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Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art

By Phoebe Hoban

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Painter Jean-Michel Basquiat was the Jimi Hendrix of the art world: in less than a decade he went from being a teenage graffiti writer to an international art star; he was dead of a drug overdose at age twenty-seven. A legend in his own lifetime, Basquiat's meteoric success and overnight burnout were an instant art-world myth; his brief career spanned the giddy '80s art boom and epitomized its outrageous excess, from its art dealers to its drug dealers, from its clubs to its galleries, from Madonna to Warhol. And the legend endures: the 1980s art world *enfant terrible* became the subject of the 1996 film *Basquiat*, starring Jeffrey Wright, Dennis Hopper, and David Bowie. Basquiat, the first biography of this prolific and charismatic figure, charts his trajectory from his troubled childhood to his volatile passage through the white art world of dealers and nouveau riche collectors. It is also the evocation of an era--one that fueled Basquiat's hyperactive rise to stardom and sadly predictable death.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This minutely reported book is as much a portrait of the frenzied, prodigal New York art world of the 1980s as it is a biography of Jean-Michel Basquiat, who died of a drug overdose at age 27 in 1988. Basquiat, one of very few African American artists to acquire an international reputation, left a thick web of dealers, collectors, friends, lovers, paintings, drawings, and used syringes behind him. Author Phoebe Hoban seems to have unblinkingly interviewed or examined them all. While she duly registers Basquiat's sad childhood, with his unstable Puerto Rican mother and punishing Haitian father, she doesn't make much of the deeper veins of sorrow and self-destruction that may have motivated the artist and informed his art. Rather, she allows his celebrity, which whisked him from street urchin to art star, to be the central trajectory of this story. The Warhol protégé would probably approve, as he was the primary obliterator of his own psychological depths, throwing away his short, phenomenally productive life in the edgy club and drug scene of downtown Manhattan. The miracle is that Basquiat was so good, and so serious, an artist, surrounded as he was by hype and cash. Hoban's book is a fluid, intricate, authoritative dissection of a time, a place, and--almost--a person. --*Peggy Moorman*

From Publishers Weekly

Hoban's background as a journalist shows in the fast-paced, reportorial style with which she presents the life and times of the 1980s art world "phenom," painter Jean-Michael Basquiat. Half-Haitian, half-Puerto Rican, Basquiat grew up in Brooklyn as the son of a middle-class accountant. At constant odds with a father friends described as "strict" and "self-absorbed," he became a drug-soaked denizen of the East Village, painting the city's walls with his graffiti tag, SAMO. How he turned his skills at wordplay and fragmented imagery into a career that captivated the international art scene before dying of a heroin overdose at the age of 27 becomes the focus of this accessible, frequently entertaining book. Those who peopled that scene, from gallery owner Mary Boone to Andy Warhol and Madonna, receive ample coverage here, as do the downtown New York clubs he frequented and the upscale European suites he trashed. Throughout, Hoban makes a strong case that racism marred the life of the dreadlocked artist in paint-spattered Armani suits. What's missing is any analysis of the degree to which Basquiat's enormous drug consumption (ca. 100 bags of heroin a day at the end) contributed to his imagery, especially the gap-toothed skulls he splayed across ragged expanses of bright colors. Basquiat died intestate, which ultimately meant that his father, Gerard, became executor. Although there are eight pages of photos (not seen by PW), Hoban could not get permission to reproduce works for her unauthorized biography and the lack is sorely felt. Editor: Paul Slovak. (Aug.) FYI: August 12 will be the 10th anniversary of Basquiat's death.

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From Library Journal

This first, unauthorized biography of the most monetarily successful black American artist?a master painter and wordsmith?is sorely needed. Jean-Michel Basquiat, initially known by the graffiti tag "SAMO," tragically lived a mere 27 years (1960-88). Son of a Haitian father and a mother of Puerto Rican extraction, he was recognized internationally as a young genius of the Eighties contemporary art scene. Hoban, a New York Times columnist, provides vivid material derived mostly from countless interviews conducted after the artist's death. Basquiat's mesmerizing charisma and sexuality accentuated a catastrophic lifestyle. Real creative talent overshadowed the fact that the enfant terrible was constantly high, fueled by massive quantities of drugs. Yet he remained able to produce dozens of masterpieces and hundreds of works with both strengths and weaknesses. A fine tale of a talented young man, this is also recommended for its commentary on the decade when art in New York was so wide-open a victim of commerce.?Mary Hamel-

Users Review

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Maria Macdonald:

This Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art book is just not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book will be information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. This specific Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art without we recognize teach the one who reading it become critical in imagining and analyzing. Don't possibly be worry Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art can bring when you are and not make your bag space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even telephone. This Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art having very good arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not sense uninterested in reading.

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