

Lifestyle

Basquiat-Warhol: A rare artistic duo, reunited in Paris



A visitor looks at "Ailing Ali in Fight of Life", an acrylic painting.



A visitor walks past a black and white photograph made in 1985 by US Michael Halsband, depicting portraits of US Neo-expressionism artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (right) (1960-1988) and US artist, film director and producer Andy Warhol (left) (1928-1987), during a preview of the exhibition "Basquiat X Warhol".



A visitor looks at "African Masks", an acrylic painting. —AFP photos



A visitor looks at "Taxi, 45th/Broadway", an acrylic and oilstick, synthetic polymer and silkscreen ink painting.



A visitor looks at black and white photographs made in 1985 by US Michael Halsband, depicting portraits of US artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and US artist, Andy Warhol.



A visitor takes a photograph of "General Electric with Waiter", an acrylic painting.



A visitor looks at "Untitled (50 Dentures)", an acrylic and silkscreen ink painting.

There are vanishingly few great collaborations in the annals of fine art. For a brief moment in the 1980s, Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat showed the world how it was done. It started with a bang. Warhol, 54, met Basquiat, 22, for lunch in October 1982 and took a polaroid of them together.

Basquiat took it to his studio and returned just two hours later with a portrait. Warhol was stunned by its brilliance. Soon they were working together on portraits that combined their favoured tropes: Basquiat's masks, skulls, graffiti and obscure symbols; Warhol's pop-art imagery, logos and newspaper headlines. The brief, intense collaboration lasted from 1983 to 1985 and produced some 160 works.

An unprecedented number of them — 70 — have been brought together for a show at the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris that opens Wednesday, mostly plucked from private collections. "It's definitely the most successful collaboration in the history of art between two great artists. It's never been matched at this level or in this short space of time," said Dieter Buchhart, the show's lead curator and a Basquiat expert.

In room after room, two different aesthetics, generations and temperaments collide — and find an unexpected synergy. "It is neither Warhol, nor Basquiat, but a third artist that emerges," said Suzanne Page, the museum's artistic director.



A visitor looks at "Chair", an acrylic painting.

"There was a great generosity between the two. They played with and provoked each other," she told AFP. "Warhol allowed himself to be completely subverted by Basquiat's interventions." At their best, it is hard to tell where one artist begins and the other ends, as in the monumental, 10-metre-long (33 feet) "African Masks". Others are unexpected: "Ten Punching Bags", never shown in their lifetimes, has the bags suspended in a line and decorated with the face of Jesus Christ inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper", drawn by Warhol with the word "judge" and a crown of thorns added by Basquiat.

Cartoonist Keith Haring, a close friend of both — and who makes a cameo in the exhibition —



A visitor looks at "Olympic Rings", an acrylic painting.

praised their collaboration at the time as a "conversation in painting". But there were doubters as well. Many felt portraits should be the singular vision of an individual artist. Their supporters saw the two artists more like great jazz musicians, riffing off each other. Basquiat was inspired by the master, Warhol was reinvigorated by his young friend. "It released an incredible energy," said Page, and on a more straightforward level, they shared an intuitive genius for composition and combining colours.

If Basquiat was the more serious, the more socially engaged — "carried by anger" at the invisibility of black people — Warhol was not as detached as he sometimes came across. "He accepted the social engagement side of Basquiat, and shared it," Page



A visitor stands next to "Mind Energy" (Left), as she looks at "Pontiac No. 5", two paintings made in 1985 by artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and US artist, Andy Warhol (1928-1987), during a preview of the exhibition "Basquiat X Warhol".

said. "Warhol was engaged too, in his own way. He was a very complex creature." What might have been seen as insolence in Basquiat's approach — scrawling over works that Warhol had left around his Factory studio, for example — was totally accepted by the elder artist. Their collaboration ended happily. But within two years both were dead — Warhol following routine surgery and Basquiat from a heroin overdose. Already global superstars, their fame would only continue to grow. —AFP



French pianist Colette Maze, born in June 1914, poses during a photo session in Paris. —AFP photos



The pianist who's been playing for more than 100 years

Colette Maze has been playing piano for more than a century, and is still drawing thousands of fans on social media. Born in June 1914, before the outbreak of World War I and when one of her favourite composers, Claude Debussy, was still alive, the French pianist practices four hours a day and is about to release her seventh album, "108 Years of Piano". From her apartment overlooking the Seine river in Paris, Maze moves cautiously between the three pianos in her living room, but retains a youthful enthusiasm.

"Me? I'm young," she says with a smile. "Age is not something I'm interested in. There are people who are forever young, amazed by everything, and then there are people who don't care about anything and never loved anything, even their man — can you imagine?" she adds.

'Piano is my life'

Maze was a piano teacher for much of her life, and it was only after turning 100 that she started building a significant fanbase — through her Facebook page. Many are inspired by her continuing good health and refusal to give up the traditional French pleasures of wine, cheese and chocolate. "She gives people strength — that's why she has such crazy success," said her son, journalist Fabrice Maze, adding with pride that she is one of the few people over 100 releasing albums.

She still remembers the sound of "Big Bertha", the huge cannon used by the German army during World War I, but most of



French pianist Colette Maze, born in June 1914, poses during a photo session in Paris.

her memories revolve around her instrument. "When I was little, I suffered from asthma and my mother would play violin with my piano teacher — it would calm me," she says. "Piano is my life, my friend. I need to feel it and hear it," she adds, before offering a rendition of Debussy's "Reflections in the Water".

Maze began playing at five, and despite reluctance from her parents, she won a place at

the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris with teachers including the renowned Alfred Cortot. Cortot was known for a method of relaxing all the muscles of the body — which Maze credits with sparing her from arthritis. The other secret to her youth? "I did a lot of dancing," she says. "I need to feel my muscles, my abdominals, my thighs, my arms. All that must be alive." —AFP

Video game BAFTAs spotlight UK's thriving independent scene

Britain's 2023 BAFTA Games Awards this week showcased independent video games studios, celebrating the powerful role of lesser-known creators in an industry where blockbuster titles enjoy vast budgets. Video game gongs were announced Thursday, one month after the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) annual cinema awards. "Vampire Survivors", conceived by a single London-based Italian, clinched game of the year with its polished minimalist retro graphics and addictive overhead gameplay. The shoot-em-up, which does not contain vampires, beat big-budget quest titles "Elden Ring" and "God of War: Ragnarok", both of which took legions of people years to create.

'Don't need AAA'

"We don't need to be AAA," Sam McGarry, one of the developers behind "Vampire Survivors", told AFP at the annual London Games Festival where fans meet the industry's movers and shakers. AAA refers to big-budget, high-profile games that are usually produced by large publishers. The Briton decided one year ago to quit his job as a web developer to join the small team writing the hit game.

Some blockbuster video games can enjoy budgets running into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Yet technological advances and freely available software tools means minor players can give them a run for their money. "The introduction of new tools has allowed people to develop games for free — now, anybody can do it," said publishing director Simon Byron at Bristol-based Yogscast, which publishes independent games and also produces related video content.

'We have to innovate'

Jay Armstrong, British design director of BAFTA-nominated quest game "Cult of the Lamb", stressed that innovation was key when faced with big-spending titans of the sector. "We can't compete on graphics or budget (so) we have to innovate a little," Armstrong told AFP on the sidelines of the London Games Festival that runs to April 8.

As he spoke, fascinated gaming fans were captivated by a big screen depicting a basic animation of a lamb presiding over the sacrifice of another small animal as satanic symbols float by. "You play as a possessed lamb that runs around the world

indoctrinating cute little creatures into their cult so they can sacrifice them," explained Armstrong, whose studio Massive Monster has ten staff and is mainly UK based.

London hub

London is among cities that boast the most video game developing talent with "over 700 studios" due to its vibrant indie scene, according to festival director Michael French. Scotland's capital Edinburgh is home to Rockstar North, the division of US group Take-Two behind the top-selling "Grand Theft Auto" series — whose fifth instalment has sold more than 175 million copies worldwide and generated billions of dollars. The UK competes with Germany for the title of top video games marketplace in Europe, but globally it still trails the United States and Japan.

Britain's video games market grew strongly last year to contribute a total of £5.26 billion (\$6.5 billion) to the economy, according to trade body Ukie. Some studios had feared that Brexit would discourage European workers from flocking to Britain and hurt the industry. French conceded Britain's exit from the European Union at the start of 2021 did pose an "obstacle" — but added that "people always want to join studios" to make video games.

'Babysitting in space'

The BAFTA for best British video game meanwhile showcased UK titles including role-playing adventure "Citizen Sleeper", designed by Gareth Damian Martin. Big gaming productions "cost so much money", according to Martin. "But players want new experiences — which is not really about technological power any more, it's not really about manpower. It's really about the stories we're telling," they added. The game has relatively static graphics and lots of text because this is "the most powerful low-cost material you can use in a game".

The game features a main character who struggles to escape a corporate existence on a space station in a dystopian future — a concept that would be difficult to sell to video game giants and thrives instead in the independent scene.

"It would be extremely hard to go to Ubisoft and pitch them this game and say: ok, I want a 1,000 developers, I want \$200 million to make a story about babysitting your friends' kid in space, or about working in a bar. I don't think it would happen," said Martin. —AFP