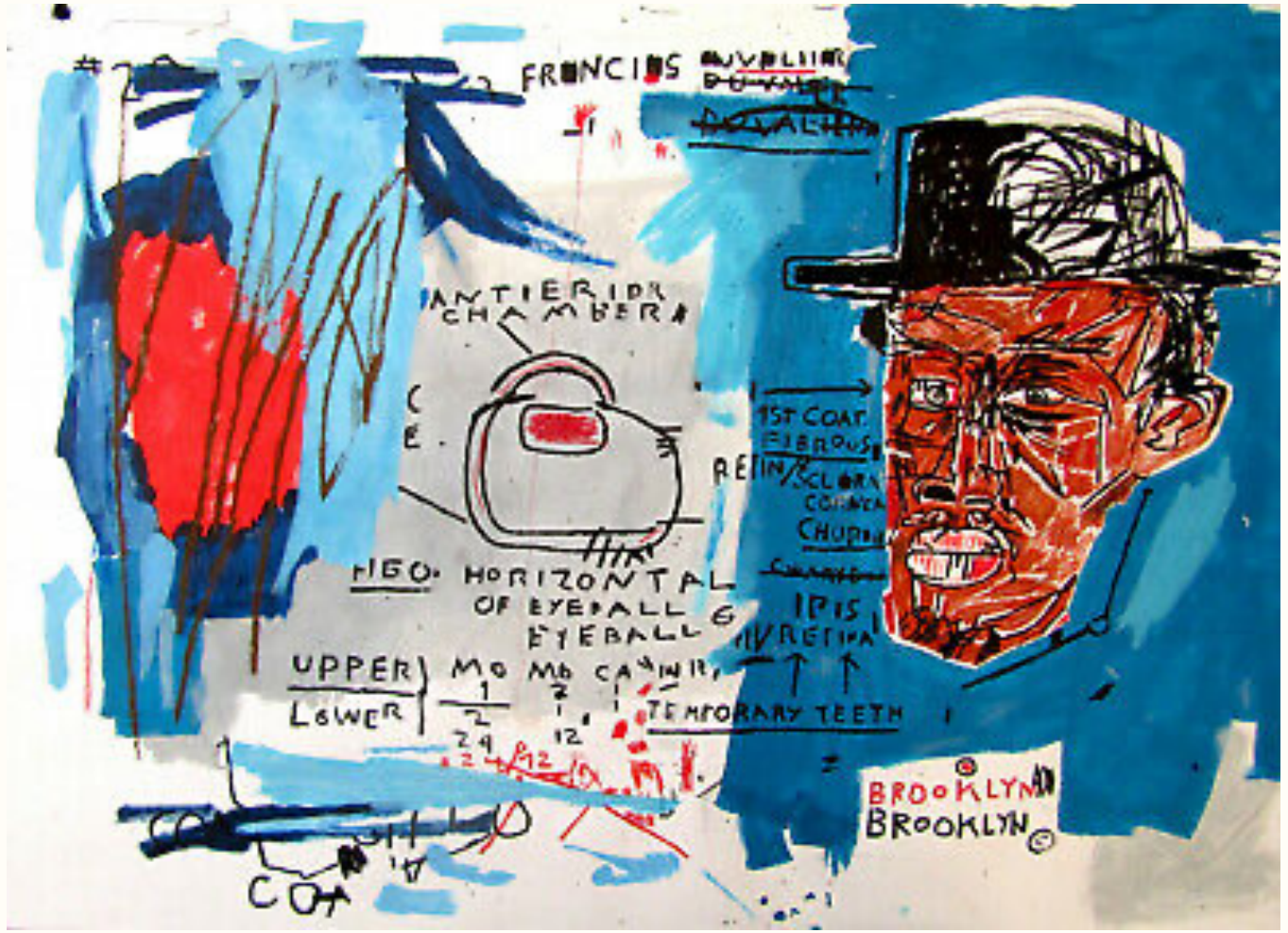
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

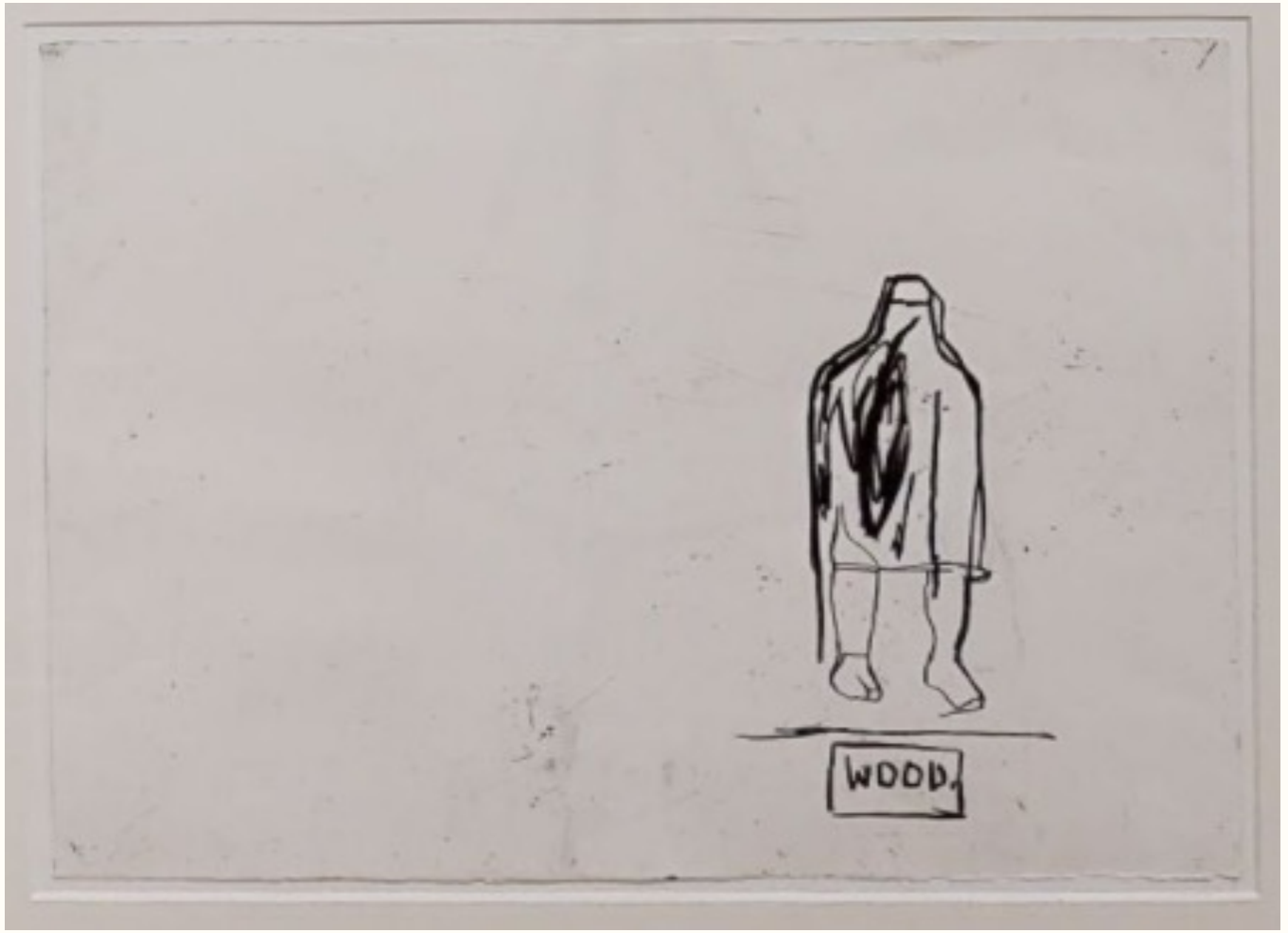
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
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

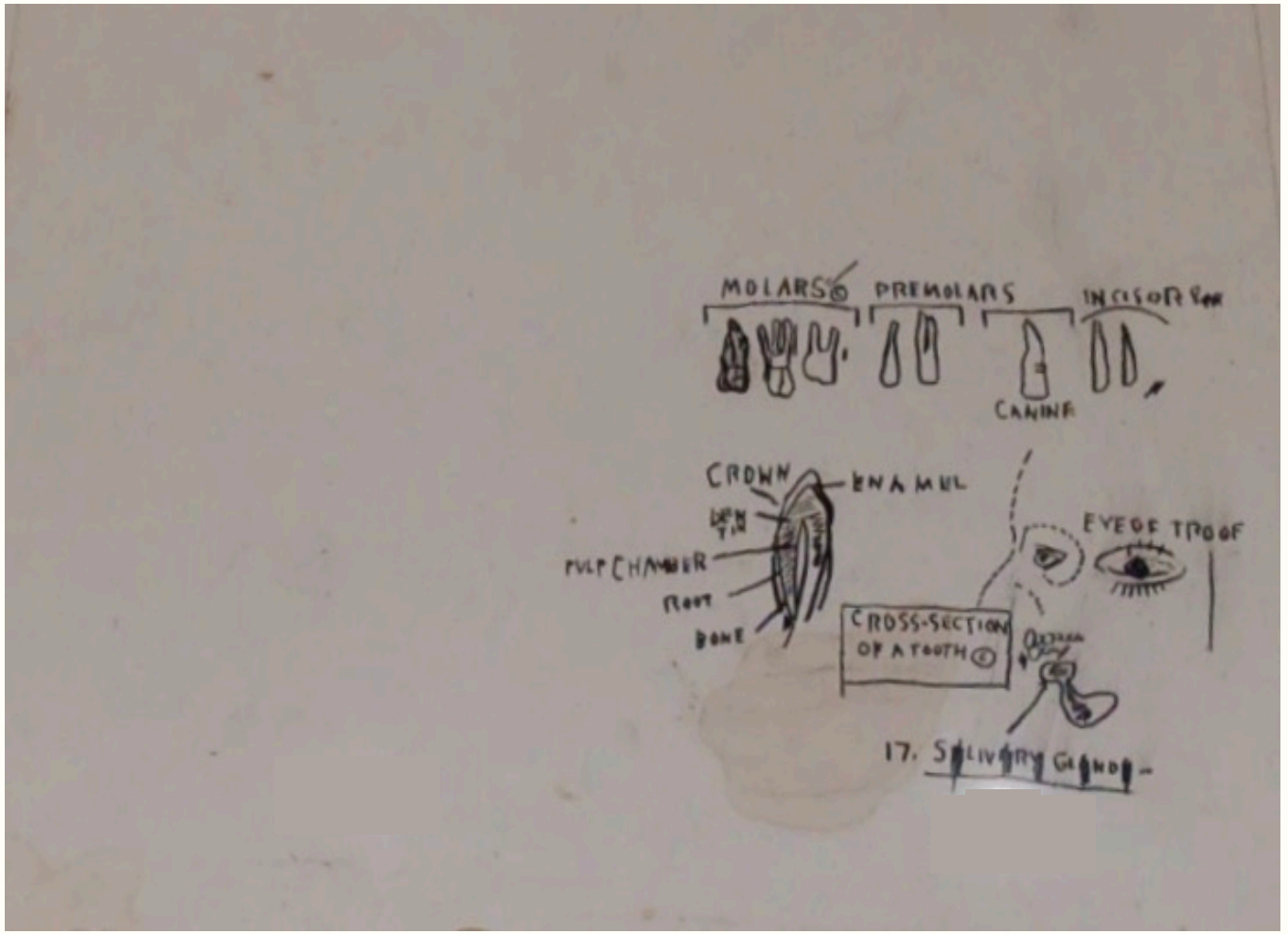
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

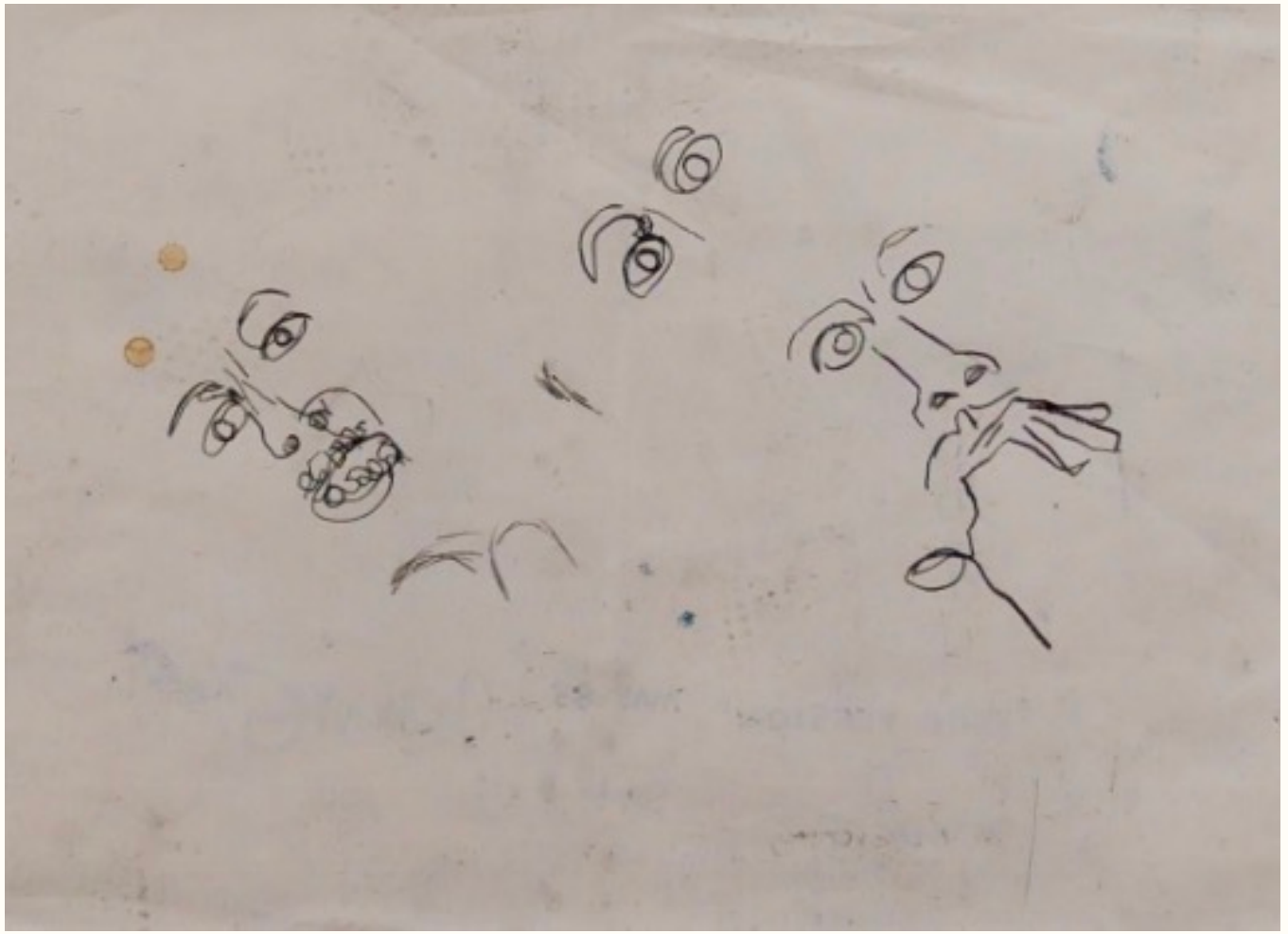
Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

Private Collection; L2021:83.6.1-32



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

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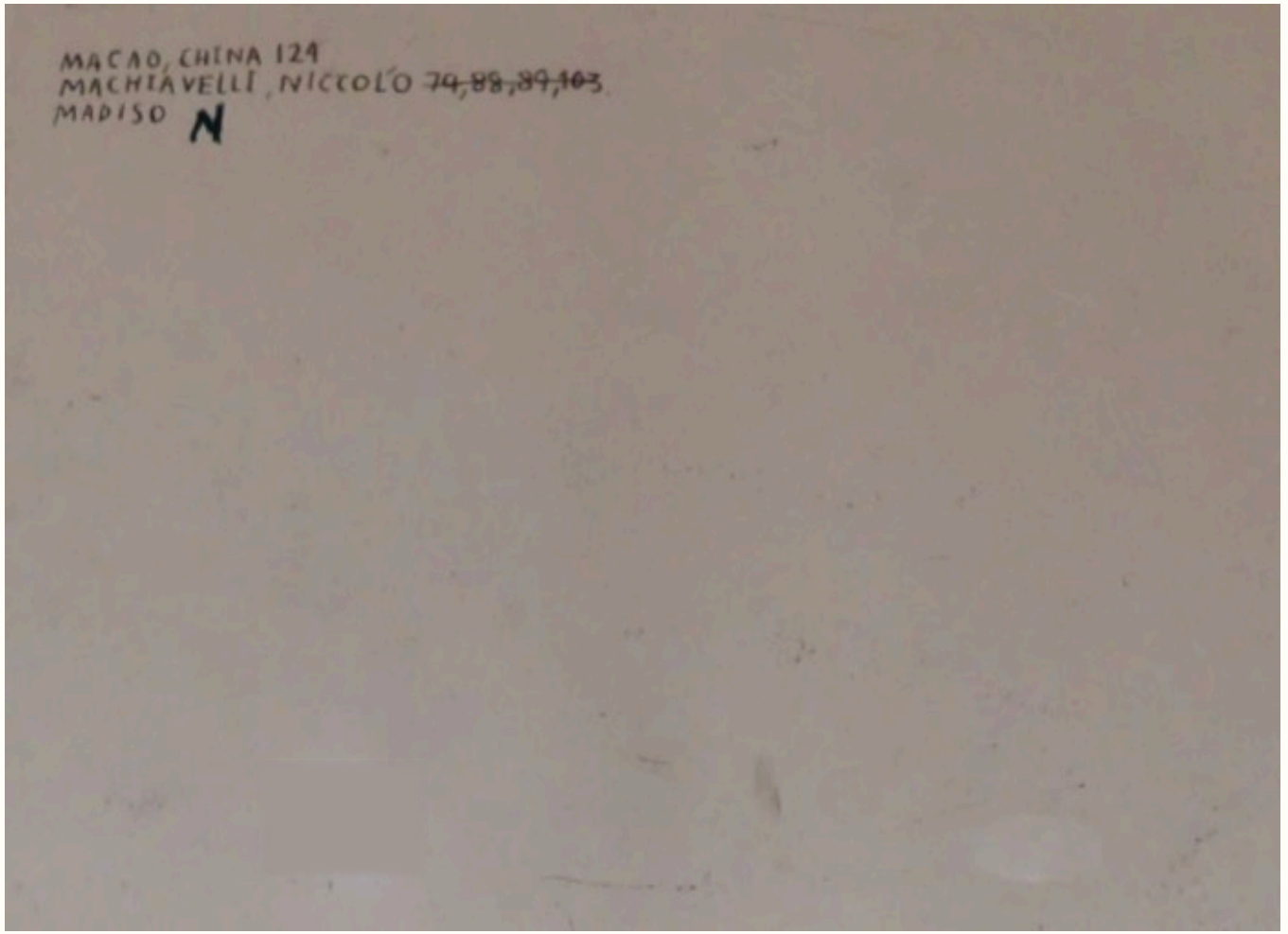


Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960-1988)
Steel from **The Daros Suite**, 1982-1983
Acrylic, oil crayon, pastel, color crayon, charcoal, and pencil on paper; Suite of 32

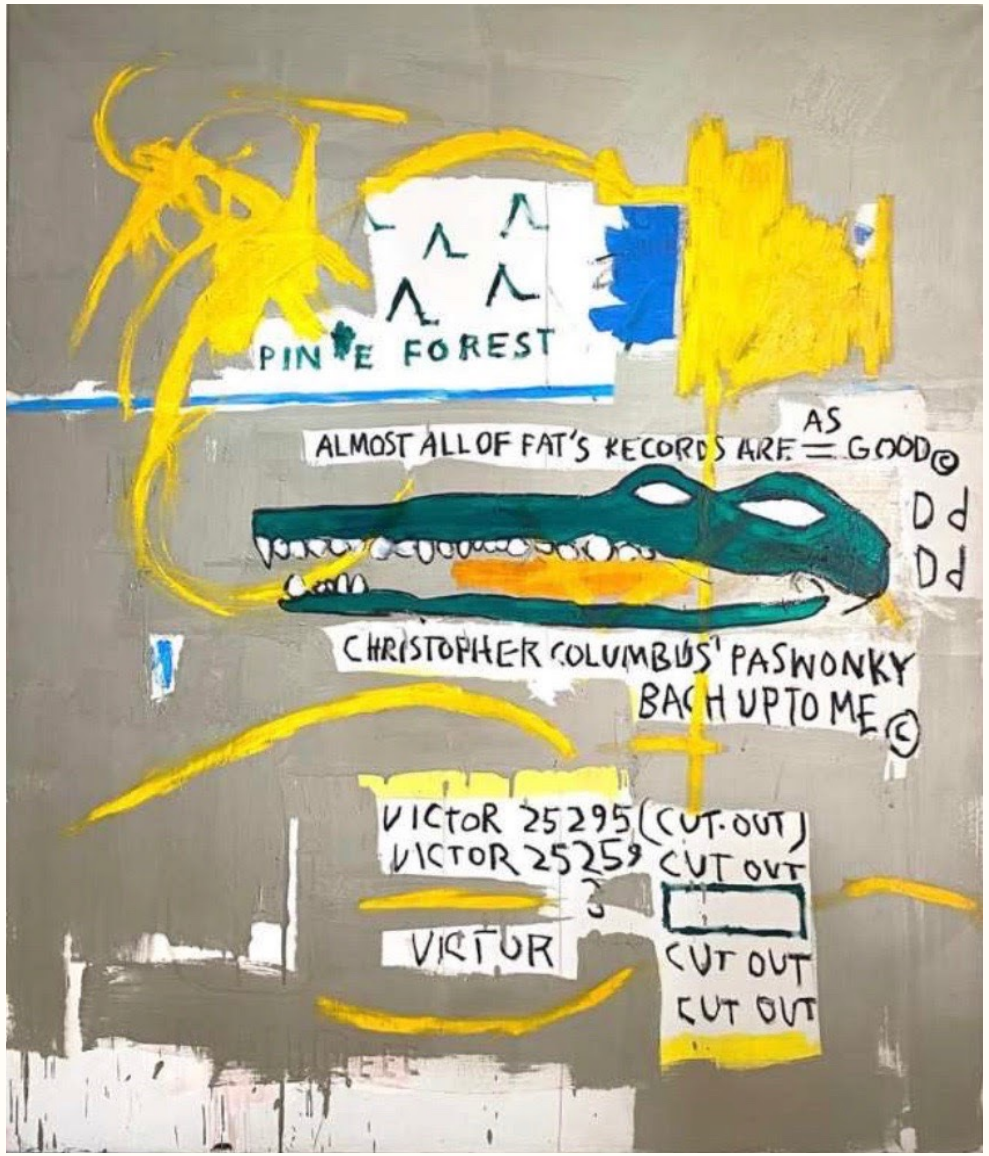
On view July 7 – December 12, 2021

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-Michele 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.

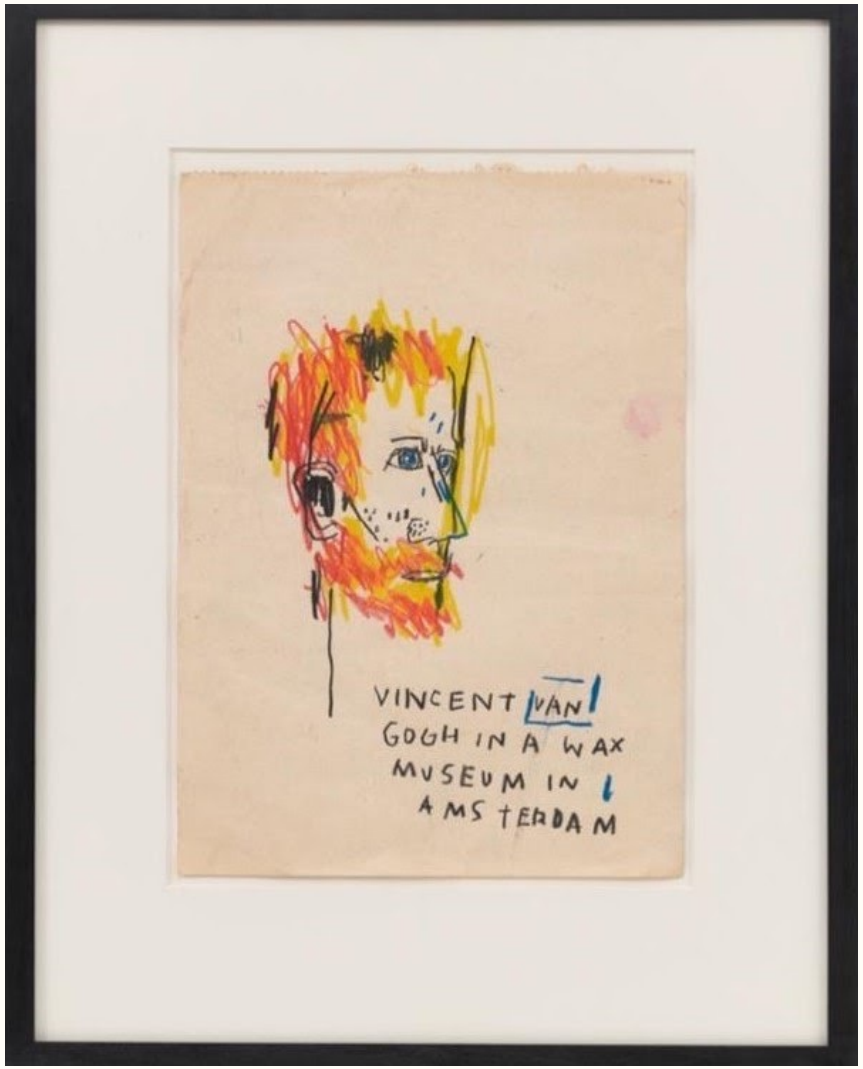
On view February 3 – May 9, 2021

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