

GESSO



Jean-Michel Basquiat

Meet the most prominent and highest earning neo-expressionist artist from the 80s

Doris Salcedo

Meet the artist who changed the installation landscape forever

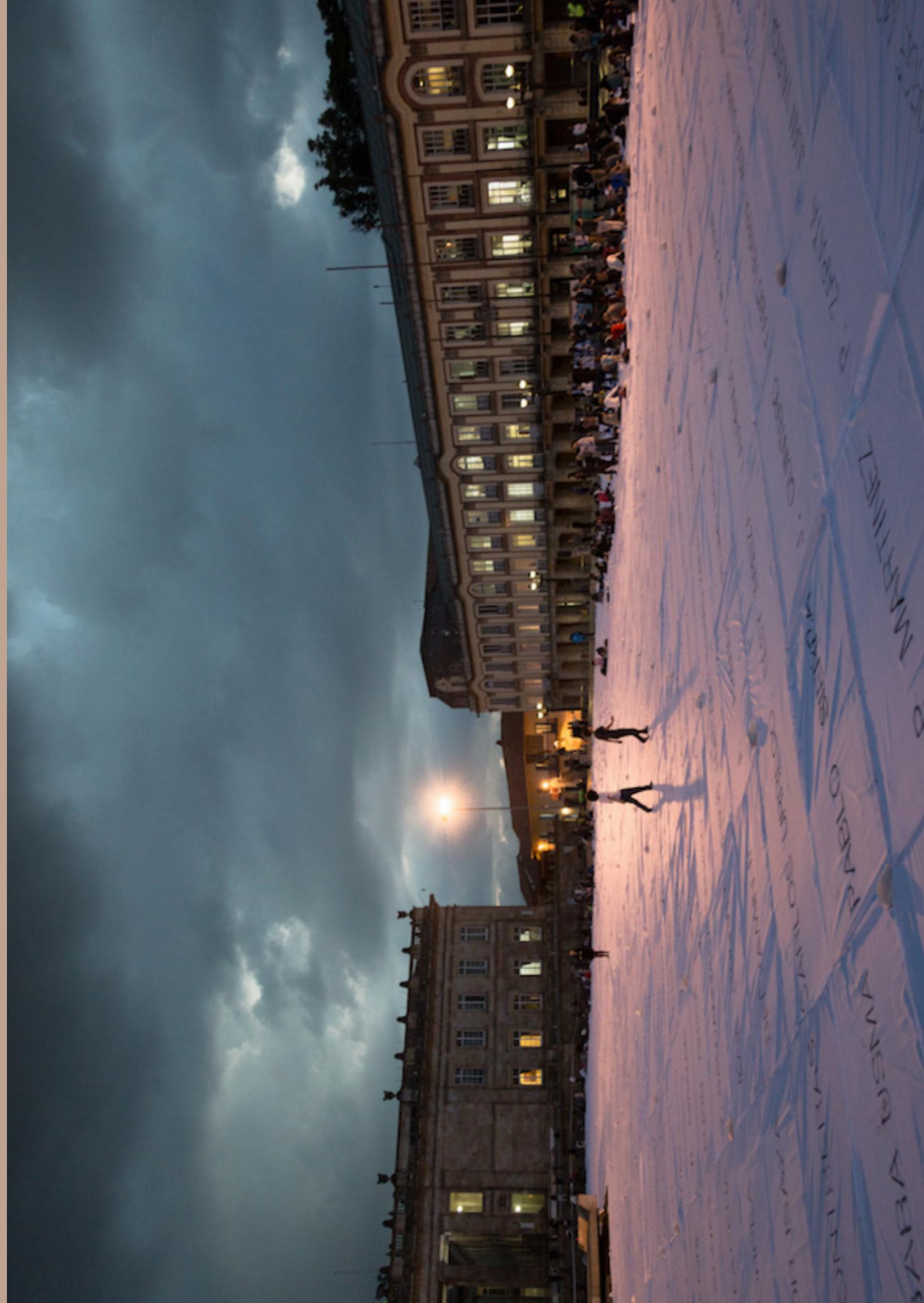
letter from the editor

These two very inspirational artists are quite different from each other, but both are key components of their own respective movements throughout art history.

Jean-Michel Basquiat was a crucial pioneer of the neo-expressionism movement and he was raged by critics in the newspapers and nightly news. Doris Salcedo also makes art that stirs up the media, yet hers is commissioned by the government as a political tool for social justice. Basquiat was taken from Earth much too soon, but thankfully Salcedo is still with us today. Join me in celebrating art throughout modern history.

- *Julia Teleki*

senior editor in chief



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Doris Salcedo

meet the artist who changed the installation landscape forever

In this interview, conducted at the artist's studio in Bogotá, Colombia in September 2008, Doris Salcedo discusses how people's experiences of war, displacement, and imprisonment form the foundation of her sculptures and ephemeral installations.

ART21: I'm curious how early on your political sensitivity was formed and when you connected that to the notion of being an artist. Looking back, when do you think you started to connect these things?

SALCEDO: I always wanted to be an artist. I cannot name a date when that came to me; it has always been there. Living in Colombia, in a country at war, means that war does not give you the possibility of distance.

War engulfs reality completely. In some cases, people can be killed or wounded at war, but in most cases war just distorts your life. It throws a shadow over your entire life.

War creates a totality and you are embedded in it. It's like being engulfed in a reality. Political events are part of everyday life here, so art and politics came to me as a natural thing, something that has been very much present in my life from the start.

ART21: Explain a little bit more about war. I suspect for people living in the United States, they think about war as being something where two countries are fighting each other, and war here in Colombia has a slightly different aspect.

SALCEDO: I think war everywhere has a different aspect now, because I don't think war is waged between two nations any longer, or not the main war.

I think war is waged at different levels. And those levels that are subtler are the ones that really destroy the life of a big section of the population.

I believe war is the main event of our time. War is what defines our lives. And it creates its own laws.

War forces us to generate some ethical codes in which we exclude a whole part of the population; once they do not fit into our ethical code, then we can attack them and destroy them because they are not "human."

So it's a tool to expel people from humankind. I think that's the main event, and that's why it worries me so much. You see that there are civil wars going on everywhere on a daily basis. You are reading about these events and these events are really shaping the way in which we live.



Shibboleth
Doris Salcedo

An installation piece placed by Salcedo in the Tate Modern in 2007 that refers to the experience of immigrants, the experience of segregation and racial hatred, and the harsh borders that divide us.



That's what I'm trying to show in my work—that war is part of our everyday life.

ART21: How does this political thinking become embedded in a work of art?

SALCEDO: Well, my work is based not on my experience but on somebody else's experience, literally defined.

That's where you get the connection with political violence, that's where you get the connection with war. And that's what really interests me.

I would like to reflect a little bit on the etymology of the word "experience": it comes from the Latin word experiri, which means "to test" or "to prove," and from the Latin word periri, which means "peril" and "danger," and also from the

Indo-European root per, which means "going across." So experience means "going across danger."

So my work is about somebody else's experience, literally defined.

I'm trying to rescue that memory, if it could be possible. But of course I don't succeed.

My work lives at the point where the political aspect of these experiences is appearing and disappearing. We are forgetting these memories continuously.

That's why my work does not represent something; it's simply a hint of something.

It is trying to bring into our presence something that is no longer here, so it is subtle.

ART21: What kind of research are you doing now?

SALCEDO: Well, I think I have been doing the same research for many, many years with small variations.

For years I kept files on concentration camps, both historical ones and contemporary ones. What interests me is how it varies. It's always there, but it presents itself in different forms.

I was amazed when Guantanamo was opened in Cuba, because Cuba was the first place that had a concentration camp. Actually it was a Spanish invention. A Spanish general, Martinez Campos, thought it up in 1896. At that time they implemented it in Cuba. It's amazing to see how it has come full circle. Now you have Guantanamo again in Cuba. But of course the British had it at the end of the nineteenth century in South Africa. Then the Germans had it in West Africa. Then you have killing fields, forced labor camps, gulags—the list is endless.

I have come to the conclusion that the industrial prison system in the United States has many of these elements, where people, for really no reason, for possession of marijuana or things like that are going to jail, where some minor crimes have become felonies. I'm really shocked by the sheer numbers of people being thrown into jails. And also I think it's amazing how this system, being in jail and then going out, has so many collateral effects that a fairly large portion of the population are not allowed to be alive.

That's what I am researching now, and that is the perspective I have been looking at events from for a long time.

Most of my pieces lately are related to this issue. There is Neither (2004), where I was



Untitled (Chair)
Doris Salcedo

An installation created from 1,550 old chairs crammed into a small space between two buildings in Istanbul, addresses the history of migration and displacement in the country.

Noviembre 6 y 7, 2002
Doris Salcedo

An installation piece that refers to the violent seizure of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, Colombia by M-19 guerrilla group which resulted in the deaths of over 100 people.



SALCEDO: More than the factual information that I have discovered in this research, what I like to think about is, let's say, "we the people." What does it mean, "we the people"? Who is included in that "we the people"? We know that when the Constitution was written, slaves, poor people, women, and Native American Indians were not included. Now when somebody says, "we the people," who are they thinking about?

There is a fragment of the population that is on the borders of life, on the edges of life, on the epicenter of catastrophe, and I would like to focus on them. How do they live? I would like to find out how they can live in such conditions without being able to find a job, without being able to vote, losing their civil rights? So I try to follow people, I try to make my work based on real testimonies of real people. I try to follow their steps and trajectories, know their family, know as much as I can to try to find and to build a complete life, in whatever situation. No matter how small the identity we try to impose on somebody else, I think that person will always be able to overcome that and be more than that identity.

When we're talking about the underclass, we have to know that that is a myth that is very useful to control a certain population. But at the same time, people that are there under

thinking directly about Guantanamo, and Abyss (2005), where I had been thinking of what it means to be a contemporary slave, really my main focus of interest. But also what interests me is why we allow that

" The idea of having a large portion of the population excluded from civil rights, from many, many possibilities, implies that you have people that can almost be considered socially dead. What does it mean to be socially dead? What does it mean to be alive and not able to participate? It's like being dead in life.

to happen? What kind of society allows those events to take place and in such a consistent manner? That's what is really important, what is the political structure that allows that to happen, that we can do that to such a large portion of the population? That's what I think about while I'm doing my work.

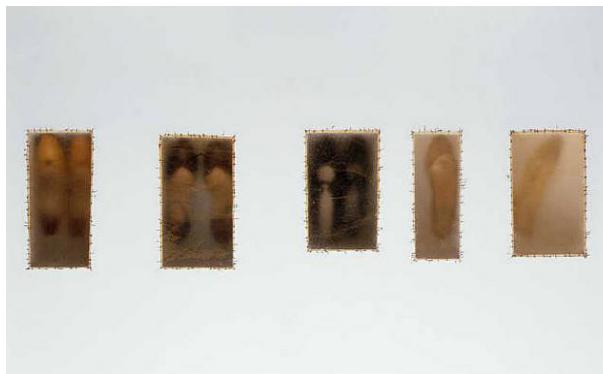
ART21: In this research you're doing now, what kinds of things are you discovering? Talk a little bit more specifically about some of the discoveries you've made in your research, some of the factual information.



that horrible identity, they are able to be more, they can be more. They can grow beyond the totality that is imposed on them. And I think art can do that—it can show the splendor of a complete life. I would like to show both sides: a complete life under whatever circumstances, and on the other hand, the circumstances and conditions in which we force some people to live. I would like to mix both things. I think art has the ability to connect everything; to connect both worlds and create an image that hopefully is richer than the stereotype or the myth or whatever.

ART21: I understand that part of your research involves talking with people, it's not just found in books or statistics.

SALCEDO: For many years I've been talking to victims of violence. I used to travel to war zones in Colombia and interview people. After terrible events took place, I would go to the sites and interview people and gather objects. And my work was built based on the words that the witnesses told me. I used to think of myself as a secondary witness and I continued doing that. Nowadays, I try to interview people. The difference in the research that I'm currently doing is that I am no longer dealing with victims that are just victims, I'm dealing with victims that are perpetrators as well. So in that sense the research is more complex now. I guess it is essential to know that the artist is not making up things. I think as an artist I have a responsibility. I have to look at



Atrabiliarios Doris Salcedo

In the 1990s there was extensive cruelty to especially women in Colombia and shoes were often used to identify their remains. These shoes were covered by a layer of animal fiber and encased into niches in the gallery wall with medical sutures. The semi-translucent surfaces of the fiber obscure the view, referring to the fraught relationship between memory and time.

"I was visiting the city and walking in an area full of ruins. There were so many ruins in a central area that I started wondering why—it doesn't make sense that a busy area has so many abandoned buildings. There were legacies of a violent past where Jews and Greeks were forced out of their buildings, these buildings. It's the process of this placement—of forceful displacement that is taking place. It was basically a multilayer of events that has been taking place for over 50 years, and it was a process that was very much alive."

—Doris Salcedo



historical events and work with whatever material is given to me. I don't work based on imagination or fiction.

I believe my work is a collaboration with the witness, with the victims, because they give me their testimonies, they give me their words. They give me the very material I'm working with. I'm making a piece for them. Their existence gives meaning to my work. My cultural work could not be possible without their previous existence and experiences. It simply wouldn't exist. The primary collaboration I have is with them, and then the collaboration with my assistants, with the architects of my team, as well. But it is all, in essence, collaboration.

ART21: What do you mean by the material that they, the victims, give you?

SALCEDO: The experiences they have gone through, the experiences that shape our world. I'm taking those, I'm working, and I'm trying to understand this reality, trying to make sense out of brutal acts, if that is possible. I know that seems vain but I try.

We know in the Third World that rationality does not fix every problem. In the Third World we see things in a different way. So you have to make your life out of chaos. You have to organize your life out of disorder and that's why I'm working on this chaos. I'm working on this pain. I'm making work out of war, out of the most chaotic and most extreme situations.



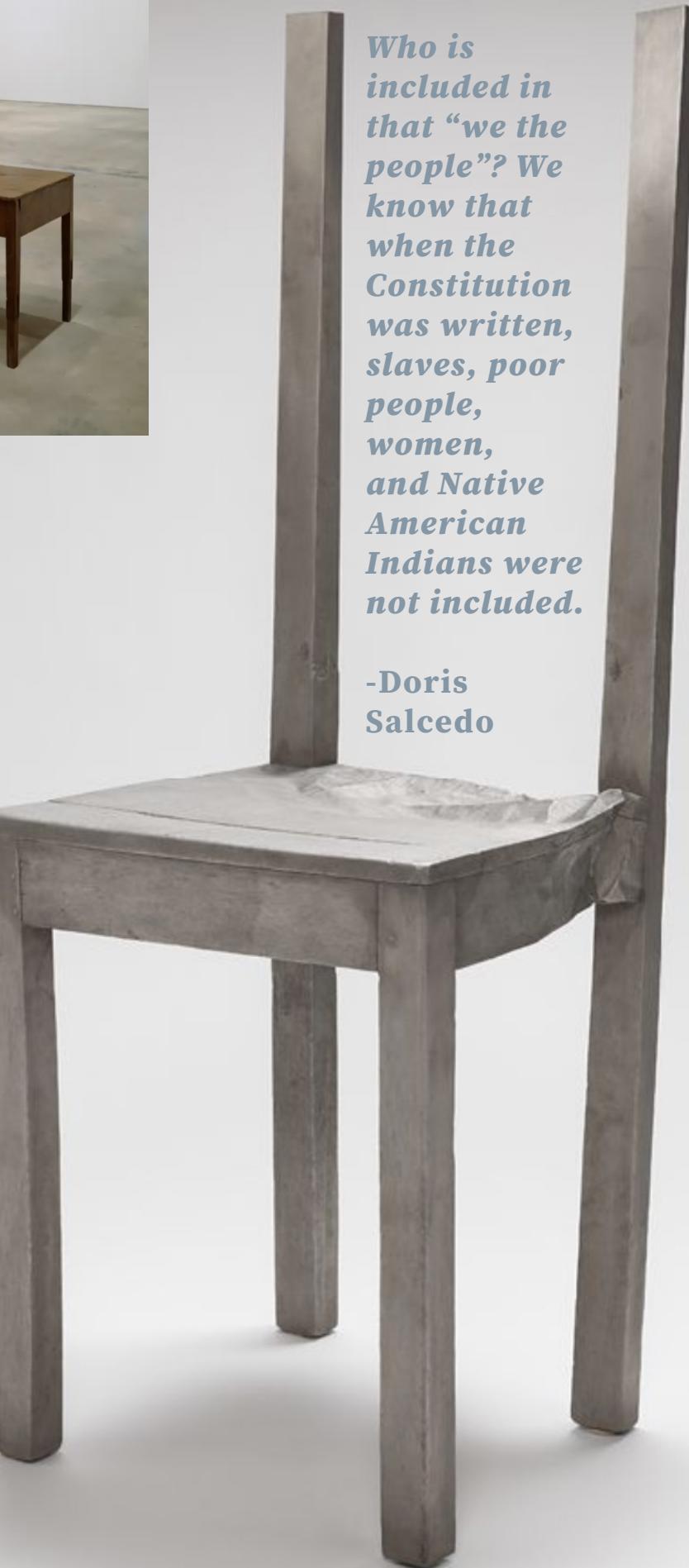
ART21: In something I read you talked about order or some aspect of order. Is there some, maybe subliminal, attempt to order this chaos?

SALCEDO: I don't think I can. My work is a vain attempt to bring some sense, to try and understand what is happening. I want to emphasize the word vain because I don't think art has the possibility of aesthetic redemption. But on the other hand, I think we have to try. Giorgio Agamben has a beautiful quote: "When the subject gives account of his own ruin, life subsists, maybe in the infamy in which it existed, but it subsists." I think that's our task, to make that subsist, not to allow that to be forgotten, to bring that to our present tense.



Who is included in that “we the people”? We know that when the Constitution was written, slaves, poor people, women, and Native American Indians were not included.

-Doris Salcedo



Jean-Michel Basquiat



Meet the most prominent and highest earning neo-expressionist artist from the 80s, who had the charisma of a famous rockstar and the talent of a classically trained painter. Basquiat studied all the rules set by the professional painters before him so he could break them like an artist. He was hated by racist critics but admired by the pros such as Keith Haring and Andy Warhol.

Becky Johnston: So I'm going to start with your childhood. What were you like as a kid?

Jean-Michel Basquiat: Here we're going now, it's going to be terrible now. What was I like as a kid? See? I hate this.

BJ: Well, what kinds of things did you do? Did you have a lot of friends or were you a loner? Did you start painting when you were really young? Were you a rebel? Were you a kid who got into a lot of trouble? You know, those are the kinds of questions... JMB: I don't want to give a one-word answer - is what it is.

BJ: I know. I want you to go into it. So if you start then we can feed off your answers and keep going...Did you have any brothers or sisters? You were an only kid, right?

JMB: No, I have two sisters.

BJ: Oh, you do?

JMB: I think I was just pretty naive as a kid, mostly.

BJ: What do you mean by "naive" - you believed that if you wanted something you would get it?

JMB: I don't think I dealt with reality that much really.

BJ: But most kids don't. That's not unusual.

JMB: You know, I wasn't [bad]; I wasn't a troublemaker, I just didn't really participate much in school.

BJ: Are you younger or older than your sisters?

JMB: I'm the oldest. I'm the oldest brother.

BJ: Are you the black sheep of the family?

JMB: Well I was until I started doing well.

BJ: What's your earliest, most vivid childhood memory?

JMB: Probably getting hit by a car, I guess.

BJ: How did that happen?

JMB: I was playing in the street.

BJ: How old were you?

JMB: I was seven-seven or eight years old.

BJ: Did you think: this is it?

JMB: It seemed very dreamlike. It seemed like the car...it was just like in the movies, where

“ I remember it just being very dreamlike, and seeing the car sort of coming at me and then just seeing everything through sort of a red filter.

they slow it down. When a car's coming at you, it was just like that.

BJ: So it was a serious accident?

JMB: Yeah, yeah, I had an operation in my stomach, the whole business.

BJ: Everybody talks about what a great memory you have. Can you remember specific details of things that happened in your childhood or have you blanked it out?

JMB: I think I remember pretty much all of it. That's not the earliest memory I have but it's probably the most vivid, the thing with the car. I remember all of it pretty much.

BJ: When did you first start painting or drawing? When did you realize this was something you really loved to do?

JMB: I just thought for as long as I could remember...I remember my mother drawing stuff out of the Bible.

BJ: Really?

JMB: Like Samson knocking down, breaking the temple down, stuff like this.

BJ: Was she a good artist?

JMB: Not bad. Pretty good.

BJ: So then you started just doing your own drawings?

JMB: I thought I wanted to be a cartoonist when I was younger and then I changed to painting when I was about fifteen or so.

BJ: So when you were about twelve years old or so, what did you imagine you'd be doing right now, at this age?

JMB: See, at that age, I never thought about professions or anything. That's what I mean by "naive." I never thought about what I'd be doing to make money, stuff like that I never thought about it.

BJ: What kind of student were you in grade school? Or high school? What did you like to learn?

JMB: I did well in English and history. I used to ignore...I just didn't participate in school at all. I'd just be drawing at my desk.

BJ: Really? Did you have pals or were you a real loner?

JMB: Usually the other kids who didn't have friends, I'd be friends with.



BJ: I read somewhere that you said you spent a lot of time in your teenage years in a park dropping acid?

JMB: Yeah, I never should have told the papers that because it looks so terrible. I should have lied even and told them something else....I don't think it's good to be honest in interviews, I think it's better to lie.

BJ: I was just wondering why you thought sitting on a park bench doing acid was a good idea.

JMB: I was just taking a bad example from the wrong people, is what happened, I guess.

BJ: And soon after that you started doing SAMO?

JMB: That's after I went back home and started going to school again.

BJ: So can you go over the chronology of that? You left home and then you went back and then you started doing SAMO?

JMB: Ah, this is the worst time in my life, you know. It's the worst....

Tamra Davis: Could you explain what SAMO is?

BJ: SAMO was his graffiti moniker. This is about what, seven years ago, Jean-Michel? JMB: That was sort of high school stuff. High school graffiti.

BJ: But it was great, it was totally great.

I remember when I first moved to New York, half the walls of downtown were covered with SAMO graffiti.

It was cryptic. It was political. It was poetic. It was funny. And it was always signed SAMO, with a copyright symbol next to the name, the "c" with the circle around it. There was a campaign for the entire first year that I was in New York,

“everyone was trying to figure out who SAMO was. And it turned out it was Jean-Michel.”

TD: So SAMO was like somebody else, like a name that you used?

JMB: Yeah.

TD: What does SAMO stand for?

JMB: It was just on something like a product sort of...

BJ: Didn't you do that with another guy?

JMB: Yeah, a friend from high school. Guy named Al Diaz.

BJ: Yeah. So at that time you were how old? You were like sixteen or so, right?

JMB: Seventeen.

BJ: Did you know at the time that you were going to stop doing graffiti and start painting on canvas? Did you have an idea that you wanted to hit the gallery circuit?

JMB: I was more interested in attacking the gallery circuit at that time. I didn't think about doing painting-I was thinking about

making fun of the paintings that were in there, more than making paintings. The art was mostly minimal when I came up and it sort of confused me a little bit. I thought

it divided people a little bit. I thought it alienated most people from art.

BJ: Because it needed too much theoretical...

JMB: Yeah, yeah. It seemed very college oriented.

BJ: So what's the first piece of art you remember seeing that left a really strong impression on you?

JMB: Probably seeing the Guernica was my favorite thing when I was a kid. I liked Rauschenberg a lot when I used to live on the Lower East Side.

BJ: Did you have any idols or any heroes either in the art world or outside of the art world?

JMB: Mostly Rauschenberg and Warhol.

BJ: OK, you did SAMO and you were living in New York at that time and you were totally broke, right?

JMB: Yeah, I was living from place to place.

BJ: How were you surviving?

JMB: I just was. You just end up surviving when you have to, I guess.

BJ: But did you ever take a part time job? How'd you make money? Just something as simple as: how'd you have money to live on?

JMB: Used to look for money at the Mudd Club on the floor with Hal

Ludacer. We used to find it too, most times. I used to hold a ladder for an electrician.

TD: I heard all these stories of that you survived on the streets from having all these different girlfriends. Is that true at all? That they helped you out a lot. That you could always that at least you had a place to stay doing that.

JMB: That's some of it, yeah.

“I don't think there really is an art world. There's a few good artists and then everything else is extra. I really don't think the art world exists. I really don't think it exists. I mean there's people who like paintings and then there's dealers and then there's people who work at the museum, but I don't think they're collectively an ‘art world.’ ”

-Jean-Michel Basquiat

BJ: You had to paint on found stuff, right? You couldn't afford to go out and get a canvas and paints, could you?

JMB: No, the first paintings I made were on windows I found on the street. And I used the window shape as a frame and I just put the painting on the glass part and on doors I found on the street. And then when I first met [inaudible], I went and bought some canvas. I was living with Suzanne Mallouk at the time and I'd just finished doing that horrible movie



with Glenn O'Brien and Edie Betoglio.

BJ: What was so horrible about it?

JMB: I got taken advantage of.

I got taken advantage of.

TD: Were you starring in it? You were acting?

JMB: Yeah, I was the star of the movie.

BJ: Well, he basically played himself, but he went all over downtown from the Mudd Club to Danceteria. Didn't you pick up Debbie Harry at one point and take her to a loft?

JMB: Well, she was a bag lady and I kissed her and she turned into a fairy princess.

BJ: The movie showcased everybody in the downtown art and music scene, and Jean-Michel was the tour guide. And this was long before he had hit it big.

TD: Did you ever see that film?

JMB: I never seen it, no. They used to keep me out of the rushes, 'cause they thought if I saw it, I would stop doing whatever it was I was doing.

BJ: [laughs] Well, then it must have meant you were doing something really well. So who was the first person who responded to your work professionally?

JMB: Diego gave me my first show, Diego Cortez.

BJ: Was that New York/ New Wave at P.S.1?

JMB: Yeah, that was my first show. First



person who bought it ... I think the first person who bought a painting was Paula [Greif]. Do you know her?

BJ: Oh yeah. So before you had a dealer, you were just selling work on your own? People would come over and look at the stuff?

JMB: I used to sell postcards for a dollar, 1 colourXeroxed [stuff].

BJ: You also painted on paper and sold them at Patricia Field's, didn't you?

JMB: Yeah.

BJ: So then after that show at P.S.1, didn't Diego arrange a big solo show of your work?

JMB: In Italy, yeah, I had my first show in Italy. After that, about four or five months, I was living-this was more the time when I was living with the girls, around at this time. But before that when I was doing the acid and living in the park, I wasn't living with anybody, I was just, you know, more of a bum. And then I was staying at Wendy [Whitelaw's] house, I remember, and she was about to throw me out any minute and then Diego came through with this show, which was just great, you know?

BJ: Then you did the show in Italy, and this is where collectors like [Henry] Geldzahler and [Bruno] Bischofberger picked up on you, no?

JMB: No, Bischofberger saw the show at P.S.1 and he didn't like it. And then for some reason...I don't know, and then I was at Annina's [Nosei] for a while and then he came there and was begging me to do

a show and I was being sort of, like I was playing it cool-telling him, you know, I didn't want to do it and so on and so forth.

BJ: What was your first reaction to selling work and making a little money?

JMB: I don't know. Overconfidence, I guess. Super confidence. I was just happy that I was able to stick it out and then get things I wanted, you know, after I felt like I was right, you know what I mean?

BJ: Yeah.

JMB: And ... I just felt really right. I felt like I was glad that I stuck it out and I was glad that I'd had these hard times...

BJ: And after you started to get famous and people started talking about your work, they also started talking a lot about you. I'm thinking in particular of that piece by Kay Larson in the Village Voice, after your show at Larry Gagosian's two years ago.

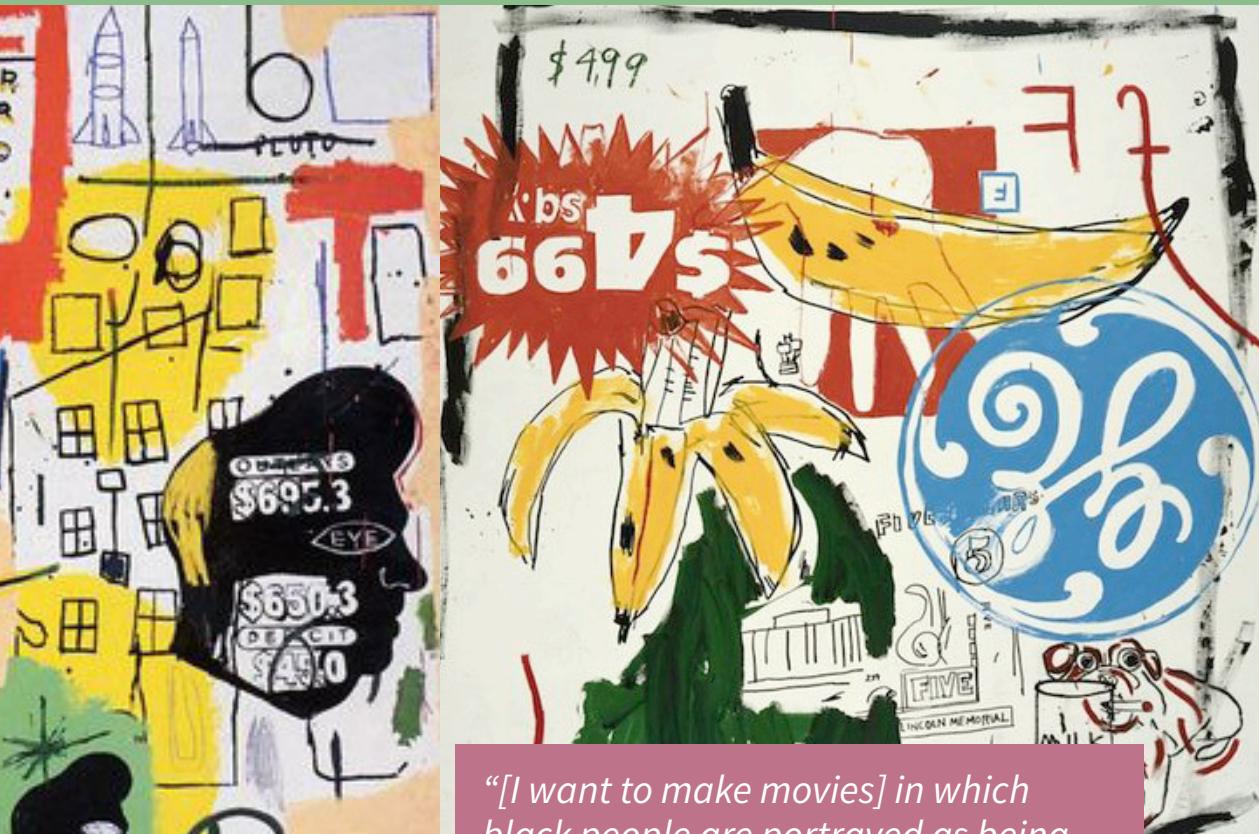
JMB: I've had this a lot. Most of my reviews have been more reviews on my...

BJ: -of your personality.

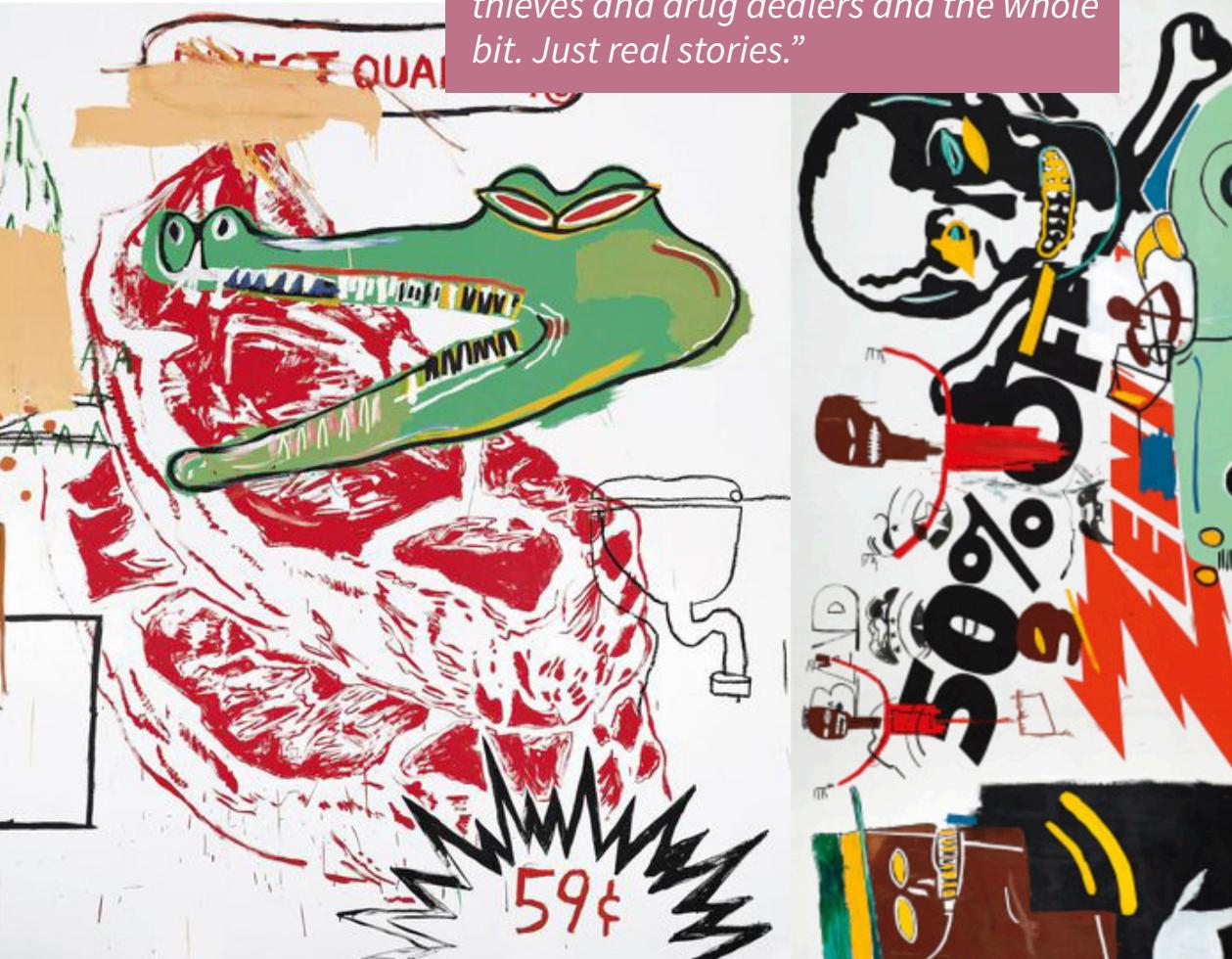
JMB: -of my personality, yeah. More so than my work, mostly.

BJ: So how do you react to that sort of thing?

JMB: They're just racist, most of these people. They went and said my father was an accountant for a fast-food chain. And they talk about graffiti endlessly, which I don't really consider myself to be a graffiti artist, you know? So they have this image of me: wild man running-you know, wild monkey man, whatever the fuck they think.



"[I want to make movies] in which black people are portrayed as being people of the human race. And not aliens and not all negative and not all thieves and drug dealers and the whole bit. Just real stories."



BJ: It seems to me that of all the painters out there, you're the one who constantly gets singled out as the enfant terrible.

JMB: But at the same time, I enjoy that they think I'm a bad boy. I think it's great.

BJ: Compare the kind of press you get to someone like Julian Schnabel or David Salle.

JMB: They attack Julian's personality also sometimes. But they usually talk about the work and make art references and stuff because he coaches the interviewers.

BJ: Right. Has anybody ever written anything about your work that you think is on the ball?

JMB: Probably Robert Farris Thompson I thought wrote the best thing-the guy that wrote Flash of the Spirit, which is probably the best book I ever read on African art. It's one of the best.

BJ: And he wrote a piece about you for what?

JMB: For my show at Mary Boone's gallery.

BJ: So when people ask you, do you ever comply with the request to describe your work?

JMB: I never know how really to describe it except maybe I don't know, I don't know how to describe my work, 'cause it's not always the same thing.

BJ: Do you feel that that's important to you, though, not to be able to describe it? That if you did, it would reify or objectify the work? And you'd feel like you were stuck with a definition you didn't want?

JMB: It's like asking somebody, asking Miles [Davis], "How does your horn sound?" I don't think he could really tell you why he played-you know, why he plays this at this point in the music. You know you're just, you're sort of on automatic...most of the time.

BJ: Do you have a specific method of working? Are there certain hours when you always work?

JMB: I'm usually in front of the television. I have to have some source material around me to work off.

BJ: Like what?

JMB: I don't know...magazines, textbooks...

BJ: You don't mind having a lot of people around too while you're painting, do you?

JMB: I've discovered that I think I rather work alone, more than anything. I used to have assistants, a lot, around me. And then on days

when they wouldn't come, I would be a lot more productive.

BJ: And do you work best late at night or do you have a certain time that's...?

JMB: Anytime is good, there's not one time better than the other.

BJ: You work all the time, too, don't you? You don't really take a break?

JMB: Depends on what time I got up has a lot to do with that, I guess.

BJ: What's the longest period of time you've ever gone without touching a pencil or a paintbrush? Have you ever taken a vacation and not worked?

JMB: I usually take paper with me when I go away, try to do as much of that as I can.

BJ: When you're watching a movie or reading a book, are there new ideas for paintings constantly popping into your head? Is everything source material?

JMB: Yeah, yes.

BJ: What music do you like?

JMB: Bebop's I guess my favorite music. But I don't listen to it all the time; I listen to everything. But I have to say bebop's my favorite.

BJ: And you listen to a lot of blues, right?

JMB: Yeah-a lot of junk too.

BJ: And what books do you like?

JMB: You know, either ones that have facts in them or Mark Twain. I like Mark Twain books a lot.

BJ: You were reading William Burroughs when you were out here the last time.

JMB: I was going to say Burroughs, but I thought I'd sound too young. 'Cause everybody [says] Burroughs all the time. But he's my favorite living author. Definitely. I think it's really close to what Mark Twain writes, as far as the point of view. It's pretty similar, I think.

BJ: Do you still see yourself as naive, the way you described yourself as a kid?

JMB: Yeah. 'Cause I'm always

embarrassed of the past, always. I always feel like if I knew more I wouldn't have done that, or...

BJ: I mean "naive" too in relation to this incredibly high pressure, competitive art world that you're part of. Do you maintain a distance from it so that you don't tend to get cynical about it? 'Cause you aren't very cynical about it at all.

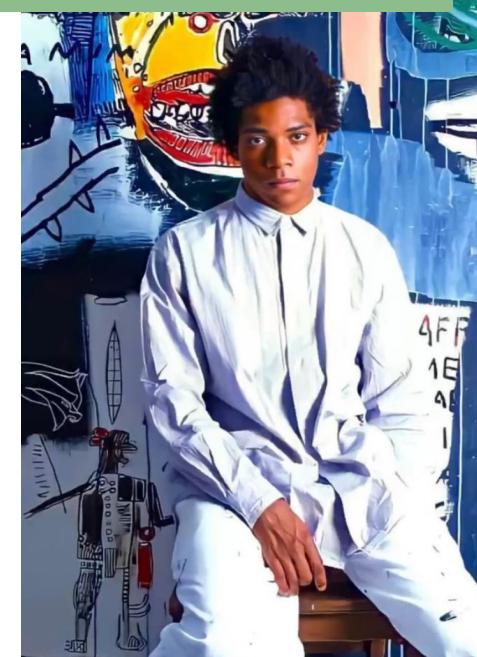
JMB: I don't see what-being cynical about it doesn't make sense. It's like being cynical about yourself, 'cause it's just you, really: it has nothing to do with them. I don't think there really is an art world. There's a few good artists and then everything else is extra. I really don't think the art world exists. I really don't think it exists. I mean there's people who like paintings and then there's dealers and then there's people who work at the museum, but I don't think they're collectively an "art world."

BJ: If you didn't paint, what do you think you'd be doing?

JMB: Directing movies, I guess. I mean ideally, yeah.



"I have to learn more not to work around what's around me and just work with what I think"



BJ: What kind of movies would you want to do?

JMB: Ones in which black people are portrayed as being people of the human race. And not aliens and not all negative and not all thieves and drug dealers and the whole bit. Just real stories.

BJ: About three or four years ago, a wave of art came out of the East Village that was identified as being black art, graffiti art. You made a specific point of saying, "I'm not part of graffiti art. My work has nothing to do with graffiti art." Why?

BJ: The thing is that graffiti has a lot of rules in it as to what you can do and what you can't do and I think it's hard to make art under those conditions—that it has to

include your name and that it has to have a certain...I don't know.

BJ: If you look at what's happened with graffiti art, it's kind of reached a dead end right now.

JMB: It's pretty sad because to be washed up at nineteen is really...is the worst.

BJ: I want to talk more about the time when you were on the street and living in the park...

JMB: Well, yeah sure. Again, I was a really, really naive person. And I just left home and I didn't even think how I was going to eat or anything.

BJ: Was this in Brooklyn or did you go to Manhattan?

JMB: I went to Washington Square Park.

BJ: Did you just meet people there? Or were you completely alone? You didn't bother to develop friends, you were just being weird?

JMB: I was just mostly being weird.

TD: What'd you look like then?

JMB: I think I shaved my head when I left home because I thought it would be a good disguise, you know? Because they wouldn't be looking for somebody with a shaved head. And I was very hypertensive, just sort of walked around all the time.

BJ: So where did you live? How did you sleep?

JMB: When I first left I went down to this boy's home that was mostly criminals and stuff. And then I went out with these guys and they mugged somebody and I was with them and then that didn't seem to be the right thing. And then I left the boy's home and I was living in the park, sort of just....I really don't know how I got through that. Just walking around for days and days without sleeping. Eating cheese doodles, or whatever.

BJ: Did you think this was how you were going to live for the rest of your life? Or did you know you'd stop at a certain point and either go back home or...?

JMB: I was determined not to go home again.

BJ: But did you think: I could be a bum, forever?

JMB: Yeah, sort of I did, yeah.

BJ: When you're living like that, when you're hanging out in a park, what's your vision of the world then?

JMB: Oh, I remember: everybody's rich that's what you think. You think everybody's rich, no matter who they are. You see people in the restaurant and you're like, "Oh those fucking rich people."

BJ: And you hate 'em of course.

JMB: You say, "Oh, for three dollars I could make myself a dinner." You see

people spending twenty-five dollars. Everybody just seems rich and you're really bitter and you hate everybody.

BJ: That explains why you give so much money to [the homeless population] on the street, right?

JMB: I guess so, yeah.

BJ: So you went back home after that? And then you started doing SAMO?

JMB: Yeah, I went home when I was about seventeen and started going to school for a little while. I never graduated. I fucked up there again, and I went on a camping trip and I just never went home after that.

BJ: You went on a camping trip and just lammed off? [laughing]

JMB: Yeah.

BJ: So how did the idea for SAMO come up? You and your friends sitting around and deciding 'this is something we should do'?

JMB: No, it was sort of my idea, and I said let's do this, let's write these sentences.

BJ: Did you come up with the sentences and the statements?

JMB: Yeah, the sentences and the formula basically and then people had variations that were in our group.

TD: Is that stuff still around New York at all?

JMB: Most of it's gone, you know. Just my favorite ones are mostly gone. There's hardly any left, to tell you the truth.

TD: I have a friend that has one still on his door.

JMB: Oh yeah? There were some guys that went around and pulled them all off walls and stuff. And they sold them when I first started to sell some paintings.

**BJ: How could you pull 'em off walls?
You painted them right on brick...?**

JMB: No, a lot of them were on signs. They had blow-torches and clippers and they went and removed a lot of them.

TD: Did that happen up here at the Roxy?

JMB: Oh yeah, somebody cut a piece of a wall out.

TD: I heard about that. And then you also painted in a sink and then they fired all the dishwashers 'cause they washed it all out of the sink.

JMB: They did? They fired dishwashers? Wow, that's too bad, that's terrible. That's at Sunset, right?

TD: They were like, "You washed fifty

thousand dollars down the drain!"

JMB: Hardly.

TD: [laughing] Save the sink.

BJ: I remember Steve Torton once said something about you that struck me as so bizarre but true: "You know, Jean-Michel is so cerebral, he lives so much in his brain that you could put him anywhere and it wouldn't matter." It's not like you're unaware of your environment, but it just doesn't matter.

JMB: I think I have to learn more not to work around what's around me and just work with what I think, I guess. I shouldn't let what's around me affect my work at all, I think. I should just work on what I normally work on.

BJ: Why is that? I think it's fascinating to see the impact a place has on an artist's work.

JMB: Hmm...I don't.

BJ: So do you go out in New York as much as you used to? You used to be out at the clubs...

JMB: Hardly ever now, no. Not too much, no. I mean sometimes, yeah. But really not as much, not as much as the

old days. It's not the way it was then, anymore.

BJ: What was it like then?

JMB: The people were pretty interesting.

BJ: In what way? They were all struggling to do the same thing? I mean they're all the same people, so why are they less interesting now?

JMB: No, they're not the same, not really. No, they're not the same people. I'm just saying it's different. You know Eric Mitchell and John Lurie ... it's not like that anymore. Danny, Vicki ...

BJ: How come you never made a Super 8 film when the New Cinema was happening and all those people were doing...?

JMB: Couldn't afford it.

BJ: Did you want to?

JMB: No, I was more thinking about painting at that time. And I wanted to be in one, I remember.

BJ: So, should we talk more seriously about painting?

JMB: No. No, I hate to talk about painting.

Riding with Death Jean-Michel Basquiat

One of the final paintings Jean-Michel did before he passed away tragically from an accidental overdose in 1988



BJ: Which collector has the largest number of your paintings?

JMB: Probably my dealers. Probably one of my dealers, probably Bruno [Bischofberger], or...I know so little about my career, to tell you the truth. I don't know who has what or anything like that really, or even what they paid for it most of the time.

BJ: But you were famous for setting up the deals that you have with your galleries, which is unusual, isn't it? I was under the impression that when you went with Mary Boone, you set the terms: you said you wouldn't be exclusive. And she had to buy the work directly from you.

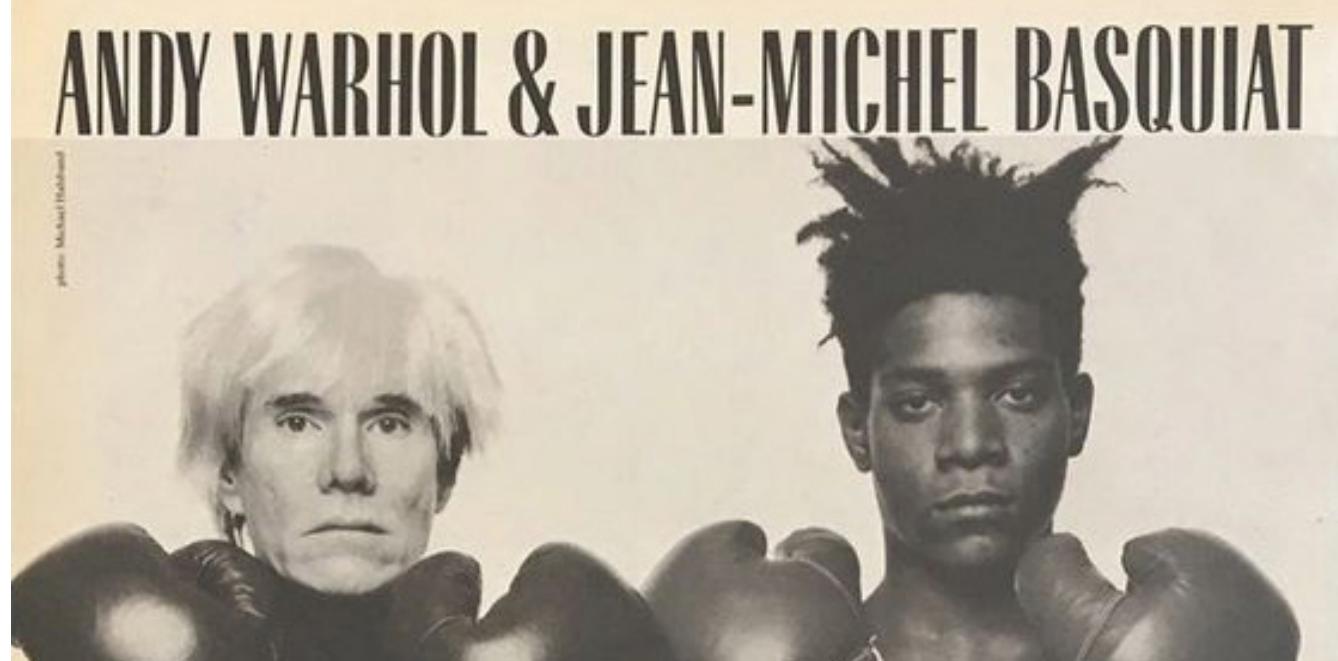
JMB: Yeah, I make them buy the work right out, most of the time.

BJ: You're perceived by people in the art world as being fully in control of what gets out there and how it gets out there. When you have a show, do you bring her [Mary Boone] work and she says, "I like this, let's show that." Or do you just show her the stuff and say, "This is it...?"

JMB: Usually, yeah, it's "I like this, I like that," yeah.

BJ: And do you listen?

JMB: Usually she likes the stuff that looks like my old work, mostly. The most identifiable things are





\$110.5M

Basquiat's Untitled becomes priciest work ever sold by a U.S. Artist in 2017.

what they [the dealers] like. I did some portraits last year and they really hated those. [laughs] But the artists like them.

TD: The artists that you did the portraits of?

JMB: No, no the artists that saw the paintings. I didn't do 'em of artists. I did them of kids mostly.

BJ: So what about Andy Warhol? You did a whole series of paintings with him.

JMB: Yeah, we worked for a year on about, on a million paintings.

BJ: How did you do the collaboration?

JMB: He would start most of the paintings. He would put something very concrete or recognizable, like a newspaper headline or a product logo, and then I would sort of deface it, and then I would try to get him to work some more on it, and then I would work more on it. I would try to get him to do at least two things, you know? [laughing] He likes to do just one hit and then have me do all the work after that.

BJ: Did you have rules, like you couldn't actually paint over his stuff or...?

JMB: No, not at all, we used to paint over each other's stuff all the time.

TD: Was that the first time you did a collaboration?

JMB: Yeah it was, yeah.

BJ: Well, you did the thing with Warhol and [Francesco] Clemente before that, didn't you?

JMB: That's right, yeah, right. But that was a little different because the paintings moved around. In this, with me and Andy, we worked in the same place on the same paintings, instead of moving the paintings from studio to studio as we did with Clemente.

BJ: Is Warhol the only artist you'd consider collaborating with?

JMB: I've been asked by other artists since then, so I really don't know what to do now. I don't know if I'll make it a practice. I don't know, I'll do whatever I want to do.

TD: What was it like working with Andy Warhol?

JMB: Well, listening to what he had to say was probably

the most fun. Seeing how he dealt with things was probably the best part. 'Cause he's really funny. Tells a lot of funny jokes.

BJ: Does he talk about other artists or art a lot?

JMB: All the time, yeah.

BJ: What paintings do you have in your own collection?

JMB: I have a couple Warhols and I have a Picasso.

BJ: Really, what?

JMB: A 1922 oil painting. I took all my money and I bought that so I wouldn't spend it all.

BJ: What else?

JMB: I have a Joseph Kosuth.

BJ: One of the old ones?

JMB: Yeah, a sixties one. And I got one Robert [inaudible] painting and those [James] Van Der Zee photographs, and I have a small Keith Haring.

TD: Did you ever trade art? Did you trade something with Keith in order to get that?

JMB: Yeah, yeah. I traded with Andy. We used to trade all the time so I have a few of his paintings.

TD: You used to leave paintings lying in places where you were staying. Are you more conscious of not doing that?

JMB: Definitely, 'cause they've wound up at auction.

BJ: Yeah, I know people who've sold those things.

JMB: Like everybody I know has sold those things.

BJ: If you were suddenly told that you only had twenty-four hours left to live, what would you do in those twenty-four hours?

JMB: I don't know—go hang out with my mother and my girlfriend, I guess.



GESSO

A Flor de Piel

Doris Salcedo

Made of rose petals and thread and gently laid across the floor in the center of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The petals are delicately suspended above the ground, perpetually in a state so vulnerable between life and death. Doris dedicates this work to a woman who was a nurse in the same country Salcedo grew up, Colombia. When researching the brutal civil war, she discovered the nurse was tortured to death and her body was never recovered. Salcedo describes this work as a floral offering to all victims of violence especially the nurse.

