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Press Release

An exploration of Jean-Michel Basquiat's connection with Switzerland and the Engadin region, and its influence on his trailblazing work

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Jean-Michael Basquiat: Engadin

Forewords by Bruno Bischofberger and Iwan Wirth. Essay by Dieter Buchhart. Chronology by Sophie Wratzfeld

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'Perhaps what drew Basquiat most to this part of Switzerland was the contrast between the pulsating life, the clubs, the street noise, and the breakneck speed of the metropolis New York and the 'discovery of slowness' in the unique, overwhelming landscape of the Engadin.'

—Dr. Dr. Dieter Buchhart

This new book examines the artist's relationship with Switzerland and is published on the occasion of the exhibition 'Jean-Michael Basquiat. Engadin' at Hauser & Wirth St. Moritz, covering a unique chapter of his work. Though most often associated with New York, Jean-Michel Basquiat had a strong connection to the Alpine region, which began in 1982 with his first exhibition at Galerie Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich. Featuring an essay by curator Dr. Dr. Dieter Buchhart and forewords by Bruno Bischofberger and Iwan Wirth, this publication documents the artist's impressions of the Swiss Alpine landscape and culture, captured in his iconic visual style, rarely seen archival material and a chronology of his time in Switzerland.

Basquiat returned over a dozen times to St. Moritz, Zurich and Appenzell, as well as other places in Switzerland. The Engadin particularly fascinated Basquiat long after his return to New York, exploring various motifs that combine the natural and cultural landscape of the Alps with the metropolis of New York. One of the earliest



Bruno Bischofberger and Jean-Michel Basquiat, Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich, 1982 © Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland. Artwork © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York. Photo: Beth Phillips



Jean-Michel Basquiat, See (Lake), Oil on canvas, 1983 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York, Courtesy Private Collection. Photo: Jon Etter



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works included in the catalogue is the monumental painting 'The Dutch Settlers' from 1982. Composed of nine canvases, the painting is a prime example of Basquiat's innovative approach of marrying William S. Burroughs' 'cut-up' technique with a method akin to sampling technology used in hip hop. The montage enabled Basquiat to assemble, combine and recombine different image fields, creating a multi-layered work that emanates a visual rhythm described as an 'Eye Rap' by art historian Robert Storr. The artist painted powerful motifs which referenced the African Diaspora and slavery (evoked through words such as NUBIA and TOBACCO) alongside images of the Engadin, depicting fir trees, a mountain road, as well as an ibex, the heraldic animal of the canton of Graubünden and native to the region. This mountain iconography can also be seen in the works 'Skifahrer (Skier)' and 'See (Lake).' In the winter of 1983/1984, during one of Basquiat's visits to the Engadin, Bischofberger and the artist began discussing the idea for a collaboration between Basquiat, Andy Warhol and Francesco Clemente. The three artists each created four paintings and a drawing, which were subsequently transported between them to complete. 'In Bianco' (1983) showcases the clearly distinguishable artistic contributions from



all three, demonstrating how each artist reacted respectfully to the parameters of the others. As Buchhart notes, 'the cornerstone for this important collaboration was laid in St. Moritz,' marking a turning point in Basquiat's artistic practice and proving Switzerland to be of great historical significance for the artist in more ways than one. Musing on what kept drawing the artist back to Switzerland, Buchhart writes, 'For Basquiat, the Engadin meant work, inspiration, friendship, and rest and relaxation, all at the same time.'

The exhibition 'Jean-Michel Basquiat: Engadin' is on view from 14 December 2024 – 29 March 2025 at Hauser & Wirth St. Moritz. The exhibition catalogue will be available from 14 December at Hauser & Wirth across Switzerland, in selected Swiss bookstores and released globally early in 2025. The exhibition and the catalogue were greatly supported by Dr. Dieter Buchhart and Dr. Anna Karina Hofbauer, internationally renowned curators and Basquiat experts.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, The Dutch Settlers, Acrylic and oilstick on canvas, 1982 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York, Nicola Erni Collection. Photo: Reto Pedrini Photography



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Jean-Michel Basquiat, Brook Bartlett and Bruno Bischofberger at the Cresta Klubhaus in St. Moritz on January 30, 1983 Photo: Christina Bischofberger © Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

About the Artist

The comet-like ascent of Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960 –1988) surprised the art world and sent shockwaves through society. Basquiat began his artistic career covering the walls of Downtown New York with conceptual, poetic graffiti. His symbol-laden paintings address political issues, criticizing racism, social injustices and consumer capitalism. He found inspiration for his powerful compositions in everyday life and popular culture such as cartoons, comics and prominent athletes, as well as in spiritual African power objects. With their skeleton-like silhouettes, mask-like grimaces and pictograms, his artworks combined the explosive visual codes of the streets of New York with the cultural heritage of mankind, blurring the line between imagery, words and signs. In just eight years, Basquiat created an all-encompassing oeuvre imbued with the same intensity and energy that characterized his short life. His idiosyncratic visual language continues to influence contemporary movements as well as post-internet artistic practices and is a testament to his enduring, cross-cultural relevance.



Dr. Michaela Unterdörfer, Executive Director Publications, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth Publishers
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In keeping with Hauser & Wirth's artist-centric vision, Hauser & Wirth Publishers works to bring readers into the universe of artists and behind the scenes of their practices. From publishing artists' writings and exceptional exhibition-related books to commissioning new scholarship and pursuing the highest levels of craft in design and bookmaking, Hauser & Wirth Publishers creates vital, lasting records of artists' work and ideas, forging critical gateways to the cultural discourse they inspire. Through its Oral History Initiative, Hauser & Wirth Publishers is building an enduring record of artists' voices for future generations. Additionally, the imprint publishes Ursula magazine, a bi-annual print and digital periodical that features essays, profiles, interviews, original portfolios, films and photography by thought-provoking writers and artists from around the world.



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