



## M3: MCs, Mics & Metaphors Remixed

Exhibition: May 27-July 15, 2011

Busboys & Poets 14<sup>th</sup> & V Streets, NW DC 20009

Closing Reception & Artist Talk: July 11, 2011 6-9 PM

[soulsuite.com/m3](http://soulsuite.com/m3)

### **CURATOR'S STATEMENT by Tewodross Melchishua**

**M3: MC's, Mics & Metaphors (M3) Remixed** explores the creative power of the lyricism and poetry of hip-hop music through visual imagery. The exhibition gathers a group of emerging artists from around the country, each responding to the theme of the MC (Emcee, or Master of Ceremonies) or simply a favorite hip-hop verse or song. These visual artists are working in a variety of media, including photography, mixed media, painting, fashion, design, video and animation.

I created the concept for this show, after years of listening to hip-hop music, and specifically the immense creativity of the MC, in his or her use of words, similes, metaphors and symbols. I began to see what MCs were saying in their rhymes, and asked myself, "What if the lyrics and language of hip-hop were represented through visual art and design? My original idea was to have a solo show, but then I decided this would more interesting to invite other visual artists to be apart of this exhibition, and to have a group show in which all of us could explore this theme through a visual and improvisational, freestyle, art session, just like a real, live hip-hop performance (music imitates life, art imitates music). Furthermore, I am still amazed at how detailed, descriptive and "visual" hip-hop music is and always has been. Of particular interest is how hip-hop has socially and consciously shaped me as a person, and visually as an artist, filmmaker and educator. Hip-hop music, like its predecessors, jazz, the blues, soul and reggae, has a unique ability to provide meaning, self-expression and inspiration for many.

*M3 Remixed* again like the first M3, draws from this same inspiration and creates a visual cipher or circle. Each image exhibited speaks to one another, similar to a circle of MC's freestyling and responding to one another in an actual cipher. The featured artists include: Artoni, Derrick (Benetez) Bryant, Nicole Cohen, Damani K. Diop (Reality), Dissident Display (Adrian Loving & Ayo Okunseinde), Jeff Henriquez, Ann (Sole Sister) Johnson, Hasaan Kirkland, Jeff McCauley, Tewodross Melchishua, Charles Jean-Pierre, Darian Robbins, Elizabeth Stewart, Marcel Taylor and Aniekan Udofia.

## **In the beginning there was the word, and it was dope**

From the dawn of humankind, metaphors, myth and symbols have been used to explain the forces of the unknown -- creation, nature, and spirit. These also provided deeper meaning and knowledge. Metaphors have become necessary tools for expression and communication. These can be found in the music and lyrics of the great Blues musicians, or in the African and Caribbean folktales taught to children. They can also be found in the sermons delivered by reverends at an African American churches on Sunday mornings, and in the inspiring speeches of historical figures such as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Especially here in America, we as a people are particularly immersed in a visual culture and language replete with symbolism and metaphors.

The “first” visual artists of hip-hop were scribes and artisans throwing up signs and symbols in ancient Kemet (Egypt) and other parts of the world. These early pioneers inspired the taggers, bombers and graffiti artists who followed. They created the provided the some of the foundation for the visual aesthetics of hip-hop, and sought to provide the imagery of the b-boys and b-girls worldwide. Hip-hop has influenced contemporary society through language, art, design, fashion, and business and of course through music.

Graffiti art's incorporation of image, typography, comic books, pop culture and color inspired many in the New York arts scene, especially during the 1980's, including Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. Perhaps some of the greatest MC's came upon the music scene during the '80s and '90s, often referred to as hip-hop's “golden era.” Many of these MCs are reflected in the exhibition, as *M3* takes us back to the original essence of hip-hop and particularly the phenomenon of the rapper. The exhibition reflects not only the MC as the central theme, but also their rhymes, verses and songs. The featured artists focus on the classic hip-hop and MCs from this period, as well as more recent and underground MCs.

## **Hey, rudeboy, no one can test dis' champion sound**

During the late 1960-70's, in the dancehalls of Jamaica, the MC was responsible for assisting the deejay by hosting the party or gathering. The MC would, chant, toast, and talk during, and in between the spinning of records. He would help the crowd “escape” the stress of life, racism, poverty and brutality of life, if just for a moment. The Jamaican MC (and deejay) was skilled in pleasing the crowd, and he would involve the audience through a rhythmic “call and response.”

We fast-forward about to the late 70's and early 80's, and this sound and style, mixed with African American jazz, soul and funk, would eventually come forward from Jamaica to the Bronx, NY, hip-hop would forever influence art, language, music, business, and culture both in the US and globally. Afrika Bambaataa, founder of the Universal Zulu Nation, states that there are five not four elements of hip-hop: Deejay(ing), Graffiti (bombing), MC (-ing), B-Boy (-ing, dance) and most importantly, forever forgotten element of *knowledge*.

### **M3 Remixed (The Visual Cypher)**

**Artoni** pays homage to none of S-S-S-Salt N' Pepa and their deejay. In his painting, *Salt & Pepa & Spinderella (Legends of Hip-Hop)*, Artoni captures three women who have forever changed hip-hop not only as lyricists but also as producers and entrepreneurs.

**Derrick (Benetez) Bryant** creates a tribute to the hip-hop group, Little Brother, in his painting, *The Origins of Hip Hop*, which is comprised of MCs Phonte and the Rapper Big Pooh. The artwork also features original member, the DJ and producer, 9th Wonder. Like jazz musicians, he creates lively, lyrical and improvisational canvases full of color and movement.

*Nigerian Gangsta*, the work of **Ayo Okunseinde and Adrian Loving** of **Dissident Display** engages audiences through the use of a visual call and response, in their “Afro-hop” mesh of Jay-Z and Fela Kuti.

**Nicole Cohen's** literally remixes herself visually with a unique series of discs from her Vinyl Maps 2011 mixed media installation. The work takes us back to the where it all started: the deejay and the turntables. She blends color, texture and form to manipulate both time and space; and uses the elements of design and hip-hop to jump through astral portals of memory, music and narrative.

**Damani K. Diop (Reality)** weaves a colorful and textural mixed media tribute to X-Clan and KRS-ONE in *Verbs of Power*. Reality's use of color and texture is in harmony with the elements of hip-hop that the Zulu Nation speaks of, especially the element of knowledge.

**Jeff Henriquez** fuses portrait painting, graffiti and live painting, in his piece, *Hyper as a Heart Attack, Nobody Smiling*. Henriquez work brings the intense color to the canvas, as he honors Rakim, one of the most influential MCs in hip-hop history.

**Charles Jean-Pierre**, uses two works, *The Nature of the Beast* and *Dreams in Color*, as a thoughtful and social critiques on the industry of not only hip-hop, but also to the sports industry and more. His layering of imagery and color create sense of urgency and call to action to the viewer.

**Ann (Sole Sister) Johnson**, uses a unique style of mixed media art to entice the viewer. Inspired by songs that praise and champion the classic origins and foundation of hip-hop, such as: *I Used to Love Her*, by Common, and *Rising Up* by the Roots, Sole Sister has created a series of paper casts depicting hip-hop in *Sacred Artifacts*. This technique creates an archaic approach that fabricates a visual excavation of historical hip-hop objects representing the word, the style and the art.

**Hasaan Kirkland's** work is comprised of geometric and colorful manifestations of hip-hop and mixed media approach also draws heavily upon the African influence, and the work of Francisco Goya. In his piece, *The Alchemist*, Kirkland explores the spirit, intellect and rhythm of hip-hop lyricism.

**Tewodross Melchishua's featured** work is titled *Planet X Marks the Spot (Nommo Music for the Suckas, Part II)*, which is inspired by Guru (of the group Gangstarr, including DJ Premier). He illustrates the sci-fi and metaphysical side of hip-hop, as he merges digital art, painting and motion. His work takes the viewer “above the clouds,” and on a journey that challenges what the viewer “knows” about the universe, earth, creation and even spirituality. Also featured *Soar (Keep Risin' to the Top)* was inspired by none other than Doug E. Fresh and The Get Fresh Crew and addresses issues of depression, and overcoming challenges in life and self esteem, by using color, rhythm, music and the concept of synesthesia to lift the spirit of people.

His video art, *It's Like Donny Hath Made Me See Lonnie's Path*, is dedicated to the musical contribution and legacy of the late and great, Donny Hathaway; soul, gospel and R & B music, but also on the world of hip-hop and community in general. Inspired specifically by hip-hop group, The Roots and also MC, Common. It features the musical remix, "Til Next Rhyme" by Maverick, a DC/DMV-based artist/MC and producer, and was remixed by another local legend Oddisee.

**Darian Robbins** works various media, including digital art, design and painting. His ode to the MC NAS, in his piece, *Got You Feeling Like Braille: It Ain't Hard To Tell*, creates a literal and symbolic interpretation of the MC's lyrics.

**Elizabeth Stewart** offers us a unique portrait of Erykah Badu in her work *Freedom*. In a colorful style very reminiscent of 1960's posters, Elizabeth honors not only a great soul singer/producer but also a deejay as Badu's alter ego of DJ Lo Down Loretta Brown.

At the core of hip-hop is the story, and **Marcel Taylor's** interprets one of perhaps one of the best storytellers in hip-hop, Slick Rick. His painting, *Slick Rick: The Ruler*, weaves the historic MC's control of words, and image, humor, and of course, his own unique style and swagger.

**Aniekan Udofia**, Now, who would bring together Kool G. Rap and Albert Einstein in one dope painting? Only Aniekan Udofia! Aniekan's work *G=MC*, weaves together the theory of relativity with humor and B-Boy swagger and is truly one of the highlights of M3.

*M3: Mcs, Mics and Metaphors* will provide the viewer an approach to contextualizing hip-hop culture in a most unique way. It does so in that just as hip-hop music has been informed by the visual, historical, and even symbolic references from society and pop culture, the visual imagery of M3 been influenced by the music and words of hip-hop and b-boy culture. Music, words, and now art, reflect and relate directly to each other, as the artists from this exhibition will further push the hip-hop visual aesthetic.

Peace and blessings

Tewodross Melchishua  
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M3: MCs, Mics & Metaphors Remixed

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Busboys & Poets

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[m3exhibition.wordpress.com](http://m3exhibition.wordpress.com)

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