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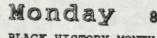
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Fort introducing: TO

JUICE tor

February





BLACK HISTORY MONTH FILM SERIES:

in RISD Library conference room, 7:00 p.m.

MODERN DANCE CLASS in student center free class 9-10 p.m.

HERETIX in concert

All proceeds to benefit R.I. Project AIDS 8:30-11:30 p.m. in the refectory tickets \$2 at SAO or Residence Life

shows

Mahler Ryder:
Woods-Gerry Gallery
Show starts February 12
Runs thru March 1
RISD Alumni Exhibition
Market House Gallery
Feb. 4-13

RISD Graduate Furniture
Design Exhibition
RECENT WORKS
Sol Koffler Gallery
Design Center

Tuesday ,

Doing Good! Designers and Artists
Working for Social & Environmental Change
7 p.m. Refectory Room A
presented by Career Services

Wednesday 10

Student Board Meeting at the TAP 11:30 am

Alumni Lecture Series presents: Alphonse Mattia MFA '73 Rosanne Somerson MFA '76

Furniture Designers and RISD Faculty 7:00 p.m. at the RISD auditorium

To publicize
an event in
upcoming issues
of *Juice*Contact RISD Box 903
or EXT 6597
with information

Thursday 11

RISD Museum Opening 5:30-7:30 p.m. "Encountering the New World 1493-1800" Rare prints, maps, and illustrated books from the John Carter Brown Library thru April 25th

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10
Speaker: Author Paule Marshall
7 00pm 9 00pm • Salomon 101

Sponsored by Students of Cambbean Ancestry

Friday 12

NUT N'HONEY

Saturday 13

bus trip to NYC tickets are \$15
bus leaves from Metcalf Lot at 7:00 a.m.
places of interest:
Studio Museum in Harlem
Whitney Museum: Jean-Michel Basquait Retrospective
Sylvia's Soul Food Restaurant
Schomberg Cultural Center
sponsored by, SAO, Multi-Cultural Ctr, and United Students

Sunday 14 VALENTINE'S DAY





Perhaps understandably given Jean-Michel Basquiat's shockingly early and still recent death, the critical literature on his work has been rather uncritical. Emphasizing the anecdotal, the elegiac, and the sacramental. many writers drift from analyses of his art into personal recollections of the artist. and seem at times to vie for the distinction of having known him best. Little arthistorical comparison is offered: there is a widespread reluctance to venture outside the sphere of black culture heroes such as Charlie Parker. Joe Louis, and Thelonius Monk, who dominate discussions of his work as if it did not occupy art history in the way of most art. Surely the work of few other important contemporary artists is more consistently talked about in terms from outside the visual arts.

so quickly from the still predominantly white art world reflects this strategy. The white arr world is not necessarily disdainful of or put off by "primit" evess" or "blackness," which can in some cases have its own a chet and act as its own

selling point, especially when it comes packaged in a modern intelligence, as in Basquiat's case. The element of irony helps make the primitiveness more palatable rather than functioning subversively. This may throw some light on how a 28-year-old with only eight or ten years of work behind him is accorded a Whitney retrospective.

At the same time that this identity game was going on, the situation had historical resonances too for a black man to peactice primitivism demonstrated that we had once and for all entered the postcolonial era. By taking on the role of the white borrower, Basquiat collapsed the distance between colonizer and colonized, embodying both at once. A famous photograph of him, which appeared on the cover of the New York Times Magazine in 1985, demonstrated this duality Basquiat sat in his studio, a brush in his hand, a painting like a primitive tribal mask on the easel behind him. His feet were bare. Yet he wore an expensive Giorgio Armani suit-which, however, was

soiled with paint. The dirty Armani brought up the cliche of the primitive who comprehends use value but not exchange value; the bare feet similarly suggested a denizen of a preurbanized culture. At the same time, the atelier venue, the expensive apparel, the exaggerated chic of one beyond caring about exchange value even if he understood it well enough, the elitist act of oil painting itself, not to speak of the gaze of the Times reader, on Central Park West or in the Hamptons, for whom this sight was prepared, all cast Basquiat as a cultural aristocrat. Carelessly yet carefully enthroned, he evoked the mood of sprezzatura, that feigned or studied casualness cul-

tivated by the Italian nobility of the Renaissance.

This ambiguous or double self-image -barefoot in Armani embodies the paradox that W. E. B. DuBois described as "this double-consciousness . . . an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. The iconography of Basquiat's work parallels this duality. The crown that he often represented on the head of a primitive-looking black male stick figure, for example, points to a sense of double identity, a royal selfhood somehow lost but dimly remembered, overlaid by a voodoo mask. The relic of ancient royalty peers from behind the shattered cultural surface

This special treatment of Basquiat, an African-American artist of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent, may in part be attributed to a queasiness about addressing the racial issues surrounding his work. One way to begin to remedy this situation is by contemplating the fact that Basquiat, though an artist of undeniable sophistication, chose to practice a form of primitivism. Why? A "primitive" artist, of course, is one whose sole means of expression lies in one of the visual modes associated with pre-Modern or traditional societies, and who comes from such a society, so that his or her exposure to global culture is comparatively limited. A primitivist, on the other hand, is an artist to whom various modes of expression are available, but who chooses to imitate the look of so-called "primitive" objects. Basquiat was a primitivist, not a primitive. And the primitivism of his work was a canny reversal of tactics from the white art tradition, a reversal that resonates with assertions, ironies, and claims.

Primitivism as practiced by Pablo Picasso and other white artists early in this century, in the late-colonial heyday of Modernism, was a matter of white culture imitating the products of nonwhite culture. To white Europeans and Americans of the time, generally speaking, white culture was the norm and nonwhite cultures were aberrations. To borrow from them showed not the impoverishment of white culture, its need for vital input from outside, but its imperial generosity in recognizing the nonwhite. This was a kind of royal slumming, as it were, like the visits of downtown white esthetes to upper Manhattan during the Harlem Renaissance.

Basquiat's practice of primitivism was an ironic inversion of all that. At first, for a young black man to confront the contemporary art world-still overwhelmingly white-with works looking conspicuously like those it called "primitive" seemed to confirm its expectations: a young black male is a primitive. But soon edges of question appeared in the equation, incommensurabilities confounding the same white expectations that seemed to have just been fulfilled. Certain elements in the work did not conform to its supposedly primitive nature: its highly self-conscious irony, for example, and its deconstruction of European culture through fragmented and jumbled lists that portrayed its coherences as breaking down. In fact, it became clear, these were the works not of a primitive but of a consummate primitivist. This black artist was doing exactly what classical-Modernist white artists such as Picasso and Georges Braque had done: deliberately echoing a primitive style.

While seeming to behave like a primitive, Basquiat was actually behaving like white Westerners who behave as they assume primitives do. He was behaving like white men who think they are behaving like black men. So it was not just a question of his imagery giorifying African roots and so on-hymning negritude (though he certainly did celebrate black culture). Basquiat was also focusing on the white art world's expectations. and on the assumptions and ideologies underlying them.

Thomas McEvilley

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(ARTFORUM NOV. 92

" ROYAL SLUMMING"

In this subject matter his ocuvre is late (142 W 17 177 wime what casually apocalyptic. It rather screne's a morniplates the moment of civilization's passing away, or its cook as one ng into a simultaneously pre- and postliterate wamp tional decay where the center no longer hands longer holds, language no longer holds Skietal gares glare from a depthless, fragmented plane that is not an idequate arena for selfhood. Language is conjugated meaning each in a field of splintered phonemes. It is with great non the Banquiat presents this afterworld, this world of the arrangement rum - which also contains an implicit > ... his rakish crown is both tarnished relic and an appatient sign

He will regain his real selfhood, that of the an extra ad of the soul, through a cataclysmic revenal of Wall -ing it upside down and inside out and win r sines while a transistor radio duct-taped to a man AL CLEVE Eddie. In this aspect, the work can aims a " rected joke on Hegel the Euro-ethnic who and " , 1 . . . e is ahis torical must accept the revenge of an \\--- \
who parodied the "end of history" with a * --an ethnic · nentary language European literacy disinfection . that

aren't of anything anymore. Coolly manipulative in a cunning sel ---Basquiat, barefoot and aloof, gazes -ur -Armani, and through the masklike face ---and purodist, he uses the marks and exmasters to redraw their own civilization a of the dream of its own future.

of Ranquial is the suffect of a retriepecture at he will use at 18 february 1981, and subsequents straining will be february 1981, and subsequents straining will be february 1981, and subsequents of Man. 1 August 1981, and 198

like a Yoruba deity concealed in a santeria statue.

In its spiritual aspect, this subject matter is orphic—that is, it relates to the ancient myth of the soul as a deity lost, wandering from its true home, and temporarily imprisoned in a degradingly limited body and an infuriatingly reduced social stature. The theme was fairly typical of the early-to-mid '80s; Keith Haring's iconography was also orphic in its formative period. The Wild Child and the Radiant Child are both visitors from outer space, exiles from other dimensions, lost princes or gods who have wandered from a glorious beyond, cloaked in hidden signs of royalty, their divinity sunk briefly in the prison of matter, and so on. Basquiat himself was engaged in royal slumming, as a dethroned black prince.

In Basquiat's oeuvre, the theme of divine or royal exile was brought down to earth or historicized by the concrete reality of the African diaspora. The king that he once was in another world (and that he would be again when he returned there) could be imagined concretely as a Watusi warrior or Egyptian pharaoh. The soul's exile could be related to slavery, and its return, to the not-yet-completed civil rights movement. If, when we looked at the Times Magazine cover, we saw dandyism, it was in the serious sense that Disraeli suggested when he observed that the dands is the prince of an imaginary kingdom. Basquiat's Armani suit, like the cartoon crown he used to paint, was a sign of that kingdom, the paintbrush in his hand indicated the means through which he recovered the outlines of his true nature, and the channel through which he would find his way back to it. Art appears, then, as a path at once to a primal beginning and to an ultimate beyond.

There are great simplicities in this system of feelings, but Basquiat's great subtlety, his desire to keep himself clear of

them, emerges when one asks exactly what was this imaginary kingdom in the regalia of which he sat enthroned in the Times Magazine. The image of it that he left differs not only from the idealized African past of Alex Hales . R. wit but also from the idealized American future of Martin Luther King's dream. Pictured through the glyphic disintegration that surrounds the haunted king in Basquiat's paintings, this is the kingdom of postcivilization, the disintegrated packingdom kingdom in which everything is falling apart traementing into atomic bits that look like evidence—clues stated acted and organized in some purposeless microanals us. Here Basquiat's orphic dandyism merges with his icon-graphs, eclebration of the idea of the end of the world, or of a certain paradigm of it at any rate the end of the stranglehold that Western civilization has had on the rest of the world

