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Basquiat Loved Photocopies So Much He Bought His Own Xerox Machine. Now the Artworks He Made With It Are Worth Millions

Didn't snag one of the 50,000 tickets for the Brant Foundation's sold-out Basquiat show? Don't despair.

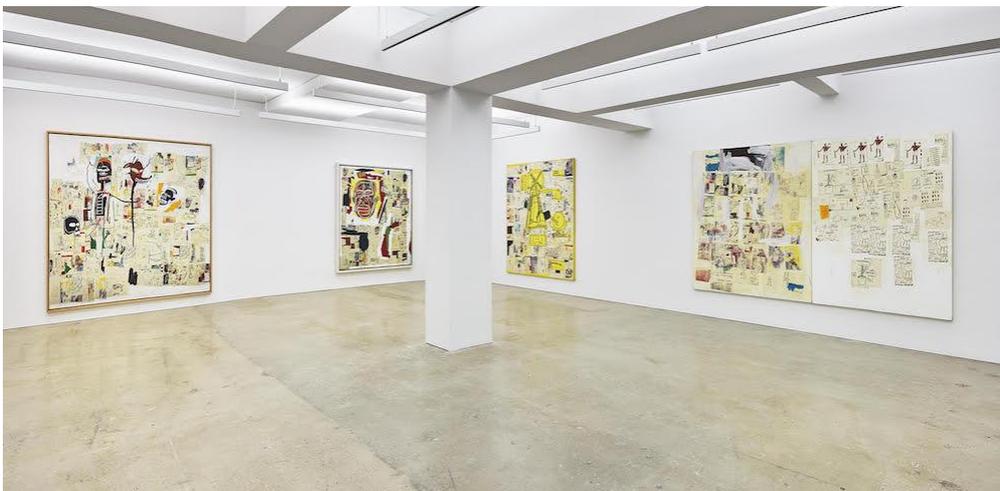
Eileen Kinsella, March 12, 2019



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Peter and the Wolf* (1985). Collection of the Robert Lehman Revocable Trust. Image courtesy of Aimee and Robert Lehman.

The Brant Foundation is already out of all 50,000 timed tickets to see its new Jean-Michel Basquiat survey in New York. But fans needn't despair yet: Further uptown, Nahmad Contemporary is opening another Basquiat survey—also free—focused on the artist's surprisingly masterful work made with xerox photocopies.

Like the Brant show, and the well-received retrospective that preceded it at Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, the Nahmad show, titled "Jean-Michel Basquiat: Xerox," was curated by Basquiat scholar Dieter Buchhart. "You have a great show uptown and a great show downtown," Buchhart told artnet News. It was always the intention to organize the complementary shows at the same time, he said, though they are quite different.



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The works at Nahmad Contemporary range in date from 1979 through 1987 (the year before Basquiat's death) and reflect the artist's playfulness and penchant for experimentation. It opens with Basquiat's first foray into the xerox medium, when he and his friend Jennifer Stein created a small series of colorful collages by incorporating photocopies of paint splatters, scrawled text, and detritus, including candy wrappers and newspaper clippings, into postcards that they then sold on the street.

Several of these diminutive works are displayed in a double-sided glass case that allow the viewer to see the "© Jean-Michel Basquiat" tag scrawled on the back. A standout of these small earlier works is a 1979 canvas with swaths of blue color, newspaper clippings, and a strip of diagonal black label tape that reads "He Was Crazy," which is also the title of the work.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *He Was Crazy* (1979). Photo by Eileen Kinsella.

In 1983, when collage became a defining element of his practice, Basquiat began using the photocopier extensively as a tool to create paintings. The process of photocopying became so integral to his practice that he eventually invested in his own Xerox machine for his studio.

In the early 1980s he “started joining separate panels because the elevator wasn’t big enough. That gave him the opportunity to play with the panels and exchange them,” Buchhart said.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *King of the Zulus* (1984–85). Marseille Museum of Contemporary Art. Like the Brant survey, the Nahmad show was years in the making and reflects both Basquiat's prolificacy and wide-ranging approach to media. Later works include his incorporation of found materials like wood and the application of xerox collages to wood boxes instead of canvases.

Buchhart says the Xerox paintings position Basquiat as a pioneer of the pre-digital age, likening the various sheets to the numerous windows and screens we now leave open on smart phones and computers every day.

Basquiat's *Untitled (One Eyed Man or Xerox Face)* (1982) achieved the highest price for a xerox work at auction when it sold for \$14.5 million at Sotheby's London in March 2017. All of the works in the present show are on loan from private collectors, museums, the Louis Vuitton Foundation, and the Basquiat estate, and none are for sale.



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