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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Basquiat Before Basquiat* comes to CAM**



Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis

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Basquiat in the apartment, 1981. Photo: Alexis Adler.

**June 19, 2018 (St. Louis, MO)** - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis announces the touring exhibition, *Basquiat Before Basquiat: East 12th Street, 1979–1980*, which will be part of the fall exhibition schedule, on view September 7 through December 30, 2018. Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, *Basquiat Before Basquiat* has drawn enthusiastic audiences and positive critical reception. The exhibition includes the entire cache of works made by Jean-Michel Basquiat during the year he lived with his friend Alexis Adler in a small apartment in the East Village in New York. The art and archival material provides rare insight into the artistic life of Basquiat before he achieved fame in the early 1980s. During this time Basquiat's creative impulses moved fluidly from his SAMO tags on the surrounding streets into a more sustained practice in their shared home. Through paintings, sculpture, works on paper, a notebook, and other ephemera, as well as Adler's numerous photographs from this period, the exhibition documents the making of an artist. The CAM exhibition will include rarely seen Basquiat works from local collections, adding a perspective of the artist as his work evolved into the mid-'80s. A new documentary, *Boom for Real*, will be shown at the museum as part of the St. Louis International Film Festival, in partnership with Cinema St. Louis.

*Basquiat Before Basquiat* explores how the context of life in New York informed and formed Basquiat's artistic practice. As Adler notes, "From mid-1979 to mid-1980, I lived with Jean in three different apartments, but for most of that time in an apartment that we moved into and shared on East 12th Street. This was a time before Jean had canvases to work with, so he used whatever he could get his hands on, as he was constantly creating. The derelict streets of the East Village provided his raw materials and he would bring his finds up the six flights of stairs to incorporate into his art. Jean was able to make money for paint and his share of the rent, which was \$80 a month, by selling sweatshirts on the street. He knew that he was a great artist."

-more-

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**Hours**  
10–5 Wed  
10–8 Thu & Fri  
10–5 Sat & Sun

CAM is free. Visit often!

The exhibition will present New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s through the prism of Basquiat's art and provide a window into the art-rich time that he emerged from and influenced so profoundly. It will sharpen and deepen our understanding of this artist at a vital yet mostly unknown, or at least under-discussed, moment of his career. Ultimately, this exhibition will attest to Basquiat's virtuosity in formation—the creative impulses that yielded a distinctive voice, but also the many diversions or paths he explored as he was developing a signature style.



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**Jean-Michel Basquiat** (1960–88, New York City) was born to a Haitian father and a Puerto-Rican mother in Brooklyn. He left his family home at the age of fifteen and took to the streets. He quickly immersed himself in the downtown Manhattan subculture of the 1970s, with his SAMO graffiti tag becoming a recognizable icon of the moment, making the precocious young artist a legend before he was known. In 1981 he began drawing and painting, first on salvaged materials and later on canvas and paper. He sold his first painting in the same year, and by the mid-'80s had attained wealth and fame in a superheated art market and within an intensified celebrity media culture. In 1988 he passed away from a drug overdose at the age of 27. Basquiat is represented in several prominent museum collections all over the world. Major solo exhibitions include *Jean-Michel Basquiat: Paintings 1981–1984*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (1984; traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, through 1985); *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1992; traveled to the Menil Collection, Houston; the Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, Alabama, through 1994); *Basquiat*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2005; traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, through 2006); *Basquiat*, Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland (2010; traveled to Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris); and *Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks*, Brooklyn Museum (2015).

*Basquiat Before Basquiat* is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver and curated by Nora Burnett Abrams, Ellen Bruss Curator and Director of Planning. The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis exhibition is organized by Lisa Melandri, Executive Director.

## Related Events

### Press & Patron Preview

Friday, September 7, 10:00–11:00 am  
Join artists and curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions. *RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.535.0770 x313 or esilva@camstl.org.*

### Opening Night

Friday, September 7  
Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm  
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

### A Conversation on

#### Jean-Michel Basquiat

Saturday, September 8, 11:00 am  
MCA Denver curator Nora Abrams, archivist Alexis Adler, musician Felice Rosser, and rapper, artist, and critic and curator Carlo McCormick will discuss the artist's life, art, and times.

### Performance: Joe McPhee

Saturday, September 22, 1:00 pm  
Saxophonist Joe McPhee connects *Basquiat Before Basquiat* with the jazz the artist loved. *Presented in partnership with New Music Circle.*

### Film Screening: *Boom for Real*

Thursday, November 8, 7:00 pm  
Director Sara Driver's documentary about Basquiat's teenage years. *Presented in partnership with Saint Louis International Film Festival.*

**All programs, dates, and times are subject to change.**

**About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis**

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.

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