

Lifestyle / Arts & Culture

## Raw power of Basquiat on show in Hong Kong – he’s ‘so of the moment’, Lévy Gorvy gallery co-founder Brett Gorvy says

Gallery launches a series of exhibitions focused on a single artwork with show featuring an untitled 1982 painting by the American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat

‘You have to see it to truly appreciate its surface and quality,’ says gallery co-founder Brett Gorvy. It’s also showing works by French painter Pierre Soulages

Topic | Art



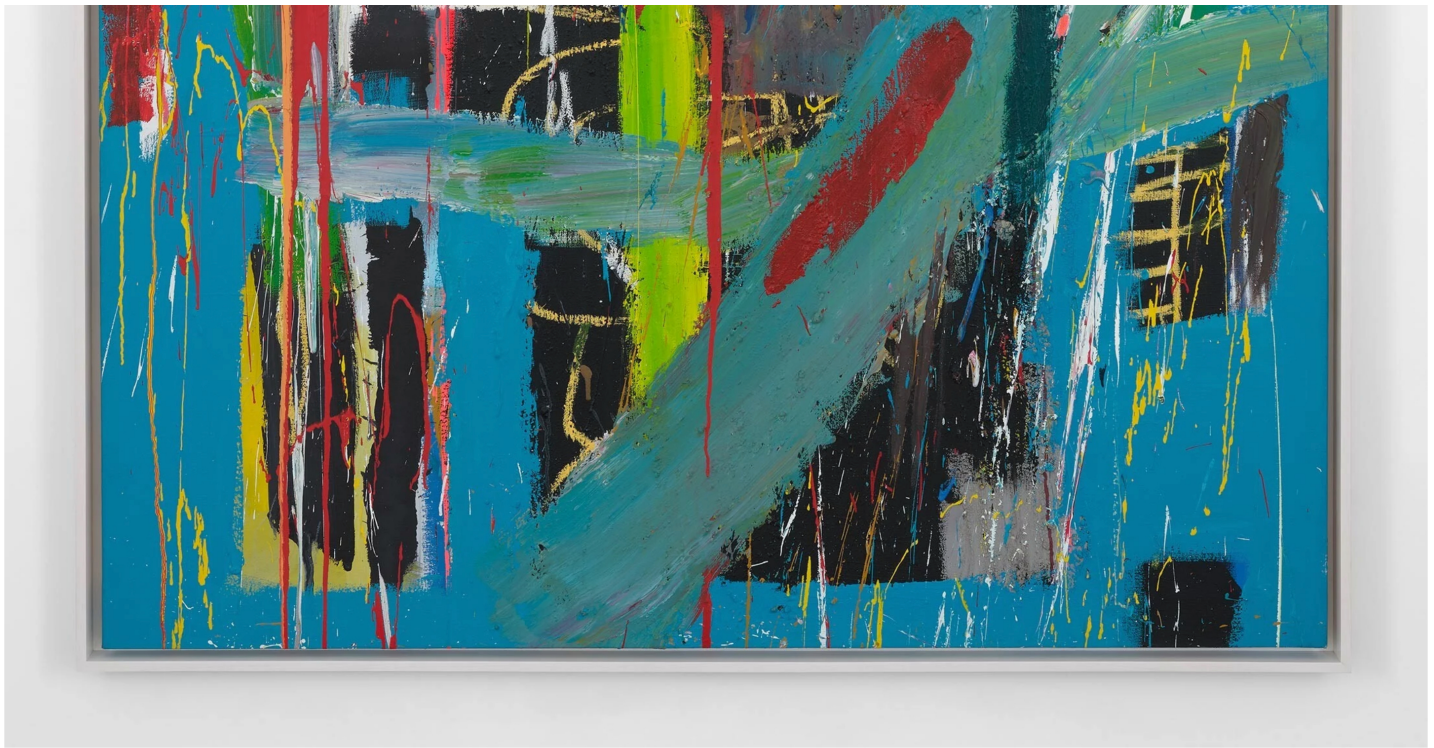
Aaina Bhargava

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International art gallery Lévy Gorvy opens its new exhibition in Hong Kong this week with a seminal painting by American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The untitled work was created in 1982, the year when the Brooklyn-born street artist began to gain recognition in the art world with his large canvas paintings. It was also a milestone year that marked a shift for the artist from the streets to the studio.

Basquiat was funded with space and proper supplies by his new dealer Annina Nosei, and able to continue developing his signature aesthetic on canvases, paper and other surfaces like leather jackets – catapulting him to international stardom. He is said to have created more than 200 paintings in 1982 – all of which are highly sought after even today, more than three decades after his untimely death.

Co-founder and chairman of the gallery Brett Gorvy says the showing of the Basquiat work could not be more timely.



Jean-Michel Basquiat and Annina Nosei in his studio in the basement of the Annina Nosei Gallery in New York in 1982. Photo: Photograph: Naoki Okamoto/The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat

“Basquiat is so of the moment, he symbolises so many different elements that are current,” he says. “He’s an African-American artist whose work reflects the experience of racism in the art world.”



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He adds: “Great works of art have to be experienced in person – Basquiat is all about raw power. You have to see it to truly appreciate its surface and quality.”

Gorvy highlights Basquiat’s unique ability to brilliantly fuse elements of street art with traditional art history.

“He’s bringing into this painting all his knowledge of art history. You can see the presence of the old masters [and] abstract expressionists [such as Willem] de Kooning. He’s incredibly well informed but also a complete natural – he was absorbing art history in the same way he’s absorbing the streets. That’s why this work is so extraordinary,” he says.

Basquiat’s *Untitled* (1982) was selected by the gallery to launch a new initiative called “Reveal”, a series of exhibitions featuring a single masterpiece – either contemporary or from the post-war period – with a view to both engaging and educating gallery-goers.



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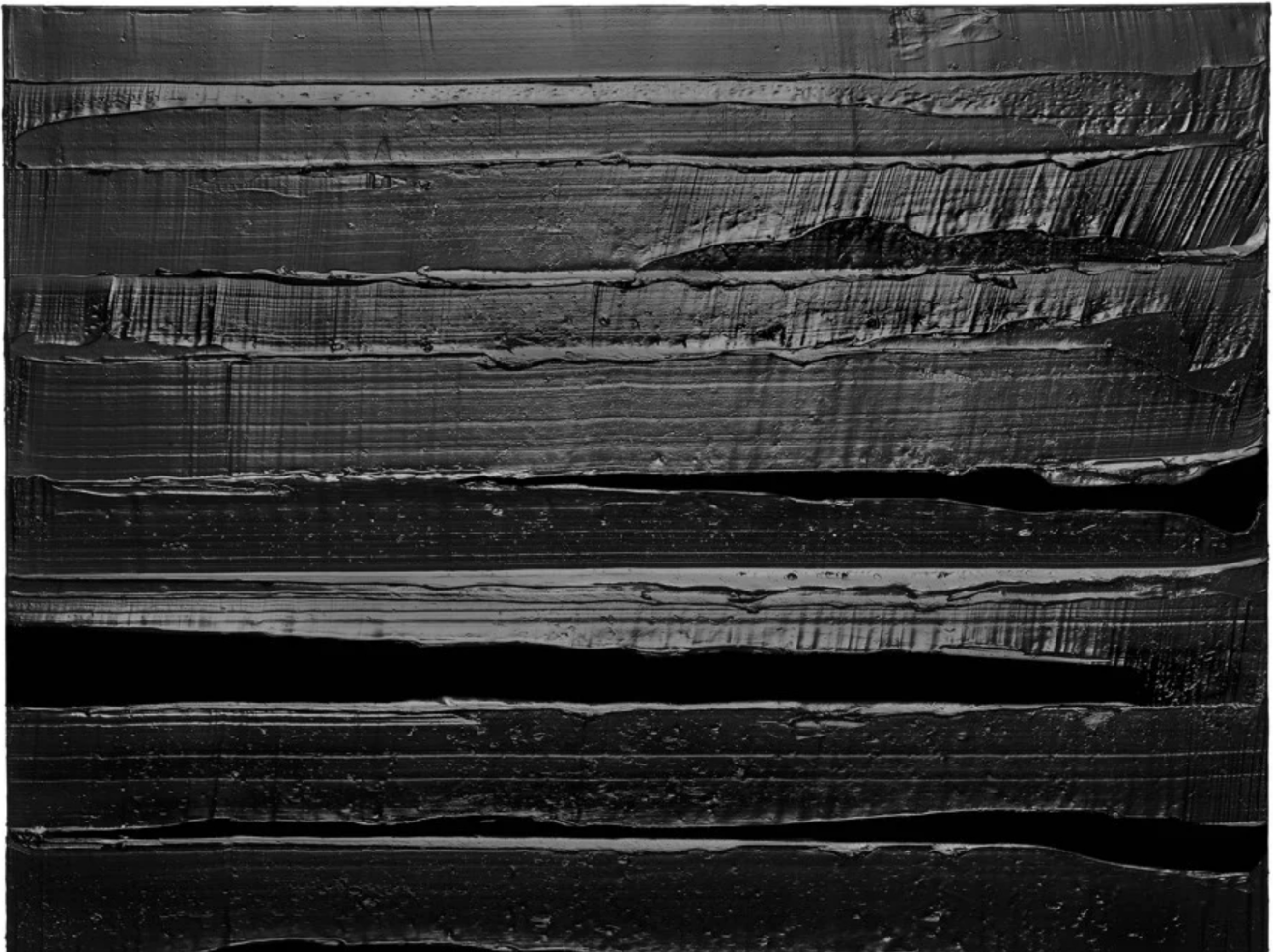
**Brett Gorvy**

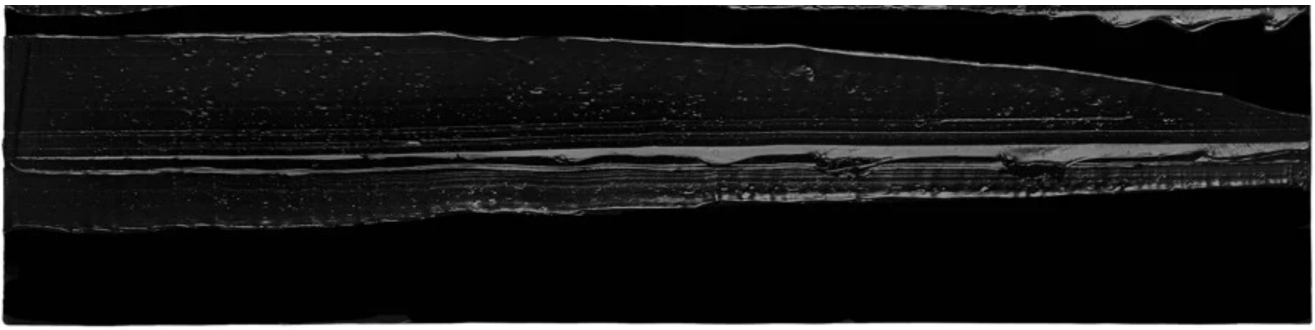


“We have the opportunity of an open space here – we’re looking at where we can bring great art where there’s a great appreciation for it – and one that shows a commitment on our part to the region,” Gorvy says. The gallery in Central has managed to remain open by appointment thanks to the managed containment of Covid-19 in the city.

“We can then use it as a focal point for our other activities in terms of social media, video content ... that are then streamed worldwide,” he adds.

Supplemental documentation of Basquiat’s creative process will accompany the painting, to enhance understanding of the artist’s practice, an experience that Gorvy believes will be well received in Hong Kong.





Pierre Soulages' 2019 work *Peinture* is on display as part of an exhibition called *L'Outrenoir*, also at Lévy Gorvy in Hong Kong. Photo: Artists Rights Society, New York/ADAGP, Paris

“What I’ve found with our Asian audiences is an amazing appetite for knowledge, and a very quick application of that to the way they collect and invest and engage with art,” he says. “Moreover, Hong Kong is going to be the focal point of the art world with the auctions for the next two weeks or so, making it all the more significant.”

In a Sotheby’s online auction last week’s, the artist’s *Untitled (Head)* was sold for US\$15.2 million – a new world record price for a work on paper. In 2017, another painting Basquiat made in 1982, also untitled, was bought for a record US\$110.5 million by billionaire Japanese collector Yusaku Maezawa. The work depicts a black skull on a predominantly blue background – a powerful take on self- portraiture and the black figure.

The work on view at Lévy Gorvy also features a self-portrait of sorts – of a black figure shrouded in Basquiat’s typical fusion of graffiti and abstract expressionism. The painting, which is not for sale, was last displayed in a Basquiat retrospective at the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris in 2018-2019. It has been part of the collection of Bard College, a liberal-arts college in New York State, since 1985.



Pierre Soulages' *Peinture*, 28 July 1953 is on display alongside the Basquiat work at Lévy Gorvy. Photo: Artists Rights Society, New York/ADAGP, Paris

Alongside the Basquiat piece will be a masterwork by French artist Pierre Soulages called *Peinture* (1953). The painting has not been shown in public for almost 60 years.

More works by Soulages will go on display at the gallery concurrently as a part of an exhibition, called “*Outrenoir*”, featuring his monochromatic “beyond black” paintings. The artist, who is 100 years old, had a major retrospective at the Louvre in Paris last year.

*Basquiat: Royalty, Heroism, and the Streets & Pierre Soulages: Outrenoir, Lévy Gorvy Hong Kong. From Jul 7 to Sep 10. G/F, 2 Ice House Street, Central. Opening hours: Mon to Fri, 11am to 7pm. By appointment. Inquiries: 2613 9568.*

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