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Edited by Dieter Buchhart

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT NOW'S THE TIME

Art Gallery of Ontario

DelMonico Books · Prestel

Munich · London · New York

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FOLLOWING PAGE

Jean-Michel Basquiat in studio with painting, 1985. Photo by Beth Phillips.

BACK COVER

James VanDerZee, Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1982 (printed later). Gelatin silver print, 60.2 × 50 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Dr. Kenneth Montague/The Wedge Collection, Toronto, 2008. 2008/71. © Estate of James VanDerZee.



FRONT COVER

Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Irony of a Negro
Policeman* (detail), 1981. Acrylic and crayon
on canvas, 183 x 122 cm. Private Collection.

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Jean-Michel Basquiat near window in
Crosby Street studio, New York City, 1982.
Photo by Beth Phillips.

Jean-Michel Basquiat
Now's the Time

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Almost thirty years after his early death, Jean-Michel Basquiat is a singular figure in the history of American art and a beacon of inspiration to many. In a short career he developed a groundbreaking and provocative artistic outlook, which he communicated with energy and conviction. Using an expressive voice fuelled by sadness, rage and longing, he explored the social and political ferment of 1980s New York. His powerful visual language includes symbols, motifs and words, many of which recur in his works as he returns to specific, substantial themes. He wants us to remember; he doesn't want us to forget.

Basquiat was deeply engaged with the social and political realities of 1980s New York. In his work, he confronts issues of racism, class struggle, social hypocrisy and black history—directly and without compromise. His preoccupations, inspirations and influences extended beyond the “art world”: he engaged with street art, music, sports, comics and other cultural phenomena, and was constantly in dialogue with other artists across disciplines. The extraordinary energy of Basquiat's works comes in part from his willingness to borrow from—and lend to—the cultural symbols of his time.

Jean-Michel Basquiat: Now's the Time is the first large-scale exhibition of the artist's work in Canada, featuring more than eighty paintings and drawings. For the first time ever, Canadians have the chance to engage with famous images as well as lesser-known works. In the selection and the thematic groupings that order the exhibition's unfolding narrative, we look to explore Basquiat's work beyond the myth of his celebrity. We have chosen to do so by asking two simple questions: what does Basquiat mean to us today, and how does his voice resound in a Canadian multicultural context? In other words, what does his art mean to audiences now, in this place of many homes, traditions and life experiences? Ultimately, we circle back to a basic and profound truth: Basquiat's work allows us to be ourselves in the world.

This exhibition comes at a key moment in Toronto's history. Submerged political issues are bubbling to the surface, and we have the opportunity to decide what kind of urban environment we want to create for the future. In this sense, Toronto today is not so unlike New York in the 1980s. In order to better understand how the kinds of issues Basquiat explored play out in present-day Toronto, and to reflect this moment, the AGO assembled an advisory committee to help us conceptualize the exhibition. These voices from Toronto provide unique insight into the political, cultural and social issues facing our city. Like Basquiat, these advisors have urged us to reject complacency and think critically about our urban environment.

To realize this project we have worked closely with our guest curator, Dieter Buchhart, a Viennese scholar who has dedicated much of his career to exploring the work of Basquiat and his contemporaries. *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Now's the Time* is rooted in his research, and we extend our heartfelt thanks to him for the fresh perspective on the artist's work that is presented in this exhibition and publication. Thanks also to Dieter's tireless team in Vienna: Dzenana Mujadzic, Flora Schausberger and Anna Karina Hofbauer.

I want also to acknowledge the immeasurable contributions of the AGO team that brought the exhibition to life: Stephanie Smith, the AGO's recently appointed chief curator; Sarah Yaffe, the project manager for the exhibition; interpretive planner

Shiralee Hudson Hill; and curatorial assistant Magdalyn Asimakis. Thanks also to manager of publishing Jim Shedden and his colleagues for leading the charge on this elegant book, which was beautifully designed by the Office of Gilbert Li.

For this volume, Dieter and the AGO have assembled an impressive roster of scholars, critics and curators to reflect on the enduring importance of Basquiat's work. I thank Olivier Berggruen, Christian Campbell, Glenn O'Brien, Francesco Pellizzi and Franklin Sirmans—as well as Dieter—for their astute and thought-provoking contributions. I am also grateful to Larry Warsh, who provided sage guidance throughout the development of this project.

I thank the many institutions and individual collectors who loaned pieces to the show; their generosity has allowed the Canadian public to encounter a wide variety of Basquiat's work. Many thanks to the Andra Collection; Acquavella Galleries; Donald Baechler; the Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT, USA; the Broad Art Foundation; John Cheim; Alba and Francesco Clemente; Nina Clemente; Collection Bischofberger, Switzerland; Collection Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris – Salzburg; the Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection; Salomon Emquies; Galerie Andrea Caratsch, Zurich and St. Moritz; Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Switzerland; the George Economou Collection; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York; Dr. Kenneth Montague/The Wedge Collection; the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Tobias Mueller Ammann; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Nahmad Collection; Glenn O'Brien; Hiroko Onoda, New York; Jean Pigozzi, Geneva; Safdie Fine Art Ltd.; Andre Sakhai; Susan Almrud Art Advisory; Christophe Van de Weghe; Van de Weghe Fine Art, New York; Larry Warsh; the Yoav Harlap Collection; Yoshii Gallery, New York; and a number of private lenders. We are particularly indebted to the Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose support throughout this project has enabled us to celebrate the artist and his work in a rich and multifaceted way.

I also extend wholehearted thanks to our valued supporters, whose enthusiasm for this exhibition and publication has been inspiring. I deeply appreciate the contribution of our lead supporter, the Hal Jackman Foundation, and I thank Robert Harding and TD Bank Group for their generous support.

The experience of living with Jean-Michel Basquiat's intricate, evocative works is a truly meaningful one. I invite our visitors to engage with his magnificent legacy and be open to change. Basquiat was an artist firmly rooted in his particular time and place, but his vision continues to reverberate—and move us—today. *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Now's the Time* is a testament to that remarkable artistic voice. I hope you'll enjoy the time you spend with Basquiat's work, and carry his energy into the future.

MATTHEW TEITELBAUM
Michael and Sonja Koerner Director,
and CEO, Art Gallery of Ontario

