

# Jean-michel basquiat and his artistic journey

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According to the New York Times writer Robin Pogrebin and Scott Reyburn, in 2017 Basquiat 1982 painting “untitled” auctioned off for a record breaking \$110.5 million dollars. It set several records when auctioned off, by becoming the highest amount ever paid for an American/African-American artist produced artwork. It also was the first artwork created since the 1980’s to make over \$100 million.

## **Introduction**

Most of us have probably seen or heard about Basquiat’s work in some shape or form in pop culture. Whether it be collaborations with clothing brands such as the Japanese brand Uniqlo or being rapped about by such artist as Jay-z, Kanye West and A\$AP Rocky. Today I will be talking the early life and beginning of Basquiat’s artistic journey, his rise to fame and sadly his early demise

Jean-Michel Basquiat born in Brooklyn, New York on December 22, 1960. He was the second oldest child and was of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent. According to writer for anothermag. com Alex Taylor, Basquiat would at the early age of four start drawing his favorite cartoons on papers that his dad would bring from work. At age six, Basquiat was hit by a car which led to him getting his spleen removed. While recovering from the operation, he was gifted the medical textbook “Gray’s Anatomy” which was very influential for him. His mother instilled a love for art in him by taking him to art museums in Manhattan and made him a junior member of the Brooklyn Museum of Art. At the age of seventeen, Basquiat dropped out of high school therefor getting kicked out his household by his father, which forced him to stay with

his friends in Brooklyn and get by, by selling T-shirts and homemade postcards.

Basquiat went from being unemployed and homeless to selling a painting for \$25, 000 in a matter of several years. In 1976 Basquiat and his high school friend Al Diaz began painting graffiti in Lower Manhattan, using the name SAMO. On December 11, 1978, The Village Voice published an article about the graffiti which shot SAMO in the spotlight. Making SAMO a reclusive and mysterious figure until the Canal Zone Party in July 1980 which was a party/live art exhibition in which Basquiat did a live graffiti tag exposing he was SAMO which rose his fame. Basquiat was included in the New York/New Wave show at PS1, a nonprofit art space in Long Island City. He was the only artist to be given a large amount of space for his paintings. According to writer Stephen Metcalf for the magazine TheAtlantic. com his paintings touched famous art dealer Annina Nosei and was quoted as saying “ had a quality you don’t find on the walls of the street, a quality of poetry and a universal message of the sign. It was a bit immature, but very beautiful.”

Her connection with Basquiat work was instant and serious, she was ready to represent him but since Basquiat was broke, he had no inventory to show her which led to him working on canvases for Nosei in her Prince Street gallery basement. Here he began to lock in and mature his work, he began to introduce race into his work more. He worked by jumping on one canvas to another, almost like dancing. One of Nosei’s assistants said it was like “ Ali in his prime.”

By 1985, Basquiat had collaborated with his pop art idol Andy Warhol, he embraced Warhol at a time where no one was buying Warhol art and wasn't very popular. The collaboration received countless negative reviews and many said Warhol used Basquiat to try to regain sales and popularity. With this and the fact that the paintings did not sell as much, Basquiat felt as either he let Warhol down or if he really felt that Warhol was taking advantage of him. " He left New York hurt and depressed, He never returned to Warhol to paint or anything" as Bruno Bischofberger, a famous art dealer recalls in the website Sleek-Mag. com written by Harriet Shepherd. On February 22, 1987 following a gallbladder surgery Andy Warhol died. The tragedy affected Basquiat mental and physical health a lot. He felt as if him and Warhol never got a chance to repair the falling out they had. Andy Warhol and Basquiat were truly best friends. With this and the fact that Basquiat felt he was thrust into fame and he turned into a machine to produce more and more masterpieces, he began to use drugs to try to cope with it. It became the center of his life and although he tried to go clean on a trip to Hawaii, he died from an Overdose of heroin when he came back to his art studio in Manhattan on August 12, 1988. He was only 27 years old.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Jean-Michel Basquiat was a ground breaking African-American artist. He gave young people and especially those of color that belief that they could be important artist. That they can be whatever they want as long as they believe. He not only changed the art world but street art and fashion.