Warhol and Basquiat: Collaboration and Contrast

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Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol, *Collaboration*, 1984-1985,   
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Overview

This lesson introduces students to the artistic collaboration between Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat during the 1980s. Students will then create a collaborative work of art in class or by mail combining Pop, graffiti and street art, and Neo-Expressionist styles.

Grade levels

* Middle school
* High school

Subjects

* Arts
* Art history
* English and language arts

Objectives

* Students will compare the solo work of Warhol and Basquiat to their collaborative painting in the 1980s.
* Students will explore the stylistic differences between Pop, graffiti and street art, and Neo-Expressionism.
* Students will create a collaborative artwork in class or by mail in the style of Warhol and Basquiat and discuss the risks and rewards of collaboration.



Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Dentures/Keep Frozen*, 1985,   
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About the Art

Andy Warhol collaborated with artist Jean-Michel Basquiat over several years during the 1980s. Their first collaborative project was with an Italian painter named Francesco Clemente. It was primarily a collaboration-by-mail in which the artists were mailing partially finished canvases to each other rather than painting together in the same room. Eventually Warhol and Basquiat became close friends, and they worked together on over 100 paintings without Clemente. Typically, Warhol would start by tracing a Pop Art symbol or a news headline onto a canvas using his overhead projector; then Basquiat would add a symbol, picture, or words to the painting in his Neo-Expressionist style. The artists would take turns adding layers to each artwork without much preliminary discussion. Both artists appropriated imagery from a variety of source material: books, magazines, newspapers, television, advertisements, and even medical diagrams. Their collaborations show the stark contrast between their artistic styles and creative perspectives. Although Warhol had collaborated with friends and assistants on art projects since the 1950s, the paintings he made with Basquiat are unique in that he allowed another artist to authentically represent their own style on the same canvas as his Pop Art.

Points of View

“Jean-Michel got me into painting differently, so that's a good thing.”  
 Andy Warhol, *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, 1984

"Andy paid Victor [Hugo] to be the ‘collaborator’ ...He would come to the Factory to urinate on canvases that had already been primed with copper-based paint by Andy.” [The uric acid would oxidize the metal in the copper ground, causing it to discolor, allowing for patterns to be created according to the ‘movement’ of the ‘painter’.]

Bob Colacello, *After Andy Warhol*, 2002

“To get the most spontaneous work into the collaborations I suggested to Basquiat that every artist should, without conferring with the others about iconography, style, size, technique, etc., independently start the paintings, of course in the knowledge that two further artists would be working on the same canvas, and that enough mental and physical space should be left to accommodate them. I further suggested to him that each artist send one half of the started collaborations to each of the other artists and the works then be passed on to the remaining artist whose work was still missing. Basquiat liked my proposal and agreed.”  
                                                  Art dealer Bruno Bischofberger, *Dangerous Minds*, 2012

“It was like some crazy-art world marriage and they were the odd couple. The relationship was symbiotic. Jean-Michel thought he needed Andy’s fame, and Andy thought he needed Jean-Michel’s new blood. Jean-Michel gave Andy a rebellious image again.”                                                            
                                    Warhol’s assistant Ronnie Cutrone, *Warhol: The Biography,* 1989

“Jean-Michel and Andy achieved a healthy balance. Jean respected Andy's philosophy and was in awe of his accomplishments and mastery of color and images. Andy was amazed by the ease with which Jean composed and constructed his paintings and was constantly surprised by the never-ending flow of new ideas. Each one inspired the other to outdo the next. The collaborations were seemingly effortless. It was a physical conversation happening in paint instead of words…"  
                                                                        Keith Haring, *Painting the Third Man*, 1988

Vocabulary

* **Collaboration:** the action of working with someone to produce or create something.
* **Graffiti and street art:** often used interchangeably,both terms refer to “art on the street”. However, significant differences separate the two. Graffiti predates street art and is often text-based and painted without permission, whereas street art is often image-based and painted on commission or with permission.
* **Neo-Expressionism:** an art movement that emerged in the late 1970s and 80s in Germany and America. Neo-Expressionists depicted their subjects in an almost raw and brutish manner, using highly textural and expressive brushwork and intense colors that had been rejected by preceding art movements.
* **Pop-Art:** anart movement that emerged in the 1950s and 60s in Britain and America. Pop artists appropriated imagery and techniques from popular and commercial culture, such as advertisements, product packaging, pop music, comic books and Hollywood movies.

Discussion Questions

1. Basquiat’s career took off during an era when cultural institutions began embracing graffiti and street art for the first time. Do you think that graffiti and street art is as valuable as art found in museums and galleries? Why?
2. When looking at a collaboration between Warhol and Basquiat, can you tell who painted what? How can you tell?
3. Reflect on a past collaboration or group project. What worked well and what didn't?
4. In general, why do you think artists collaborate? What are the risks and rewards of collaboration?

Materials

* Large pieces of paper (8 ½ x 11 for mail art)
* Pens, pencils, markers, crayons, paint
* Magazines, newspapers, old books
* Scissors
* Glue or glue sticks
* Envelopes and stamps (if collaborating via mail)
* A computer and scanner, or a tablet/phone with internet access (if collaborating over email)
* [Powerpoint: Warhol & Basquiat](https://www.warhol.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Warhol_Basquiat_Collaboration_The-Andy-Warhol-Museum.pptx)
* Video: [Making It: Mail Art](https://youtu.be/Hz_EeNATyw0)
* Video: [Collection Close-Up: Warhol and Basquiat](https://youtu.be/OWjXcBkYzJM)

Procedure

1. As a class, review the [Powerpoint](https://www.warhol.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Warhol_Basquiat_Collaboration_The-Andy-Warhol-Museum.pptx), vocabulary, and discussion questions. Watch the [Making It: Mail Art](https://youtu.be/Hz_EeNATyw0) video if students are collaborating via mail.
2. Assign, or allow students to choose a partner to collaborate with on an artwork. If students are collaborating by mail, have them exchange email addresses or home addresses.
3. Assign roles or allow students to choose who will draw in Warhol’s Pop Art style and who will draw in Basquiat’s graffiti and street art, and Neo-Expressionist style.
4. Direct the Pop artists to look through books, magazines and newspapers to copy or trace a headline, face of a celebrity, or a corporate logo that interests them. Students can also cut out images and collage them onto the paper. Remind students to leave plenty of blank space on the paper.
5. Direct the graffiti and street art, and Neo-Expressionist artists to choose a word or image from the books, magazines, and newspapers and draw it in a rough, raw, or expressionistic style. Remind students to leave plenty of blank space on the paper.
6. Ask students to take turns passing the paper back and forth while adding and layering words and images. Remind students that overlapping is ok, but to not completely cover what your partner has drawn. If collaborating by mail, have students scan their artwork and email it to their partner or mail them the actual artwork.
7. Once students have received the artwork from their partners, direct them to add images or words to the artwork in their chosen style. Remind students that overlapping is ok, but to not completely cover what their partner has drawn.
8. Allow students to share the artworks back and forth at least three times, so that both artists have the opportunity to add at least two layers to each artwork.

Wrap-up  
When both students have decided that the artwork is complete, encourage them to reflect on the process and how it felt to collaborate with another person using the following prompts:

* How does working with another person transform the experience of making art?
* What were the risks and what were the rewards?
* What is needed for a successful collaboration?

Have students share their reflections and artwork with the class.

Extension

1. Participate in collaborative art making with a friend, relative, or neighbor via mail or in person. Discuss how collaborations may differ the more we get to know someone. Are these collaborations easier or harder?
2. The video [Collection-Close-Up: Warhol and Basquiat](https://youtu.be/OWjXcBkYzJM) can be used as a catalyst to further conversation in the classroom. It features Sarah Huny Young, an award-winning visual artist and cultural producer based in Pittsburgh. She joins Petra Floyd, artist educator at The Warhol, for a critical conversation exploring Andy Warhol's Polaroid photographs of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Their conversation explores the complex relationship between Warhol and Basquiat, representations of the Black body, and the notion of truth-telling in art and artifacts.

Assessment

The following assessments can be used for this lesson using the [downloadable assessment rubric](https://www.warhol.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AssessmentRubric_TheAndyWarholMuseum.xlsx).

* Aesthetics 1
* Communication 3
* Creative process 3
* Critical thinking 1
* Historical context 3