

Editorial

# Introduction “Hip-Hop, Art, and Visual Culture: Connections, Influences, and Critical Discussions”

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Visual art has been tied to hip-hop culture since its emergence in the 1970s. Commentary on these initial connections often emphasizes the importance of graffiti and fashion during hip-hop’s earliest days (Fricke and Ahearn 2002). Forty years later, hip-hop music has grown in to a billion-dollar industry (Watson 2004), and its relationship with visual art has also evolved. During the genre’s first decades of existence, notable hip-hop practitioners whose work crossed the boundaries of music and visual art included Fab 5 Freddy (Fricke and Ahearn 2002), Lady Pink (Piskor 2014), Rammellzee, and Jean-Michel Basquiat (Nosnitsky 2013). More current examples of such cross-disciplinary efforts include (a) the mixed media performances of Eclectic Method (*Copyright Criminals* 2009), (b) Swizz Beatz’s efforts to create and collect visual art while also producing rap music (Giles 2014), and (c) the Hi-ARTS non-profit organization’s initiatives in supporting hip-hop artists in theatre, visual art, dance, and music (Hi-ARTS 2019). Meanwhile, references to visual artists and art have appeared more frequently in the lyrics and music videos of such hip-hop musicians as Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Nas, Kanye West, Substantial, Rick Ross, and Lil Wayne. An overt example of these references can be found in the Carters’ (2018) award-winning music video for “Apushit,” filmed in the Louvre Museum in Paris and featuring iconic works of Western art.

Hip-hop has become an established global phenomenon, influencing many facets of society including art, art education, and visual culture. The possibilities and ramifications of this influence have been noted by many scholars and educators. A number of these authors have discussed connections between hip-hop and visual art (Ross 2003), fashion (Whitley 2011), and postmodernism (Lehmann 2011; Potter 1995), while others have explored the use of hip-hop in art education as a tool for critically examining visual culture (Chung 2007; Clinton 2010) or aesthetics (Broome 2015). For this special issue of *Arts*, we invited contributors—either practitioners or scholars—to join these ongoing conversations by submitting manuscripts that further explore the connections between hip-hop, art, and visual culture.

In the opening article, Kaplan (2018) focuses on the work of “ghetto potter” Roberto Lugo, a contemporary ceramic artist, whose “hip-hop aesthetic” creates a space in visual arts that challenges white visual hegemony and privilege. The author explores the intersections of ceramics, hip-hop, and visual culture, focusing on representation, access, and equity within art education. Kaplan presents a compelling argument for greater inclusion and diversity within visual art and art education, illuminating Lugo’s pedagogical approaches centered on promoting opportunity for voices typically excluded within dominant discourse.

Buffington and Day (2018) present a nuanced argument that Hip-Hop Pedagogy can be implemented as a type of culturally responsive instruction. Art educators can consider adopting similar strategies when developing their own approaches to culturally sustaining pedagogy. The authors urge educational practitioners to move beyond the use of cyphers to attract students to academic subjects, and to instead make meaningful connections to works of art more directly related to the hip-hop genre

itself. When selecting examples for class discussions, Buffington and Day remind us of the importance of featuring women and gender minority artists as focal points for art curricula. As a guiding example, the authors discuss the work of contemporary artist, Rozeal, and the implications of her art in initiating classroom dialogue on identity and cultural appropriation.

In the third article in this volume, Leonard (2018) describes ways in which art educators can use hip-hop to foster critical discussions on the topics of creativity, copyright, and authorship in digital media. By making relatable connections to “sample-based hip-hop music” (Schloss 2004), art teachers may increase student engagement toward legal and creative issues involved in the production of digital artwork.

The final article by De Paor-Evans (2018) argues for a critical relationship between hip-hop and fine art, exploring the “intertextuality between visual and sonic metaphors” produced by hip-hop artists, while challenging the class-based labelling of hip-hop as a “mainstream” or “lowbrow” culture. The author situates his analysis within the framework of Bourdieu’s theories of distinction, establishing a sociocultural history of hip-hop culture, examining cultural capital and promoting the use of fine art tropes in the analysis of cultural production in hip-hop.

This special issue closes with Jeff’s own review of Ed Piskor’s *Hip Hop Family Tree* comic book series, recently compiled and packaged into gift box sets by Fantagraphics (Piskor 2014, 2016). These collected works use a graphic novel format to chronicle the early development of hip-hop culture from the mid-1970s to 1985. Jeff concludes his book review by suggesting ways in which art and visual culture educators can use Piskor’s work as a catalyst for introducing social justice issues, postmodern principles, and the use of arts-based historical research methods.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the editorial board and staff at *Arts* for giving us this opportunity to assemble a collection of academic work on the topic of hip-hop and visual art. Without the tireless efforts of such a hardworking staff, this issue would not have been possible. We hope that the articles presented here are useful in broadening discussions on the evolving role of visual art in hip-hop culture. As our authors have demonstrated, the possibilities of extending these conversations beyond the topics of graffiti, fashion, and the use of cyphers in educational contexts are vast and fruitful.

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