

**THE** HIP HOP & CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
**CULTURE**

Large Print Labels

# THE **HIP HOP & CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY** CULTURE

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 profound 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 white dominance. In the art museum, however, "culture" has historically meant a Europe-focused set of aesthetics, values, and traditions sustained through gatekeeping.

The works in these galleries explore where "culture" and "The Culture" collide through six themes: Language, Brand, Adornment, Tribute, Pose, and Ascension. Language, whether in words, music, or graffiti, explores hip hop's strategies of subversion. 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. Pose celebrates how hip hop speaks through the body and its gestures. Ascension explores mortality, spirituality, and the transcendent. Endlessly inventive and multi-faceted, hip hop, and the art it inspires, will continue to dazzle and empower.

## 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 distinctive "tags." Their exploration takes the recognizable shapes of letters and numbers and pushes their forms to—and beyond—the limit of legibility.

Hip hop artists convey messages for anyone to understand, while they code others 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?**



*Front Image:* Chinese graffiti artist Chose tagging during a Puma event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the classic Puma suede shoe, Guangzhou, China, 2017. Photo by Martha Cooper



*Reverse Image:* Lady Pink with her first canvas, 1981.  
Photo by Martha Cooper

**Language Section Graffiti**  
2024

**WHEN** in tribute to the artist RÁPES

Curated by DSGN CLLCTV, Cincinnati, Ohio

## **Adam Pendleton**

(American, b. 1984, Richmond, VA)

### **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 creative output. The manifesto borrows both from Dadaism, an absurdist artistic movement active 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. Pendleton's art refuses to be easily understood as it explores the power and limits of what language can address.

## **Jean-Michel Basquiat**

(American, 1960–1988, New York City)

### **With Strings Two**

1983

acrylic and oil stick on canvas

The Broad Art Foundation

Here, Jean-Michel Basquiat paid homage to jazz musician Charlie “Bird” Parker (1920–1955), referenced frequently throughout the artist’s works. Basquiat included letters from Parker’s name encased by a blue box, and below, the artist wrote the title of Parker’s 1946 single “Ornithology,” struck through in red. An artist’s reverence for iconic Black figures also occurs in hip hop: name-dropping is a way for musicians to pay respect to those who have come before and created “the culture,” and to align themselves with those creators.

## **Gordon Parks**

(American, b. 1922 Fort Scott, KS;  
d. 2006, New York City)

## **A Great Day in Hip Hop**

1998

photograph

Courtesy of The Gordon Parks Foundation,  
Pleasantville, NY

In 1998, 177 people gathered on the steps of a brownstone in Harlem, New York, to celebrate the impact and evolution of hip hop. This photograph documents its exponential growth and unprecedented movement into mainstream culture.

Commissioned by the music publication *XXL*, *A Great Day in Hip Hop* is an homage to Art Kane's (1925–1995) 1958 photograph, *A Great Day in Harlem*, which commemorates legendary jazz figures. By referencing Kane's popular image, Parks' work invites you to consider the evolution of Black sound from jazz to hip hop.



Art Kane (American, 1925–1995), *A Great Day in Harlem*, August 12, 1958;  
© Art Kane Archive

## **Hip Hop in Cincinnati Scribble Jam (1996 – 2009)**

Born out of a magazine dedicated to graffiti writing culture, Scribble Jam became one of the most prominent hip hop festivals in the Midwest and the country. From its start in 1996, co-founders "Fat" Nick Accurso, Jason Brunson, and DJ Mr. Dibbs transformed this small backyard party into a world-renowned hip hop festival through blood, sweat, and tears.

Scribble Jam served as a hub of hip hop culture, and its competitions became highlights of the festival, incorporating the five elements of hip hop: graffiti, DJ, emcee, B-Boy, and beatbox. Staying true to these fundamentals and to its grass roots origins, Scribble Jam did not accept corporate sponsorship.

Over the course of its 13 years (1996–2009), national artists such as KRS-One, Atmosphere, Living Legends, Eminem, Juice, MF Doom, and Rhymefest graced the Scribble Jam stages. The festival also did much for Cincinnati and Ohio hip hop culture by giving these artists a national platform. Prominent Ohio artists who enriched the stages included Mood, Five Deez, Holmskillit,

Blueprint, Lone Catalysts, and Mhz.

The Scribble Jam years left a strong legacy of hip hop culture in Cincinnati and represent the strong relationships between both.

## **Gajin Fujita**

(American, b. 1972, Los Angeles)

### **Ride or Die**

2005

spray paint, paint marker, paint stick, gold and whitegold leaf on wood panels

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri, Bebe and Crosby Kemper Collection, Museum purchase, Enid and Crosby Kemper and William T. Kemper Acquisition Fund

2005.39.01

A Japanese Edo-era (1603–1867) samurai rides into battle on horseback, assailed by an onslaught of piercing arrows. Emblazoned on his otherwise traditional helmet adorned with golden antlers is a Los Angeles Dodgers logo. Perhaps referencing the Edo-era printmaker's mark, various 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 visual language of street culture of Los Angeles, California. In works

like *Ride or Die*, conjoining the two serves as a unique mode of activism and free-form creative expression.

## **RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ (Rammellzee)**

(American, 1960–2010, Far Rockaway, NY)

### **Alphabet (pages 6, 8, and 10 from series of 11)**

circa 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 “arman-amentation” 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.

## **Julie Mehretu**

(American, b. 1970, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

### **Six Bardos: Transmigration**

2018

aquatint

Gemini G.E.L.

This print's complex mapping of layered lines, marks, and colors calls to mind a wall dense with graffiti. One of the original pillars or elements 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 these panels, which are part of a sweeping six-part series, Mehretu drew inspiration from political graffiti and calligraphy and her upbringing, particularly her father's professional background 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."

## Alvaro Barrington

(Venezuelan, b. 1983, Caracas, Venezuela)

### They have They Can't

2021

hessian (burlap) 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." Sewn in yarn on burlap, the pointed lyrics 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 Shakur in this work is the large, emblazoned rose that nods to his autobiographical poem "The Rose That Grew from Concrete."

Of Grenadian and Haitian descent and raised in a West Indian neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, Alvaro Barrington admires such rappers as Shakur and DMX (1970–2021), who told "the story of the [U.S.] war on drugs as a war against working-class Black communities."

## Shirt

(American, b. 1983, New York City)

## 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 whether a rap song can be called significant art. The artist, Shirt, based the concept and design on a 1922 issue of the experimental art 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 notably not photographers. Shirt invites you to reevaluate the art world's hierarchies and consider who gets to be called an artist, what is considered art, and who gets to decide.

## **Kahlil Robert Irving**

(American, b. 1992, San Diego)

### **Arches & standards**

**(Stockley ain't the only one)**

**Meissen Matter: STL and pedestal**

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. The wares reference Meissen, the famed German porcelain first produced in the 1700s. Look closer for images of Jason Stockley (b. 1981), a St. Louis, Missouri, police officer acquitted in 2017 for the 2011 murder of Anthony Lamar Smith (1987–2011), along with other scenes of protests against police brutality. Here, the artist collapsed contemporary acts of state violence with porcelain, a material entangled with histories of colonialism. The work sits on a pedestal wrapped in ephemera reflecting on Black life, death, remembrance, celebration, and survival.

**Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit and Unangax̂ )**  
(American, b. 1979, Sitka, AK)

**Tsu Héidei Shugaxtutaan 1**  
2006

single-channel video (black and white, sound)  
duration: 4 minutes, 37 seconds, looped

**Tsu Héidei Shugaxtutaan 2**  
2006

single-channel video (black and white, sound)  
duration: 4 minutes, 7 seconds, looped  
Both works courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum  
Gallery, New York

In this pair of videos, Nicholas Galanin uses dance and music to remix cultural references and bridge the past and present. In the first video, the fluid movements of breakdancer David Elsewhere (b. 1979) animate a white room and rhythmically align with a song 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 Lit-

tlefield 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 1* and *2*, 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.

## **Troy Chew II**

(American, b. 1992, Los Angeles)

### **As seen on TV**

2021

oil on canvas with augmented reality  
Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel,  
San Francisco

## **LA II (Angel Ortiz)**

(American, b. 1967, New York City)

## **Untitled (Large Multicolored Teardrop Vase)**

2009

acrylic, marker, and spray paint on ceramic vase  
Courtesy of Woodward Gallery, New York

**Shinique Smith**  
**(American, b. 1971, Baltimore)**

**Shortysugarhoneybabydon'tbedistracted**  
2002

acrylic on vinyl

Collection of the artist, courtesy of the artist,  
Shinique Smith

Dynamically flowing across this sheet of vinyl are swirls of red and white acrylic paint. Shinique Smith's work references the visually abundant and gestural street art of the 1980s and 1990s and the mid-20th-century Abstract Expressionist tradition that pushed paint to the very edge canvas.

In her youth, Smith wrote graffiti around her hometown of Baltimore. She explains: "Graffiti still influences my work, but in a nostalgic way, reminding me of...the brash, fearless way you have as a teenager. Creating art re-creates that energy for me."

## **José Parlá**

(American, b. 1973, Miami, FL)

### **Coral Way, Alive Five**

2015

acrylic, oil, ink, collage, fabric, and plaster on wood  
Collection of the artist

Paint and plaster cover wood to recreate a graffitied wall transplanted from the street. The sculpture is part of a series referencing neighborhoods in Miami, Florida—in this work, the neighborhood of Coral Way. Here, the 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 example draws on Parlá's experiences with graffiti, one of hip hop's five pillars or elements, its vertical, 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.

# Abbey Williams

(American, b. 1971, New York City)

## Overture

2020

HD single-channel video (color, sound) duration: 4 minutes, 18 seconds, looped

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 (b. 1976), Nicki Minaj (b. 1982), and Princess Nokia (b. 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 critiques white-centered definitions of what it means to be “lady-like” and recenters certain kinds of Black femininity instead.

**Rozeal**

(American, b. 1966, Washington, D.C.)

**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

## 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?**



*Front Image:* ARCHBOY, showing St. Louis rapper Smino in Los Angeles, CA, November 8, 2018. Photo by Curtis Taylor Jr.



*Reverse Image:* Run backstage with fan in New Orleans, Raising Hell Tour, 1986 (printed 2003). Photo by Ricky Powell, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture © Ricky Powell

# **Brand Section Graffiti**

2024

## **2KEWL & AKTOE**

Curated by DSGN CLLCTV, Cincinnati, Ohio

## **Larry W. Cook**

(American, b. 1986, Landover, MD)

### **Picture Me Rollin'**

2012

single-channel video (color, sound) duration: 1 minute, 43 seconds, looped

Courtesy of the artist

A black Lamborghini spins in circles, cheered on by men in white T-shirts and medallion necklaces. Larry W. Cook reused a clip from the 2000 music video "Get Your Roll On" by the rap group Big Tymers (est. circa 1997), replacing the audio with a version of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1929–1968) "I Have a Dream" speech. The civil rights leader's words have 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."

## **Jordan Casteel**

(American, b. 1989, Denver)

### **Fendi**

2018

oil on canvas

Private Collection, New York

An unidentified figure riding the subway holds bags covered in Fendi logos in their lap. Despite the symbols of the Italian fashion house, 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.

In her figurative work, 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.”

# Stan Douglas

(Canadian, b. 1960, Vancouver)

## ISDN

2022

two-channel video (color, sound)

duration: 6 hours, 41 minutes, 28 seconds

(video variations), looped

duration: 82 hours, 2 minutes, 52 seconds

(musical variations), looped

Courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro, and

David Zwirner

Two screens showcase a pair of performers, one in London and another in Cairo. They take turns delivering freestyle rap verses in English and Arabic transmitted through ISDN, a technology conceived in the 1980s to send digital audio over a phone line.

According to the artist, this back-and-forth, call-and-response reflects global interconnectedness: "The idea of having this endless music is to say that when you do have this cross-fertilization between cultures, the possibilities are endless." Both pairs of artists use the language of rap to explore systemic

social issues and ideas of race and class that connect them across continents. This work underscores that hip hop, transnational yet rooted in the African Diaspora, is an undeniable global force and that, despite its enormous commercial appeal, continues to adapt to the local conditions under which it is made.

*ISDN* is one of Stan Douglas' "recombinant" works in which dialogue, soundtrack, and imagery recombine and change, often over a prolonged period. You are welcome to enter the work at any point.

## **Kudzanai Chiurai**

(South African, b. 1981,  
Harare, Zimbabwe)

### **The Minister of Enterprise**

2009

Ultrachrome ink on photo fibre paper

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 seen among 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 depicts 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.

**Luis Gispert**

(American, b. 1972, Jersey City)

**Louis Uluru**

2012

chromogenic print

Courtesy of Moran Moran Gallery

**Jayson Musson**

(American, b. 1977, New York City)

**Knowledge of God**

2015

mercerized cotton on stretched linen

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

# **Rashaad Newsome**

(American, b. 1979, New Orleans)

## **Power and Periphery (NOLA)**

2012

collage in customized frame

Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, New York

## **Daniel “Dapper Dan” Day for Gucci** (American, b. 1944, New York City)

### **Guccissima Leather Down Jacket** Spring/Summer 2018

lamb leather, polyamide, and 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 produced custom-made clothing out of existing luxury stock. In the 1980s and 1990s, he created iconic looks for artists such as Eric B. & Rakim (est. 1986), LL Cool J (b. 1968), and Salt-N-Pepa (est. 1985). As his clients' fortunes rose, so did his visibility—high-end fashion houses filed lawsuits, and his store closed. When, in 2017, Gucci created a mink bomber jacket suspiciously similar to one by Dapper Dan, 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 from expensive brands to make something unique questions the notion of the "original" and underlines the uneasy relationship between symbols of affluence and those they deliberately exclude.

## **Sheila Rashid**

(American, b.1988, Chicago)

### **Overalls**

2016, recreated in 2023

gabardine, copper oxide buttons, and rivets  
Courtesy of the artist

### **Chance the Rapper for New Era**

(American, b. 1993, Chicago)

### **Chance 3 New Era Cap**

2022

fabric, plastic, and stickers

The Baltimore Museum of Art: Museum Purchase

During the promotion of his 2016 *Coloring Book* album, Chance the Rapper (b. 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, which he wore at many major public events. The look visualized the joy and play in

*Coloring Book's* sound.

For this exhibition, Rashid reproduced the overalls from Chance the Rapper's 2016 appearance on the television show Saturday Night Live. The ensemble also includes the baseball cap worn for the performance.

**Cross Colours by Carl Jones and  
Thomas "TJ" Walker Jones**

(American, b. 1953, Memphis; b. 1960,  
Toomsaba, MS)

**Denim Bucket Hat, worn by Cardi B  
during 2018 Grammy's Performance  
1991**

denim cotton

Cross Colours Archive

## **Travis Scott by Air Jordan** (American, b. 1992, Houston)

### **Cactus Jack Air Jordan 1** 2019

leather, suede, rubber, and  
cotton  
Private Collection

In these retro high-top brown-and-pink suede sneakers, the designer reverses the ever-recognizable Nike swooshes—the tail faces the toe rather than the heel. This feature is just one of the ways that rapper Travis Scott's partnership with Nike Air Jordan breaks away from conventional 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 hides in the collar.

This collaboration has fueled record-breaking engagement with Nike. It 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.

## **Hassan Hajjaj**

(Moroccan, b. 1961, Larache, Morocco)

## **Cardi B Unity**

2017 / 1438 (Gregorian / Hijri)

metallic Lambda print on 3 mm dibond in a  
poplar sprayed-white frame with HH green  
tea boxes with butterfly

Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

## **Tariku Shiferaw**

(Ethiopian, b. 1983, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

### **Money (Cardi B)**

2018

spray paint, wood, price tags, and screws

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.,  
New York

Tariku Shiferaw painted a large X and various symbols on this box-like object. The open wood slats suggest a shipping pallet used to move goods and commodities and 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.

**Please do not touch.**

## **Vivienne Westwood**

(British, b. 1941, Cheshire, England;  
d. 2022, London)

## **Buffalo Hat**

1984

felt

Courtesy of Arby's, Inspire Brands, Inc., Atlanta, GA

This wide-brimmed, oversized hat was famously worn by musician Pharrell Williams (b. 1973) at the 2014 Grammy Awards. It first debuted in the fall 1982 collection of legendary fashion designer Vivienne Westwood. Her 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 the movement's 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 movie sets and the streets of

New York City, Williams repopularized the buffalo hat. His use of the accessory for his brand recalled the era of classic hip hop and became a unique signifier of the artist.



*Left: Pharrell Williams performs onstage during *The Night That Changed America: A Grammy Salute to the Beatles* at the Los Angeles Convention Center on January 27, 2014, in Los Angeles, California; Kevork Djansezian / Getty Images North America / Getty Images.*

*Above: Malcolm McLaren (front, center), rappers The World's Famous Supreme Team, and models wearing items from designer Vivienne Westwood's "Buffalo" collection, London, February 1983; Photo by Dave Hogan / Hulton Archive / Getty Images*

## **Malcolm McLaren**

(British, b. 1946, London;  
d. 2010, Bellinzona, Switzerland)

## **Duck Rock**

1983

12-inch vinyl record and paper cover sleeve  
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Museum Purchase

**Zéh Palito**

(Brazilian, b. 1991, Itaqui, Brazil)

**It was all a dream**

2022

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist, Simões de Assis and  
Luce Gallery

This artwork has been generously supported by  
Dr. & Mrs. Robert H Collins.

## 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 hip hop culture can resist Eurocentric ideals of beauty and challenge concepts of taste and decorum.

**What story does your style tell?**



*Front Image: LL Cool J, London. 1986 Photo by Richard Bellia*



*Reverse Image: Miss Kam, 2021. Photo by Philip Muriel*

# **Adornment Section Graffiti**

2024

**The K & KONQR (Front Graffiti)**

**FRANK & UFOREK (Reverse Graffiti)**

Curated by DSGN CLLCTV, Cincinnati, Ohio

## Wilmer Wilson IV

(American, b. 1989, Richmond, VA)

### RID UM

2018

staples and pigment print on wood  
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett  
Gallery, NYC

In this work, Wilmer Wilson IV rephotographed and enlarged a party flier depicting three figures dressed for a night out. Wilson's laborious process—affixing hundreds of staples to plywood—is an effort “to cope with the impermanence of things—like bodies, but also the fragments of everyday social life.”

*RID UM* 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 complete picture 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 photograph.

**Derrick Adams**

(American, b. 1970, Baltimore)

**Style Grid 10**

2019

acrylic paint and graphite on digital photograph  
Courtesy of Derrick Adams Studio

# **Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola**

(American, b. 1991, Columbia, MO)

## **CAMOUFLAGE #105 (Metropolis)**

2020

durags and acrylic on wood panel

Keith Rivers Collection

Anthony Olubunmi Akinbola cut, stretched, stitched, and collaged black durags (also spelled "do-rags") into a shimmering composition in this four-panel work from his CAMOUFLAGE series. Worn as fashion statements in their own right, these flexible headscarves also offer practical protection for Black hair. The artist flattened the durags to transform these recognizable objects into patterns that absorb and reflect light. The all-over movement and solid black surface created by the artist brings abstract monochrome painting into conversation with the culture of Black adornment.

## **Lauren Halsey**

(American, b. 1987, Los Angeles)

### **auntie fawn on tha 6**

2021

synthetic hair on wood

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 (b. 1974), Lil' Mo (b. 1978), Blaque (est. 1999), and TLC (est. 1990). Lauren Halsey creates works that celebrate the everyday world of her neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. This vibrant example celebrates synthetic hair as a bold form of adornment within Black communities and hair styling as an art form in its own right.

## **Dionne Alexander**

(American, b. 1967, Washington, DC)

### **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 Purple Wig from MTV VMAs**

1999, recreated 2022

synthetic 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 XXL Magazine**

May 2000

paper

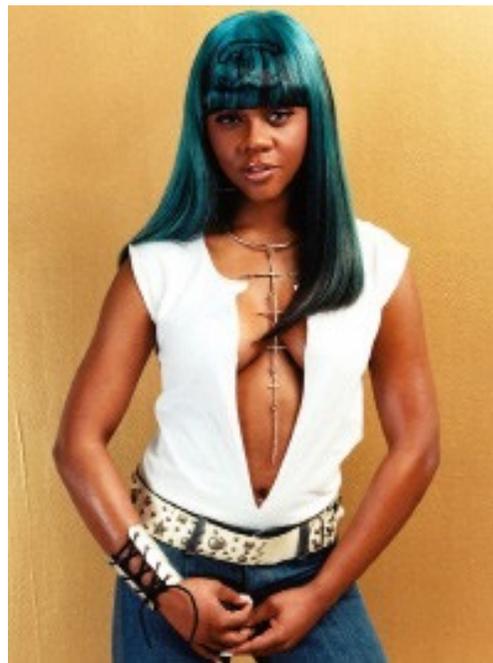
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Museum Purchase

## **Lil' Kim Interview Magazine**

November 1999

paper

The Baltimore Museum of Art: Museum Purchase



Left: Lil' Kim at the MTV Video Music Awards, New York, 1999;  
Kevin Mazur/Getty Images;

Right: Lil' Kim, for Manhattan File magazine, 2001;  
Photo by Danielle Levitt

Provocative lyrics, monochromatic outfits, and vibrant wigs adorned with luxury brand logos defined rapper Lil' Kim's (b. 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 musical artists such as Mary J. Blige (b. 1971), Lauryn Hill (b. 1975), and Missy Elliott (b. 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.

**Murjoni Merriweather**

(American, b. 1996, Temple Hills, MD)

**Z E L L A**

2022

ceramic and hand-braided synthetic hair

Courtesy of the artist ©mvrjoni

**Please do not touch**

## **Robert Pruitt**

(American, b. 1975, Houston)

### **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 intertwines 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 transatlantic slave trade from the western coast of Africa to the eastern shores of the Americas, giving the glittering links an ominous significance.

## **Deana Lawson**

(American, b. 1979, Rochester, NY)

### **Nation**

2018

pigment-based inkjet print 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."

**Megan Lewis**

(American, b. 1989, Baltimore)

**Fresh Squeezed Lemonade**

2022

oil and acrylic on fabric

Courtesy of the artist

**Hank Willis Thomas**

(American, b. 1976, Plainfield, NJ)

**Black Power**

2006

chromogenic print, digital exposure

Barrett Barrera Projects

## **Bruno Baptistelli**

(Brazilian, b. 1985, São Paulo, Brazil)

### **Memento**

original cast 2020–2022; this cast 2023

gold grills

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. By mounting and covering the grill with a vitrine, the artist treats gold teeth with reverence. The title of this work reinforces this notion, evoking the phrase *memento mori* (Latin for “remember that you must die”).

Worn by hip hop originators such as Slick Rick (b. 1965) and celebrated in songs like Nelly’s (b. 1974) 2005 single “Grillz,” gilded teeth are a popular form of adornment in hip hop. The gold signifies an accumulation of wealth and refuses the Eurocentric ideal of an unadorned white smile.

**Miguel Luciano**

(Puerto Rican, b. 1972,  
San Juan, Puerto Rico)

**Plátano Pride**

2006

chromogenic photograph

Courtesy of the artist

## **Miguel Luciano**

(Puerto Rican, b. 1972,  
San Juan, Puerto Rico)

## **Pure Plantainum**

2006

polyurethane encased in platinum with sterling silver in plexiglass with synthetic fiber  
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 encases 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 refer-

enced 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.

**Yvonne Osei**

(German, b. 1990, Hamburg)

## **EXTENSIONS**

2018

single-channel video (color, sound) duration:  
6 minutes, 4 seconds, looped

Courtesy of the artist and Bruno David Gallery

Filming in 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 (b. 1970) 1990s looks to A\$AP Rocky's (b. 1988) current style, braided hair can serve as another political form of self-presentation.

## **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 contributes 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 art form has become a touchstone for artists of the 21st century. As visual artists trace its 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 background and preferences, questioning what is beautiful, who is iconic, and whose histories are valued.

**Who do you pay homage or respect to in your life?**



Front Image: "Wall Mural Tupac Shakur Live by the Gun" by Andre Charles, New York, 1997. Photo by Al Pereira, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture  
© Al Pereira



*Reverse Image: "The Hip Hop Mount Rushmore": Biggie, Tupac, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Eazy-E, Four Fingers of Def 4-finger ring by Johnny Nelson.  
Photo by Danita Bethea on model Aurora Anthony, courtesy Johnny Nelson*

# **Tribute Section Graffiti**

2024

## **The K & KONQR**

Curated by DSGN CLLCTV, Cincinnati, Ohio

**Jen Everett**

(American, b. 1981, Detroit)

**Unheard Sounds, Come Through:**

**Extended Mix**

2022

wooden speakers, boom box, cassette tapes, vinyl record sleeves, cassette player, vinyl photo sleeves, and transistor radios

Courtesy of the artist

## **Cross Colours by Carl Jones and Thomas "TJ" Walker**

(American, b. 1953, Memphis;  
b. 1960, Toomsuba, MS)

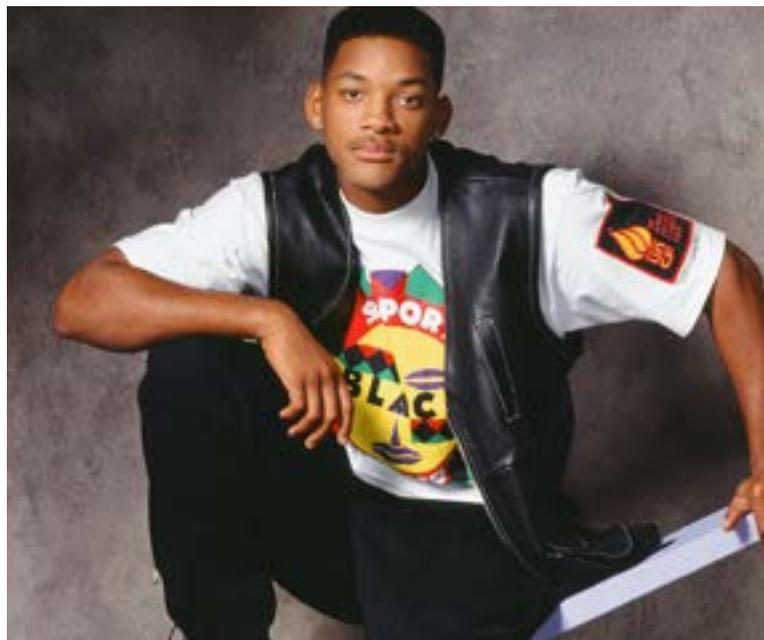
### **Color-Blocked Denim Ensemble with Hat** 1990–1992

cotton, acrylic, and wool  
Cross Colours Archive

The boxy cut of the jacket and tapered pants of this color-blocked denim ensemble is generous by design. The stiff material affects how one moves, stands, and walks—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 (b. 1968) wearing Cross Colours at the height of his youthful charm circulated the style into homes everywhere.



Will Smith in Cross Colours as the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, 1994;  
NBCU Photo Bank

**Derrick Adams**

(American, b. 1970, Baltimore)

**Heir to the Throne**

minted June 25, 2021

non-fungible token, HD  
duration: 11 min., looped  
Private Collection

**Roberto Lugo**

(American, b. 1981, Philadelphia)

**Street Shrine 1:**

**A Notorious Story (Biggie)**

2019

glazed ceramic

Collection of Peggy Scott and David Teplitzky

This artwork has been generously supported by  
Dr. & Mrs. Robert H. Collins

## **Tschabalala Self**

(American, b. 1990, New York City)

### **Setta's Room 1996**

2022

solvent transfer, paper, acrylic, thread, and collaged painted canvas

Courtesy of 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. The artist, Tschabalala Self, based this work on recollections of her sister Princetta, who self acknowledges 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 to the artist, who credits it as a formative touchstone for her interest in how society situates the Black female body within contemporary Black culture.

**Shabez Jamal**

(American, b. 1992, St. Louis)

**Album Reconstruction No. 4**

**(After Kimberly)**

**Album Reconstruction No. 5 (After Inga)**

**Album Reconstruction No. 6**

**(After Katrina)**

2022

mixed media (oak, acrylic sheets, Polaroid images,  
chromogenic prints, and bronze photo corners)

Courtesy of the artist

# Carrie Mae Weems

(American, b. 1953, Portland, OR)

## Anointed

2017, printed 2023

archival pigment print

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Mary J. Blige (b. 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."

## **El Franco Lee II**

(American, b. 1985, Houston)

## **DJ Screw in Heaven**

2008

acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, Houston

Wearing a Fubu shirt and in the flow, DJ Screw (1971–2000) presides over his turntables. Fans and friends surround him in his home—an essential 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 interest in comic books to create a detailed tribute to the DJ in his element.

## **Alex de Mora**

(British, b. 1982, Frimley, England)

## **West Coast Tattoos**

2019, printed 2023

pigment-based inkjet print

## **Big Gee**

2019, printed 2023

pigment-based inkjet print

## **East Coast Tattoos**

2019, printed 2023

pigment-based inkjet print

All works courtesy of the artist and DMB

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

izes their global influence. The central photograph features Mongolian hip hop celebrity Big Gee (b. circa 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.

## **Maï Lucas**

(French, b. 1968, Paris)

## **Sté Strausz**

2002

archival pigment print

## **Oxmo Puccino**

2000

archival pigment print

Both works courtesy of the artist

French hip hop luminary Sté Strausz (b. 1977) confronts us with a bold and playful gaze. Oxmo Puccino (b. 1974) poses deadpan against an urban cityscape in a T-shirt that 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. As she says, it was a time when "no one really thought that the culture was going to become a major movement."

Today, France is the world's second-largest market

for hip hop, only behind the United States. Despite being a global phenomenon, hip hop is constantly adapting to express the specifics of style anywhere it flourishes.

**Ernest Shaw Jr.**

(American, b. 1969, Baltimore)

**I Had A Dream I Could Buy My Way To  
Heaven (Portrait of Ota Benga)**

2022

pastel pencil, oil pastel, and graffiti paint marker  
on paper

Courtesy of the artist

**Joyce J. Scott**

(American, b. 1948, Baltimore)

**Hip Hop Saints and Fallen Angels:**

**Da Brut**

2014

monotype

Courtesy of Goya Contemporary Gallery, Baltimore

## **Fahamu Pecou**

(American, b. 1975, New York City)

### **Real Negus Don't Die: Thug**

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 were cut short. This work is part of a 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. Others include activist Fred Hampton (1948–1969), record producer J Dilla (1974–2006), and writer Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965).

## **Wales Bonner**

(British, b. 1990, London)

## **Adidas**

(Herzogenaurach, Germany, est. 1949)

## **Lovers Tracktop**

Fall/Winter 2020

recycled polyester, spandex,  
acrylic, and wool

## **Wales Bonner Dub Tuxedo Trousers**

Fall/Winter 2020

polyester and cotton

All works courtesy of Wales Bonner

**adidas Originals by Pharrell Williams**  
(American, b. 1973, Virginia Beach, VA)

**Track Jacket**  
2013

leather with zipper  
Collection of Pharrell Williams

**Daniel "Dapper Dan" Day for Gucci**  
(American, b. 1944, New York City)

**Dapper Dan Tracksuit**  
2018

synthetic blend and wool  
Barrett Barrera Projects

**Baby Phat by Kimora Lee Simmons**  
(American, b. 1975, St. Louis)

**Tracksuit**  
circa 2000

cotton, spandex, rhinestones, zipper  
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Museum Purchase

**NIA JUNE, Kirby Griffin,  
and APoetNamedNate**

(American, b. 1995, Baltimore; b. 1988,  
Baltimore; b. 1994, Baltimore)

**The Unveiling of God / a love letter  
to my forefathers**  
2021

single-channel video (color, sound) duration:  
20 minutes, 7 seconds, looped  
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.

Countering narrow and destructive ideas of masculinity that are present—though not unchallenged—in hip hop, NIA JUNE, Kirby Griffin, and APoetNamedNate created an 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?"

**adidas Originals by Pharrell Williams**  
(American, b. 1973, Virginia Beach, VA)

**Track Jacket**  
2013

leather with zipper  
Collection of Pharrell Williams

## 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 specter 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 precariousness 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 artists use to process, grieve, and remember those lost.

**Pause and reflect on the lives and experiences amplified by the works on view.**



*Front Image:* A man displays a T-shirt tribute to rapper Biggie Smalls, a.k.a. The Notorious B.I.G., during the funeral procession route through Brooklyn, March 18, 1997. Photo by Jon Levy/AFP via Getty Images



*Reverse Image:* YG with a picture Nipsey Hussle at a BLM protest in Los Angeles, June 7, 2020. Photo by Tommy Oliver, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Tommy and Codie Oliver

**Ascension Section Graffiti**  
2024

**FRANK & UFOREK**

Curated by DSGN CLLCTV, Cincinnati, Ohio

## **Robert Hodge**

(American, b. 1979, Houston)

### **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, and hemp thread)

Courtesy of the artist and David Shelton Gallery, Houston

**Devan Shimoyama**

(American, b. 1989, Philadelphia)

**Cloud Break**

2022

Timberland boots, rhinestones, silk flowers,  
epoxy resin, and chain

Courtesy of the artist and Kavi Gupta Gallery

## **John Edmonds**

(American, b. 1989, Washington, DC)

### **Ascent**

2017

inkjet print on silk

Courtesy of the artist

This image of a figure seen from behind wearing a white durag and fur coat is printed on a delicate silk surface, which moves subtly with passing air currents. The ethereal work is part of John Edmonds' *DuRags* series. The artist 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 individual seem to rise out of the blurred coat, which suggests feathers or a cloud. Here, the silky material of the durag transcends its utilitarian function to become a headdress, a helmet, a crown.

## **Damon Davis**

(American, b. 1985, East St. Louis, IL)

### **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 obscures the figure's features and references the desire to justify one's worth for social acceptance.

Born in East St. Louis, Illinois, 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."

**Texas Isaiah and Ms. Boogie**  
(American, Texas Isaiah and  
Ms. Boogie, b. New York City)

**Pelada: Chapter II**  
2021

pigment-based inkjet print  
Courtesy of the artists

**Texas Isaiah**  
(American, b. New York City)

**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 trans-

formative 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, his baby pictures, pairs of Nikes, offerings for Baltimore-based artists, a New York Yankees baseball cap, and more. This altar is a small glimpse into the practice that centers and grounds Texas Isaiah's life and career.

Both works explore how Isaiah has extended notions of worship, prayer, remembrance, and the importance of paying homage to the land and fellow creatives.

## Caution

The videos in this gallery contain sequences of flashing lights and images. These occur for several seconds within the first minute and at the 6- and 11-minute marks.

## Kahlil Joseph

(American, b. 1981, Seattle)

### **m.A.A.d.**

2014

two-channel video (color, sound) duration:

15 minutes, 26 seconds, looped

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 (b. 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.

Set to songs from Lamar's revered 2012 album *good kid, m.A.A.d* 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.

## **Pose**

From the club to backyards and bedrooms, from online to on the street and on stage, the works in these galleries explore what someone'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 deemed 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 the body can communicate. 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?**



*Front Image:* Salt-N-Pepa (left to right: Sandra "Pepa" Denton, Deirdre "Spinderella" Roper, and Cheryl "Salt" James), New York, 1987.  
Photo by Janette Beckman/Getty Images



*Reverse Image:* David Banner and Ludacris at "Diamond in the Back" video shoot, Atlanta, 2004. Photo by Julia Beverly, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture  
© Julia Beverly/Ozone Magazine

# Pose Section Graffiti

2024

**2KEWL & AKTOE** (Front Graffiti)

**WHEN** in tribute to the artist RÁPES  
(Reverse Graffiti)

Curated by DSGN CLLCTV, Cincinnati, Ohio

## **Devin Allen**

(American, b. 1988, Baltimore)

### **You Can't Raid the Sun**

2020

pigment-based inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist

Composed like a class picture yet exuberant as a snapshot of friends, this portrait by Devin Allen documents hip hop artists and activists from Baltimore. The image references Gordon Parks' 1998 iconic photograph, *A Great Day in Hip Hop*, which was an homage to the historic 1958 photograph, *A Great Day in Harlem*, by Art Kane.

## **Nina Chanel Abney**

(American, b. 1982, Harvey, IL)

### **Untitled**

2022

collage on panel

Courtesy of the artist and Pace Prints

Amidst 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. The artist, Nina Chanel Abney, based this collage on the work she created as cover art for rapper Meek Mill's (b. 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?

## Various Artists

### Compilation of 16 CDs

1987–2022

Vinyl records from the collection of 70,000 records of “DJ Fly Guy” Flynn

Before music streaming services dominated the market, vinyl records, cassette tapes, and CD covers offered artists a way to communicate their vision to their audiences before they heard a single note. The crates of classic soul, funk, and R&B albums that DJs sampled from provide the beginnings of a hip hop aesthetic, and key samples from them form the backbone of hip hop’s musical canon, from The Isley Brothers’ *Greatest Hits* (sampled by Lil Wayne, Salt-N-Pepa, and NWA) to Babe Ruth’s *First Base* (sampled by Afrika Bambaataa, Doug E. Fresh, and Cypress Hill).

As you encounter this snapshot of hip hop visual representation, beginning with classic albums used for iconic samples and ranging from the 1970s through the present, consider what aspects of self-presentation change and which remain consis-

tent over time.

*Top row, left to right:*

The Isley Brothers, *Isleys' Greatest Hits*, 1973

Babe Ruth, *First Base*, 1972

Miquel Brown, *Symphony of Love*, 1978

James Brown, *Revolution of the Mind:*

*Live at the Apollo, Volume III*, 1971

*Middle row, left to right:*

J.J. Fad, *Supersonic*, 1988

Eric B. & Rakim, *Paid in Full*, 1987

Queen Latifah, *Nature of a Sista'*, 1991

Big Pun, *Capital Punishment*, 1998

Foxy Brown, *Il Na Na*, 1996

DMX, *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood*, 1998

Missy Elliot, *Supa Dupa Fly*, 1997

Fugees, *The Score*, 1990

*Bottom row, left to right:*

Nelly, *Country Grammar*, 2000

Nicki Minaj, *Pink Friday*, 2010

Lil Nas X, *MONTERO*, 2021

Megan Thee Stallion, *Traumazine*, 2022

Bad Bunny, *YHLQMDLG*, 2020

Miss Kam, *Tew Be Continued*, 2022

Lil Wayne, *Tha Carter II*, 2005

Rico Nasty, *Nasty*, 2018

## **Amani Lewis**

(American, b. 1994, Baltimore)

### **Swamp Boy**

2019

acrylic, oil pastel, glitter, embroidery, and  
screen print

on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

As cameras flash and phone screens glow, West Baltimore rapper Butch Dawson (b. 1993) grasps a microphone during a concert for his 2018 EP *Swamp Boy*. The audience crowds close to Dawson, suggesting an intimate location. Over the last two decades, Baltimore has been a hotbed for underground music and art, with venues like the Copy-Cat, Floristree, Bellfoundry, Annex, the Paradox, and the Crown creating safe spaces for entertainers and partygoers.

Amani Lewis built this collage from digitally edited images and blurred and manipulated photographs that were then screen printed 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.

**Monica Ikegwu**

(American, b. 1998, Baltimore)

**Open/Closed**

2021

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Myrtis

This artwork has been generously supported by  
Erica Spitzig and Brent Patterson.

# All Things Hip Hop, A Scribble Jam Short 2024

Please enjoy this short video, a prelude to *Scribble Jam: A Documentary*. The upcoming film explores the history of Cincinnati's legendary hip hop festival, Scribble Jam (1996–2009). Currently a work in progress, the film's creators, listed below, say this about their work:

"Our goal with this documentary is to tell the story of Scribble Jam through the eyes of the people who were most involved with its history. This includes the lives and friendships of Scribble Jam's founders, its relationship with the city of Cincinnati, and its monumental impact on hip hop history."

To contribute to the completion of this video, please visit: [bit.ly/4aO8JN7](https://bit.ly/4aO8JN7) or scan the video's QR code.



**Director**

Tyler Brune

**Producer**

Jacob Lightner

**Assistant Producer**

Emma Tallent

**Director of Photography**

Zachary Schutte

**Assistant Director/Production Assistant**

Zoey Desmond

**Sound Mixer/Audio Engineer**

Abigail Spears

**Story Editor/Production Assistant**

William Iles

**Social Media/BTS Photography**

Abby Murphy

**Production Assistant**

Cameron Hollstegge

**Assistant Audio Engineer**

John Hensey

**Production Assistant**

Max Walsh

**THE** **HIP HOP & CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY**  
**CULTURE**

**Gallery 104**

**Caution:** The video in this gallery includes references to violence, profanity, racial stereotypes, and sexuality.

## **TNEG**

**4:44**

2017

video (color, sound)

duration: 8 min., 30 sec.

Courtesy of Arthur Jafa and Gladstone Gallery

**Telfar by Telfar Clemens  
and Babak Radboy**

(American, b. 1985, New York City;  
Iranian, b. 1983, Tehran)

**Azalea Tracksuit**

2022

polyester jersey knit and rib knit collar  
and cuffs with mesh lining

**Medium Azalea Shopping Bag**

2022

faux leather and twill  
TELFAR, New York

**Willy Chavarria**

(American, b. 1976, Fresno, CA)

**Buffalo Track Jacket and Kickback Pant**

Spring/Summer 2022

nylon satin

Courtesy of the artist

**THE** HIP HOP & CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
**CULTURE**

**Gallery 150**

## **Aaron Fowler**

(American, b. 1988, St. Louis)

### **Live Culture Force 1's**

2022

car parts and mixed media

Courtesy of the artist

Using recycled car parts and other media, Aaron Fowler created a pair of oversized Nike Air Force 1 basketball shoes. The monumental scale emphasizes the resounding power of these sneakers as a cultural icon exalted by hip hop performers. In 2002 St. Louis hip hop artist Nelly (b. 1974), featuring the St. Lunatics (est. 1993), released the single "Air Force Ones," making the shoe a national fashion trend.

Fowler's sculpture laces together this exhibition's co-organizing institutions, the Saint Louis Art Museum and the Baltimore Museum of Art. The Missouri license plates reference the artist's hometown of St. Louis and the shoe's significance to the city. Baltimore-area sneaker retailers, such as Downtown Locker Room, successfully convinced Nike to resur-

rect the shoe in the late 1980s after the company's initial decision to discontinue production in 1984.

**THE** HIP HOP & CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
**CULTURE**

**Gallery 212**

## **William Cordova**

(Peruvian, b. 1969, Lima, Peru)

### **Moby Dick (for Oscar Wilde, Óscar Romero y Oscar Grant)**

2003/2008/2022

mixed media on reclaimed police car  
Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins  
& Co., New York

Artist William Cordova sawed a reclaimed police cruiser in half, removed the wheels, and placed it atop cinder blocks. The installation interweaves various languages of urban life, crime-fighting, social justice, and inspiration.

Cordova's title refers to the stories of three Oscars: author Oscar Wilde (1854–1900); activist priest Óscar Romero (1917–1980); and father, aspiring barber, and victim of police violence, Oscar Grant (1986–2009). The bubble-style graffiti emblazons the names of such philosophers and leaders as Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) and Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803).

Peek inside the windows for a curated selection of books about racial equality and feel the vibrations of the subwoofers and music, "Bass In Yo Face" by André Leon Gray. Cordova wanted to create a sanctuary and place of refuge for those in vulnerable and underserved communities.

**THE** HIP HOP & CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
**CULTURE**

**Gallery 214**

**Lauren Halsey**

(American, b. 1987, Los Angeles)

**Prototype Column For Tha Shaw (RIP  
The Honorable Ermias Nipsey Hussle  
Asghedom) I**

2019

**Prototype Column For Tha Shaw (RIP  
The Honorable Ermias Nipsey Hussle  
Asghedom) II**

2019

hand-carved glass fiber-reinforced gypsum  
Rennie Collection, Vancouver

Cool white gypsum columns rise to the ceiling from square bases, recalling the architecture of ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome. On their surfaces, Lauren Halsey interspersed contemporary figures and imagery among traditional Egyptian motifs. Winged figures share space with Los Angeles street scenes, graffiti, lowriders, and a profile of the city's skyline.

*Prototype Columns For Tha Shaw (RIP The Honorable Ermias Nipsey Hussle Asghedom) I and II* are a memorial and monument to the late rapper Nipsey Hussle (1985–2019). Evoking both the hieroglyphs and monumental tombs used by the ancient Egyptians to commemorate the life and death of their rulers, Halsey's columns function to honor the legacy of those lost too soon.

**Please do not touch.**