JOHNNY OTTO

New Works 2020-2022

“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

www.ottophobia.com
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Johnny Otto is a self-taught Contemporary Artist and Magazine Publisher based in Los Angeles. He was born in Bay Village, Ohio in 1966, the grandson of Czech and German immigrants. Often compared to Basquiat, Haring and Picasso, Otto's work is actually influenced by a trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts, which he visited as a child and where he was exposed to their vast collection of African Art. Otto's work spans more than 35 years and includes shows with David Hockney (Divine Design Fundraiser Auction), 01 Gallery, Headquarters, Jeff Hamilton's Street Art Fair, Radiant Space, Ministry Gallery, Art Squat, Project Angel Food Auction, Novian/Miller Space and others. He has been featured in numerous publications including Art Reveal Magazine, Artillery, LAWeekly, VoyageLA, and Left Bank Magazine.

JOHNNY OTTO / A Brief History

2021 ART SQUAT MAGAZINE / Editor-in-Chief of new magazine - Los Angeles, CA

2020 PROJECT ANGEL FOOD AUCTION / Fundraiser/Donation - Los Angeles, CA

2019 RADIANT SPACE / Group Show / It Was All A Dream with Sammy Baptista, Chad Muska, Oscar Meza, Kris Markovich, Thatcher, and BLIKEME - Los Angeles, CA

2018 RADIANT SPACE / Solo Exhibit / Water & Spirit Fundraiser for Drop in the Bucket - Los Angeles, CA

2018 SPECIAL GUEST ON DEBORAH KOBYLT LIVE - PODCAST / Los Angeles, CA

2016-2020 MAGAZINE INTERVIEWS / Art Reveal Magazine, LAWEEKLY, VoyageLA, Splash, Shout Out LA, Left Bank Magazine, Artillery, Arts & Culture, Fine Art America.

2017 MURAL PAINTING / Video Shoot - L Los Angeles, CA

2017 BURGERS & BUDZ / Live Painting at JEFF HAMILTON'S TUDIO - Los Angeles, CA

2017 STREET ART FAIR, JEFF HAMILTON'S STUDIO - GroupShow - 40 of the top Street Artists - Los Angeles, CA

2017 #FINDART / Hidden pieces throughout the Hollywood area - Los Angeles, CA

2014 THE ASHLEY PAIGE GALLERY / Group Show - FIGURATIVE PAINTINGS - Los Angeles, CA

2009 MOVIEMAKER MAGAZINE FEATURE - New York

2005 HEADQUARTERS / Solo Exhibit - SKETCHES AND PAINTINGS - Los Angeles, CA

1999 01 GALLERY / Group Auction - ABSTRACT AND FIGURATIVE PAINTINGS - Los Angeles, CA

1996 MINISTRY GALLERY / Solo Show - ABSTRACT AND FIGURATIVE PAINTINGS - Los Angeles, CA

1994 ART IN THE ALLEY / Solo Show - EXPERIMENTAL DRIVE.THRU ART EXHIBIT - FIGURATIVE PAINTINGS - Los Angeles, CA

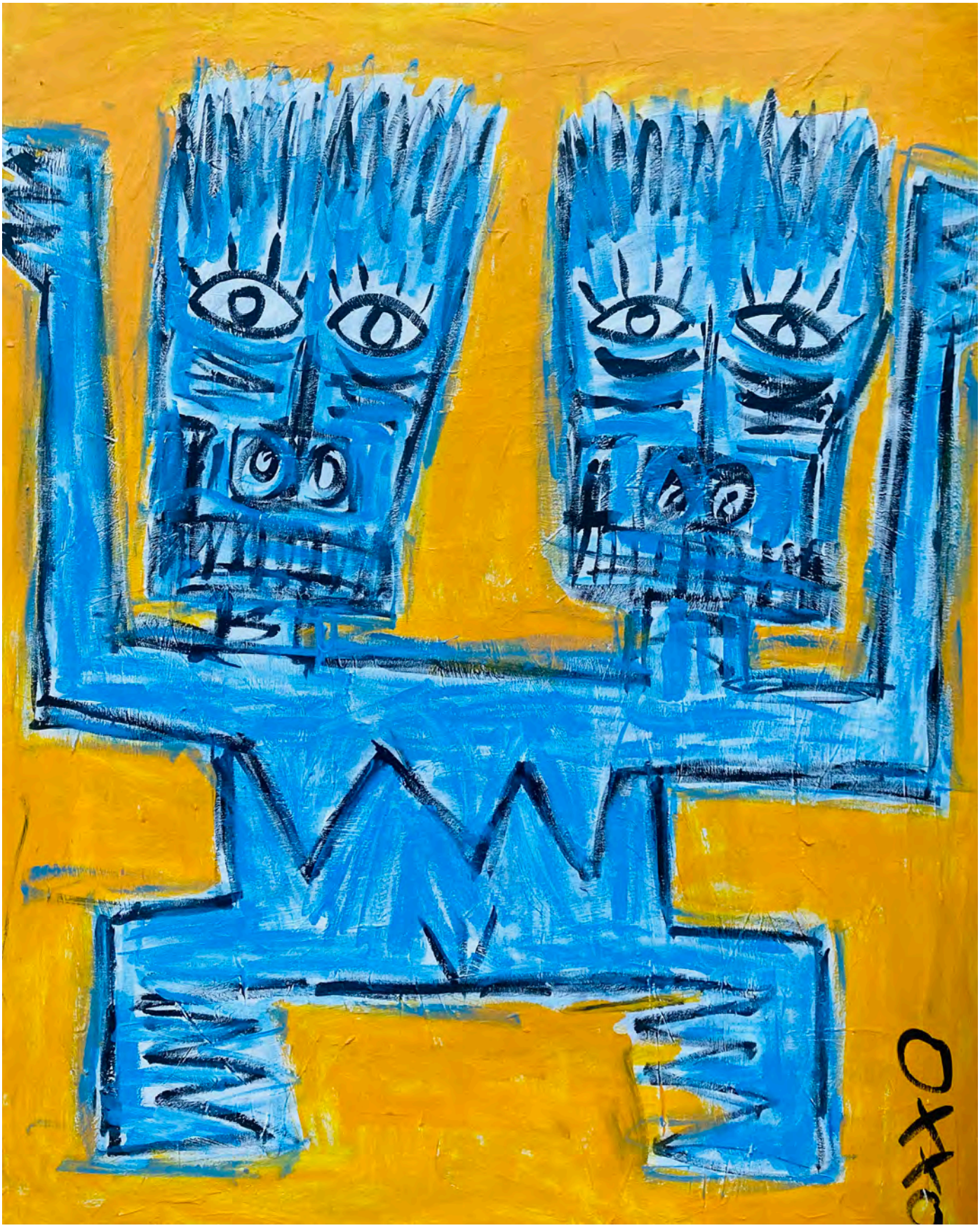
1992-1994 ART SQUAT COLLECTIVE / Group Show -CONCEPTUAL PIECES - Los Angeles, CA

1993 PROJECT ANGEL FOOD ART / AIDS fundraiser Auction at Pacific Design Center with David Hockney - Los Angeles, CA

1990-1991 NOVIAN-MILLER SPACE / "MEGABOYS" - FEATURING20 EMERGING ARTISTS - Los Angeles, CA

1989 RIVERFRONT GALLERY / Solo Show - FIGURATIVE PAINTINGS AND SKETCHES - WINDSOR - Ontario, Canada

1986 SUBWAY EXHIBITIONS / Group Show - ABSTRACT PAINTINGS - UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR - Ontario, Canada



Johnny Otto "Blue Dream" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2022

Johnny Otto "Fang Dance" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2021

Johnny Otto "Blood Tribe" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2021

OTTO VS BASQUIAT
FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

by Charlie Anison

Jean-Michel Basquait 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, Basquait 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 overwhelming 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

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 painterly legacy entirely 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 necessarily 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 an homage to the original. Otto's painting took only a few days to make, but is just as jaw-dropping as Harings. Instead of tentacles with bodies, Otto's painting has eyes and is called 'Za Videní' (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 reinvigorates the same attitudes that Basquiat and Haring embodied, while at the same time reinventing their grammar.

"It is a delight to see the manner in which Otto reinvigorates the same attitudes that Basquiat and Haring embodied, while at the same time reinventing their grammar." - Charlie Anison, Art Reveal Magazine

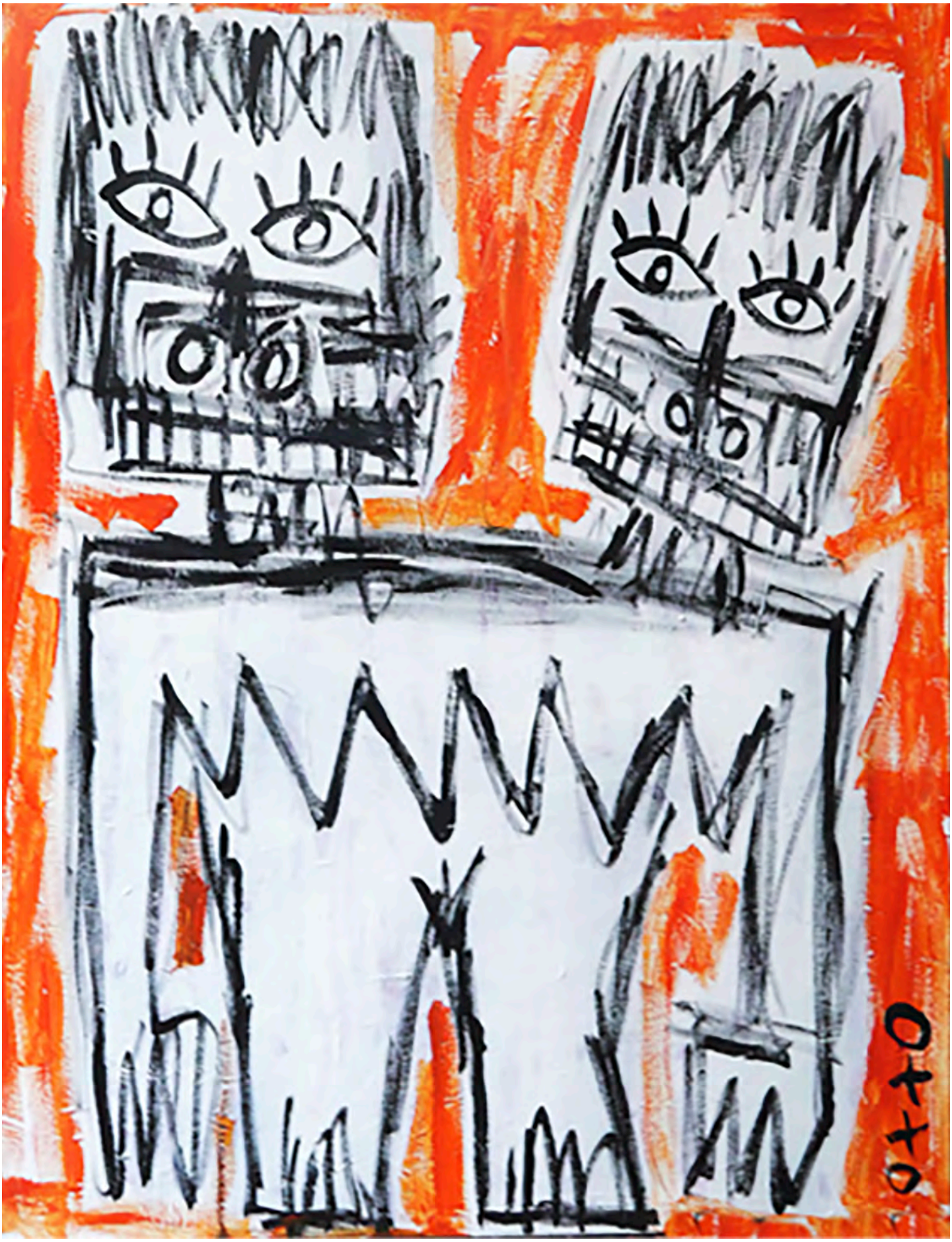
While many Artists are capable of duplicating another Artist's work, it is a difficult undertaking to manifest their spirit and passion while adhering to a style that is new and fresh. As Picasso would say, 'good artists copy, great artists steal'. For even he was an adherent of the great artists that came before him and a keen disciple of his contemporaries. Like Haring, Otto has chosen chalk as his medium to carve his path across Los Angeles. Sidewalks and empty walls are quickly filled with his line art. He moves fast, mostly 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 leap out, whereas art that is more deliberate and time consuming to make, 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 expressionistic inclinations. It was there that, for the first time, he saw a Haring and a Basquait up close and personal and it the same room. Until that point, Otto had only see photos on-line, in documentaries or in books. While studying one of the Basquait'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 towards 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.

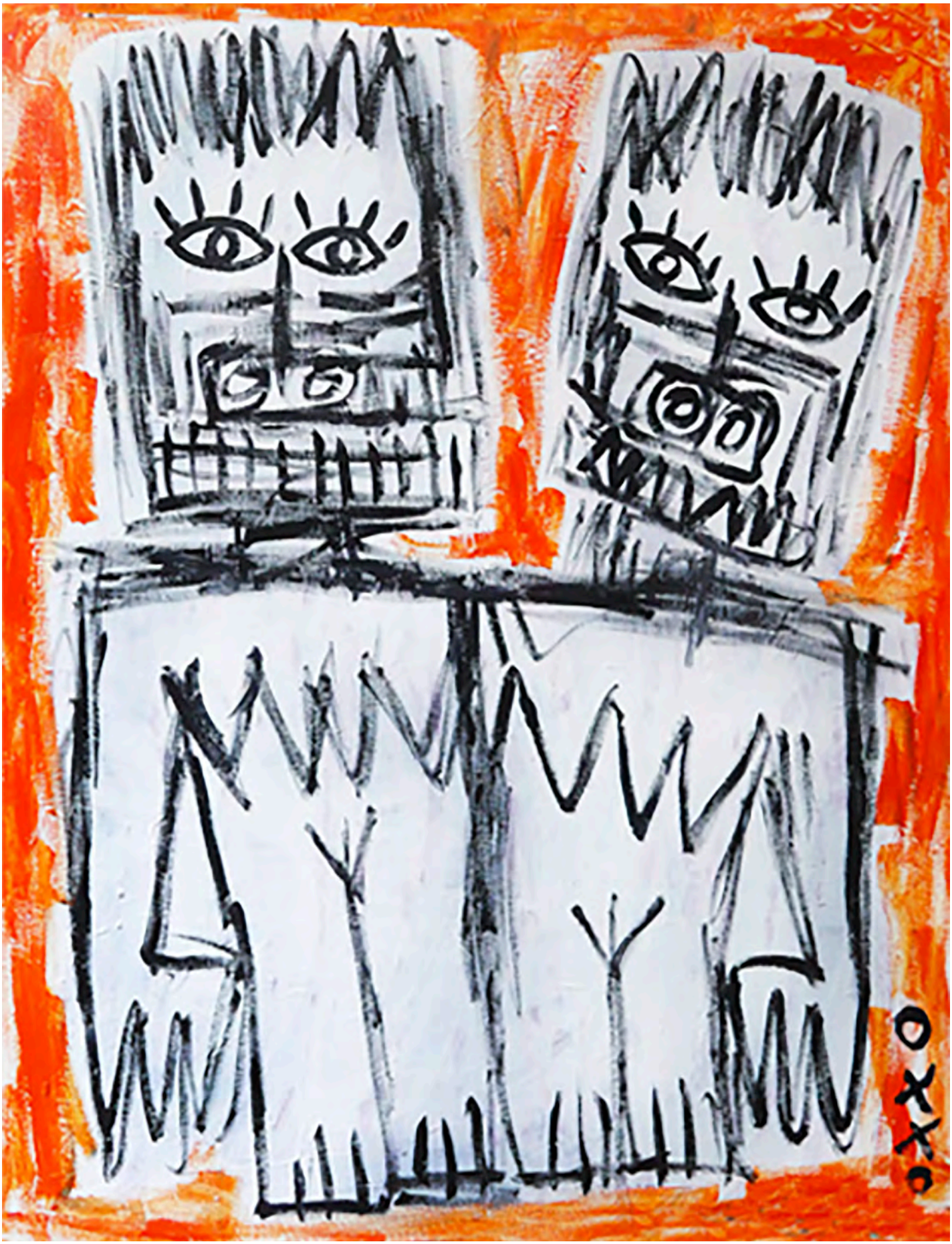
In Basquait's Untitled piece (above), we find the 'messy' use of paint, the vibrant colors, the urgent lines, the use of space to be similar to Otto's painting 'Fire Tribe', but, as stated previously, not a copy or an attempt to plagiarize in any way. There are a similarities in technique and passion, but the results are vastly individual, and it is those parallels in approach to Expressionism that create harmony between these two great Artist's work, even though created decades and lifetimes apart.

johnnyotto.com/art

Johnny Otto "Spirits of Elysium" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2021



Johnny Otto "Joined" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2021



Johnny Otto "Separated" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2021

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Johnny Otto "Tomorrow's Garden" 48" x 60" acrylic on canvas 2020

Johnny Otto "The Lonely Warrior" 48" x 60" acrylic on canvas 2020

Johnny Otto "The Sun Spirits" 48" x 60" acrylic on canvas 2020

Johnny Otto "Twins of the Flame" 48" x 60" acrylic on canvas 2020

Johnny Otto "Eyes Believe" 48"x60" acrylic on canvas 2021

Johnny Otto "Augur" 48" x 60" acrylic on canvas 2020

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