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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum to host “Basquiat’s ‘Defacement’: The Untold Story”

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“Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart),” 1983, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Acrylic and marker on wood, framed, 63.5 x 77.5 cm, Collection of Nina Clemente, New York
(Photo: Allison Chipak, © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2018)

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, will be hosting “Basquiat’s ‘Defacement’: The Untold Story,” a focused and thematically organized exhibition of the works of late American artist [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#). The exhibition opens on June 21, 2019, and will be on view through November 6, 2019.

[Jean-Michel Basquiat](#) (December 22, 1960 – August 12, 1988), an artist of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent, was known for the social commentary he used in his paintings. Basquiat’s poetics were political and direct in their criticism of colonialism and class struggle; he used his paintings as a “springboard to deeper truths about the individual” as well as attacks on power structures and systems of racism. This exhibition, curated by guest curator Chaedria LaBouvier, in collaboration with Nancy Spector, explores a formative chapter in the artist’s career through the “lens of his identity and the role of

cultural activism in New York City during the early 1980s.” The exhibition will also have on view, works by other artists of his generation.

Basquiat’s 1983 painting “Defacement” a work he created to commemorate the fate of the young, black artist Michael Stewart is taken as the starting point of this exhibition. Stewart died allegedly at the hands of New York City transit police after tagging a wall in an East Village subway station. Together with this rarely exhibited painting, the exhibition will showcase approximately 20 paintings and works on paper by Basquiat and his contemporaries. The presentation, centered around “Defacement,” will examine Basquiat’s exploration of Black identity, his protest against police brutality, and his attempts to craft a singular aesthetic language of empowerment.

“The works on view by Basquiat will further illustrate his engagement with state authority as well as demonstrate his adaptation of crowns as symbols for the canonization of historical Black figures. Also featured will be archival material related to Stewart’s death, including diaries and protest posters, along with samples of artwork from Stewart’s estate,” the museum says.

The exhibition will showcase several other paintings that artists had made in response to Stewart’s death and the subsequent criminal trial of the police officers charged in his killing. This includes Haring’s “Michael Stewart — U.S.A. for Africa” (1985); Andy Warhol’s screenprinted “headline” paintings from 1983 incorporating a New York Daily News article on Stewart’s death; David Hammons’ “The Man Nobody Killed” (1986), and Lyle Ashton Harris’s “Saint Michael Stewart” (1994).

“An illustrated publication with an introduction by the exhibition’s curators and essays by Chaedria LaBouvier and art historian J. Faith Almiron will present new scholarship on Basquiat and the burgeoning East Village art scene during the early 1980s, an era marked by the rise of the art market, the AIDS crisis and the activism it engendered, and persistent racial tensions in the city. The essays will be supplemented by brief interviews with several key activists, critics, artists, lawyers, and journalists who were directly involved in the aftermath of Stewart’s death,” the museum says.

[Jean-Michel Basquiat](#)’s work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including at the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Barbican Art Gallery, London; Foundation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

The exhibition opens on June 21, 2019, and will be on view through November 6, 2019, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 5th Ave, New York, NY 10128, USA.