



JEAN MICHEL BASQUIAT



DOWNTOWN 81



**NEW YORK THE WAY IT WAS...
WHEN IT WAS...**

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE



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DOWNTOWN 81

DOWNTOWN 81 is a “lost” feature film starring the legendary American artist Jean Michel Basquiat (1960-1988). Basquiat was a 19 year-old painter, graffiti artist, poet and musician when he played the lead in this film, which vividly depicts the explosive downtown New York art and music scene of 1980-81. Basquiat was an important figure on that scene. He had yet to have his first exhibition, but his paintings and words were part of the city landscape. Today, his paintings hang in museums and important collections around the world and he is internationally recognized as one of the most important artists of the late twentieth century.

The film is a day in the life of a young artist who needs to raise money to reclaim the apartment from which he has been evicted. He wanders the downtown streets carrying a painting he hopes to sell, and encountering friends whose lives (and performances) we peek into. He finally manages to sell his painting to a wealthy female admirer, but he’s paid by check. Low on cash, he spends the evening wandering from club to club, looking for a beautiful girl he had met earlier, so he’ll have a place to spend the night

Basquiat is a natural actor—witty, radiant, the epitome of coolness and artistic exuberance. The cast includes Deborah Harry and leading bands of the era including Kid Creole and the Coconuts, James White and the Blacks, DNA, Tuxedomoon, the Plastics, and Walter Steding and the Dragon People. Also heard on the soundtrack are rap legend Melle Mel, John Lurie, Lydia Lunch, Suicide, Vincent Gallo, Kenny Burrell and Basquiat’s own band, Gray.

DOWNTOWN 81 not only captures one of the most interesting and lively artists of the twentieth century as he is poised for fame, but it is a slice of life from one of the most exciting periods in American culture, an era bursting with new wave music, new painting, hip hop and graffiti.

PRODUCTION NOTES

DOWNTOWN 81 was shot in 1980-81. Originally titled “New York Beat,” it was written and co-produced by the well known writer Glenn O’Brien, produced by Maripol, the art director and stylist, and directed by photographer Edo Bertoglio, all of whom were deeply involved in the art, music and fashion scenes of the time. The director of photography was John McNulty, one of New York’s top lighting men, shooting his first feature.

The film is not a documentary, but presents a slightly exaggerated, romantic and magical version of the reality of the time. The entire cast is composed of the movers and shakers on the downtown scene. In 1981, business problems interrupted the completion of post-production, and parts of the film were lost in Europe. Finally after much searching, the missing materials were located in 1998. Post production was begun in 1999 and finished in 2000, supervised by Maripol and Glenn O’Brien and edited by director/editor Pamela French. The executive producer of the film is Michael Zilkha, whose Ze Records released recordings by several of the bands in the film.

THE SOUNDTRACK includes music by: Gray, Jean Michel Basquiat with Andy Hernandez, John Lurie, DNA, Tuxedomoon, the Plastics, Marvin Pontiac, Kenny Burrell, the Specials, Chris Stein, Melle Mel with Blondie, Kid Creole and the Coconuts, James White and the Blacks, Vincent Gallo, Lydia Lunch, Steve French and Suicide.

DNA was recorded live at Vanguard Studios. Tuxedomoon was recorded live at Blank Tapes Studios. The live club performances were recorded on location using the RCA 24 track mobile unit.



BIOGRAPHIES - THE CAST

JEAN MICHEL BASQUIAT was nineteen years old when he was cast in **DOWNTOWN 81**. His twentieth birthday came during the shooting of the film. Basquiat was already a notorious member of the downtown art scene, known for his witty, omnipresent “Samo” graffiti, his unique band Gray, and his general creativity and stylishness. He was a painter without a studio, making art with whatever was at hand: sweatshirts, refrigerators, doors and discarded wood. Around this time he met Glenn O’Brien, who was working on an article about graffiti. They became friends and Basquiat began collaborating on O’Brien’s wild public access cable show, “TV Party,” the crew of which also included Maripol, Edo Bertoglio and Fab Five Freddie. In 1980 Basquiat’s work was first exhibited in the influential “Times Square Show.”



The main part of **DOWNTOWN 81** was written specially for Jean Michel, and during filming the young artist lived in the production office, which was his first real studio space. In 1981, Basquiat was one of the art stars of the “New York New Wave Show” at P.S.1 Institute for Art, where he exhibited several paintings. It was the beginning of a meteoric rise, and within a year he was one of the hottest artists in the world. His work drew raves in *Art in America* and *Art Forum*. In 1982 he had his first one-man exhibition at the Annina Nosei Gallery, followed by one-man shows at Bruno Bischoffberger in Zurich and Larry Gagosian in Los Angeles.

At twenty-one he was the youngest of the 176 artists included in “Documenta 7” at Kassel, Germany. The next year, 1983, he was the youngest artist included in the Whitney Biennial exhibition. By this time Basquiat had formed a strong friendship with Andy Warhol, collaborating with him on paintings and renting a building owned by Warhol for a studio. Between 1984 and 1986, his work was shown in major museums and galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hirschorn Museum in Washington, the Musee d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In February 1987, Andy Warhol died, devastating Basquiat. For the remainder of his life he struggled with drug use. In the spring of 1988 he held his first New York Show in one and a half years and he traveled to Hawaii to kick drugs. He returned to New York clean, but on August 12, 1988 he died in his loft at the age of twenty-seven. A memorial was held at St. Peter’s, the jazz church, on November 5, 1988. A major retrospective of his work opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art in October 1992.

DOWNTOWN 81 not only stars Basquiat but also features music created by the artist with his band Gray (“Drum Mode”), and in collaboration with Andy ‘Coati Mundi’ Hernandez (“Palabras con Ritmo”) and Rammellzee (“Beat Bop”).

DEBORAH HARRY, who appears in a unique dual role in **DOWNTOWN 81**, was then and is now again the star vocalist of Blondie. She has released numerous solo albums and is also the featured vocalist of the Jazz Passengers. Harry is an accomplished actress, with such credits as *Union City*, *Videodrome*, *Hairspray*, *Heavy*, *Six Ways to Sunday*, and *Intimate Strangers*, as well as television shows such as *Crime Story* and *Wise Guys*. Also appearing in the film are Blondie bandmates Chris Stein and Clem Burke as members of "The Felons" and Jimmy Destri as the taxi driver.



KID CREOLE AND THE COCONUTS were one of the top international acts of the '80s, and they have continued to make their exotic eclectic music on into the new millennium. "Kid Creole" is August Darnell, who along with featured bandmate Andy 'Coati Mundi' Hernandez started out in the hit disco group Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band. Their first album, "Off the Coast of Me," was released by Ze Records in 1980. Since then they have gone on to make a total of twenty albums. Andy Hernandez also produced the track "Palabras Con Ritmo" with vocals by Jean Michel Basquiat, which is heard at several points in **DOWNTOWN 81**. August Darnell recently starred in one of England's top musicals, "Oh What a Night."



TUXEDOMOON came together in San Francisco in 1977, but they were one of the most popular "new wave" bands on the New York scene. In 1982 they migrated to Belgium where they continued to make music and began wandering through Europe. In **DOWNTOWN 81**, Tuxedomoon appears as a trio: Steven Brown, Blaine Reininger and Peter Principle. Performance artist Winston Tong was also a sometime member of the group. Tuxedomoon has released ten albums, all of which are still available on Crambo Records. Tuxedomoon still exists; they played the Next Festival in Tel Aviv in 1997 and hope to begin rehearsing over the Internet. Today, Steven Brown lives in Mexico City, where he has a band called Ninerain. They have recorded a CD in Cuba, which will be released by Opcion Soncia. Blaine Reininger lives in Athens, where he is active in composing and performing. He has scored and acted in films by Nick Triandfyllidis, an award winning Greek director. Peter Principle lives in New York City. He has three solo albums to his credit, "Sedimental," "Tone Poems," and "Conjunction." He's currently working with an improvisational ensemble, "Ecobravo."

JAMES WHITE AND THE BLACKS, in one form or another, was one of the most notorious bands in New York for more than a decade. James White was first known as James Chance, the saxophonist in Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, who achieved worldwide notice on Brian Eno's No New York compilation LP. Soon Chance formed his own group, the Contortions, who pioneered "punk funk," with their breakthrough music that reflected such disparate influences as Ornette Coleman, James Brown and Funkadelic. With the breakup of the Contortions, Chance became White and founded an extraordinary band called James White and the Blacks, featuring an all black except for "White" lineup of top musicians, including the well known jazz players, trombonist Joe Bowie (who founded Defunkt) and guitarist Bern Nix. The Contortions and James White and the Blacks released numerous albums on Ze Records. James White is still active with a new band and a new album: James White and the Sardonic Sinphonics.



DNA brought new meaning to the word "power trio" as one of the most remarkable ensembles ever to come out of the New York music scene. Founded by guitarist Arto Lindsay, the group included bassist Tim Wright, formerly of Pere Ubu, and drummer Ikue Mori, who are also featured in control room "cameos" in **DOWNTOWN 81**. DNA issued a few recordings including an EP, "A Taste of DNA," in 1981 (American Clave), and an LP, "DNA Live at CBGBs" (Disk Union, Japan.) The members of DNA continue to work on their individual musical projects. Arto Lindsay releases inventive new albums regularly and is one of the most popular producers on the Brazilian music scene. His most recent release is "Noon Chill" (Bar/None Records.)



THE PLASTICS were the first Japanese band to make a global impact as part of the "new wave" scene. They released three albums between 1980 and 1981. "Welcome Plastics," "Origato Plastico," and "Welcome back Plastics." In the late eighties some of the members reformed as The Melons.



WALTER STEDING started out in the late seventies as a one-man band, generally appearing as a favorite opening act at CBGBs for popular bands such as Blondie, the Ramones and Suicide. When Blondie became a number one act, Walter continued his opening as one-man band, but in arenas and

stadiums. In 1980, Walter formed a group, Walter Steding and the Dragon People. In **DOWNTOWN 81**, that band includes Lenny Ferrari, Karen Geneice, Claudia Summers and Katherine Ruby (now Mrs. Mac Rebennack, "Dr. John.") In the eighties, Walter's day job was painting assistant to Andy Warhol, who eventually became his manager. Steding released several albums on Red Star and Animal Records, featuring such musicians as Robert Fripp, Television's Richard Lloyd and Blondie's Chris Stein. Steding still makes music, mostly for films, and is a noted painter whose work is in many important collections.



BIOGRAPHIES - THE FILMMAKERS

Producer **MARIPOL** has worked as a fashion and jewelry designer, stylist, and photographer. She was the art director of Fiorucci in the early eighties. She has directed short documentary films for French television, including one on the artist Keith Haring. Maripol has been involved in creating looks for Madonna at various points in her career, including the "Boy Toy" and "Like a Virgin" looks. She has styled music videos, for such artists as Madonna, Cher and Elton John, as well as many television commercials. She has worked with several musical acts, including the Gypsy Kings, as an image consultant. A book of her photography "Mes Polas" was published in 1990 by Art Random. Her photos have also been exhibited at the Earl McGrath Gallery and the Robert Miller Gallery. She was the art director of **DOWNTOWN 81** in which she also plays "the fashion designer."

Screenwriter and co-producer **GLENN O'BRIEN** began his career working for Andy Warhol at Interview Magazine, serving as editor and art director during the emergence of the magazine. He went on to work as New York bureau chief of Rolling Stone. In the late seventies he returned to Interview as a columnist, covering music and other cultural phenomena in "Glenn O'Brien's BEAT" which ran for 12 years. In 1981 he was also well known for his cable show "Glenn O'Brien's TV Party" which featured Jean Michel Basquiat, Debbie Harry, Fab Five Freddie and many other cast members of **DOWNTOWN 81**. In the early eighties he worked as a stand-up comedian, opening for Buster Poindexter. O'Brien is the author of several books, including "Soapbox," (Imschoot, 1997) and "The Style Guy," (Ballantine, 2000.) A poet and essayist, he has contributed to numerous books and catalogs on Basquiat. He has also worked as a creative director in advertising, creating campaigns for clients including Barneys New York and Calvin Klein. A collection of his poetry, with drawings by Richard Prince will be published in the spring, 2001 by Greybull Press. He is currently working on a film about Andy Warhol. In **DOWNTOWN 81** he plays rock critic Neil Barlowe of the Christian Science Monitor.

Director **EDO BERTOGLIO** received his degree in film directing and editing at the Conservatoire Libre du Cinema Francais in Paris in 1975. He lived in New York from 1976 to 1990 where he worked as a photographer for such magazines as Interview, Italian Vogue, Paper, GQ, Spin, Cult and Vanity. His work was frequently published in Interview and other magazines. He shot many record covers for Warner Brothers Records, Arista Records, Atlantic Records and Chrysalis Records. He also worked as art director of Look Magazine. In 1990 he returned to his hometown, Lugano, Switzerland, where he currently produces and directs programs for Swiss TV, as well as television commercials.

Executive Producer **MICHAEL ZILKHA** was founder of Ze Records, one of the most influential labels of the seventies and eighties. Ze, introduced and released records by many important musical artists including Was Not Was, Kid Creole and the Coconuts, the Contortions, James White and the Blacks, Lydia Lunch, Suicide, and Lizzy Mercier Descloux. Zilkha moved to Houston, Texas in 1986 to pursue a career in the energy business. He is an owner of the International Wind Company and is also involved in several other projects with a Green emphasis.

WHO'S WHO

WHO'S WHO in the rest of the cast? The love interest was **ANNA SCHROEDER** who was a fashion model. She is now a musician who lives in Germany. The graffiti artists are **FAB FIVE FREDDIE BRATHWAITE** and **LEE QUINONES**. Lee has had many exhibitions of his art in galleries and museums around the world. He is also a noted drag racer. Fred became known to the world when he was mentioned in Blondie's Rapture. Shortly after Downtown 81 was filmed, he collaborated with Charlie Ahearn on "Wild Style," the first hip hop film. He went on to direct videos and host Yo MTV Rap. After years as a hip hop exec, he is now involved in distributing urban music, film and video on the Internet. "The landlord," **GIORGIO GIOMELSKY**, once managed the Yardbirds and the Rolling Stones. He continues to be involved with discovering new musicians in New York. "The thief," **MARSHALL CHESS**, was president of Rolling Stones Records. He is now involved in the ARC Music Group. "Danny," **DANNY ROSEN**, is a fisherman who lives in Ireland. The chauffeur was played by **COMPTON MADDUX**, a musician who lives in New York. His latest CD is "Feet of Clay" (Silver Disc.) "Mrs. Cavalcanti," **DANIELA MORERA**, is a well known journalist who produces a line of exotic scarves. "The maid," **LISA ROSEN**, is an art restorer. "The drunk" in the go-go bar was played by **STEVE MASS**, proprietor of the famous Mudd Club, who is now opening a Mudd Club in Berlin. The second go-go dancer was played by the late **COOKIE MUELLER**, a legendary New York writer and star of John Waters films. The go-go bar crowd includes the late **TOM BAKER**, actor and Jim Morrison's best friend, artist and Warhol Factory figure **RONNIE CUTRONE**, novelist **JOHN BROWNER**, and **LARRY RATSO SLOMAN**, who has written books about Bob Dylan and with Howard Stern. "Michael," bound and gagged, was played by **MICHAEL HOLMAN**, Basquiat's bandmate in Gray who contributed two songs to the soundtrack. Mudd Club conversationalists include writer **VICTOR BOCKRIS**, **BETSY SUSSLER**, editor of Bomb Magazine, film director **AMOS POE**, musician **TAV FALCO**, and the late French guitarist **PATRICK GEOFFROIS**. The fist fighter at the Mudd Club was **DIEGO CORTEZ**, noted curator. The studio manager was played by the late **BRADLEY FIELD** of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks and The Contortions. The record mogul was played by **MARTY THAU**, proprietor of Red Star Records.



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DEBORAH HARRY
KID CREOLE AND THE COCONUTS
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DNA
JAMES WHITE AND THE BLACKS
WALTER STEDING
THE PLASTICS

Directed by EDO BERTOGLIO

Director of Photography JOHN McNULTY

Edited by PAMELA FRENCH

Art Direction by MARIPOL

Executive Producer MICHAEL ZILKHA

Co-Produced by PATRICK MONTGOMERY and GLENN O'BRIEN

Written by GLENN O'BRIEN

Produced by MARIPOL

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