



JANUS FILMS

Booking Inquiries:
booking@janusfilms.com
212-756-8822

Press Contact: Courtney Ott
courtney@cineticmedia.com
646-230-6847

janusfilms.com

BASQUIAT

In his *Cahiers du cinéma* review of *Basquiat*, the great French film critic Serge Toubiana praised director Julian Schnabel's intuitive approach to telling the story of a fellow painter he knew intimately:

The strength of this film consists precisely in not seeking to be more of an “artist” than the model: Jean-Michel Basquiat. That a painter as recognized as Schnabel shows such humility is precisely what gives the film greater emotional force.

Jean-Michel Basquiat transformed from a street kid to a painter who electrified the 1980s New York scene—and the rest is (art) history. His visionary blend of expressionism, pop art, and the radical new aesthetics of hip-hop and graffiti propelled him to international fame before his untimely demise. Julian Schnabel's stunning directorial debut charts Basquiat's dizzying rise and fall with an insider's eye for the authentic textures of the downtown demimonde, as well as a fellow postmodernist's penchant for the dreamlike and the surreal. Jeffrey Wright's brilliant, early-career performance provides penetrating insight into the artist's creative passions and personal demons. Crowned by David Bowie as a pitch-perfect Andy Warhol, *Basquiat*'s supporting cast is a murderers' row of Hollywood legends and art lovers (among them, Dennis Hopper, Gary Oldman, Benicio del Toro, Parker Posey, Christopher Walken, and Willem Dafoe) lending their matchless talents to this high point of nineties independent cinema—an intimate elegy for a once-in-a-generation artistic phenomenon.

United States | 1996/2024 | 108 minutes | Black & White/Color | 1.85:1 aspect ratio

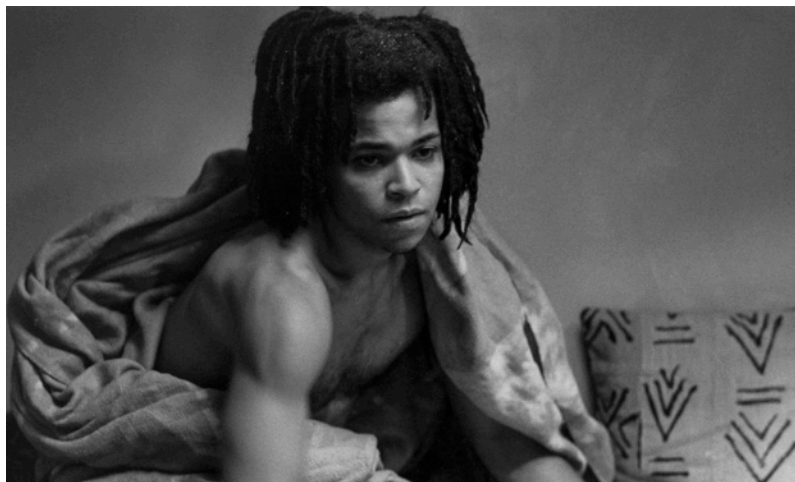
PRODUCTION HISTORY

Not long after Jean-Michael Basquiat's death, Lech Majewski reached out to artist Julian Schnabel for a film he was planning about the late painter. Schnabel admired the Polish filmmaker's work as well as his intention to depict Basquiat in unsensational terms. Because Basquiat had died from a drug overdose in his late twenties, Schnabel worried that any cinematic portrait of him might focus on his life's more lurid details. Schnabel and Majewski's correspondence soon became a collaboration. But Schnabel disliked Majewski's representation of Andy Warhol and felt that, as he had known the film's subjects and environs personally, he could more accurately capture the explosive New York art scene of the 1980s. *Basquiat* (1996) would not only be Schnabel's directorial debut but also the first time a professional painter had made a commercial feature about another painter. "I wanted to make a requiem for Jean-Michel and Andy," Schnabel told Charlie Rose in an interview broadcast on the day of *Basquiat*'s release. "They were so attacked for their friendship, for the work that they did together . . . and I wanted to set the record straight. I just felt like a tourist shouldn't make this film."

Schnabel wrote a script from Majewski's original treatment (as codeveloped with John Bowe and Michael Holman) and then attempted to secure funding for the project. In the end, executive producers Peter Brant (Schnabel's friend) and his cousin Joseph Allen provided most of the film's \$3.3 million budget. It took six years to gather enough money to hire a cast and crew but only thirty-two days (from June 5 to July 18, 1995) to shoot the film on location in New York City. Despite the modest budget and lightning-fast production schedule, a veritable who's who of Hollywood talent agreed to act for scale in order to fulfill Schnabel's vision: Jeffrey Wright (Basquiat), David Bowie (Warhol), Dennis Hopper (art dealer Bruno Bischofberger), Gary Oldman (painter Albert Milo, a fictionalized version of Schnabel), Benicio del Toro (Benny Dalmau, a composite character representing Basquiat's pre-fame friends), Parker Posey (gallery owner Mary Boone), and Christopher Walken (a hostile magazine interviewer), among others.

Many supporters of the project contributed in other ways. "Everyone knew Basquiat's work as well as mine and wanted to be helpful," Schnabel told the *New York Times* in 1996. "Bowie not only acted in the film . . . but gave me the song 'Small Plot of Land.' I don't show at Larry Gagosian's gallery. He let us use it [to represent] the Annina Nosei Gallery and Mary Boone's. Mary lent Parker Posey her clothes. The Warhol Museum lent Andy's wigs and glasses." The film's eclectic soundtrack—including the Pogues, Public Image Ltd, Melle Mel, Van Morrison, and Keith Richards—was compiled through a similar spirit of generosity, with some offering use of their tracks for free or reduced rates. One resource unavailable to Schnabel, however, was Basquiat's work, which at the time belonged to an estate controlled by the artist's father. To circumvent this problem, Schnabel worked with assistant Greg Bogin to approximate Basquiat's unique style, which merges bold splashes of color and scrolled, glyphlike figures with phrases culled from popular and outsider culture. The effect was successful; even connoisseurs struggled to identify the film's paintings and sculptures as facsimiles.

More important for Schnabel was casting the title subject, a creative supernova whose short life was spent perfecting a vibrant



CAST

Jean-Michel Basquiat	Jeffrey Wright
Andy Warhol	David Bowie
Benny Dalmau	Benicio del Toro
Bruno Bischofberger	Dennis Hopper
Albert Milo	Gary Oldman
Rene Ricard	Michael Wincott
Gina Cardinale	Claire Forlani
Mary Boone	Parker Posey
Big Pink	Courtney Love
Annina Nosei	Elina Löwensohn
Henry Geldzahler	Paul Bartel
Cynthia Kruger	Tatum O'Neal
Interviewer	Christopher Walken
Electrician	Willem Dafoe
Deli counterman	Michael Badalucco
Thug	Sam Rockwell

amalgamation of expressionism and pop art with the new languages of hip-hop, graffiti, and New Wave fashion. Chris Rock and Lenny Kravitz were considered, yet Schnabel ultimately chose Wright, a stage veteran but a relative novice to cinema: when production began, he had only a handful of minor screen roles to his credit. Schnabel justified his choice by tapping—and occasionally molding—Wright’s uncanny invocation of Basquiat’s insouciance, passion, and turbulence. “It was important that people not know who the actor was, so they would just think it was Jean-Michel, not Lenny Kravitz playing Jean-Michel,” Schnabel explained to the *Times*, adding that he tutored Wright on art-making. “I showed him how to hold a brush in a believable way. He would draw something and I would wipe it out. I didn’t want him interpreting Jean-Michel’s work. I wanted it to be automatic.”

Though better known as a rock legend, Bowie was no stranger to the screen; by 1995, he had starred in several notable films, including *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), *Merry Christmas* (1983), and *Labyrinth* (1986). Like Schnabel, Bowie had known Warhol personally and could draw on firsthand observations of Warhol’s voice and mannerisms to humorous or moving effect, in the process winning the respect of those who had been closest to the iconic pop artist. Paul Morrissey, who collaborated with Warhol on several films, has said that “Bowie was the best by far. You come away from *Basquiat* thinking Andy was comical and amusing, not a pretentious, phony piece of shit, which is how others show him.” Schnabel’s film also deflates the myth that Warhol exploited Basquiat, or that Basquiat was left unshakably bitter toward Warhol after their disastrous joint exhibition in 1985. Instead, Schnabel shows Basquiat crying and watching home movies upon learning of his old friend’s death. Wright initially fought against this scene, which he felt softened the image they’d created of an angry, hard-edged young artist. Yet Schnabel—who, Hopper once said, trusts actors to interpret their roles for themselves—eventually won out. “I know what the scene demanded,” he told the *Times*. “I knew Jean-Michel. Jeffrey had a survival instinct and wanted to fight for life. I wanted him to be more like Mahatma Gandhi and take the blows.”

Schnabel had originally asked Miramax to fund the project but was rejected on the basis of its script. But when shooting and editing were complete, he shopped the film to Miramax again for distribution and found the company enthralled. (Schnabel also got the final cut.) *Basquiat* was released on August 9, 1996, to positive reviews. Not only has it remained a perceptive portrayal of the glitz and grime of the art world, but it has also become a cult classic of American independent cinema’s daring peak, when innovative forms and stories were enthusiastically received by audiences on the lookout for the next challenge. In 2024, *Basquiat* was restored in a new version in black and white, featuring a color sequence for its coda. ●

CREDITS

- Directed by Julian Schnabel
- Written by Lech Majewski
John Bowe
Julian Schnabel
Michael Holman
- Produced by Jon Kilik
Randy Ostrow
Sigurjon Sighvatsson
- Coproducer Lech Majewski
- Second-unit director Michael Holman
- Executive producers Peter Brant
Joseph Allen
Michiyo Yoshizaki
- Cinematography by Ron Fortunato
- Music by John Cale
Julian Schnabel
- Editor Michael Berenbaum
- Costume design John Dunn
- Production design Dan Leigh



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT BIOGRAPHY

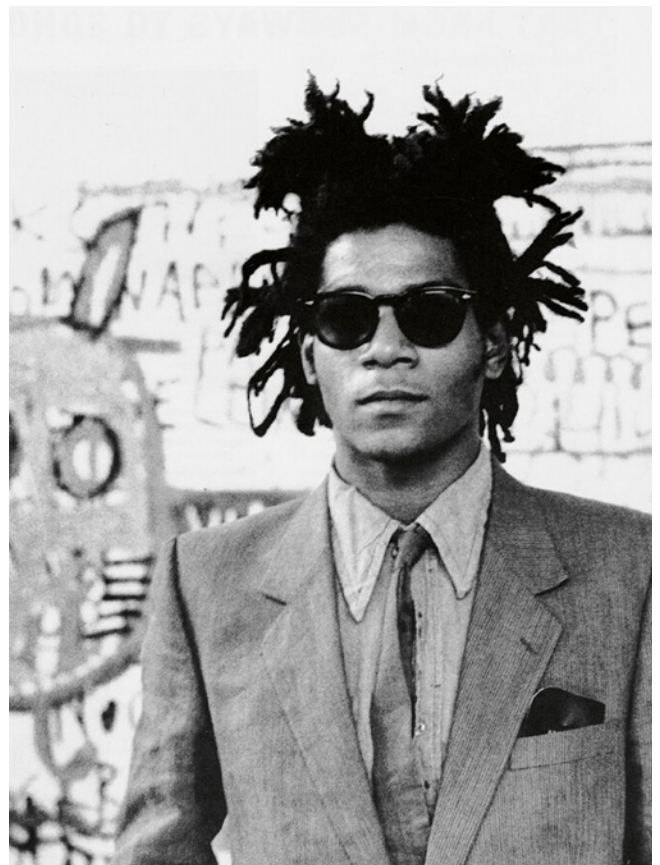
A major American artist of the late twentieth century, Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 22, 1960, to a Haitian father, Gérard, and a Puerto Rican mother, Matilde. Basquiat demonstrated intellectual and creative gifts from an early age, and Matilde fostered his talents by enrolling him as a junior member of the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Gérard and Matilde separated, and in 1974 Matilde moved the family to Puerto Rico, but she returned to Brooklyn two years later. During this time, Basquiat began to rebel—skipping class and dabbling in drug use—in response to Matilde’s struggles with mental illness and his troubled relationship with Gérard. At seventeen, Basquiat quit school, which prompted Gérard to kick him out. Basquiat began sleeping rough in Washington Square Park—supporting himself by selling painted T-shirts and homemade postcards—and soon befriended Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf, two students at the School of Visual Arts, and other young graffiti artists who were part of the East Village scene. Basquiat gained a following in the art underground when he and Al Diaz, a former schoolmate, started spray-painting the tag SAMO.

In 1979, Basquiat founded the noise band Test Pattern (later Gray) with Michael Holman, who would eventually help to write *Basquiat*. Basquiat had his first brush with the art-world glitterati when he sold Andy Warhol a postcard titled *Stupid Games, Bad Ideas*. By the time Basquiat fell out with Diaz, in 1980, he was selling upcycled clothes and sculptures in Patricia Field’s Greenwich Village boutique. He also starred in *Downtown 81*, a surreal depiction of New York’s bohemian scene (though it wasn’t completed until 2000). Basquiat’s major break came in June 1980, when his work was featured in *The Times Square Show*, where he was praised by prominent critics and curators. Several months later, more work was included in the PS1 exhibition *New York/New Wave*. Soon thereafter, dealer Emilio Mazzoli bought ten Basquiat paintings for his gallery in Modena, Italy. By the end of 1981, the influential *Artforum* critic Rene Ricard had proclaimed Basquiat to be a genius.

The Annina Nosei Gallery mounted Basquiat’s first American solo show in March 1982. Only a few months later, he left Nosei for Bruno Bischofberger, who formally introduced him to Warhol; the two artists soon became friends and collaborators. In 1983, Basquiat dated Madonna, then about to release her eponymous debut album, and produced the Rammellzee and K-Rob single “Beat Bop.” That same year, the Whitney Biennial picked Basquiat to be one its youngest-ever participants, as neo-expressionist collages of wild color, figures, and text became his creative signature. By the summer, Basquiat was living in a Warhol-owned Great Jones Street apartment that doubled as his studio.

In 1985, Warhol and Basquiat’s friendship fractured after *Paintings*, their joint exhibition at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, was assailed by critics. Nonetheless, Basquiat had major solo shows and exhibitions over the next few years in Atlanta, Salzburg, Hanover, Paris, Düsseldorf, Tokyo, the Ivory Coast, and his native New York City. But this period was also marked by Basquiat’s increased drug use—a problem dire enough that he spent June 1988 in Hawaii withdrawing from heroin and cocaine. However, only two months later, on August 12, 1988, Basquiat died of an overdose at the age of twenty-seven. In his short yet incandescent career, he proved the rarefied gallery world could merge with the raw attitude of street art. ●



JULIAN SCHNABEL

BIOGRAPHY

Julian Schnabel was born on October 26, 1951, in Brooklyn, New York. In 1965, his family relocated to Texas, where he earned his BFA at the University of Houston. Soon after graduation, Schnabel submitted a portfolio to the Independent Study Program at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art that contained slides of his work sandwiched between slices of bread. He was accepted and studied there from 1973 to 1975.

In 1975, Schnabel returned to Houston, where he soon exhibited work at the Contemporary Arts Museum. When Manhattan's Mary Boone Gallery put on his first solo show in 1979, all of his paintings were sold before it opened. He cemented his reputation in New York's post-modern art scene by presenting his work in the 1980 Venice Biennale as well as the Royal Academy of Arts' lauded 1981 exhibition *A New Spirit in Painting*, in which he was the youngest featured artist. During this time, Schnabel became famous for his "plate paintings," a series of large canvases mosaicked with ceramic fragments that were then overpainted. In 1984, Schnabel moved from the Mary Boone Gallery to Boston's Pace Gallery and, a few years later, published his autobiography, *CVJ: Nicknames of Maitre D's & Other Excerpts from Life*. Over the last three decades he has used wax, wood, velvet, and other media to continue his experiments with expressionism, while also establishing himself as a recording artist—releasing a studio album, *Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud*, in 1995—and a film director.

Schnabel wrote and directed his first feature, *Basquiat* (1996), which was an official selection of the Venice Film Festival. His next film, *Before Night Falls*—based on an autobiographical novel by exiled Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas—won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2000 Venice Film Festival, where Javier Bardem also took home Best Actor. Bardem was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance. Schnabel snagged directing awards at the Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Globes for *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007), which also secured a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film; four Academy Award nominations, among them Best Director; and seven nominations at the César Awards, including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Actor, the last of which Mathieu Amalric won for his portrayal of Jean-Dominique Bauby.

In 2006, Schnabel shot a concert film during Lou Reed's *Berlin* tour at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, which premiered in 2007 as *Lou Reed: Berlin*. A few years later, Schnabel's film *Miral* (2010), about a young girl drawn into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, was screened at the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations. *At Eternity's Gate*, which stars Willem Dafoe as Vincent van Gogh, had its world premiere at the 2018 Venice Film Festival, where it was nominated for the Golden Lion. Dafoe won the Coppa Volpi there and was then nominated for Best Actor at the Golden Globes and the 2019 Academy Awards. Lately, Schnabel has completed his seventh feature film, *In the Hand of Dante*, an adaptation of Nick Tosches's novel of the same name, starring Oscar Isaac, Gal Gadot, Gerard Butler, John Malkovich, Jason Momoa, Al Pacino, and Martin Scorsese. He currently lives and works in New York City and Montauk, Long Island. ●



JULIAN SCHNABEL FILMOGRAPHY

1996	<i>Basquiat</i>
2000	<i>Before Night Falls</i>
2007	<i>The Diving Bell and the Butterfly</i> <i>Lou Reed: Berlin</i> (documentary)
2010	<i>Miral</i>
2018	<i>At Eternity's Gate</i>
2025	<i>In the Hand of Dante</i>