

“Skull”

The concept of art has taken many different forms and changes after the events of 1972, not just in terms of style and materials used to create the piece but how and why the artist created the piece in question. Some artworks are made in response to certain ideologies or events that had occurred before even if it's through the viewer's interpretation or intended by the artist. There are even some artwork that may unintentionally be seen as being influenced by past practices of artwork throughout different time periods when examined closely by different viewers and critics. An example of this can be seen from a 1981 dynamic artwork made by an American artist named Jean-Michel Basquiat.

This art piece in particular was not given a title by the artist, though some have dubbed the piece as “Skull” due to what is presented. Since 1978, Jean-Michel Basquiat has been making art for smaller businesses including T-Shirts and postcards with influences coming from struggles in his personal life and the world around him. By the 1980s, his art gained recognition from a Times Square Show exhibition with many seeing the representation of avant-garde and graffiti within them. One of Basquiat's art that would gain recognition for its unique design and discussion is “Skull”. The art piece depicts a shape resembling a human head with visible features such as eyes, teeth, a nose, and the shape of an ear. However the art itself also contains different usage of colors and shapes around and even inside the head, leading many to question if there is meaning behind the art piece and why certain decisions with its creation were made. Some even question if the given title of “Skull” is appropriate as the piece could be a head or an abstract figure. While the piece itself is considered a mystery, there can be some meaning found within it.



“Skull” can be described as an Avant-Garde due to its unusual and new appearance, fitting with Basquiat’s other work. Basquiat has created art pieces that reflect the time period of radical art that reflects society using very unique designs combined with seemingly mismatched uses of colors. This an accurate observation with the colors and shapes constantly moving and expanding within the piece, it could be nonsensical to some but to others it is an artistic choice. The fact that “Skull” raises a lot of questions regarding its purpose and meaning can be attributed to the universal system of communication and how viewers interpret or question the art piece. Communication itself can take many forms in terms of art aside from typography or using a

combination of letters to create a message, so in the case of “Skull” it could be a form of Basquiat expressing emotions with how certain aspects of the head appear disfigured and notable inconsistencies with the splashes and strokes colors used. Some could see this as the artist communicating his view of unorganization and stress within society, and how it can mentally affect a person. The mismatch of colors and strokes possibly conveying uneasy emotions without the need of words but instead visual presentation.

Avant-Garde such as “Skull” could also communicate different meanings depending on how the viewer reads into the piece, as one of the many interpretations of the artwork being it symbolizing death which is why it is given the title of “skull” at first. But how this belief is spread about the art piece in conjunction to the artwork is definitely through the sign interpreted, with the sign itself being the main shape resembling a skull. The concept of language and linguistics could also be a factor into this, as a sign or symbol resembling a skull tends to be attributed for death or more negative emotions. Whether or not this was intended by Basquiat is not known, but it does show how certain shapes even as the centerpiece of an artwork can give off a message to certain viewers even if they perceive the message in a certain way than intended. But in some languages, a sign or symbol resembling a skull might not always mean negative things such as death, as to others it could also be a focus on a human’s head or mind which could bring an entirely different message from the artwork.

Jean-Michel Basquiat’s “Skull” along with his other artwork reflect many different aspects of Avant-Garde, but can also reflect the different forms of communication and usage of signs within art. Every artwork has its own perspective among each viewer, and how a message is perceived.

The Life and Legacy of Jean-Michel Basquiat

<https://www.basquiat.com/about/#chronology>

25 contemporary artworks you need to see Artsper Magazine

<https://blog.artsper.com/en/get-inspired/25-works-of-contemporary-art-you-need-to-see/>

Untitled, Jean-Michael Basquiat Thebroad.org

<https://www.thebroad.org/art/jean-michel-basquiat/untitled>