

# Calabash

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## Information about this work:

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*Basquiat*

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*Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters* is an international literary journal dedicated to publishing works encompassing, but not limited to, the Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. The Journal is especially dedicated to presenting the arts and letters of those communities that have long been under-represented within the creative discourse of the region, among them: Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, Maroon societies, and the Asian and Amerindian societies of the region. Calabash has a strong visual arts component.

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*Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*

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## *Bonafide Rojas*

### BASQUIAT

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So tell me                      Jean Michel?

How did it feel to be pedestalyzed  
then pick-a-nannied, 1982  
a Haitian Puerto Rican  
in a pop art world on a raft by yourself,  
displayed in galleries in Munich, L.A. and Tokyo  
but what about The Lower East Side  
the same old song of SAMO  
slogans tell your life on brick walls of Loisada

Lithographs, wood, canvas cutouts  
sketched with black marker Pilots  
house painted your devotion for  
Dali and Picasso  
Showing your true colors for your heroes  
Charlie Parker, Joe Louis,  
Muhammad Ali and Roberto Clemente

How did it feel                      Basquiat?

Being the only black man  
Graffiti writer  
Turn talk of the art world in less than a year  
From chalk floors to oils  
jessoed in basement studio spaces  
with hills of cocaine next  
to buckets of white paint  
you tried to stay sane  
inherited the love for the moment  
in these days of excess  
addicted to painting your torture  
breaking your bones    slowly  
breaking your spirit    slowly  
but all you wanted to do is paint

your soul on the street and be a little famous  
to paint your acid tripped LSD on anything

then you were tapped by  
art gallery dealers who represented you  
wheeled and dealed for you  
but did they have your voice, your interest  
they knew they could make a lot of money  
off of you and they slaved you  
Your output was phenomenal  
dozens of paintings  
flying out of your hands at the hands  
of these dealers who dealt pieces of  
your soul to people who just wanted  
a piece of the hype

then it's your relationship  
with Warhol                      Jean Michel  
Your collaboration with the  
Intergenerational pop icon  
who was inspired by your energy  
I know you idolized Andy  
The one man who embodies contemporary  
You desperately wanted his approval  
You two were inseparable  
working and partying together

Warhol never joined you  
in your escapades of drugs  
but he watched you  
in your youthful abrasiveness  
Was he sincere in telling you  
he like your paintings?  
Or did he snicker the way he did?  
Was he man enough to say you  
had more raw untapped energy  
than he ever would?

Did he                      Jean Michel?

Warhol built you up  
then broke you down  
A white pimp with a black painting whore  
in a downtown art scene  
made of leeches and snakes  
painting their lives away

Who's using who  
In this power dynamic  
struggle of race and culture  
Who's using who  
27 years of your life  
fresh and vibrant  
you had dozens and dozens of years  
to paint your heart out to show people  
What it meant to be a painter  
a black painter

Tell me Basquiat?

How does it feel  
to be a tainted immortal in a art world  
that whispers under their breath  
and says all you did was scribble  
But you inspired me  
to paint slogans of poverty  
and anti-capitalist lines  
over America's dream of art imitates life  
showed me to paint with a marker  
draw on doors  
sketch on the subway  
showed me that graffiti is ART

It's the same old song  
It's the SAMO song

Tell me Jean Michel?

How does it feel?