

Jean-Michel Basquiat: *An Intimate Portrait*

The photographs in this exhibition reveal an intimate look at the friendship between artists Nicholas Taylor and Jean-Michel Basquiat, a camaraderie that was born under the pulsating lights of New York's famed Mudd Club in lower Manhattan in January 1979. The Mudd Club was a beehive of creativity, where the likes of Fab Five Freddy, David Byrne (*Talking Heads*), Keith Haring, and Madonna frequented before they became famous. These historic photographs, shot on just one roll of film, are being exhibited and traveled for the first time in their entirety. These images are portals into the life of an artist who was on the threshold of taking the art world by storm. Countless essays and reviews have been written about Basquiat and his work. This exhibition focuses on the portrait of a man, an artist, and, most importantly, a friend. Taylor's and Basquiat's friendship endured many years, through the ups and downs of Basquiat's rise to notoriety in the art world until his untimely death in 1988.

These striking images, taken by Taylor, of a nineteen-year-old Jean-Michel Basquiat, unspoiled by the art-star celebrity that was to reveal itself in just a few



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short years. The accompanying text panels, written by Taylor, document the friendship the two shared and also serve to contextualize the historical significance of Basquiat in the early 1980s. Taylor's personal revelations and memories are shared with great candor. Looking back on these images, twenty years later, there is a subtle aura of predetermination for Basquiat. His actions and poses, captured by Taylor, appear aloof or casual upon first glance. These are, in fact, rarely publicized visual records of Basquiat's character and use of body language to express his emotions and personality, which, in turn, reflect his serendipitous struggle for fame and respect.

Basquiat painted as he lived – full throttle – everything, all the time. He had little sense of self-control, nor did he seek out any realm of moderation. In retrospect, his paintings are aggressive and fragmented, radiating nervous energy and enthusiasm for the chaotic world of which he was a part. Existing

simultaneously in his work is a sense of excitement, imagination, and exploration of visual language. His frustration in trying to assert himself as a black artist into a predominantly white art culture was continuously filtered into the context of his work.

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