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When talking about Kawakami and the works of Jean-Michel Basquiat, it's possible to perceive a resonance between their philosophies and manifestations of art. Kawakami postulates that art in Japan has acted as a peaceful resistance against the overarching currents of patriarchal authority and societal conformity. Similarly, Basquiat's explosive, insurgent canvases screamed against the systemic inequities and racial injustices that riddled the American society of his time. The stark contrast between the serene imagery evoked by Kawakami and the aggressive, emotive force of Basquiat's work is a testament to the diverse ways in which art interacts with and comments on society's fabric.

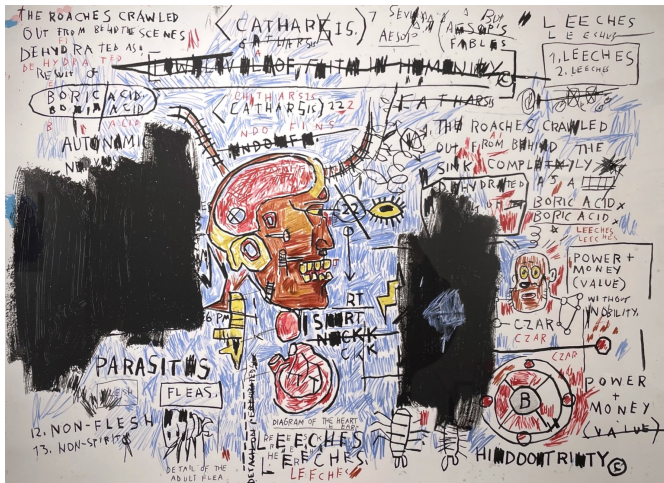


In "Hollywood Africans" (1983), Basquiat offers a narrative on the stereotypical roles and marginalization of Black people in the entertainment industry. The title itself is a satirical jab at the reduction of African Americans to mere entertainments in Hollywood. Kawakami might argue that just as cherry blossoms in Japan symbolize the impermanence of beauty and the resilience

to start anew, Basquiat's art symbolizes the ongoing struggle for recognition and equality, a reminder of the resilience in the face of societal transience.



"Untitled (History of the Black People)" (1983) by Basquiat unravels a tapestry of African-American history, interweaving symbols, figures, and cryptic phrases to express the complexity and often-ignored narratives of Black heritage. Kawakami, through her writing, champions the significance of individual narrative and the resistance of cultural norms. Both Basquiat and Kawakami, through their respective mediums, assert the necessity of acknowledging and valuing individual stories within the collective history.



Finally, in "King Brand" (1984), Basquiat's crown symbol serves as an emblem of both power and critique—a recurring theme that elevates the stature of his subjects while questioning the societal structures that determine value and worth. Kawakami may find alignment with

Basquiat in the idea that art can subvert traditional hierarchies, providing a space where suppressed voices can be heard and where the status quo can be challenged.

Kawakami and Basquiat, though operating in vastly different contexts and cultures, both illustrate the power of art as a societal mirror and a beacon of personal truth. Where Kawakami's prose gently peels back the layers of conformity to reveal a stoic, collective defiance, Basquiat's visceral works shout from the canvas, demanding attention to individual identity and injustice. Both are united in their belief that art possesses the profound ability to console, unite, and incite change. As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded and Japan found solace beneath cherry blossoms, Basquiat's works continue to inspire and provoke, ensuring that the issues they address remain in the public consciousness, refusing to be ignored or forgotten. Their art, transcending time and place, reminds us that while the contexts may differ, the essence of human experience and the struggle for authenticity in a conformist world are universally shared.