

# THE AUTONOMY OF ART

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT, 1960-1988, KINGS OF EGYPT II, MUSEUM BOIJMANS VAN BEUNINGEN



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

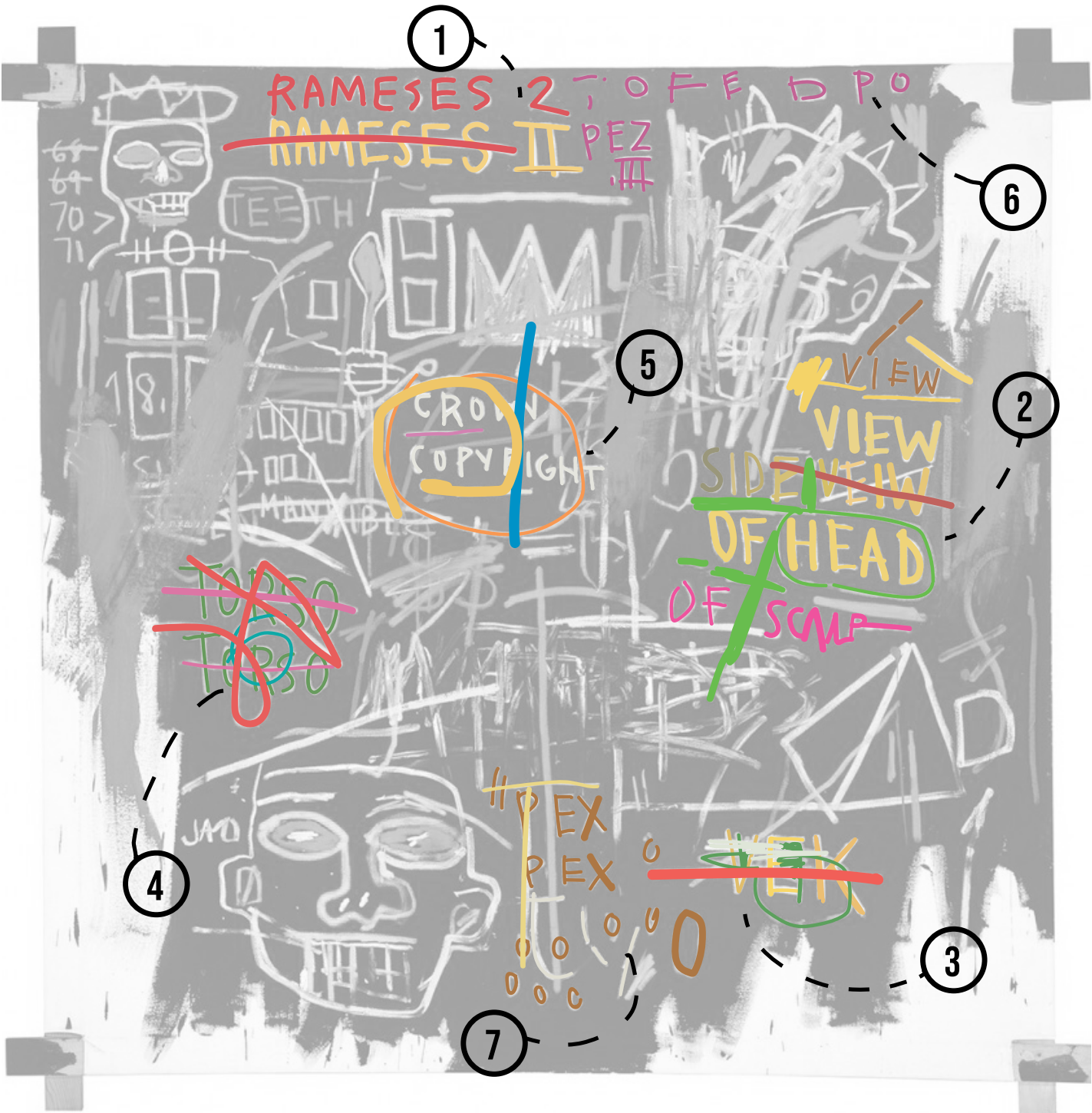
**INTERVIEWER “WHY ARE YOU ANGRY?”**

**BASQUIAT: “MM.....M...  
... I DON'T REMEMBER”**

**JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT WAS AN AMERICAN ARTIST. BASQUIAT FIRST ACHIEVED FAME AS PART OF SAMO, AN INFORMAL GRAFFITI DUO WHO WROTE ENIGMATIC EPIGRAMS IN THE CULTURAL HOTBED OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF MANHATTAN DURING THE LATE 1970S WHERE THE HIP HOP, PUNK, AND STREET ART MOVEMENTS HAD COALESCED. BY THE 1980S, HE WAS EXHIBITING HIS NEO-EXPRESSIONIST PAINTINGS IN GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS INTERNATIONALLY. THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART HELD A RETROSPECTIVE OF HIS ART IN 1992.**

**BASQUIAT’S ART FOCUSED ON “SUGGESTIVE DICHOTOMIES”, SUCH AS WEALTH VERSUS POVERTY, INTEGRATION VERSUS SEGREGATION, AND INNER VERSUS OUTER EXPERIENCE. HE APPROPRIATED POETRY, DRAWING, AND PAINTING, AND MARRIED TEXT AND IMAGE, ABSTRACTION, FIGURATION, AND HISTORICAL INFORMATION MIXED WITH CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUE.**

**BASQUIAT USED SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN HIS PAINTINGS AS A “SPRINGBOARD TO DEEPER TRUTHS ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL”, AS WELL AS ATTACKS ON POWER STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS OF RACISM, WHILE HIS POETICS WERE ACUTELY POLITICAL AND DIRECT IN THEIR CRITICISM OF COLONIALISM AND SUPPORT FOR CLASS STRUGGLE. HE DIED OF A HEROIN OVERDOSE AT HIS ART STUDIO AT THE AGE OF 27.**



1

RAMESES 2 OFF TO PO  
~~RAMESES II~~ PEZ III

6

5

CROWN  
COPYRIGHT

2

VIEW  
VIEW  
SIDE VIEW  
OF HEAD  
OF SCALP

~~TORSO~~  
~~TORSO~~

4



PEX  
PEX  
O  
O  
O  
O  
O

~~VENK~~

3

7

1

**RAMESES 2 RAMESES II.** RAMESES WAS AN EGYPTIAN PHARAO (KING), ALSO KNOWN AS RAMESES THE GREAT. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY BASQUIAT MADE THE THREE-PIECE SERIE OF THIS PAINTING ABOUT EGYPT. HE OFTEN REFERENCED TO HIMSELF AS A KING. THE KING OF HIS WORK.

2

**VIEW VIEW SIDE VEIW OF HEAD OF SCALP.** BASQUIAT USED A LOT OF TEXT IN HIS PAINTINGS. SOMETIMES THEY ARE STATEMENTS BUT MOSTLY WE CANNOT BE SURE WHAT THEY MEAN. THESE WORDS ARE WRITTEN NEXT TO A SKULL. WE KNOW THAT BASQUIAT PAINTED SKULLS IN HIS WORK TO REFERENCE TO DEATH BUT ALSO TO THE BEHEADING OF KINGS. THEY ARE ALSO A REFERENCE TO HIS CULTURE. MAYBE THIS IS JUST A DESCRIPTION OF THE HEAD. BUT MAYBE IT MEANT MORE.

3

**VEK.** AS YOU CAN SEE BASQUIAT USED A LOT OF SHORT WORDS. OFTEN CROSSING THEM WITH BIG STRIPES OF PAINT. ARE THEY “MISTAKES”, ARE THEY THINGS HE WANTED TO ERASE FROM THE WORLD OR ARE THEY JUST JIBBERISH?

4

**TORSO TORSO.** COULD THIS REFERENCE TO DE BEHEADED BODY? IS IT LITERAL OF FIGURATIVE? IT SEAMS MORE DEDACTED THAN OTHER WORDS, WHY?

5

**CROWN COPYRIGHT.** THE KING “OWNS”. MAYBE JUST THIS PAINTING, MAYBE ART IN GENERAL OR MAYBE EVEN THE WORLD. COPYRIGHT IS A WORD AND SYMBOL THAT RETURNS ON A LOT OF BASQUIAT HIS PAINTING. IT COULD MEAN THAT HE LITERALLY COPYRIGHTS HIS WORK, BUT IT COULD ALSO HAVE A BIGGER MEANING...

6

**O F E D P O PEZ III.**

7

**“PEX PEX O O O O O O O O O O.”** YOU COULD ARGUE IF THE O’S ARE INTENDED AS LETTERS. BASQUIAT WAS A BIG MUSIC FAN. HE EVEN MADE A RAPSONG. COULD THERE BE A HIDDEN RHYTHM OR BEAT IN HIS PAINTINGS?





