JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 22, 1960. With a Haitian-American father and a Puerto Rican mother, Basquiat's diverse cultural heritage was one of his many sources of inspiration.

A self-taught artist, Basquiat began drawing at an early age on sheets of paper his father, an accountant, brought home from the office.

As he delved deeper into his creative side, his mother strongly encouraged him to pursue his artistic talents. Basquiat first attracted attention for his graffiti in New York City in the late 1970s, under the name "SAMO." Working with a close friend, he tagged subway trains and Manhattan buildings with cryptic aphorisms.

In 1977 Basquiat quit high school a year before he was slated to graduate.

To make ends meet, he sold sweatshirts and postcards featuring his artwork on the streets of his native New York. During his lifetime, an art loving public that had no prob-

lem paying as much as $50,000 for a Basquiat original. However, in 2017 a Japanese billionaire broke a record when he bought Basquiat's "Untitled," a 1982 painting of a skull, for $110.5 million at a Sotheby's auction.

In his earlier works, Basquiat was known for using a crown motif, which was his way of celebrating black people as majestic royalty or deeming them as saints.

Describing the crown itself in further detail, artist Francesco Clemente posited: "Jean-Michel's crown has three peaks, for his three royal lineages: the

poet, the musician, the great boxing champion. Jean measured his skill against all he deemed strong, without prejudice as to their taste or age."

Three years of struggle gave way to fame in 1980, when Basquiat's work was featured in a group show. His work and style received critical acclaim for the fusion of words, symbols, stick figures, and animals. Soon, his paintings came to be adored by an art loving public that had no problem paying as much as $50,000 for a Basquiat original. His rise coincided with the emergence of a new art movement, Neo-Expressionism, ushering in a wave of new, young and experimental artists that included Julian Schnabel and Susan Rothenberg.

In the mid 1980s, Basquiat collaborated with famed pop artist Andy Warhol, which resulted in a show of their work that featured a series of corporate logos and cartoon characters. On his own, Basquiat continued to exhibit around the country and the world.

In 1986, he traveled to Africa for a show in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. That same year, the 25-year-old exhibited nearly 60 paintings at the Kestner-Gesellschaft Gallery in Hanover, Germany — becoming the youngest artist to ever showcase his work there.