

JOHNNY OTTO

ART FOR MODERN SPACES

LOS ANGELES / NEW YORK / PARIS



Johnny Otto

Art for Modern Spaces
Celebrating 32 Years

Collected by Celebrities around the world

Basquiat meets Haring

African Art in a modern context

“Grand. Vibrant. Aggressive. Powerful.”

- Art Reveal Magazine

“I see a postmodern man shaking off his false identities and dancing naked in front of the primordial fire.”

- Amber Christianson, Artist

"Bright, brash and bold"

- Shana Nys Dambrot, LAWEEKLY

VALENTINA BAICUIANU | ANDREA DANKOVA | REGINA DMYTRYSHYNA | SNOW DOLKINSON
 MARIANGELA GALLO | JULIA HADJI-STYLIANOU | LECH | TROY LECOINTE | ALEX MANEA
 BRITTANY MINNES | KERSTIN PAILLARD | NEZ SWEETLOVE | ANETT UDUD | JOSH TALBOTT
 RICHARD YOUNG

46

Art Reveal



Jardin
Rouge

OTTO
VS
BASQUIAT

Image as
a metaphor
Fu Wenjun

OTTO VS BASQUIAT FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

by Charlie Anison

Jean-Michel Basquiat once said that he wanted to make paintings that looked as if they were made by a child, in a sense trying to recapture the innocence and purity of thought in ones youth. In that way, Johnny Otto's primal brush strokes and bold use of color, are very similar. Both Artists used their art to invoke a feeling of freedom of expression, often called 'Neo-Expressionism' or 'Art Brut', a type of painting which French artist Jean Dubuffet described as naïve art, made outside the academic tradition of fine art.

Throughout his short, yet brilliant career, Basquiat astutely incorporated elements of black culture into his work, including tributes to Jazz Music icons, Policemen and Boxers. While Otto's paintings are also inspired by strong cultural forces, it was several trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts to see their ever-expanding collection of African Art that really had a profound impact on his work. He was only 10 years old at the time and not even thinking about being an Artist. It wasn't until he entered University that his art began to emerge. Otto's father had previously shown him work in books by Masters such as Picasso, Dali, Rembrandt, Degas and Van Gogh, but Otto had never seen African Art at all until that

Art Reveal



Basquiat, 1982



Basquiat, 1982

point. The wooden masks and sculptures had a profound impact on him that would slowly show itself over the span of several decades of painting.

Otto is not trying to be the next Basquiat and tries to avoid discussions on the matter altogether, insisting that his interest is to fight Basquiat's imposing legacy and to create an aesthetic identity and unapologetically his own. Side by side, each Artist work is immediately distinguishable. The comparisons that are made are more abstract and intangible. It is the immediacy and energy of each Artist's work that are aligned in some manner. They share a genre of art, the same way bands fall into similar genres, but do not

Art Reveal



Basquiat, 1982

recessarily sound exactly alike and each have their own style and nuances, which separate them.

Keith Haring is another Artist that collectors mention in the same breath as Otto's, and, admittedly, Haring did influence at least one of Otto's pieces directly. In 1986, when Otto was just starting off as an Artist and having small shows in his hometown of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, Haring created a large painting depicting a hydra-like figure, whose head of tentacles morphs into individual bodies. Otto had not seen the piece and knew nothing of it, until in 2018 he saw a black & white print of it on Guy Hepner's website. Seeing it only once is all that it took for Otto to be inspired to create a homage to the original. Otto's painting took only a few days to make, but is just as jaw-dropping as Haring's. Instead of tentacles with bodies, Otto's painting has eyes and is called 'Za Videni' (Czech, which translates to 'For Vision').

Otto's brilliance is, in an authentic way, mimicking these two great Artists' passion without copying them outright. It is a delight to see the manner in which Otto reinvents the same attitudes that Basquiat and Haring embodied, while at the same time reinvigorating their grammar.

Art Reveal

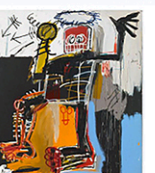


Basquiat, 1982

While many Artists are capable of duplicating another Artist's work, it is a difficult undertaking to maintain their spirit and passion while adhering to a style that is new and fresh. As Picasso would say, 'I don't create great artists, I find them.' For Otto, he was an admirer of the great artists that came before him and a keen disciple of his contemporaries. Like Haring, Otto has shown, chalk to his medium to create with across Los Angeles. Side-walks and empty walls are quickly filled with his line art. He never works at night. "It's a fast world," Haring has said, and Otto's manner of painting reflects that belief. He usually creates his street art in just a few minutes. Mostly so that he won't get caught, but also because creating art with great urgency allows the energy of the moment to be kept out, whereas art that is more deliberate and time consuming risks, seems to lack that same energy.

In the summer of 2017 it was a trip to the Broad Museum in Los Angeles that pushed Otto's work even further toward his expressive inclinations. It was there that, for the first time, he saw a Haring and a Basquiat up close and personal and it hit him. Until that point, Otto had only seen photos on-line, in documentaries or in books, while studying one of the Basquiat's. Otto realized that it was quite dirty around the edges, as if it had been in someone's basement or neglected for decades. He also noticed that there was a piece of gum under the paint and a shoe print, presumably Basquiat's own. The use of large amounts of paint, and the vibrancy of the colors, left a large impact on Otto and his attitude toward painting. Up until that point, he had been extremely careful and reserved with his pieces, not allowing them to be too messy or wild. That all changed.

In Basquiat's Untitled piece (above), we find the 'messy' use of paint, the vibrant colors, the urgent lines, the use of space to be similar to Otto's painting 'Za Videni', but, as stated previously, not a copy or an attempt to plagiarize in any way. There are a similarities in technique and passion, but the results are vastly individual, and it is those parallels in approach to Expressionism that



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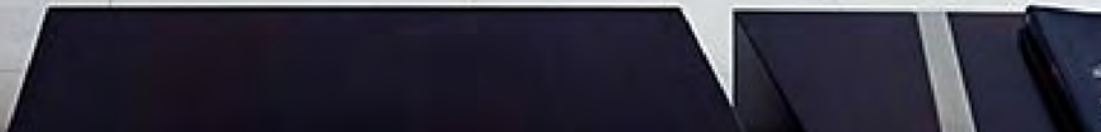


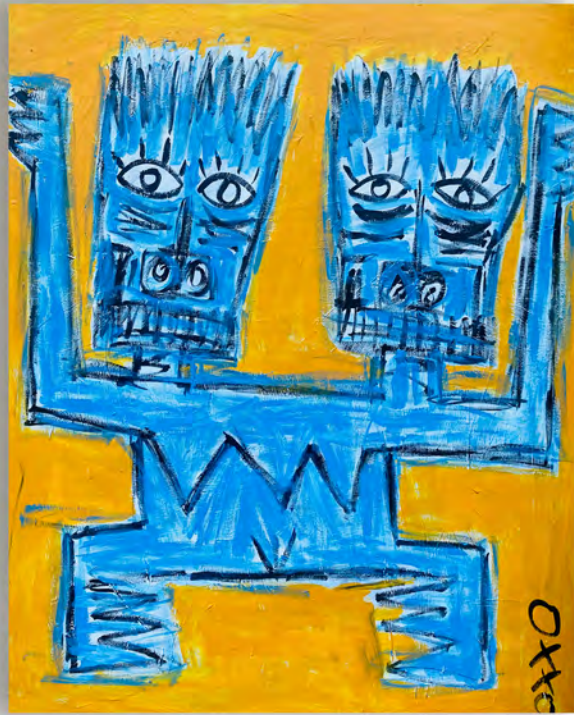
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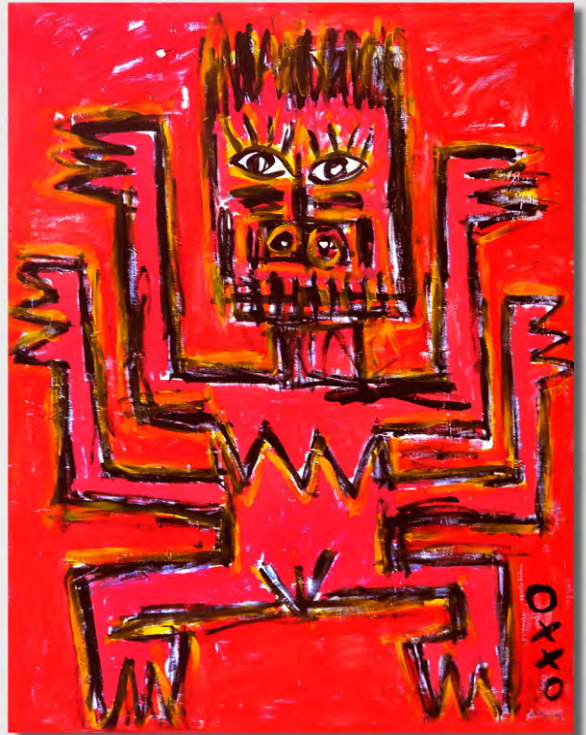


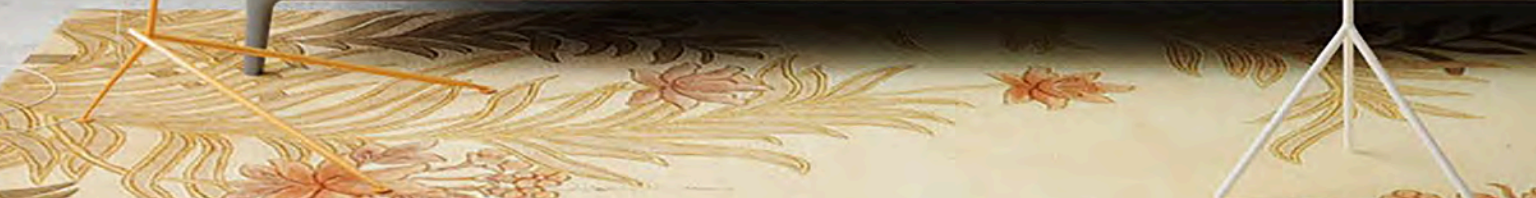








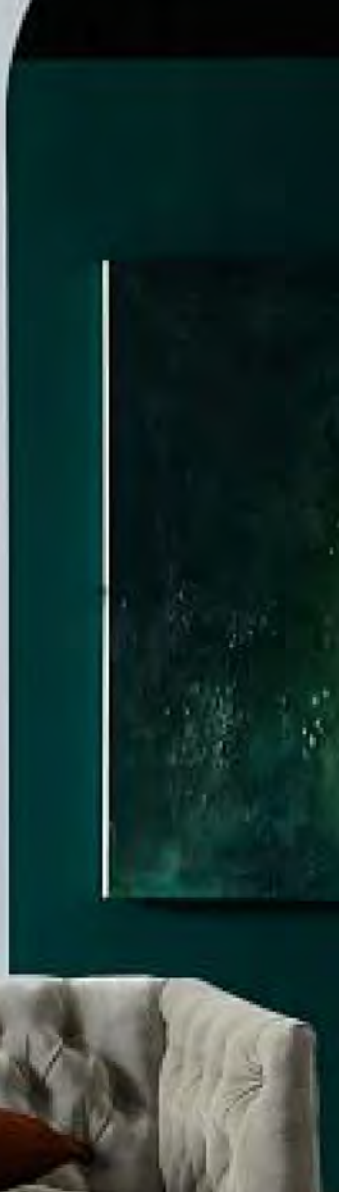
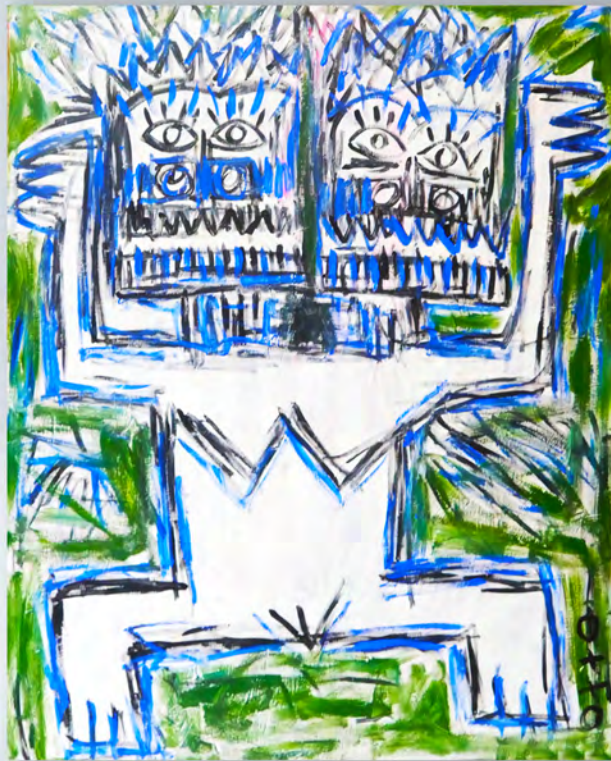












Johnny Otto
ottophobia@gmail.com
213-422-4154
ottophobia.com
@ottophobia