

Cherise Gabbidon

Professor Lange

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The Persona of Art: Into the World of Basquiat's Acrylic & Ink on a Wig Mannequin

This is not the first time that I used Jean-Michel Basquiat's work as the subject for an academic assignment. This is the third. I enjoy analyzing his work. It is so different in appearance from all the artwork I was exposed to in my lifetime. The colors that he uses, how he paints his line, and most iconically the horrific visual nature of his work. That seemingly horrific visual is a staple in Basquiat pieces, both a frightening and mesmeric quality that his work possesses. It is something that makes his art truly unique and special. It is something that cannot be bought. That something is talent.

Basquiat is best known for his paintings however did you know that he also created a sculpture? A newly discovered piece of his was discovered on November 7th, 2020. "Art Legacy Auctions in Chicago offered the item in a live auction that added a whole new dimension to Basquiat's art: a 1985 mannequin head wearing large stereo headphones that the artist painted and gave as a gift to Jimmy Hart (a.k.a the Mouth of the South), a WWF wrestling manager." The discovery of this item that Basquiat designed leads me to my first point. In one of the assigned readings for assignment three "Our Book", there was a statement made that I originally disagreed with it more than I agreed with it. It stated that "Although great works of art are created from the use of the easel its effectiveness as an item has been lost." What is interesting to me is that I have changed my mind. I now more agree than I disagree with this statement. Basquiat's mannequin head wearing large stereo headphones is direct evidence of this claim.

Basquiat was a painter who used to create everywhere, on the floor, walls, etc. He did not exclusively use easels. He did not need to. As you can see the same is true for this item. He paints directly onto the pre-made object and thus it became his art piece. An art piece that was estimated to sell for between \$350,000 and \$380,000 in the article that I read. To move on to the broader reason our society has just changed. We have evolved to find new more practical ways of doing tasks. This ideation was evident in the assigned readings regarding language and technology so in my opinion this ideology can be applied to art as well as many other aspects of life.

Moving on, to my next point I will be focusing on an ideology from “Abstraction and Form” regarding a Bauhaus principle. It was that it is best to separate the artist from the world of the industry and community of his or her desired field because skill and knowledge are gained through the hours of practicing your craft and natural talent. It is an interesting principle that I mostly agree with. Take Basquiat for example. He is proof of the principle that the Bauhaus believed. He was not an academically or professionally trained artist. He was a high school dropout that rose to fame through his work. He started with graffiti tagging the walls of New York with a friend under the name SAMO. It was his artistic expression that separated him, that made his work special. There are two more examples that I would also like to point out. One being Pablo Picasso. Picasso was known to have been a child prodigy when it came to art. It came to him easy. His father was also an artist which means that art runs in the family. I believe that if you are a great dancer your child may have a better chance at being a good dancer than children that came from non-dancer families. I believe in inherited skills and their connection to being talented. Picasso was formally taught however he did not like formal education. He got into the best fine art schools and even an advanced class that process usually takes students a

month but with him only a week at just thirteen years of age. Then suddenly Picasso goes cubist. He goes primitive, he goes unrealistic but still, he shined. They become works of art that are now critically acclaimed. This is talent. Lastly, look at the renaissance period for example. In this period time respect and recognition were hard to come by for artists who were professionally trained. It was an occupation that was looked down upon and jobs were scarce. This is an example that also proves the Bauhaus theory that just because you are professionally trained, and you go to a good school does not mean that you will make it as an artist.

Going back to Basquiat's mannequin head wearing large stereo headphones, what does this piece say? What do you see? Do you see the same thing that I see? Is there a general message that could be universally understood when looking at this piece or any art piece for that matter? The answer is no because language is not universal. I believe art can speak just as design and verbal language does just in different ways. To Basquiat, this is a work dedicated to his love of wrestling entertainment to a person he respects. However, when I first looked at it, I saw a victim of abuse, I see a rapper of 2020, I see the Joker, a sick person to name a few. There are lines on this mannequin's face to me it looks like writings of the Arabic language. I find this extremely interesting because it looks like typography. I wonder if it was written consciously.

On a final note, I want to share something from "Munari Design as Art." It reads, "At one time people thought in terms of fine art and commercial art, pure art and applied art... We used to have sewing machines built by engineers and then decorated by an artist... We no longer have this distinction of art." The point the author is making is that art can be all things. It cannot easily be gatekept anymore. More and more people are experimenting with materials and using premade objects in their art. Art has evolved and will continue to do so. Basquiat's mannequin head wearing large stereo headphones applies to this ideology. He has used a premade mannequin

head that would probably have cost a few dollars and turned it into something that now values thousands of dollars just by using paint. Art is mixing with technology just as the example of the sewing machine. The mannequin head that Basquiat used was probably made in a factory, the paint as well. We live in a society where art, technology, and language will continue to evolve and interact with one another for the innovation of our future society.

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