

Graffiti artist offers more than the 'Samo'

By MIRACLE RODRIGUEZ
THE UHCLIDIAN

The Basquiat exhibit currently showcased at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts provides insight into the confused, yet interesting life of the artist Jean Michel Basquiat.

Basquiat was born Dec. 22, 1960, in Brooklyn, NY. With a Haitian father and a Puerto Rican mother, Basquiat was raised in a lower middle-class household. His parents were profound Catholics and tried to instill their beliefs in their son by sending him to Catholic school at an early age. Basquiat was kicked out of this school for oppositional views of "not believing in God." However, he used various aspects of Catholicism in his later paintings.

As a teenager without any formal training Basquiat experimented with his passion by painting graffiti art on the sides of buildings and subways in the lower east side of Manhattan. The work is still easily identifiable because even then he signed his art with his tag name "Samo," which means "same old, same old." Basquiat's work on the streets gained instant critical acclaim and attracted the attention of influential artists and art dealers.

The controversial graffiti artist had the privilege of

working alongside Andy Warhol, the well-recognized artist who was extremely influential with the pop art movement. Warhol was famous for his silk-screened commercial imagery. He and Basquiat collaborated on several types of these paintings. Basquiat would contribute freehand art silk-screened images. The two admired each other's work and became close friends. They collaborated on almost one hundred paintings, some can be viewed in this exhibit.

Some may feel the retrospective collection is a bit challenging to interpret, but this was Basquiat's objective. He used a technique coined "suggestive coherence," which displays images that are intentionally confusing in order to capture the viewer's attention for a longer amount of time. The Daros Suite, a group of thirty-two drawings on paper, demonstrates this method. Noticeably many on-lookers spent more time at this part of the exhibit.

Basquiat painted on canvases of all sizes, mainly concentrating on murals. He used various

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PHOTO BY LIZZIE HIMMEL

THE MASTER: Jean Michel Basquiat in his studio, 1985. The pictures on the background represents his view of life.

J. IVY

Spoken-word artist teaches strength through surrender

By ROGER ROBERTS
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Night after night J. Ivy steps in front of a group of strangers and bares his soul for anyone willing to listen. No topic is taboo, no story too personal.

Transmuting mere words into instruments of instruction, Ivy blurs the boundaries between teacher and poet. By sharing his hopes, pains and fears with a crystalline precision, Ivy delivers a message that somehow manages to surpass the dusty dogmas that society holds so dear. In short, J. Ivy's message speaks as loudly to the heart as it does to the ears.

The Film and History Club recently brought Ivy to UH-Clear Lake's own Bayou Theater, Jan. 21, for an intimate evening of thoughtful prose. Over the course of his hour-long performance, Ivy touched on a variety of topics such as troubling childhood memories, a one-time obsessive addiction to video games, and his recent marriage to Grammy-winning singer Tarrey Torae.

Torae, who also received a Grammy for her performance on Kanye West's debut album, "The College Dropout," joined her husband on stage to provide accompanying vocals for several of Ivy's poems.

As one of the first spoken-word poets to appear on HBO's "Def Poetry Jam," Ivy has helped revitalize an art form all but forgotten. Casting off many of the bygone remnants of its beatnik heritage, modern spoken-word performances embrace a wide variety of styles and cultures to form a unique melting pot of thoughts, dreams and ideas.

"It was cool being a part of "Def Poetry" because they reach out to so many different backgrounds and cultures," Ivy said. "Everyone has a voice. Everyone has a story. Before HBO, spoken-word artists could only hope to reach a couple hundred people at a time. So to perform on a platform where you can reach so many in a single moment was an unbelievable experience."

Since his appearance on HBO,

Ivy's talents have been showcased on virtually every form of mass media known to man. From his Grammy-winning performance on Kanye West's hit single, *Never Let Me Down*, to his televised monologues for such national events as "The Orange Bowl," "Monday Night Football" and "The 2004 NBA Finals," Ivy has shattered pre-conceived notions of what spoken-word artists may hope to achieve. One event in particular, "The 2004 NCAA BCS Selection Show," forever opened Ivy's eyes to poetry's true potential.

"I went down to Miami and the director had already arrived with the whole crew," Ivy said. "They had cranes, cameras and everything, and I was just looking at the whole set and was thinking to myself, this can't be real because it was all about the poetry. I was just blown away that poetry could reach this height."

When listening to Ivy's poems, the similarities between his style of prose and the lyrical flow of rap become immediately apparent. In describing the relationship between the two mediums, Ivy deftly delivers a history lesson that clarifies hip-hop's ancestral roots.

"As far as poetry and the spoken word are concerned, spoken word is the godfather of rap," Ivy said. "But it has a lot more freedom than rap. Poetry allows you to go further out the box since you are not constrained by a beat. You are your own rhythm. It's freedom."

This freedom allows Ivy to tackle difficult subject matter in a fashion that maximizes dramatic effect. For example, in delivering his gut-wrenching poem entitled "Dear Father," Ivy begins by pausing for several seconds and seems to mentally transport himself back to a time when he was still a vulnerable child living in single-parent household.

Giving form to his anger, Ivy pleads, "I mean I understand if people breakup and don't makeup and some relationships don't last forever. But why weren't we together? Mom could find a new man but where was I gonna

find a new dad? Looking back I wish I could have pleaded my case cause I felt I didn't matter—like I was deleted and erased."

When listened to in its entirety, "Dear Father" moves through several distinct phases that mirror the classical stages of grief felt by those who experience the loss of a loved one. These stages traditionally include anger, sadness and, ultimately, forgiveness.

"I think a lot of people carry things around from their childhood to adulthood and at times it holds them back," Ivy said. "Maybe they didn't do certain things or chase certain dreams because of events that happened in their childhood and they don't even realize it. The burden was too much; I had to find some way to get rid of it."

While Ivy's poems serve as a mechanism for healing, both for himself and for others, some of his friends worry about the wisdom of allowing strangers unfettered access to his most private thoughts.

"One of my guys said I was vulnerable because I was so open and, I said 'no I'm not,'" Ivy said. "Being open protects you in a way. Once you're so open you can't be hurt. It's like what are you gonna say about a person when he's already said it all himself?"

Barbara Schwartz, a history major largely responsible for Ivy's appearance at UH-Clear Lake, was happy to witness Ivy's honesty of spirit firsthand.

"J. Ivy's performance was an amazing experience," Schwartz said. "Anyone who heard about it and passed up the opportunity made a huge mistake. I am grateful to have been part of this event and equally thankful for the efforts of the many that were vital to bringing J. Ivy to our campus. I think we really opened the door for thinking outside of the box with this one."

To learn more about J. Ivy and view video of several of his performances, visit his bio site online at www.sphinxmg.com/artist/j_ivy.asp.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SPHINX MANAGEMENT: UHCLIDIAN

J. IVY: Ivy performed spoken-word concerts at over 80 different college venues last year.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SPHINX MANAGEMENT: UHCLIDIAN

J. IVY: Ivy recently received a Grammy for his performance on Kanye West's hit single, *Never Let Me Down*.