

the warhol: resources & lessons

Unit Lesson Plans / Creative Thinking and Making / Collaboration / Lesson 3 / Basquiat

Warhol & Basquiat (artistic collaborations)



Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat, *Ten Punching Bags (Last Supper)*, 1985-1986, Acrylic and oil stick on punching bags, 42 x 14 x 14 in. (106.7 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm.), The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh © AWF

"It was like some crazy-art world marriage and they were the odd couple. The relationship was symbiotic. Jean-Michel thought he needed Andy's fame, and Andy thought he needed Jean-Michel's new blood. Jean Michel gave Andy a rebellious image again."

Ronny Cutrone quoted in *Warhol: The Biography* by Victor Bockris, Da Capo Press: Cambridge, 20030, pp. 461-2.

In the early 1980s, Andy Warhol and painter Jean-Michel Basquiat began a series of collaborative paintings. Like Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat constructed a persona that he presented to the public that was contradictory to who he truly was. During press interviews, Andy Warhol also gave contradictory statements about his past. Emerging first out of the Graffiti Art movement, Basquiat chose SAMO as his "tag" referring to "Same Ol'." Weaving the story of himself as a Caribbean-born ghetto kid who lived in a box on the streets of New York, Basquiat was, in fact, the educated son of a middle class African-American lawyer from the borough of Queens. Warhol liked the confrontational Basquiat who was continually running against the grain of both the law and the art world. Basquiat has been credited with inspiring Warhol to return to painting on canvas like he did during the early 1960's.¹ The two artists collaborated on numerous paintings together. Warhol usually painted first, allowing Basquiat to layer over his work. On many occasions Basquiat wrote a word, and then drew a line through it, simultaneously stating and contradicting the word's meaning and associations.

In 1986 Warhol was deeply involved in a large series of paintings derived from *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci. The series was commissioned by the art dealer Alexandre Iolas, who offered Warhol a show in Milan right across the street

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Unit Lesson Plans / Critical Thinking / Collaboration / Lesson 3 / Handout 3.1



Detail, *Ten Punching Bags (Last Supper)*, 1985-1986, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh
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from the real Last Supper. Warhol worked on the project on and off for a year, and the source material of da Vinci's Christ image became the central motif of *Ten Punching Bags (Last Supper)*, a collaborative sculpture with Basquiat. A number of other key factors contributed to the execution of this sculptural installation: Warhol had been following a rigorous exercise regimen, which included boxing with his trainer; Basquiat, his young collaborator, was an avid fan of professional boxing (Basquiat once painted a punching bag with a mocking portrait of his dealer); both artists were unsteady at that moment from the barbs of negative artworld criticism. The text, "judge," and other symbols were Basquiat's contributions. Warhol admitted that he tried to paint some images like Jean-Michel, and said that the "paintings we're doing together are better when you can't tell who did which parts."² He also questioned the aesthetics of their collaborations saying, "[Jean-Michel] painted over a painting that I did, and

I don't know if it got better or not."

But Warhol gave credit where it was due: "Jean-Michel got me into painting differently, and that's a good thing."³



Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat, *Collaboration (Dollar Sign, Don't Tread on Me)*, 1984-1985 acrylic, silkscreen ink, and oil stick on canvas, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm.) The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh
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Comprehension Questions:

1. What does symbiotic mean?
2. When you look at *Ten Punching Bags* can you discern which artist painted the various elements?
3. What are the general differences between Warhol's work and Basquiat's work?
4. Do you think that Warhol and Basquiat were equal partners in their collaborative paintings? Why or why not?

6 Stoner, J. (2006) *Factory Work*. London: University Press of New England

2 Hackett, P. & Warhol, A. (1991) *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. Grand Central Publishing (Apr. 16, 1984)

3 Hackett, P. & Warhol, A. (1991) *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. Grand Central Publishing (Apr. 17, 1984)