

THE CULTURE

HIP HOP AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY

FEBRUARY 29 – MAY 26, 2024

WALL PANELS ON THE EXHIBITION

From the street to the runway, the artist's studio to the museum gallery, and countless sites in between, "The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art in the 21st Century" explores hip hop's deep impact on contemporary art and culture. One of the most vital movements of the 20th century, hip hop is now a global industry and way of life. In the 21st century, hip-hop practitioners have harnessed digital technologies to gain unparalleled economic, social, and cultural capital. Hip hop emerged in the 1970s in the Bronx as a form of celebration expressed by Black and Latinx youth through emceeing (rapping), deejaying, graffiti-writing, and breakdancing. Over the past 50 years, these creative practices have produced new forms of power as they critique, celebrate, and refuse dominant ones.

Hip hop has deeply informed "The Culture," an expression of Black diasporic culture that has largely defined itself against the white dominance. In the art museum, however, "culture" has historically meant a Europe-focused set of aesthetics, values, and traditions that are sustained through gatekeeping.

The works in these galleries explore the place where "culture" and "The Culture" collide through six themes: Pose, Brand, Adornment, Tribute, Ascension, and Language.

Pose celebrates how hip hop speaks through the body and its gestures. Brand highlights the icons born from hip hop and the seduction of success. Adornment exuberantly challenges white ideas of taste with alternate notions of beauty, while Tribute testifies to hip hop's development of a visual canon. Ascension explores mortality, spirituality, and the transcendent. Language, whether in words, music, or graffiti, explores hip hop's strategies of subversion. Endlessly inventive and multi-faceted, hip hop, and the art it inspires, will continue to dazzle and empower.

"The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art in the 21st Century" explores hip hop's deep and resounding impact on contemporary art. Hip-hop culture is everywhere: from the street to the runway, the artist's studio, the museum gallery, and countless sites in between.

The exhibition The Culture at the Schirn continues at the Kunstverein Familie Montez with the video installation ISDN by Stan Douglas, and is supplemented by an exhibition on the milestones of hip hop at MOMEM, an event organized by the Diamant Offenbach: Museum of Urban Culture as well as a film series on the fifty-year history of hip hop at the DFF – Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum.

POSE

From the club to backyards and bedrooms, from online to on the street and onstage, the works in these galleries explore what one's gestures, stance, and mode of presentation can communicate to others. Here, artists explore and explode stereotypes of gender and race, examine the line between appreciation and appropriation, consider the relationship between audience and performer, and ask which bodies are considered dangerous or vulnerable and who decides. For some, self-presentation is a means of survival, for others a way to claim space in a hostile world, for still others a tool in changing dominant narratives about what can be communicated through the body. As part of its total project of creating a new canon, hip hop's aesthetics of the body refuse to conform to one standard and instead open up new ideas of what the body can say. How do you want to be seen?

Tschabalala Self

Setta's Room 1996, 2022, Solvent transfer, paper, acrylic, thread, and collaged painted canvas
Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

A young woman in a two-piece pink polka dot outfit sits on the floor. She holds a landline phone in her hand as her smiling gaze looks beyond the picture frame. This work is based on artist Tschabalala Self's personal recollection of her sister Princetta, who the artist credits as an important early muse. The pink walls and hardwood floor recall Princetta's teenage bedroom in the family's Harlem, New York, brownstone. A Lil' Kim poster—a promotional image for her 1996 debut album *Hard Core*—floats on a wall above the scene. This poster was significant for the artist, who credits it as a formative touchstone for her interest in how the Black female body is situated within contemporary Black culture.

Megan Lewis

Fresh Squeezed Lemonade, 2022, Oil and acrylic on fabric, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Myrtis

Amani Lewis

Swamp Boy, 2019, acrylic, oil pastel, glitter, embroidery, and screen print on canvas, Courtesy of the artist

West Baltimore rapper Butch Dawson (born 1993) holds the mic and looks out as cameras flash and screens light up during a performance of his 2018 EP *Swamp Boy*. The audience crowds close to the performer, suggesting an intimate venue. Over the last two decades, Baltimore has been a hotbed for underground music and art, with spaces like the *CopyCat*, *Floristree*, *Bellfoundry*, *Annex*, the *Paradox*, and the *Crown* creating safe spaces for performers and partygoers alike.

Amani Lewis built this collage from digitally edited images and blurred and manipulated photographs that they then screenprinted onto canvas and finished with painted details. The live performance photography that is the source material for this work gives the collage its sense of immediacy, as though we too, are at the club.

Rozeal

divine selektah...big up (after yoshitoshi's moon of the filial son), 2006, Acrylic and gold leaf on panel, Collection of The University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson; Museum Purchase with funds provided by Robert J. Greenberg

A DJ with headphones around his neck wears a track jacket worn over a kimono or yukata as he spins a record. The composition references a Japanese woodblock print by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1939–1892) from 1889. However, his long dreadlocks, tan arms, and spattered tan face evokes Ganguro, Japanese for “face-black.” This trend of appropriating hip hop and Black style emerged among teenagers in Tokyo, Japan, in the mid-1990s. Ganguro youth sported traditionally Black hairstyles and hip-hop fashion, along with liberal applications of skin-darkening self-tanner. Artist Rozeal critiques the short-lived subcultural trend and raises difficult questions about appreciation versus appropriation.

Jonathan Lyndon Chase

With his dogs and bitches heading back to da crib, 2020, Acrylic, glitter, spray paint, and marker on muslin, Courtesy of Company Gallery, New York

Joyce J. Scott

Hip Hop Saints and Fallen Angels: Da Brat, 2014, Monotype, Courtesy of Goya Contemporary, Baltimore

Michael Vasquez

Chain Strangle, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, Courtesy of Arthur Halsey Rice

In this painting, three men in vibrant red clothing display gang hand signs and boastfully show off their chain jewelry in front of a picket fence. The energetic brushwork captures both the immediacy of the moment and something of the mood of the figures. Artist Michael Vasquez explores the human need for community that is found in gang culture.

Gang culture is not synonymous with hip-hop culture. They are distinct, yet one is often depicted in the other. However, this association between gangs and hip hop, real or imagined, has done indisputable harm. For example, many recent court cases have attempted to use rap lyrics as evidence of criminal activity and violence.

Vasquez poignantly captured these men's relationship to one another through his sensitive rendering of their gestures, demeanor, and settings, with the full knowledge of both their perceived menace and their vulnerability.

Nina Chanel Abney

Untitled, 2022, Collage on panel, Courtesy of the artist and Pace Prints

Amidst of a cacophony of images and symbols including cars, a yacht, palm trees, and dollar signs, nude women dance around a central male figure with a single tear. This collage is based on the work Nina Chanel Abney created as cover art for rapper Meek Mill's (born 1987) 2021 album *Expensive Pain*. When the image appeared on buses and billboards, it sparked a public debate: Does Abney's exaggerated abstraction of Black feminine sexuality celebrate or critique the sexist stereotypes found in many hip-hop videos and lyrics?

Monica Ikegwu

Open/Closed, 2021, Oil on canvas, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Myrtis

Shabez Jamal

Album Reconstruction No. 4 (After Kimberly), Mixed media (oak, acrylic sheets, Polaroid images, chromogenic prints, and bronze photo corners), Courtesy of the artist

Album Reconstruction No. 5 (After Inga), 2022, Mixed media (oak, acrylic sheets, Polaroid images, chromogenic prints, and bronze photo corners), Courtesy of the artist

Album Reconstruction No. 6 (After Katrina), 2022, Mixed media (oak, acrylic sheets, Polaroid images, chromogenic prints, and bronze photo corners), Courtesy of the artist

BRAND

"I'm not a businessman, I'm a business, man!" exclaimed Jay-Z in 2005. Soon after, he became the first rapper to cross the billion-dollar-net-worth threshold. The concept of a brand is not limited to differentiating and marketing commercial goods but extends to how an individual uses available communication technologies—including social media—to position themselves in the public sphere. In previous decades, hip-hop artists have functioned as unofficial promoters of major brands that aligned with their style and desired public persona. Today, artists both partner directly with companies and create their own independent brands to bolster their personal business empires.

Whether designing fashion, recording music, or making art, artists blur the boundaries between these art forms, between being in business and being the business. Is the artist a producer or is the artist a product?

Vivienne Westwood und Malcolm McLaren

Buffalo Hat, 1984, Felt, Courtesy Arby's, Inspire Brands, Inc., Atlanta, GA

Famously worn by musician Pharrell Williams (born 1973) at the 2014 Grammy Awards, this wide-brimmed, oversized hat debuted in the fall 1982 collection of legendary U.K. designer Vivienne Westwood. The designer's partner Malcolm McLaren donned the hat alongside his hip-hop group, The World's Famous Supreme Team. McLaren, best known as the manager of the British punk band the Sex Pistols, turned his attention to hip hop in the 1980s. The hat became embedded in hip-hop aesthetics through its appearance in films such as *Wild Style* (1982) and *Beat Street* (1984).

Thirty-two years later, having circulated from Westwood's runway to film sets and the streets of New York City, Williams repopularized the hat. His use of the buffalo hat for his personal brand harkened the era of classic hip hop and became a unique signifier of the artist.

Malcolm McLaren

Duck Rock, 1983, 12-inch vinyl record and cover sleeve

Travis Scott by Air Jordan

Cactus Jack Air Jordan 1, 2019, Leather, suede, rubber, cotton, Private Collection

In these retro high-top brown and pink suede sneakers, the ever-recognizable Nike swooshes are reversed—the tail faces the toe rather than the heel. This feature is just one of the ways that rapper Travis Scott's highly influential partnership with Nike Air Jordan breaks away from conventions of Air Jordan 1 design. Tongue tags are stitched in red and sit to the side of the tongue instead of the top and a stash pocket is hidden in the collar.

This collaboration has fueled record breaking engagement with Nike and is a prime example of how, by bringing their influential cultural capital to legacy brands, rappers have stepped into the role previously held by elite athletes.

Cross Colours by Carl Jones and Thomas „TJ“ Walker

Denim Bucket Hat, worn by Cardi B during 2018 Grammy's Performance, 1991, Denim cotton, Cross Colours Archives

Chance the Rapper for New Era

Chance 3 New Era Cap, 2022, Fabric, plastic, stickers

During the promotion of 2016's *Coloring Book*, Chance the Rapper (born 1993) adopted overalls and a baseball cap with the number three as his uniform and personal brand. The rapper commissioned Chicago-based designer Sheila Rashid to create the overalls and wore Rashid's design at many major public events. The look visualized the joy and play in *Coloring Book's* sound.

For this exhibition, Rashid reproduced the overalls Chance the Rapper wore during his 2016 performance on the television show *Saturday Night Live*, shown here with the baseball cap he also wore for the performance.

Sheila Rashid

Overalls, 2016, Gabardine, copper oxide buttons, rivets, Courtesy of the artist

Daniel „Dapper Dan“ Day for Gucci

Guccissima Leather Down Jacket, Spring/Summer 2018, Lamb leather, polyamide, goose down
Barrett Barrera Projects

Green dragons march around the sleeves of this distinctive red leather jacket. The all-over Gucci logo in white leaves no doubt as to the identity of the brand, but all is not as it appears. The legendary designer known as Dapper Dan created custom-made clothing out of existing luxury stock. In the 1980s and 1990s, he created iconic looks for artists such as Eric B. & Rakim (founded 1986), LL Cool J (born 1968), and Salt-N-Pepa (founded 1985). As his clients' fortunes rose, so did his visibility—luxury brands filed lawsuits and his store was shuttered. When in 2017, Gucci created a mink bomber jacket that was suspiciously similar to a Dapper Dan look, the public outcry was immediate. In a canny move, Gucci invited Dapper Dan to design a Fall 2018 capsule collection, of which this jacket is a part.

The borrowing of luxury brands to create something unique questions the notion of the “original” and underlines the uneasy relationship between symbols of luxury and those they deliberately exclude.

Virgil Abloh für Louis Vuitton

Keepall Bag, Fall/Winter 2021, Cowhide leather, textile lining, silver-color hardware, yellow acetate chain, Courtesy of the artist

Virgil Abloh transformed Louis Vuitton's classic 1930s Keepall duffle design into a bright canary yellow bag emblazoned with the brand's name in a chunky, graffiti-like script. The traditional leather handles are accentuated by an acetate chain worked into a Cuban link, a common form of adornment for many hip-hop artists. In 2018, Abloh joined Louis Vuitton as the artistic director of menswear and became the first Black person to helm a luxury brand. Drawing on his backgrounds as a DJ and engineer, he used the mode of sampling, or reworking existing recordings, to introduce new designs that have since become cult favorites. A visionary and prolific creator, Abloh understood how to merge seemingly opposite cultures, linking the buoyancy of street fashion with haute couture and the restraint of minimalism with the vibrant traditions of the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora.

TNEG

4:44, 2017, Single-channel video (color, sound), 8:11 min., Courtesy of the artists and Gladstone Gallery

This eight-minute video centers on two performances. In the first, dancers Storyboard P (born c. 1990) and Okwui Okpokwasili (born 1972) twist and twine their bodies in a moving two-part dance of desire, pain, and regret. In the second, present-day hip-hop royalty Beyoncé (born 1981) and Jay-Z (born 1969) serenade each other as part of a live performance.

The work accompanies Jay-Z's track of the same name, widely viewed as an apology to his wife, Beyoncé, for his infidelity and emotional failures as a husband.

A collaboration between Arthur Jafa, Malik Sayeed, and Baltimore-based Elissa Blount Moorhead, the video uses cinematography, choreography, and found footage to explore complex and constricted notions of masculinity in an insightful and moving tapestry of Black love and life.

Please give your eyes time to adjust as you enter this darkened space.

Visitor Advisory: Explicit Content. This video includes depictions of violence, racial stereotypes, and sexual content.

Jayson Musson

Knowledge God, 2015, Mercerized cotton on stretched linen, Salon 94, New York
QR-CODE: *Elevators (Me & You)* von Outkast

Joyce J. Scott

Hip Hop Saints, Tupac, 2014, Monotype with collaged beads on painted paper, Women's Committee Acquisitions Endowment for Contemporary Prints and Photographs, BMA 2020.61

Kudzanai Chiurai

The Minister of Enterprise, 2009, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of Kudzanai Chiurai and Goodman Gallery

Lighting his cigar with money, the Minister of Enterprise stares defiantly at you. He positions himself in front of shining gold wallpaper, wearing tinted sunglasses and a gold watch and chain. In a theatrical image, he embodies the conspicuous consumption and desire for brandishing luxury goods that is seen among so many hip-hop stars.

This work is part of a series of scathing mock portraits titled *The Parliament*. South Africa-based artist and social activist Kudzanai Chiurai depicted members of a fictitious government cabinet, inventing characters representing the ministers of education, finance, health, defense, home affairs, art, and culture. The series comments on political powers in South Africa, corruption, and masculinity through the aesthetics of hip-hop culture.

Tariku Shiferaw

Money (Cardi B), 2018, Spray paint, wood, price tags, screws, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

Tariku Shiferaw painted a large X and various symbols on this box-like sculpture. The open wood slats suggest a shipping pallet, used to move goods and commodities, as well as the straightforward construction of Minimalist sculpture.

The titles of Shiferaw's works, such as *Money (Cardi B)*, reference artists known for music originating in Black communities, like hip hop, R&B, reggae, Afrobeats, blues, and jazz. These genres have historically been instruments of resistance against societies that have repeatedly attempted to erase—and profit from—Black labor. By invoking one of the most bankable names in hip hop within the context of the shipping crate, Shiferaw questions when a personal brand becomes a product.

Hassan Hajjaj

Cardi B Unity, 2017/1438 (Gregorian/Hijri), Metallic Lambda print in white frame with green tea boxes, Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery, New York, NY

Jordan Casteel

Fendi, 2018, Oil on canvas, Private Collection, New York

Jordan Casteel paints her sitters with immediacy and individuality, hoping to “tell stories of people who are often unseen, making someone slow down and engage with them.” Here, an unidentified figure riding the subway holds bags covered in Fendi logos in their lap. While the logos are designed to catch your eye, the artist sought to create a moment of humanity in the otherwise unremarkable scene of a subway ride. Through conspicuously branded luxury items, a person aligns themselves with the lifestyle and affluence the brand represents. Sometimes, this image of wealth is at odds with reality.

Zéh Palito

It was all a dream, 2022, Acrylic on canvas, Courtesy the artist, Simões de Assis, and Luce Gallery

Larry W. Cook

Picture Me Rollin', 2012, Single-channel video (color, sound), 1:43 min., Courtesy of the artist

A black Lamborghini spins in circles, cheered on by men in white T-shirts and medallion necklaces. Larry W. Cook has reused a clip from the 2000 music video “Get Your Roll On” by the rap group Big Tymers (founded c. 1997) but replaced the audio with a version of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s (1929–1968) “I Have a Dream” speech. The civil rights leader’s speech has been chopped and screwed, a hip-hop turntable technique that involves slowing down a track. In the early 2000s, the rap music video aesthetic of driving luxury cars as an assertion of hypermasculinity emerged.

Cook stated, “My video suggests that the materialism glorified in hip-hop music has become the American Dream for many and is passed down to younger generations.”

Luis Gispert

Louis Uluru, 2012, Chromogenic print, Courtesy of Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

ADORNMENT

“Now I like dollars/I like diamonds/I like stunting/I like shining,” Cardi B raps at the top of “I Like It.” Her words capture the recurrent identification of self with adornment in the canon of hip hop. While style often signifies class and politics, almost no culture dresses as self-referentially—or as influentially—as hip hop. From Lil’ Kim’s technicolor wigs to the exuberant, excessive layering of gold chains by Big Daddy Kane and Ra Kim, some of the most important and unique styles have originated in hip hop.

Jewelry flashes, grills glint in smiling mouths, and iconic Air Force One sneakers are meant to be seen. In her 2015 book *Shine*, art historian Krista Thompson looks at how light is caught and styled close to the body within the African Diaspora. She explores the ways people today “use objects to negotiate and represent their personhood,” in contrast to how their ancestors were defined as property. Adornment in the culture of hip hop can resist Eurocentric ideals of beauty and challenge concepts of taste and decorum.

What story does your style tell?

Wilmer Wilson IV

WISH, 2018, Staples and inkjet print, pigment-based, on plywood, Purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., BMA 2019.35

In this work, Wilmer Wilson IV rephotographed and enlarged a party flier depicting two figures wearing sunglasses. Using staples to adorn the image, which has been affixed to plywood, Wilson’s laborious process is an effort “to cope with the impermanence of things— like bodies, but also the fragments of everyday social life.” The work recalls how party fliers, typically used to promote hip-hop concerts, are stapled to wooden telephone poles across urban spaces. While the staples offer a visually compelling surface, the full image is somewhat difficult to decipher due to the metallic glare, suggesting both invisibility and hypervisibility. Through this act of shielding, Wilson has provided a means of protection to the Black people depicted in the original image.

Robert Pruitt

For Whom the Bell Curves, 2004, Gold chains, The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase made possible by a gift from Rena Bransten, San Francisco, and a gift from Burt Aaron, New York 2006.14

From a distance, these graceful arching lines recall 1960s Minimalist wall sculpture. A closer look reveals layered references to Blackness, in terms of historical trauma and contemporary desire. Masculinity in hip-hop culture is intertwined with gold chains, a material associated with wealth and excess. Robert Pruitt used the form that typically graces a rapper's neck to trace the routes of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade from the western coast of Africa to the eastern coast of the Americas, giving the glittering links an ominous significance.

Miguel Luciano

Plátano Pride, 2006, Chromogenic photograph, The Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center

Pure Plantainum, 2006, Polyurethane encased in platinum with sterling silver in plexiglass with synthetic fiber, The Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center

Platinum sheathes a sculpted polyurethane plantain, transforming a common food of the Caribbean into jewelry. The humble fruit, rendered in a precious metal, adorns a young person's neck in the photograph and rests against velvety black fabric in the sculpture. Miguel Luciano describes the plantain as "a stereotypical and yet iconic symbol."

Plantain sap stains skin and clothing, an effect captured by the saying "la mancha de plátano," the mark of the plantain.

This phrase originally referenced the lingering brown stain left on rural farmworkers harvesting the fruit and became an anti-Black and classist euphemism. Now, it is a proud assertion of Puerto Rican identity, especially for the millions in the diaspora, and of connection to heritage as lasting as the plantain stain.

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola

CAMOUFLAGE #105 (Metropolis), 2020, Durags, acrylic on wood panel, Keith Rivers Collection
In this four-panel work from his CAMOUFLAGE series, Anthony Akinbola cut, stretched, stitched, and collaged black durags into a shimmering surface. This flexible headscarf offers a practical protection for Black hair and is also worn as a fashion statement in its own right. The artist stretched the durags to transform these recognizable objects into powerful abstract patterns that both absorb and reflect light. In the work's all-over movement and solid black surface, the artist brings abstract monochrome painting into conversation with the culture of Black adornment.

Lauren Halsey

auntie fawn on tha 6, 2021, Synthetic hair on wood, from the Collection of Alyson & Gunner Winston

Bundles of brightly colored synthetic hair create a cascade in rainbow hues. Often styled into wigs, braids, and other hairstyles, candy-colored synthetic hair has been popularized throughout the 21st century by musicians such as Lil' Kim (born 1974), Lil' Mo (born 1978), Blaque (founded 1999), and TLC (founded 1990). Lauren Halsey creates works that celebrate the everyday world of her neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, California.

This vibrant work celebrates both synthetic hair as a bold form of adornment within Black communities and hair styling as an art form in its own right.

Murjoni Merriweather

Z E L L A, 2022, Ceramic, hand-braided synthetic hair, Courtesy of the artist

Dionne Alexander

Lil' Kim, *Purple Wig from MTV VMAs*, 1999, recreated 2022, Synthetic wig, Courtesy of the artist

Lil' Kim, *Chanel Logo Wig*, 2001, recreated 2022, Human hair wig, Courtesy of the artist

Lil' Kim, *Versace Logo Wig*, 2001, recreated 2022, Human hair wig, Courtesy of the artist

Lil' Kim, *Zipper Wig from MTV VMAs*, 2001, recreated 2022, Human hair wig, zipper, Courtesy of the artist

Lil' Kim photographed by David LaChapelle, *Interview Magazine*, November 1999, Magazine

Lil' Kim photographed by, *XXL Magazine*, May 2000, Magazine

Provocative lyrics, monochromatic outfits, and vibrant wigs adorned with luxury brand logos defined rapper Lil' Kim's (born 1974) style in the early 2000s. Her hairstylist during this period, Dionne Alexander, dyed, imprinted, and stenciled some of the most recognizable brand logos in mainstream fashion onto these wigs, exemplifying hip hop's popularization of conspicuous consumption and branded clothing and accessories. Alexander also created iconic hairstyles for such music artists as Mary J. Blige (born 1971), Lauryn Hill (born 1975), and Missy Elliott (born 1971). For this exhibition, Alexander reproduced some of the most memorable wigs she created for Lil' Kim, which continue to reverberate in hip hop's visual culture today, inspiring a new generation of stylists and music artists.

Yvonne Osei

EXTENSIONS, 2018, Single-channel video (color, sound), 6:04 min., Courtesy of the artist and Bruno David Gallery

Filming in the city of Asafo in her home country of Ghana, Yvonne Osei captured the performative quality of the everyday cultural tradition of hair braiding. Throughout the video, braids on the sitter's head grow longer and longer, and the camera pulls back to capture their length. In the end, the braids are so long that they drag behind the woman as she walks through the city, her hair literally stopping traffic. The title of this work nods to both the length of the sitter's braids and the impact of hair braiding across the African Diaspora. Braided hair has historically communicated group identity, status, and geography. From Queen Latifah's (born 1970) 1990s looks to A\$AP Rocky's (born 1988) current style, braided hair can serve as another political form of self-presentation.

Derrick Adams

Style Variation Grid 10, 2019, Acrylic paint and graphite on inkjet-printed photograph on Artex® Canvas

Deana Lawson

Nation, 2018, Inkjet print, pigment based, with collaged photograph, Courtesy of the artist, David Kordansky Gallery, and Gagosian

Two shirtless figures, dripping with gold, boldly confront the camera. One wears a glistening cheek retractor commonly used by dentists. A necklace with an ankh, the ancient Egyptian symbol of life, points toward the history of metalwork throughout the African Diaspora. An inset image of George Washington's (1732–1799) dentures—made of ivory, gold wire, and teeth from enslaved Black people—obscures a standing figure. By bringing Washington's teeth into dialogue with the mouthpiece worn by the sitter, Deana Lawson drew a harrowing connection to the racial violence that has shaped the United States. At the same time, the work honors the culture of hip hop.

Notes the artist: “There is a nobility and majesty of a lot of gold that’s worn, and how it’s appropriated in hip hop, and how I think hip hop actually channels ancient kingdoms.”

Bruno Baptistelli

Memento, Original Casting 2020-2022; this version 2023, Gold-plated silver, Courtesy of the artist
Using his own teeth as the mold for this gold-plated grill, Brazilian-based artist Bruno Baptistelli placed himself into the long history of cosmetic dentistry. Mounting them on a stand, covering them with a vitrine, and evoking the phrase *memento mori* (Latin for “remember that you must die”) in the work’s title, the artist treats gold teeth with reverence. Worn by hip-hop originators such as Slick Rick (born 1965) and celebrated in songs like Nelly’s (born 1974) 2005 single *Grillz*, gold teeth are a popular form of adornment in hip hop, signifying an accumulation of wealth and a refusal of the Eurocentric ideal of an undorned white smile.

QR-CODE: *Grillz* by Nelly

Hank Willis Thomas

Black Power, 2006, Chromogenic print, digital exposure, Barrett Barrera Projects

TRIBUTE

From name-dropping in a song to wearing a portrait of a deceased rapper on a T-shirt, tributes, respects, and shout-outs are fundamental to hip-hop culture. These references proclaim influence and who matters, honor legacies, and create networks of artistic associations. Elevating artists and styles contribute to hip hop’s canonization—when certain artworks, songs, and rappers are collectively recognized for their artistic excellence and historical impact.

Hip hop as a global artform has become a touchstone for artists of the 21st century. As visual artists trace hip hop’s conceptual and social lineage through tribute, they engage the idea that the art historical canon, previously homogenous, white, and stable, is fluid depending on your own background and preferences, questioning what is beautiful, who is iconic, and whose histories are valued. Who do you pay homage or respects to in your life?

Cross Colours by Carl Jones and Thomas „TJ“ Walker

Color-Blocked Denim Ensemble with Hat, 1990–1992, Cotton, acrylic, wool, Cross Colours Archives

The boxy cut of the jacket and tapered pants of this color-blocked denim ensemble is generous by design. The stiff denim affects the way that one might move, stand, and walk—literally, the figure that one cuts. Carl Jones and Thomas “TJ” Walker founded the iconic streetwear brand Cross Colours in 1989 to unify hip-hop culture. After observing New York City street style, the Los Angeles-based brand leaned into the oversized look.

Cross Colours was among the first streetwear brands to understand their product as currency and distributed it carefully, most notably to the wardrobe department of the then-popular sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. The image of actor Will Smith (born 1968) wearing Cross Colours at the height of his youthful charm circulated the style into homes everywhere.

Virgil Abloh for Louis Vuitton

Look 15, Spring/Summer 2022, Silk, wool, polyester, leather, fur, metal, Collection Louis Vuitton
“My Adidas and me close as can be/We make a mean team, my Adidas and me,” rapped the hip-hop trio RUN D.M.C. (founded 1981) in their 1986 single *My Adidas*. RUN D.M.C. adopted the classic adidas tracksuit and sneakers as a uniform and made it a hip-hop staple. Moving from its origins in soccer to the stage and then the runway, the tracksuit inspired a generation of fashion designers to reimagine the iconic look of a zipped jacket and matching pants. Designers from Los

Angeles, California, to Lagos, Nigeria, have created their take on the tracksuit. From Virgil Abloh's airy silk construction to Telfar Clemens playful cut-out pants to Willy Chavarria's extreme tailoring, these looks telegraph the significance and reverberations of hip-hop style across the African Diaspora and beyond. Tracksuits offer endless variations and challenge ideas of gender and sexuality, updating the classic look while always paying tribute to its original form.

QR-CODE: *My Adidas* by RUN D.M.C.

Baby Phat by Kimora Lee Simmons

Tracksuit, ca. 2000, Cotton

Telfar by Telfar Clemens and Babak Radboy

Azalea Tracksuit, 2022, Polyester jersey knit, rib knit collar and cuffs, mesh lining, Courtesy of TELFAR, New York

Small Azalea Shopping Bag, 2022, Faux leather, Courtesy of TELFAR, New York

Wales Bonner by Grace Wales Bonner

Wales Bonner Dub Tuxedo Trousers, Fall/Winter 2020, Polyester, cotton, Courtesy of Wales Bonner

adidas Originals by Wales Bonner

Lovers Tracktop, Fall/Winter 2020, Recycled polyester, spandex, acrylic, wool, Courtesy Wales Bonner

Willy Chavarria

Buffalo Track Jacket and Kickback Pant, Spring/Summer 2022, Nylon satin, Courtesy WILLY CHAVARRIA

Roberto Lugo

Street Shrine 1: A Notorious Story (Biggie), 2019, Glazed ceramic, Collection of Peggy Scott and David Teplitzky

adidas Originals by Pharrell Williams

Track Jacket, 2013, Leather, zipper, Courtesy Pharrell Williams

Daniel „Dapper Dan“ Day for Gucci

Dapper Dan Tracksuit, 2018, Synthetic blend, wool, Barrett Barrera Projects

Derrick Adams

Heir to the Throne, minted June 25, 2021, Non-fungible token, HD, 11 min., Private Collection

Alex de Mora

West Coast Tattoos, 2019, printed 2023, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of the artist and DMB

Big Gee, 2019, printed, 2023, Archival pigment print, Courtesy of the artist and DMB

East Coast Tattoos, 2019, printed 2023, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of the artist and DMB

Two flanking images depict a shirtless man with tattoos of notable American rappers. The left arm includes West Coast stars Tupac Shakur (1971–1996), Eazy-E (1964–1995), and Snoop Dogg (born 1971) while the right arm sports East Coast musicians The Notorious B.I.G. (1972–1997), DMX (1970–2021), and Nas (born 1973). This tattooed tribute memorializes their global influence.

The central photograph features Mongolian hip-hop celebrity Big Gee (born c. 1984) atop a camel in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Hip hop reached Mongolia shortly after the fall of communism in the mid-1990s, and Mongolian rappers and fans were quick to emulate great hip-hop artists from the United States. In 2019, British photographer Alex de Mora traveled to Ulaanbaatar to document the capital city's prominent hip-hop scene and explore the specificities of its own hip-hop culture.

QR-CODE: *Hustle* by Big Gee.

Devin Allen

You Can't Raid the Sun, 2020, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of the artist

Adrian Octavius Walker

A Great Day in St. Louis, 2022, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of the artist

Composed like a class picture, yet exuberant as a snapshot of friends, these two portraits by Devin Allen and Adrian Walker document hip-hop artists and activists from their respective cities—Baltimore and St. Louis. These portraits reference Gordon Parks' 1998 iconic photograph, *A Great Day in Hip Hop*, also on view in this exhibition, which itself was an homage to the historic 1958 photograph, *A Great Day in Jazz*, by Art Kane.

Cover of *XXL* magazine with Gordon Parks' *A Great Day in Hip Hop*, 1998

Maï Lucas

Oxmo Puccino, 2000, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

Sté Strausz, 2002, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist

French hip-hop luminary Sté Strausz (born 1977) confronts us with a bold and playful gaze, while Oxmo Puccino (born 1974) poses deadpan against an urban cityscape in a T-shirt which reads "Ghetto de France." Franco-Vietnamese artist Maï Lucas has been observing and photographing the hip-hop and graffiti scene in Paris, France, and its suburbs since the mid-1980s, a time, as she puts it, when "no one really thought that the culture was going to become a major movement." Today, France is the second- largest market for hip hop in the world, behind only the United States. Hip hop is a global phenomenon but is always being adapted to express the specifics of style anywhere it flourishes.

Carrie Mae Weems

Anointed, 2017, printed 2023, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Mary J. Blige (born 1971) receives a crown in this red-tinged photograph, referencing the musician's nickname as the Queen of Hip Hop Soul. Carrie Mae Weems honored the singer by placing her in a lineage of other Black icons. Commissioned for *W* Magazine's 2017 art issue, Weems' regal portrayal stands at the intersection of popular media, fine art, and music. According to the artist, "I appropriated an image of Dinah Washington, who was considered the queen of blues, the queen of jazz. And of course, there's Jean-Michel Basquiat's constant use of the crown in relationship to jazz and music, and African American cultural utterance."

Alvaro Barrington

They have They Can't, 2021, Hessian on aluminum frame, yarn, spray paint, concrete on cardboard, and bandanas, Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami. Gift of Private Collection, US "They got money for wars, but can't feed the poor." The pointed lyrics sewn in yarn across *They have They Can't* are from Tupac Shakur's (1971–1996) 1993 song "Keep Ya Head Up," which highlights Black persistence in the face of racism, sexism, and marginalization. Another reference

to Tupac in this work is the large, emblazoned rose that nods to Shakur's autobiographical poem *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*. Of Grenadan and Haitian descent, and raised in a West Indian neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, Alvaro Barrington admires such rappers as Tupac and DMX (1970–2021), who told “the story of the [U.S.] war on drugs as a war against working-class Black communities.”

QR-CODE: Scan here to listen to *Keep Ya Head Up* by Tupac.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Lester Yellow, 1987, Acrylic, oil pastel, pencil, and Xerox collage on canvas, Nicola Erni Collection
Alongside the select number of important paintings he dedicated to the greatest jazz legends of the twentieth century, Basquiat here depicts the image of Lester Young—arguably the most influential and innovative saxophonist of all time. By including Lester Young in his pantheon of Black cultural icons, Basquiat attempts to reshape narratives about Black culture while also positioning himself as a contributor to its legacy. Basquiat's appreciation of iconic Black figures is also a common practice in hip hop: through referencing names, musicians pay respect to and align themselves with those who came before them and created "the culture."

Basquiat himself is often referenced in hip hop. In the remix of Wale's (born 1984) 2012 single *Slight Work*, Sean Love Combs (born 1969), also known as Diddy, raps, “Chop the top off the drop and tell 'em Basquiat inspired me.”

El Franco Lee II

DJ Screw in Heaven, 2008, Acrylic and vinyl record on canvas, Private Collection, Houston
Wearing a Fubu shirt and in the flow, DJ Screw (1971–2000) presides over his turntables, surrounded by fans and friends in his home—an important part of the 1990s hip-hop scene in Houston, Texas. His hands appear to be in motion, scratching and changing records. DJ Screw is a hip-hop legend who created the distorted “chopped and screwed” sound: he would chop the lyrics, slow the tempo of a song, and reduce the pitch. Additional lyrics, often freestyles by Houston-based rappers, were then layered over his tracks.

DJ Screw tragically died of an overdose in 2000. Houston-based artist El Franco Lee II drew on his interests in comic books to create a detailed tribute to the DJ in his element.

Hier scannen, um *My Mind Went Blank* von DJ Screw anzuhören.

QR-CODE: *My Mind Went Blank* by DJ Screw.

Jen Everett

Unheard Sounds, Come Through: Extended Mix, 2022, Holzlautsprecher, Boombox, Kassettenbänder, Schallplattenhüllen, Kassettenspieler, Vinyl-Fotohüllen, Transistorradios, Fotos
Wooden speakers, boom box, cassette tapes, vinyl record sleeves, cassette player, vinyl photo sleeves, transistor radios, photographs, Courtesy of the artist

ASCENSION

“Promise that you will sing about me/I said when the lights shut off and it's my turn,” Kendrick Lamar gently asks in his 2012 song *Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst*. Death—or the spectre of it—along with notions of ascension and the afterlife frequently appear in hip-hop lyrics, from pouring one out for a friend who has passed to the precarity of being Black in an urban environment and never knowing which day is your last to meditations on the kind of immortality conferred by fame.

Inspired by themes of ascent in the culture, artists create works that invite reflection. Ordinary objects transform into altars and monuments, and images of Black bodies melt into heavenly clouds. Hip hop is a cultural form that artists use to process, grieve, and remember those lost. Pause and reflect on the lives and experiences amplified by the works on view.

NIA JUNE, Kirby Griffin, and APoetNamedNate

The Unveiling of God / a love letter to my forefathers, 2021, Single-channel video (color, sound), Courtesy of the artists

In this short film, Black men and boys swim, play, embrace loved ones, and navigate various physical and emotional landscapes. *The Unveiling of God / a love letter to my forefathers* is an operatic visual poem that celebrates the Black men in the artists' lives.

In counter to narrow and destructive ideas of masculinity that are present—though not unchallenged—in hip hop, NIA JUNE, Kirby Griffin, and APoetNamedNate created a visually arresting work that celebrates male strength through tenderness. As the artists note, *The Unveiling of God / a love letter to my forefathers* is a visual interpretation of Nia June's imagination on the matter of her forefathers and Black men prematurely removed from her life. Through poetry, music, and moving portraits, the film asks its viewers: what could they have been, unburdened by the gravity of an oppressive system and known to the God in themselves?"

Devan Shimoyama

Cloud Break, 2022, Timberland boots, rhinestones, silk flowers, epoxy resin, and chain, Courtesy of the artist and Kavi Gupta Gallery

Texas Isaiah and Ms. Boogie

Pelada: Chapter II, 2021, Inkjet print, pigment based, Courtesy of the artists

Untitled, 2023, Mixed Media, Courtesy of the artist

Ms. Boogie, an Afro-Latina transgender rapper, proudly stands by an open gate in denim cut-offs and a blue and purple top. Pelada means naked or peeled in Spanish. The image bears witness to Ms. Boogie during the conception of her debut album *The Breakdown*, which celebrates the transformative and transcendent experience of the evolution of her personhood.

In front of the image lies an altar with devotional candles, photographs taken by the artist, baby photographs of the artist, pairs of Nikes, offerings for Baltimore-based artists, a Yankees fitted cap, and more. This altar is a small glimpse into the practice that centers and grounds Texas Isaiah's life and work. Both works explore how Texas Isaiah has extended notions of worship, prayer, remembrance, and the importance of paying homage to the land and fellow artists.

Charles Mason III

blocked them, but couldn't stop the growth 3, 2021, Oil stick, acrylic, paper, pastel, Courtesy of the artist

Damon Davis

Cracks XIX (EGO), 2022, Concrete and homegrown crystals, Courtesy of the artist

The sharp edges of crystals shimmer and form a protective layer over the concrete sculpture of the artist's face. A material that could be seen as unremarkable as the sidewalk becomes precious when covered with the icy flash of luxury. The accumulation of adornment obscures the figure's face and references the desire for justifying one's worth for social acceptance. Born in East St. Louis, Missouri, Damon Davis has characterized adornment as a form of ascension or transcendence: "You come from poverty and put things on to prove you are not poor."

Maxwell Alexandre

I saw things I imagined, 2020, Liquid shoe polish on brown kraft paper, Zabłudowicz Collection
In a palette of browns and gold, musicians perform and crowd surf in a sea of fans, many of whom bask in the energy of the concert and raise their glowing phones as an act of worship. Brazilian artist Maxwell Alexandre created this work as part of his Pardo é Papel series. Pardo (Portuguese for “brown”) is the government census term for citizens of Afro-Brazilian heritage or mixed race. Using everyday materials like kraft paper and shoe polish, Alexandre emphasized the brown skin tones of these concert goers while also elevating rap music as form of ascension and the concert as a near-religious experience.

John Edmonds

Ascent, 2018, Inkjet print on silk, Courtesy of the artist
The image of a figure seen from behind wearing a white durag and a white fur coat is printed on a delicate silk surface, which moves subtly with passing air currents. This ethereal work is part of John Edmonds’ DuRags series, which complicates dominant views of Black masculinity by presenting sitters adorned in durags in instances of vulnerability, majesty, and delicacy. Everything about *Ascent* is soft. The head and shoulders of the figure seem to rise out of the blurred image of the coat, which suggests feathers or a cloud. Here, the silky material of the durag has transcended its utilitarian function to become a headdress, a helmet, a crown.

Robert Hodge

Promise You Will Sing About Me, 2019, Mixed media collage constructed of canvas, enamel and acrylic paint, household items (shelves, books, a vase, artificial flowers, a model ship, a globe, fabric, reclaimed paper, newsprint, hemp thread), Courtesy of the artist and David Shelton Gallery, Houston
QR-CODE: *Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst* by Kendrick Lamar.

Kahlil Joseph

m.A.A.d., 2014, Two-channel video (color, sound), 15:26 min., The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles Gift of the artist
m.A.A.d. is a lush, contemporary portrait of Compton, California. Located just outside Los Angeles, the city is the hometown of Pulitzer-prize-winning hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar (born 1987). As the camera glides through predominantly Black neighborhoods, it pauses to capture everyday moments—a car in motion, a marching band, a barbershop—suffused with creativity, joy, and sadness. The video is set to songs from Lamar’s revered 2012 album *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, which narrates a young man’s redemption, the arrival of a new voice in emceeing, and the rebirth of Los Angeles hip hop. Here, filmmaker Kahlil Joseph shifted attention from the album’s main protagonist, allowing a range of characters to paint a picture of daily life in Compton. Please give your eyes time to adjust as you enter this darkened space.
Visitor Advisory: Explicit Content. This video includes depictions of violence, racial stereotypes, and sexual content.

LANGUAGE

Hip hop is intrinsically an art form about language: the visual language of graffiti, a musical language that includes scratching and sampling, and, of course, the written and spoken word. An emcee calls to the crowd with “Let me hear you say...” and orders language to a rhythm. Call-and-response chants, followed by rap rhymes and lyrics overlaid on tracks, form the foundations of hip-hop music. In addition to the poetry of music, one of the most recognizable markers of hip hop is

graffiti. Since the 1970s, graffiti writers have colored city trains, overpasses, and walls with vibrant hues of spray paint. Many writers sign their works with recognizable “tags.” Their exploration takes the recognizable shapes of letters and numbers and pushes their forms to—and beyond—the limit of legibility.

Some messages are meant for anyone to understand, while others are coded in references, technologies, or forms that require insider knowledge, asserting the right not to be universally understood.

How do you read the language of hip hop in these works?

José Parlá

Coral Way, Alive Five, 2015, Acrylic, oil, ink, collage, fabric, and plaster on wood, Collection of the artist

Layers of paint and plaster cover wood to create a work that resembles a graffitied wall transplanted from the street. The sculpture is part of a series that references neighborhoods in Miami, Florida—in this work, the neighborhood of Coral Way. Here, complex layers suggest the many ways people make their mark on a city: graffiti writers paint on walls, posters get pasted up or pulled down, nicks to concrete add texture and dimension. While this work draws on José Parlá’s experiences with graffiti, a pillar of hip hop, its upright slab-like form also references mid-20th-century minimalism and abstraction. Born in Miami to Cuban parents, Parlá has spoken of his practice as “erasing the hyphen” in the designation “Cuban- American” to bridge histories, spaces, and politics.

Julie Mehretu

Six Bardos: Transmigration, 2018, 2-panel, 32-color aquatint, The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

This print’s complex mapping of layered lines, marks, and colors calls to mind a wall dense with graffiti. One of the original pillars of hip hop, graffiti has challenged mainstream notions of public space, private property, what is considered art, and what is considered a crime. In creating this work, which is part of a sweeping six-part series, Julie Mehretu drew inspiration from political graffiti and calligraphy, as well as her own upbringing, particularly her father’s work in geography. For the artist, making her mark to make space is vital: “My work is an insistence on being here. I am here, we are here, and we are in the building.”

Adam Pendleton

Untitled (WE ARE NOT), 2022, Silkscreen ink on canvas, Courtesy of Carmel Barasch Family Collection

Black letters hover over dripping white letters, the overwriting reminiscent of a tagged wall. The words “we,” “are,” and “not” appear but are obscured by further marks. Artist Adam Pendleton’s *Black Dada Manifesto* guides much of his work. The manifesto borrows both from Dadaism, the artistic movement associated with artists during World War I (1914–1918), and writer Amiri Baraka’s (1934–2014) poem *Black Dada Nihilismus*. Both the Dadaists and the Black Arts Movement, with which Baraka was associated, operated within the framework of the systemic violence of their respective political moments. In its refusal to be easily understood, its suggestion and withholding of meaning, Pendleton’s work explores both the power and limits of what language can address.

Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit and Unangaḵ)

Tsu Héidei Shugaxtutaan 1, 2006, Single-channel video (black and white, sound), 4:37 min.,
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York City

Tsu Héidei Shugaxtutaan 2, 2006, Single-channel video (black and white, sound), 4:07 min.,
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York City

In this pair of videos, Nicholas Galanin used dance and music to remix cultural references and bridge the past and present. In the first video, the fluid movements of break-dancer David Elsewhere (born 1979) animate a white room and rhythmically align with a song that is sung in Tlingit, the language of the Indigenous people from the regions presently known as Southeast Alaska and Western Canada. In the second video, Tlingit dancer Dan Littlefield performs a Raven Dance to a pulsating electro- dub soundscape.

Galanin wrote, “Culture cannot be contained as it unfolds. My art enters this stream at many different points, looking backwards, looking forwards, generating its own sound and motion.” The Tlingit titles, *Tsu Héidei Shugaxtutaan I* and *II*, translate to “We will again open this container of wisdom that has been left in our care.” This phrase is also sung in the video.

RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ (Rammellzee)

Alphabet (pages 1, 2, and 5 from series of 11), ca. 1986, Felt-tip pen and pencil on paper, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Gilbert B. and Lila Silverman Instruction Drawing Collection, Detroit, 2018

The artist, performer, and philosopher RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ retooled written language as a means of exercising and circulating power. He sought to obscure—and by doing so, repurpose—the Roman alphabet through what he called the “armanamentation” of letters and a system he later called IKONOKLAST PANZERISM.

His approach—or, in his words, “correction”—to the influential wild style form of graffiti writing enables each letter to perform a highly specific kind of work. These intricate letterforms reference a philosophy that commingles the street with the galactic. RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ wrote of the letter C, on view nearby, “C Structure knowledge incomplete O, 60 (point- point+) missing from cipher=C, representing third letter.

Since O is broken, C cancels out itself because its outline does, not go around and come around. In this formation XC equals finance.” Some languages do not exist to be readily understood.

Gajin Fujita

Ride or Die, 2005, Spray paint, paint marker, paint stick, gold and white gold leaf on wood panels, Collection of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri, Bebe and Crosby Kemper Collection, Museum purchase, Enid and Crosby Kemper and William T. Kemper Acquisitions Fund, 2005.39.01

A Japanese Edo-era (1603–1867) samurai rides into battle on horseback, assailed by an onslaught of piercing arrows. An L.A. Dodgers logo is emblazoned on his otherwise traditional helmet, adorned with golden antlers. Perhaps referencing the Edo-era printmaker’s mark, a variety of graffiti tags engulf the rider.

Deeply informed by his years as an active member of two graffiti crews, Gajin Fujita often combines historic Japanese art with the street culture of Los Angeles, California. In works like *Ride or Die*, Fujita’s commingling of the visual language of the street with historical Japanese art serves as a unique mode of activism and free-form creative expression.

Ernest Shaw Jr.

I Had A Dream I Could Buy My Way To Heaven (Portrait of Ota Benga), 2022, Pastel pencil, oil pastel, graffiti paint marker on paper, Courtesy the artist

Troy Chew II

As Seen on TV, 2021, Oil on canvas with augmented reality, Courtesy of Altman Siegel Gallery

Fahamu Pecou

Real Negus Don't Die, 2013, Graphite and acrylic on paper, Collection of Uri Vaknin and Taufiq Adam

A figure looks down at the portrait of Tupac Shakur (1971–1996) on his T-shirt, paying homage to the hip-hop artist whose life and career was cut short. This work is a part of the series titled *Real Negus Don't Die*, in which Atlanta-based artist Fahamu Pecou used the Rest in Peace T-shirt, a popular mourning object in Black and Latinx working-class communities, to center departed luminaries such as Shakur, activist Fred Hampton (1948–1969), record producer J Dilla (1974–2006), and writer Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965), among others.

Shirt

Don't Talk To Me About No Significance Of Art, 2021, Inkjet on canvas, Courtesy of the artist
In this text-based work, 32 contemporary artists and thinkers considered if a rap song can be called significant art. The artist, Shirt, based the concept and design on a 1922 issue of the experimental arts journal *Manuscripts (MSS)*, where contributors offered opinions on the medium of photography. The original prompt—"Can a photograph have the significance of art"—largely elicited responses from white, male artists and influential cultural theorists, most of whom notably were not photographers. Shirt's work invites you to re-evaluate the hierarchies of the art world and to consider who gets to be called an artist, what is considered art, and who gets to decide.

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RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ (Rammellzee) und K-Rob mit Jean-Michel Basquiat

Beat Bop, "1983, reprinted 2001", Cover sleeve for 12-inch vinyl record, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Committee on Prints and Illustrated Books Fund, 2013

Jean-Michel Basquiat's distinct crown, bones, and lightning bolt imagery fill the cover sleeve of this album. The record, which is composed of two versions of the song *Beat Bop*, was released on Basquiat's label, Tartown, at a time when the underground scene of downtown New York was brimming with artists experimenting with the musical and visual languages of jazz, punk, funk, hip hop, graffiti, and popular culture.

Vocalists K-Rob and Rammellzee collaborated with Basquiat for the track. With such lyrics as "I'm the mellow D down with the funky sound/ That can mace your brain with my diamond studded

crown," *Beat Bop* stands out as an early example of hip hop, influencing artists from Cypress Hill (founded 1988) to Wu-Tang Clan (founded 1992).

QR-CODE: *Beat Bop* by K-Rob and RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ.

Abbey Williams

Overture, 2020, HD single-channel video (color, sound), 4:18 min., Courtesy of the artist

In this video, Abbey Williams spliced together footage of flowers in bloom and the title credits from the opening sequence of the 1964 film musical *My Fair Lady*. Williams superimposed black bars over the text to suggest the redaction of language. Sexually explicit lyrics by women hip-hop artists such as Khia (born 1976), Nicki Minaj (born 1982), and Princess Nokia (born 1992) float over the bars in an elaborate script. These bars expand, eventually blotting out the flowers entirely to form a black screen. By displacing the idealized femininity embedded in the *My Fair Lady* narrative, Williams critiqued white-centered definitions of what it means to be "lady-like" and recentered certain kinds of Black femininity instead.

Visitor Advisory: Explicit Content. This video includes depictions of violence, racial stereotypes, and sexual content.

LA II (Angel Ortiz)

Untitled (Large Multicolored Teardrop Vase), 2009, Acrylic, marker, and spray paint on ceramic vase, Courtesy of Woodward Gallery, New York

Kahlil Robert Irving

Arches & standards (Stockley ain't the only one) Meissen Matter: STL, 2018, Glazed and unglazed ceramic, luster, enamel, personally constructed and vintage decals, Courtesy of the artist

Caught within what looks like concrete, the artist has nestled images of cigarette butts and corporate logos among patterned ceramics that reference Meissen, the famed German porcelain first produced in the 1700s. Look closer for images of Jason Stockley (born 1981), a St. Louis, Missouri, police officer who was acquitted in 2017 for the 2011 murder of Anthony Lamar Smith (1987-2011), along with other images of protests of police violence. Here, the artist collapsed contemporary acts of state violence with porcelain, a material that is entangled with histories of colonialism. The work sits on a pedestal wrapped in images that reflect on Black life, death, remembrance, celebration, and survival.