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A French Gallery Cancelled This Artist's Show After He Was Accused of Copying Jean-Michel Basquiat

The gallery, which stands by Guillaume Verda's work, cited "public safety" concerns.

Sarah Cascone, February 26, 2019



Guillaume Verda has been accused of ripping off Jean-Michel Basquiat. Photo courtesy of Guillaume Verda.

Galerie Sakura in Paris has cancelled an exhibition by artist Guillaume Verda due to concerns about “public safety” after the artist was threatened online by people accusing him of copying the style of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The issue blew up after a Twitter user noted similarities between the work of the two artists on February 19.

The situation escalated quickly from there, with Verda coming under fire as a white man appropriating the style of an African American artist.

“There’s not a single mention of Basquiat’s enormous influence on [Verda’s] ‘work’, which, if I may, allows us to qualify it as a bad copy,” the user wrote in a later tweet.



“[Verda] received threats, a lot of hatred and threats,” Sakura Gallery director Jean-Baptiste Simon told FRANCE 24, dismissing the accusations of copying. “There were many messages and emails. It was an avalanche on non-constructive criticism. It’s been completely blown out of proportion.” He added: “A lot of artists work like that, they draw inspiration from another artist or movement.”

According to FRANCE 24, a page on Verda’s website said the exhibition was to be of “traditional expressionist masks made of paperboard and wood, representing the ancient spirits that still inhabit our modern world. A piece of the Urban voodoo myth.” The page has since been removed.

Some of Verda’s posts on Instagram referenced Basquiat, but others did not. In at least one comment captured in a screenshot by his detractors, he claimed not to know who the late graffiti artist was.



Guillaume Verda claims not to know of Jean-Michel Basquiat in a comment on Instagram.
Screenshot via Instagram.

The artist has since removed all content from his website and made his social media accounts private. His [portfolio](#) is still available by direct link.

“He’s not trying to hide, because he stands by his work,” Simon, the gallery director, said. “But he doesn’t want all the pressure of social media.” An announcement of the exhibition’s cancellation was posted on the gallery website, but has since been taken down.