

GALERIE BRUNO BISCHOFBERGER

Founded 1963

Collaborations - Reflections on the Experiences with Basquiat, Clemente, and Warhol' Bruno Bischofberger



Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Bruno Bischofberger and Francesco Clemente, New York, 1984. Photo: Beth Philipps

In the winter of 1983-1984, on the occasion of one of Jean-Michel Basquiat's many visits to our home in St. Moritz, we spoke about works that artists had done together, so-called collaborations. There were several reasons why we had started talking about them. Basquiat had done a 120 x 120-centimeter acrylic on canvas painting in our garage together with my daughter Cora, who was not quite four years old at the time (pl. 1). He also made a double page drawing in my guest book in St. Moritz (pl. 2). The baby-child "primitive" technique of my daughter and Basquiat's independently chosen "primitive" style were a perfect fit. Already during my first visit to his studio in 1982 in New York, he answered my question about which artists had influenced him: "What I really like and has influenced me are works by three- to four-year-old children." The same guest book shows, immediately preceding, a two-page color pastel, a collaboration between Francesco Clemente and Cora, dating from the preceding winter (January 1983), and signed by Francesco with both names (pl. 3). Again, some pages earlier, dated March 1982, one finds two drawings by Walter Dahn and Jiří Georg Dokoupil. These artists had, during their stay at our house in St.

¹ This is an edited version of the text that was first published in Tilman Osterwold, ed., *Collaborations: Warhol - Basquiat - Clemente* (exh. cat. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1996).

Moritz, painted a small group of collaborations using acrylic on canvas in our garage, one of which was hanging in our house in the winter of 1983–1984 (pl. 4).

All these were reasons for Jean-Michel Basquiat and me to start talking about collaborations. I personally had been fascinated by such works for some time. I knew collaborations of painters from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries and the *cadavre exquis* of the Surrealists. For over twenty years, I had owned a collaboration, dating from 1961, between Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint-Phalle, and Daniel Spoerri (pl. 5). I also had a work that had been jointly painted by Enzo Cucchi and Sandro Chia (pl. 6), and I had begun buying my first works by the New York artists David McDermott and Peter McGough in 1983. The conceptuality of these paintings fascinated me, because through the voluntary act of collaborating, a certain theory became more apparent than in works which the artists created individually.

I had noticed that in the works of the so-called “postmodern” movement a certain kind of conceptual collaboration was taking place, because artists were referring to other artists’ works or integrating parts thereof in their own paintings. From a large diversity of examples let me mention: Caravaggio in several early works of Julian Schnabel, from 1980–1981 (pl. 7), Antoine Watteau and Alberto Giacometti in works by David Salle. Andy Warhol himself, while working on his series of *Reversal Paintings* (1979–1980), referred to several of his works from the period 1962–1963 as a point of inspiration—a sort of self-collaboration (pl. 8). When I asked Sandro Chia in Venice in 1980 why he had, admittedly in his own style, copied fairly exactly Kirchner’s shower painting in the Museum of Modern Art in New York,² he responded: “Naturalmente, pesco nella pittura—Of course, I fish around in the history of painting.” This programmatic statement was valid for many works of the then new painting and culminates in the conceptual work of Mike Bidlo, the radical finishing point of this development, in which the artist reproduces in the most direct way the work of other artists, which could be interpreted as simply copying by the uninitiated observer. This too is a kind of ultra-collaboration (pl. 9).

A project took shape in my mind, to ask Andy Warhol whether he would make some collaborative work with Basquiat and another young artist I represented. I had become Warhol’s main dealer in 1968, when he had granted me “first right of refusal,” which lasted until his death in 1987. At the same time he also told me that he was thinking of only making films in the future and wasn’t sure he’d continue to paint. But shortly after, I was able to convince him to start the large series of private portraits, which finally became his main income. With Warhol, I also co-founded *Interview Magazine* in 1969, in which I had a 25 percent stake. I came up with the idea of Warhol making portraits of people who were

² The painting *Soldatenbad* (Artillerymen) of 1915 shows naked Russian prisoners of war in a shower. It belonged to the Jewish art dealer Alfred Flechtheim (1878–1937) but after the Nazis came to power, it became the property of Kurt Feldhäusser, art collector and member of the National Socialist Party. After his death in 1945, it was transferred, via back channels, to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and finally to the Guggenheim Museum in New York. In 2018, the Guggenheim returned the painting to the heirs of Alfred Flechtheim.

willing to be photographed. He liked the idea and told me enthusiastically that it gave him a “Contemporary Gallery,” like those he knew from the volumes of famous people created by Nadar, Etienne Carjat, and others in France in the mid-nineteenth century.

In early October 1982, I asked Warhol if I could come to the Factory with Jean-Michel to have him take a portrait photograph to create a work on canvas in exchange for a work by the young artist. I’d had an agreement with Warhol for several years, and had already brought a number of different artists, especially those whose works I’d shown in my Zurich gallery. Warhol trusted my judgment, and through this exchange, he was able to establish a relationship with the younger generation. But Warhol was rather surprised and asked me, “Do you really think that Basquiat is such an important artist?” and I said, “Yes, I do.” He wasn’t familiar with Basquiat’s new work; he’d met him on one or two occasions, and each time had found him too brash. To get closer to him, Basquiat had offered him the kind of small drawings on paper that he sold on the street, but Warhol was very skeptical. I told Basquiat, who was very excited about the news, and I took him to the Factory late on the morning of October 4, to formally introduce him to Warhol.

That day, Warhol photographed Basquiat with his special Polaroid portrait camera about thirty times. Jean-Michel asked Warhol whether he could also take a photo of him and he agreed. After that, Basquiat asked Warhol if he could hand the camera over to me to take a double portrait of the two artists, so he gave me his camera and I made a few shots of the two together, in his name. We then wanted to go next door to have the customary cold buffet lunch. Basquiat did not want to stay and said goodbye. We had hardly finished lunch, one, at most one and half hours later, when Basquiat’s assistant appeared with a 150 × 150-centimeter work on canvas, still completely wet, a double portrait depicting Warhol and Basquiat: Andy on the left in his typical pose, resting his chin on his hand, and Basquiat on the right with the wild hair that he had at the time. The painting was titled *Dos Cabezas* (pl. 10). The assistant had run the ten to fifteen blocks from Basquiat’s studio on Crosby Street to the Factory on Union Square with the painting in his hands because it wouldn’t fit into a taxi.

All visitors and employees at the Factory flocked around to see the painting, which was admired by all. Most astonished of all was Andy who said a little humorously: “I’m really jealous—he is faster than me.” Soon thereafter Warhol made a portrait of Basquiat on several equally large canvases: Basquiat sporting his wild hairdo, silkscreened on the background of the Oxidation-type, the same as the *Oxidation* or *Piss Paintings* of 1978.³ Basquiat subsequently painted another two portraits of Warhol. One in 1984, titled *Brown Spots* (pl. 11), which depicts Andy as a banana, and the other in 1984–1985, which shows Warhol with glasses and large white wig working out with a barbell in each hand.

³ Richard Marshall, *Jean-Michel Basquiat* (exh. cat. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), p. 243.

I had already asked Jean-Michel Basquiat in St. Moritz whether he would be interested in doing some collaborative paintings with Warhol and perhaps another artist. Jean-Michel was exceptionally receptive to new ideas and immediately agreed. He was surely also interested in creating works together with the famous Warhol. Basquiat and I soon started to speak of Francesco Clemente as the third artist and we decided together to invite him to join in, after having considered Julian Schnabel. First, of course, we wanted to know whether Warhol would agree to do the project.

Jean-Michel knew and respected Clemente, whose studio was only two blocks away from his. In the following years, he became great friends with him and his wife Alba. He also knew Schnabel well for quite some time and was very impressed by his work and his success. Basquiat decided not to approach Schnabel with the collaboration project because, as he explained to me, he felt that an artist like Schnabel, with his strong, dominating personality, could not have prevented himself from influencing or commenting upon the work of the other collaborating artists. Basquiat was over-sensitive to other artists' comments on his work. He told me that he was once insulted, in my opinion wrongly, when Schnabel, as a response to the question of what he thought of a work by Basquiat which both were looking at, gave what Basquiat considered to be a too critical answer, but which was surely meant by Schnabel to be no more than a constructive suggestion. Clemente had, in the summer of 1983, painted a group of twelve large paintings in Skowhegan, Maine, which I was able to purchase from him and which are also a sort of collaboration. He stretched fragments of painted theater backdrops made of cloth on stretchers and added his own inventions to those already there.⁴ Schnabel had also, early in his career, painted on surfaces that had a clearly defined structure, in a sort of collaboration. In 1986, he painted a series of Japanese Kabuki theater backdrops,⁵ and Enzo Cucchi also painted on four Italian theater backdrops in 1987.⁶

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 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.

On my next visit to New York, I suggested the whole project to Andy Warhol and also to Francesco Clemente. Both found it interesting and surely a new challenge and soon started on their work.⁷

⁴ Michael Auping, *Francesco Clemente* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), plates 7 and 8.

⁵ Julian Schnabel, *CVJ: Nicknames of Maitre D's and Other Excerpts from Life* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 168-169 and 200-201.

⁶ Helmut Friedel, *Enzo Cucchi - Testa* (Munich: Lenbachhaus, 1987), vol.2. (Documentation), pp. 14ff., 43ff., 51.

⁷ I suggested that each artist started four works in oil or acrylic and one work on paper.

Between September 15 and October 13, 1984, I showed the group of fifteen works at my Zurich gallery in an exhibition titled «Collaborations: Basquiat Clemente Warhol», with a publication of the same name. In all the works on canvas, Warhol used the silkscreen that he had been using since 1962. In two of the works, he repeated the first panel, which had been done by Basquiat and Clemente, five times in the same size using silkscreening. In three of the works, Basquiat also used a silkscreen.

The three large drawings, in which the order the artists worked was different each time, were mounted on canvas so that they could be exhibited without glass. Where Warhol was the last artist, he again repeated the two other artists' work using a silkscreen. On the drawing that he started himself, he drew, using a projector, two GE (General Electric) logos, and a spaceship, an image from a series of children's paintings, which I had commissioned from him for an exhibition the year before. In the third work on paper, *Alba's Breakfast* (pl. 12), which had been started by Clemente, Warhol again painted a GE logo and a washing machine, both in red, very much in the style of the hand-painted works of the early sixties.

At my request, Warhol left naming the works to Basquiat and Clemente. In the summer of 1984, my family—my wife Yoyo and our four children, Lea, Nina, Cora, and Magnus—Basquiat, and I flew to Rome to have a family portrait done by Clemente. During a break in the portrait session, Basquiat, Clemente, and I went into the restaurant Casa del Popolo, which was in the vicinity and which lent its name to one of the paintings (pl. 13). The artists discussed possible names for all the fifteen works on the basis of the large transparencies I had brought with me. One of the works was titled *Ex-Ringeye* (pl. 14). This work was started by Warhol. Basquiat, the last artist to work on the painting, put a white ring around the head of the central figure done by Clemente and also painted white rings around its eyes. After a discussion between the two and with mutual consent, the circle around the head and the circles around the eyes were removed again.

During this trip via private jet, which took us first to also see Enzo Cucchi in Ancona and then, Miquel Barceló in Majorca, Basquiat said to me, mentioning Warhol's hand-painting in *Alba's Breakfast*: "Andy is such a fantastic painter! His hand-painting is as good as it was in his early years. I am going to try and convince him to start painting by hand again."

When I met Warhol, about half a year later, in the spring of 1985, on one of my almost monthly visits to New York, he revealed to me that he and Jean-Michel Basquiat had for several months been working together in the Factory on a large number of further collaborations. He seemed a bit embarrassed, presumably because he and Basquiat had not mentioned it earlier to me. He also said that both he and Basquiat felt that I was not in a privileged position regarding these paintings, since they were not a commission of mine as the three-way collaboration had been. I had to accept his point. He immediately agreed, however, that as his and Basquiat's dealer, I was nevertheless the best-suited person to buy the paintings and they entrusted me with them. He showed me a great number of these paintings—large-scale works that I was both extremely surprised by and enthusiastic about.

Warhol's entire contribution was partly in a kind of poster style featuring heraldically hand-painted enlargements of advertising images, headlines, and company logos but partly in painterly, free brushstrokes, similar to a part of his early works of 1961 and early 1962. Basquiat fused his spontaneous, expressive, and effusive iconography with that of Warhol. It was also surprising that Basquiat had used silkscreens for a large number of the paintings. In these works, it was almost always Warhol who was the second artist to work on the paintings. I purchased a group of twenty-six large-format works from the two artists and we decided to exhibit some of them in New York; our mutual choice was the gallery of Tony Shafrazi. Andy was especially interested in showing the collaborations Downtown and not Uptown because, as he put it, there was a livelier and younger art scene there. The show was held at the end of September 1985, with sixteen of the paintings that I had purchased and had given to Tony Shafrazi on consignment. The critiques of the show were almost uniformly negative. The works were described by Vivien Raynor, in the *New York Times* on September 20, as Warhol's manipulations, and that he was using Basquiat as his mascot.

After twenty years as an art dealer, I was used to the fact that practically all my best and most important exhibitions had received almost entirely negative critiques. I have always believed that this helps keep the artist's creative and fighting spirit strong, and prevents risking that, due to a large and general acclaim of his art, the artist becomes less involved.

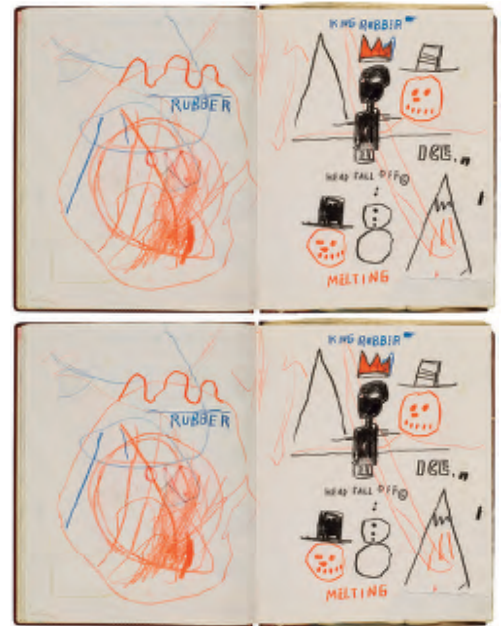
Warhol was used to this, but Basquiat, who had hoped to gain wider recognition with this exhibition and through this "baptism" by the famous Warhol, was unhappy about the critical reaction and broke off, almost entirely, the painting sessions in the Factory that had been so frequent until then. Andy was not very happy about this, since he apparently had planned further work. The larger part of the hand-painted works, the later, and large works by Warhol that were shown by the Estate on various occasions only after his death, seem to me to be started collaborations for stylistic and iconographic reasons, in which Basquiat's contribution is missing.⁸

⁸ See *Andy Warhol, Heaven and Hell are Just One Breath Away! Late Paintings and Related Work 1984-86* (New York: Rizzoli/Gagosian, 1992). pp. 28-30, 51-54, 60-61, 66-67, 76-77, 95, 105, 114-115, 123-126, and 137.

Plates :



1. Jean-Michel Basquiat et Cora Bischofberger, Untitled (Pakiderm), 1983. Acrylic and oilstick on canvas, 120 x 120 cm. Cora Sheibani-Bischofberger Collection



2. Jean-Michel Basquiat et Cora Bischofberger, Untitled (Chesa Lodisa, St. Moritz Guest Book No. 1 / 2), 1984. Mixed media on paper, 30 x 47.4 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



3. Francesco Clemente et Cora Bischofberger, « San Maurizio » (Chesa Lodisa, St. Moritz Guest Book No. 1 / 2), 1983. Pastel and pencil on paper, 30 x 47.4 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



4. Walter Dahn et Dokoupil, Ein Herz für Bruno, 1982. Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



5. Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely et Daniel Spoerri, *Untitled* (11, 12 and 13th of January), 1961. Assemblage on wood, 45 × 48.3 × 5 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



6. Sandro Chia et Enzo Cucchi, *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 200 × 256 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland.



7. Julian Schnabel, *The Exile*, 1980. Oil, antler, gold pigment, and mixed media on wood, 229 × 305 × 63 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



8. Andy Warhol, *Retrospective*, 1978. Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, 203 × 203 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



9. Mike Bidlo, *Not Picasso (Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907)*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 244 × 234 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



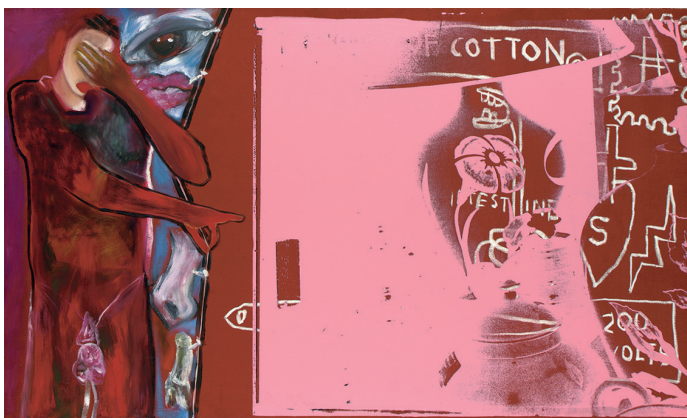
10. Jean-Michel Basquiat
Dos Cabezas, 1982
Acrylic and oilstick on canvas with wood supports, 152.4 × 152.4 cm. Private collection. Courtesy Gagosian



11. Jean-Michel Basquiat
Brown Spots (Portrait of Andy Warhol as a Banana), 1984
Acrylic and oilstick on canvas, 193 × 213 cm. Private collection. Courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



12. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente and Andy Warhol
Alba's Breakfast, 1984
 Mixed media on paper mounted on canvas, 117 × 150 cm. Bischofberger Collection, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland



13. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente and Andy Warhol
Casa del Popolo, 1984
 Acrylic, silkscreen ink, and oilstick on canvas, 128 × 215 cm. Private collection



14. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente and Andy Warhol
Ex-Ringeye, 1984. Mixed media on canvas, 122 × 167.5 cm. Würth Collection.



Ex-Ringeye, 1984. First version.