

Document Citation

Title	Basquiat
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Source	<i>Reader (Chicago, Ill.)</i>
Date	1996 Sep 27
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	Section 2, p.2
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Basquiat, Schnabel, Julian, 1996

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CHOICE

Chicago Reader, 9/27/96, sec 2 p 2



Basquiat

Painter Julian Schnabel's feature is a biopic about Jean-Michel Basquiat (Jeffrey Wright), a black graffitist in New York who became famous in 1981 and died seven years later. Art critic Robert Hughes titled his obituary for Basquiat "Requiem for a Featherweight," and part of what's so interesting and unexpected about this picture is that it makes fresh observations without actually refuting that judgment. It's also quite energetic—there isn't a boring shot anywhere, and writer-director Schnabel is clearly enjoying himself as he plays with expressionist sound, neo-Eisensteinian edits, and all sorts

of other filmic ideas. What emerges may be unfocused as narrative, but it's lively as filmmaking. Others in the cast include David Bowie as Andy Warhol, Michael Wincott as Rene Ricard, Paul Bartel as Henry Geldzahler, and Elina Lowensohn as art dealer Annina Nosei; the actors playing fictional characters include Gary Oldman (as an apparent stand-in for Schnabel himself), Christopher Walken (in a brilliant bit as a slimy interviewer), Willem Dafoe, and Courtney Love. Fine Arts, Davis.

—Jonathan Rosenbaum