

1.12.19 –
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Keith Haring Jean-Michel Basquiat

Crossing Lines



Artist notebook

Explore the techniques Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring used to create art and discover more in the exhibition

Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring both used distinctive language and techniques for visual effect and to communicate ideas. Explore these below and look for other examples in the exhibition.

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–88) was an American artist who emerged from New York's creative downtown community in the 1980s. His paintings, drawings and sculptures drew from art history, graffiti, music and popular culture.

LETTERS, WORDS AND PHRASES

Basquiat recorded letters, words and phrases from songs, TV shows and the streets in his notebooks. He would use these in his paintings, where they would sometimes be misspelled, crossed out, or included for the way they looked or sounded. In *Irony of a Negro Policeman*, some of the words have a more direct relationship with the image and help the viewer to understand what they see.

How has Basquiat used text in *Irony of a Negro Policeman* 1981? What effect does the text have on the meaning of the work?

Go to the **Notebooks Section** of the exhibition. Find a phrase that intrigues you and write it down here:

What do you find intriguing about the phrase? Suggest why it may have been of interest to the artist.

LAYERING

Jean-Michel Basquiat's and Keith Haring's public art was often layered over existing graffiti and advertising on buildings, trains and in subway stations. In a similar way, their paintings were also often made layer by layer. Here Basquiat has created an outline of a policeman's figure by applying opaque white paint over a darker base layer. He then added line and text to the surface with oil stick, and scratched into the wet paint to reveal the darker colours underneath.

Find another work which uses layering and write the title here:

How many layers can you identify?

Which techniques and materials has the artist used to create these layers?



Jean-Michel Basquiat *Irony of a Negro Policeman* 1981, acrylic and crayon on canvas, 183.0 x 122.0 cm. Private collection. © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEMES

Basquiat and Haring were activists who commented on social issues such as racism in their work. *Irony of a Negro Policeman* expresses Basquiat's view that black people who became police officers were being hypocritical, since law enforcement was widely associated with racial profiling and harassment. *Malcolm X* is named after black leader and activist Malcolm X, from the 1960s American civil rights movement.

Choose one of the works (here). What evidence can you find in the work to suggest it is about racism? Consider the artist's use of line, shape, colour and text.

JUXTAPOSITION

Haring and Basquiat often incorporated seemingly unconnected historical and cultural references in their work, creating contrasting visual effects and bringing different ideas together in unexpected ways to create new meaning. This technique is called juxtaposition. In this work, the image of the Mona Lisa is placed alongside a newspaper article covering the death of human rights activist Malcolm X during the 1960s American civil rights movement.

What ideas emerge out of this combination of images from different cultures and times? How might the ideas in this work relate to Keith Haring's social activism?

APPROPRIATION

Artists often borrow, copy and modify existing images or objects to highlight or subvert the original meaning and create new ideas, this process is called appropriation. In this work Haring has appropriated a printed image of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting *Mona Lisa* 1503, which is on display in the Louvre in Paris, France. He has painted a red tribal mask over her face, added radiant black lines and set the image on top of a museum plinth.

What meanings or ideas does Haring's appropriation of the Mona Lisa suggest to you and why?

- 1 Find another work that uses appropriation in the exhibition
- 2 Sketch the work here
- 3 Add annotations which describe how appropriation has been used and what ideas or meanings this creates.

Keith Haring (1958–90) was an American artist based in New York through the 1980s known for his distinctive visual style and graffiti-inspired chalk drawings in subway stations.



Keith Haring *Malcolm X* 1988, acrylic, enamel and collage on canvas 152.4 x 152.4 cm. Private collection. © Keith Haring Foundation.

MIXING AND MATCHING

Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat created collages by mixing and matching materials and techniques, and took inspiration from a range of sources. In this work Haring has used paint, pen and ink, as well as printed images from books and newspapers. This mixing and matching creates a composition full of energy and layers of meaning.

Find another artwork where Haring or Basquiat have mixed and matched. List the different materials and techniques you find here:

Describe the visual effects or ideas created by the combination of materials and techniques:

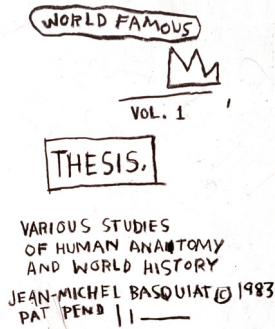
PICTOGRAMS

Pictograms are simplified drawings, images or icons which communicate ideas through their resemblance to a physical object. Haring and Basquiat developed a vocabulary of pictograms symbolising key themes, messages or aspects of their identities. These symbols would commonly recur throughout both artists work as motifs.



Radiant Baby

One of Keith Haring's most recognisable pictograms is the radiant baby which symbolises his love of play and reverence for the wisdom of children.



Crown

The crown is one of Jean-Michel's most commonly repeated pictograms. It asserts his own great ambition as an artist, and often appears in his art alongside representations of people he respected and admired.



- 1 Think of an object or image which symbolises something about you. Consider groups you belong to, things you love or your hobbies and interests.
- 2 Draw this as a pictogram in (box 1). Remember to keep it simple, limit it to a few lines.
- 3 Redraw your pictogram in each box, rotating it by 90 degrees each time to create a pattern.



1	2
3	4

Which other pictograms can you find in the exhibition?
Where else might you see and use Pictograms each day?

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COLLABORATION



During the 1980s, Haring and Basquiat took inspiration from the New York art scene's collaborative and accessible spirit. They collaborated with each other to create new forms of art which combined their styles and ideas. For example, Haring's radiant baby and Basquiat's crown often appear together in their joint works.

Find a work that Haring and Basquiat collaborated on in this exhibition and write the title here. How does the meaning of each artists' symbols or motifs change when read together?

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- 1 Ask a friend to describe an artwork they found interesting in the exhibition. Identify specific details in the work, and describe how elements like line, shape, colour and text are arranged on the picture plane.
- 2 Draw what they describe in the box on the right, without looking at the artwork.
- 3 Compare the results against the original artwork to see how well you did as a team. Swap turns.



(above left) **Keith Haring** *Untitled* (wood relief) 1983, enamel on wood, 28.0 x 29.0 cm. Private collection. © Keith Haring Foundation.

(above right) **Jean-Michel Basquiat** *Untitled (World Famous)* 1983, crayon on paper, 57.2 x 76.2 cm. The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, New York.

(cover) **Keith Haring** *Untitled* 1982, fibre-tipped pen and enamel on wood panel, 135.0 x 45.0 cm. Courtesy Laurent Strouk.

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