

BASQUIAT AND THE PHOTOCOPIER, ON EXHIBIT IN NEW YORK

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Jean-Michel Basquiat's "King of the Zulus" (1984-85) Jean-Michel Basquiat's "King of the Zulus" (1984-85)
AFP New York (AFP)

Amid the success in New York of a major Basquiat exhibition from Paris, a gallery in the painter's hometown is paying homage to the late American artist's intensive use of the photocopier and collage in his work.

"Jean-Michel Basquiat / Xerox," at Nahmad Contemporary, shows that the Brooklyn-born artist of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent integrated the machine into his creative process from his first attempts to transition from the world of street art and graffiti to contemporary art.

The famous postcard that Basquiat sold in the streets in 1979, and which were his first point of contact with Andy Warhol, were color photocopies of collages that integrated painting, text and found objects.

Later, when he turned to larger media, he used photocopies to add density to his works, covering his collages with small drawings, phrases and names, as evidenced in several of the pieces on display.

The Nahmad Contemporary show runs from Tuesday to May 31, while the Louis Vuitton Foundation's big Basquiat exhibition's New York iteration, at the Brant Foundation, is sold out through its closing May 15. The details in Basquiat's work can be overwhelmed by the powerful overall impression they make, so it is often necessary to get up close to see them. Basquiat played a lot with repetition, in individual works as well as across works, interconnecting them around favorite themes such as racism, black historical figures or anatomy.

Like Warhol, Basquiat's use of repetition evokes consumer society's endlessness, although without magnifying it as the Pop Art master did. "He was using this Xerox like a weapon," said the show's curator, Dieter Buchhart, who also collaborated with the Vuitton Foundation show and "Basquiat: Boom for Real," at the Barbican in London in 2017.

From 1983, photocopies took on such importance that Basquiat ended up buying a Xerox photocopier and installing it in his Manhattan studio. While the machine was fundamental to his art, Basquiat never had a direct relationship with Xerox, which never sought to establish contact, Buchhart said. In contrast with the pure abstract paintings of Cy Twombly or Mark Rothko, Basquiat -- who died in 1988 -- wanted the complexity of his paintings to be apparent. "I learn everyday I look at these works," said Buchhart.