

Jean-Michel Basquiat. Engadin

14 December 2024 – 29 March 2025

Hauser & Wirth St. Moritz



Jean-Michel Basquiat, 'The Dutch Settlers', 1982 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York. Nicola Erni Collection. Photo: Reto Pedrini Photography

Exploring various artistic motifs that combine the natural and cultural landscape of the Engadin with the metropolis of New York, Jean-Michel Basquiat's first solo exhibition dedicated to the paintings he created in and inspired by his visits to Switzerland opens on 14 December at Hauser & Wirth St. Moritz. 'Jean-Michel Basquiat. Engadin' traces the renowned artist's connections to the country, which began in 1982 with his first show at Galerie Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich, returning over a dozen times to St. Moritz, Zurich, Appenzell and Basel. The Engadin region in particular continued to fascinate Basquiat long after his return to New York, resulting in a body of work that captures his impressions of the Swiss Alpine landscape and culture through the lens of his highly distinctive and personal artistic language.

'Jean-Michel Basquiat. Engadin' will be accompanied by a catalog from Hauser & Wirth Publishers, featuring a foreword by Bruno Bischofberger and a text by Dr. Dr. Dieter Buchhart to give visitors a unique insight into this specific chapter of one of the most important artists of the 20th Century. The exhibition is supported by Dr. Dr. Dieter Buchhart and Dr. Anna Karina Hofbauer, internationally renowned curators and Basquiat experts.

About the exhibition

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1960 and coming of age in the downtown, post-punk artistic scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Basquiat drew on the diversity and intensity of New York City within his multi-disciplinary practice. His expressive paintings combined bold text and imagery from his expansive references across art, film, history and music, as well as his experiences of everyday racism as a young Black man in the US.

After his first exhibition with Galerie Bruno Bischofberger in 1982, the same year Basquiat became one of the youngest ever artists to participate at Documenta in Kassel, the influences of the disparate cultural landscapes of New York City and Switzerland began to take shape in his work, incorporating the motifs of ski lifts, fir trees, mountains and German phrases into his expansive visual lexicon. 'From then on, Jean-Michel Basquiat often visited me in Switzerland, where he particularly liked it. About half a dozen times in Zurich and exactly seven times in St. Moritz, four of them in the summer', says Bischofberger. Basquiat was captivated by the Engadin's vast natural landscape, cultural history and the hospitality of the Bischofberger family. Perhaps what drew Basquiat most to this part of Switzerland was, as Dr. Dr. Dieter Buchhart writes, 'the contrast between the pulsating life, the clubs, the street noise, and the breakneck speed of the metropolis New York and the 'discovery of slowness' in the unique, overwhelming landscape of the Engadin.'

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Jean Michel-Basquiat, Brook Bartlett and Bruno Bischofberger at the Cresta Klubhaus in St. Moritz on January 30, 1983. Photo: Christina Bischofberger © Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich, Switzerland

One of the earliest works on view in the exhibition is the monumental painting 'The Dutch Settlers' from 1982. Composed of nine canvases, the painting is a prime example of Basquiat's innovative approach of marrying William S. Burroughs' 'cut-up' technique with a method akin to sampling technology used in hip hop. The montage of nine canvas panels enabled Basquiat to assemble, combine and recombine different image fields – creating a multi-layered work that emanates a visual rhythm described as an 'Eye Rap' by art historian Robert Storr. The artist paints powerful motifs which reference the African Diaspora and slavery (evoked through words such as NUBIA and TOBACCO) alongside images of the Engadin, depicting fir trees, a mountain road, as well as an ibex, the heraldic animal of the canton of Graubünden and native to the region. This mountain iconography can also be seen in the playful works 'Skifahrer (Skier)' and 'See (Lake)' on view in the exhibition. The former depicts a comic-like figure on a bright red background and the latter the local landscape at night, both painted in St. Moritz a year later. These works were part of a series by Basquiat that he intended for a hunting lodge, and were subsequently hung in the Bischofberger's St. Moritz dining room.

In the winter of 1983/1984, during one of Basquiat's visits to the Engadin, Bischofberger and the artist began discussing the idea for a collaboration between Basquiat, Andy Warhol and Francesco Clemente. The three artists each created four paintings and a drawing, which were subsequently transported between them to complete. 'In Bianco' (1983) showcases the clearly distinguishable artistic contributions from all three, demonstrating how each artist reacted respectfully to the parameters of the others. As Buchhart notes, 'the cornerstone for this important collaboration was laid in St. Moritz', marking a turning point in Basquiat's artistic practice and proving Switzerland to be of great historical significance for the artist in more ways than one.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, Skifahrer (Skier), 1983 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York. Collection Carmignac, Photo: Thomas Hennocque

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Jean-Michel Basquiat, 'Big Snow', 1984 Private Collection © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York



Jean-Michel Basquiat, 'See (Lake)', 1983 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York. Courtesy Private Collection

Integrating the immediate world around him with his varied encyclopaedic knowledge, 'Big Snow' (1984) sees Basquiat once again processing his impressions of the Engadin in conjunction with themes relating to race and Black history, combining motifs of the Swiss mountains, snow and skiing with the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 and Jesse Owens' win of four gold medals. In 1985, Basquiat would go on to be part of a group show at the Segantini Museum in St. Moritz, showcasing his work 'See (Lake)' (1983) in an exhibition titled 'The Engadine in Painting'. The latest body of work on view includes a group of monochrome paintings titled 'To Repel Ghosts' which Basquiat created in 1986 during his time in Zurich and St. Moritz, exploring themes of emptiness as well as spirituality in relation to the African Diaspora. Musing on what kept drawing the artist back to Switzerland, Buchhart writes, 'For Basquiat, the Engadin meant work, inspiration, friendship, and rest and relaxation, all at the same time.'



Jean-Michel Basquiat / Andy Warhol / Francesco Clemente, 'In Bianco', 1984 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York © Francesco Clemente © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich © Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz Picasso -- FABA - 2024



Jean-Michel Basquiat, 'To Repel Ghosts', 1986 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York. Nicola Erni Collection. Photo: Reto Pedrini Photography

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Gallery hours:
Tuesday – Sunday
11 am – 7 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Caption and courtesy information:

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Jean-Michel Basquiat
The Dutch Settlers
1982

Acrylic and oilstick on canvas
183 x 549 cm / 72 x 216 1/8 in
© Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.
Licensed by Artestar, New York
Nicola Erni Collection. Photo: Reto
Pedrini Photography

Jean Michel-Basquiat, Brook Bartlett and
Bruno Bischofberger at the Cresta Klub-
haus in St. Moritz on January 30, 1983
Photo: Christina Bischofberger © Galerie
Bruno Bischofberger, Männedorf-Zurich,
Switzerland

Jean-Michel Basquiat
Skifahrer
1983
Oil on canvas
70 x 90 x 2 cm / 27 1/2 x 35 3/8 x 3/4 in
© Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.
Licensed by Artestar, New York
Collection Carmignac, Photo: Thomas
Hennocque

Jean-Michel Basquiat
Big Snow
1984
Oil, acrylic, felt-tip pen and oilstick on
canvas
168 x 151.5 cm / 66 1/8 x 59 5/8 in
Private Collection © Estate of Jean-
Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar,
New York

Jean-Michel Basquiat
See (Lake)
1983
Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm
© Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar,
New York
Courtesy Private Collection
Photo: Jon Etter

Jean-Michel Basquiat / Andy Warhol / Francesco Clemente
In Bianco
1984
Acrylic, silkscreen, and pastel on canvas 122 x 168 cm / 48
x 66 1/8 in
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Jean-Michel Basquiat
To Repel Ghosts
1986
Acrylic on wood
112 x 83 x 10 cm / 44 1/8 x 32 5/8 x 3 7/8 in
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Nicola Erni Collection.
Photo: Reto Pedrini Photography