

Ten Punching Bags



This provocative, disturbing and challenging work is a study in juxtapositions, paradoxes and contradictions. But that is exactly what Christianity, a religion that claims that God took on human form, died and was raised from the dead, claims to be, I think Warhol chose punching bags to portray Jesus as taking the blows (read “bearing the sins”) of humankind. That there are ten of them suggest both the Ten Commandments and the ten lepers (outcasts) whom Jesus cleanses (Mark 1: 41). Onto Warhol’s serene images of a da Vinci-esque Christ, Basquiat superimposes his own images, both religious (a crown, a Root of Jesse, Trinitarian symbols) and secular (lead, asbestos, a gallows, a dilapidated football stadium). Jesus the Judge is himself judged by the squalor of urban poverty.

Reverend Dr. Harold T. Lewis, Rector, Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, *Point of View Labeling Project*

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“Picked up Jean Michel and he has people ringing his bell every fifteen seconds, it reminded me of the old Factory. He says things like, ‘Listen man, why don’t you call before you come over.’ A guy he’d given fun drawings to once when he was needing a place to stay sold them now for a fortune—\$5000 or something. So Jean Michel’s finding out how you have to be a business, how it all stops being just fun, and then you wonder. What is art? Does it really come out of you or is it a product? It’s complicated.”

Andy Warhol, *The Andy Warhol Diaries*

The collaborations were seemingly effortless. It was a physical conversation happening in paint instead of words. The sense of humor, the snide remarks, the profound realizations, the simple chitchat all happened with paint and brushes. I visited them at the Factory several times while they were painting together. The atmosphere was playful and intense at the same time.

Keith Haring, *Painting the Third Mind* from *Collaborations: Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat*. ©Mayor Rowan Gallery 1988.