BRING THE NOISE:
A View Into Hip-Hop and Art
(BRING THE NOISE: A VIEW INTO HIP-HOP AND ART)

A Thesis in Contemporary Art
By Derrick Burnett

Committee Members
Professors:
Nancy Nichols-Pethick
Dr. Stephen Smithers
Ray Chen

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

May 2011
"It can be done but only I can do it
For those that can dance and clap your hands to it
I start to think and then I sink
Into the paper like I was ink
When I'm writing, I'm trapped in between the lines,
I escape when I finish the rhyme"...
-Rakim  "I Know You Got Soul" 1987

William Griffin aka (Rakim), one half of the rap duo, Eric B and Rakim put these words to his creative process as a hip-hop artist. There is much of the same feeling in my work, and it is apparent that I am not the first artist to think about the relationship between music and art or how the two share similar qualities when describing them. Romare Bearden drew from the contemporary music of his time, creating his own jazz music. (Fine, p.145) I think it is likely that music fed Bearden’s visual creativity and caused his inner responses to manifest themselves visually.

Peter Abbs writes about recognizing the actual moment of aesthetic experience across the arts. He breaks down the aesthetic experience into six areas that range from the initial experience of being overwhelmed, to the natural desire to share this experience with others that may or may not have been present (Abbs, p.78). It is in this final area, I believe my experiences with music move me to an outward visual response based on auditory stimuli. It seems to be a feeling that most share from some type of aesthetic experience in some other form of art. My relationship to hip-hop music and its global effect on pop culture now fuels my artwork. The body of work I have been preparing while attending the MFA program at Indiana State University has led me to think about the influence music has had on me. (Scratch 2)
As a collage artist I borrow, remake, and reuse materials. My work also addresses the breaking down and tearing apart of the old to create new works of art from existing images. Collage is not a new idea, but I took the idea of reformatting and reusing images that were available to uphold my version of the technique. My intent is to use this technique to speak to others visually. The most effective use for collage in my work is to play up designs and line, creating rhythmic patterns. I seek to create colors and textures in areas that are flat or void of space by including the spliced samples. Aside from starting with an image, I collect pieces of fabric and clippings from various printed materials. It is from these that I compare colors, textures, and look for areas that can be cut and joined together as seamlessly as possible. After this step, I gesso areas I wish to add paint to and paint in or paint out sections that I don’t need, or wish to enhance. Each layer serves to deepen the viewer’s interaction with the piece: Some response is better than none. De Furia and Scacciaferro described the sampling process in their book as: (De Furia, P.14) selecting your source to be sampled; sampling the source, editing the source and application of the sample.

Sound plays a crucial role in the formation of my pieces. My work then is much like that of a disc jockey (DJ) who carries around crates of music, to chop apart and reassemble music to appease what he/she believes is a shared taste. This explanation of the sampling process is how I initiate my work, splicing, looping, and blending different sources, thereby creating harmonious work that speaks to the visible elements of the collaging technique and effective use with the subject matter. I believe it is in the artist’s handling of the transitions between sections of a piece.
that reveals how well he/she has solved the problem of making art that is believable
versus producing something that is just aesthetically pleasing. I reuse or “loop” the
circle in my work because it reminds me of the front of a speaker. Headphones
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others around the subject. Most of the time, this would include the viewer.

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influence of graffiti. In recent years, street art has expanded beyond graffiti into a
worldwide version of urban art. The rhythmic colors and designs of graffiti have
been the starting point for my pieces. Spray paint and the application of painted
materials have some of the same qualities graffiti wall art possesses but it is my
intention to create using more than only one medium. I am “sampling” from graffiti
its use of materials, techniques (can control) and attitude. (Miranda, p.89) Collage
and spray paint have been as important to me as a DJ who needs records and
turntables for materials. I cannot conjure up sights and sounds without the layered
effects of mixed media, time, scale, and most importantly color. Each layer is
dependent on the next and the subsequent layers are made because the former is
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noise, a visual sound that is composed of layers that were once seen as complete but
are no longer a finite solution to my aesthetic response. (scratch 3)
The works I have created also use sections of lyrics or song titles for their subject. The piece called *Wordsmith* was completed early in my studies at Indiana State University but has a direct connection to the work that would follow. Mos Def in his song entitled *HIP-HOP* wrote:

*Speech is my hammer; bang the world into shape now let it fall... (Ungh!!)*

*My restlessness is my nemesis It's hard to really chill and sit still Committed to page, I write rhymes Sometimes won't finish for days Scrutinize my literature, from the large to the miniature I mathematically add-minister Subtract the wack Selector, wheel it back, I'm feeling that”*

Immediately the thought of a wordsmith (blacksmith) banging words into existence formed in my mind. It was an eureka moment, when I realized I could incorporate my visual responses to music in my work by translating portions of these songs into visual dialogue.

Sounds and noise are part of the work, just as a city has sounds, signs and noise. The capturing of auditory sensations manifests itself as speakers, or a gaping mouth and even the noise within the piece, through the intentional busyness of layers. Using overspray from spray cans and lines that resemble glyphs from graffiti
writing, remain part of my connection to street art. It is not just about making art; it also is about the feeding of the mind. There is a balance for me in the work that I am still striving toward, the serious versus the playful, the informed and the disillusioned, the honorable and the dishonorable. My work is a kindred spirit with music, or the art of music, in the same way that the arts all deal in creativity. The noise of music, of sound, of busy artwork comes from the same places. It is in the improvisations, rhythm and shared vocabulary used to illustrate art, also describes music. Noises drive me to think, process and associate visually what I hear and want others to hear or relate in my work. These thoughts I may not be able to verbalize, but I can paint a picture that stands proxy when my words are not enough. Each layer in my work serves to deepen the viewer’s interaction with the piece: Some response is better than none. (Scratch 4)

Chuck D, of the hip-hop group Public Enemy, was once asked: what is the purpose of noise in your music? His response was that it was to agitate, make the jam noticeable. (Cepeda, p.201) The very nature of hip-hop is loud, braggadocious and confrontational. This was once an asset for hip-hop enthusiasts, but now it seems to be more about record sales and pure entertainment. As hip-hop is no longer in its infancy stage but has matured into adulthood and those who follow the genre have had to endure growing pains. Public Enemy played a serious role in the representation of the duality of rap music. Chuck D served as a militant voice with an emotional bravado that stirs minds and at any moment can ignite a riot. (Nelson, p.220) His counter part Flava Flav, always rockin’ an oversized clock and crazy
antics, as off the wall as he was, had Chuck D’s back. Together they represent the two veins that feed hip-hop’s more serious side versus pure entertainment. I create art that models this type of emotion and impact art that has qualities of seriousness, consciousness and realness but is mindful of the playful, entertaining aspects of how real or fake an artist can be. Rap music has a hidden agenda to educate and poke fun simultaneously. I achieve this in my work *Polar Ice*.

(Figure 2) Hip-hop uses concealed speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on or to challenge authoritative voices that oppose expression. (Nelson, p.225) This subtext can be used as subject matter when you consider how influential hip-hop culture has become. The figure in *Polar Ice* grew from the noticeable opulence of some hip-hop artists with their jewelry, fur coats and sunglasses at night, popular accessories for urban club goers.

A Polar bear, however, has a fur coat. This bear is wearing the fur of another animal. The question then is how did he obtain it? Did he find it? Did he take it from another bear? What will people do to be noticed and flaunt their seemingly endless personal resources in front of others? My intent with this piece was to pose such a question.
My MFA work is only a small fraction of what will be a life long exploration of music, art and culture. A career full of breaks, beats, rhythm changes, crashes and noise. Within the body of work I created for my thesis exhibition I drew on stereotypes, class, gender and hip-hop for sources of inspiration. The mixed media work Brass Monkey (Figure 3) uses an animal as a stand in hip-hop portrait. There is an attitude in his glance, but the fact remains that he is a monkey and is dressed up to play a role. This represents my feelings toward some rappers and their relationship with their record labels. Some artists are ignorant of the social impact that their image carries to others, the truth is some do not care and respond with...where do I sign? Brass Monkey also recalls a song by hip-hop group, the Beastie Boys, in their version they sing of the styled libation that makes you act ‘ill’.

It could be a matter of coincidence or taste, but I have chosen artists who use musical influences or have similar interests in subject matter. Historically, my artistic influences range chronologically from the Harlem Renaissance to contemporary artists like Kehinde Wiley.
The Art of Sampling: the process of taking brief segments of sound (from a song, movie or elsewhere) and using that sound to form another sound or musical piece. It is equally important to mention the contemporary and historic art references in my work. I use the term “sampling” like a DJ who puts together music using pieces of works he has created or borrowed from another source. The end result is a blend of sounds that make a new work that has echoes a previous form. Artists that use collage to create work borrow, or sample sources. However, the artist’s vision takes the pieces to a new state of existence. I have been most influenced artistically by the following artists: Romare Bearden, Jean Michel Basquiat, Kerry James Marshall and Kehinde Wiley.

"Practically all great artists accept the influence of others. But... the artist with vision... by integrating what he has learned with his own experiences... molds something distinctly personal." -(Romare Bearden)

The life’s work of Romare Bearden (1911-1988) has had by far the single most influential impact on me as an artist. It is because of his ideas of collage that I was able to sample his techniques for tearing and cutting papers to build new art. Bearden’s quote makes it clear that, aside from technique, the sampling of others is a daily ritual and it is the unique vision of the artist that is to be most revered. I am able to identify with him culturally as well. The role of the black artist has, until recently, been subtle and quiet, with major gains within the last few decades. I believe that because of artists like Romare Bearden I have more of a voice in today’s art market. (Fine, p.27)

"I am not a black artist, I am an artist."
-Basquiat
Jean Michel Basquiat’s shortened career (1960-1988), has left a lasting imprint on modern and contemporary art. His work began as street art and blossomed into an intentionally cynical view of his contemporary status as an artist. His transition from the streets to the gallery rocketed him to stardom. He lacked academic training but possessed a strong artistic eye for composition and subject matter. What sets him apart in his early works was the inspiration he drew from the graffiti tradition. (Sirmans, p.92) Similarly, my work comes from my experiences in graffiti and a love for hip-hop music. His creativity crossed into making music and performance art at the same time hip-hop was gaining momentum as a respected form of music. The deconstruction and reassembling of the work that came before it has its roots in graffiti, street art and hip-hop. Tearing apart social, historical and cultural norms feeds my ideas in art, and I would like to think that Basquiat felt the same while he created his vast body of work.

“Personality inflects not the selection, but the organization...with a particular point of view” –(Kerry James Marshall)

Kerry James Marshall’s work on unstretched canvas inspired me to paint place unstretched canvas on the wall and in some manner continue the rituals of graffiti without legal repercussions. Marshall’s work confronts head on the idea of race; he gives us a “black” subject in both skin color and culture. (Cesaire, p.46) His ideas about black culture and identity have pushed his work to the forefront of contemporary art in an art world that too often excludes artists from the African Diaspora. (Marshall) Within my work I also deal with issues concerning race and the perception of others when faced with diversity. We both create fragments of a
picture plane to increase the detail of the work by using collage. All of the afore
mentioned artistic styles are consistent with urban expression.

**Urban Expressionism** is the term I would use to describe my artistic style.

: Of, relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a city.
: A theory or practice in art of seeking to depict the subjective emotions and
responses that objects and events arouse in the artist.

Because hip-hop has a strong urban metro following freezing it out of the
mainstream was the norm. As times have changed, hip-hop is engrained in our
digital and audio advertisement daily on a global scale. (Rose p.134) “Bringing the
Noise” is my way of placing myself into the pages of art history and cranking up the
volume to the max exposing, uncovering, and embracing my love for hip hop music,
culture and visual art. This is only the beginning. Throughout my process of
creating the work for my MFA exhibition I have come full circle to the roots of
collage. In the future I plan to continue working with collage and keep my work at
its current scale. However, as far as the noise in my work, I see it becoming more
saturated in visual sound and pushing the mixed media to the next level.
Bibliography (Works Cited)


3a. Fine, the art of Romare Bearden, 27.


Derrick Burnett

**2D works**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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<td>36in x 15in x 12in</td>
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<td>BBoyz: The Manual</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Mixed Media</td>
<td>Accordion Fold</td>
<td>$150</td>
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<td>I Might Go Ape S**t! Now Turn It Up!</td>
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**Installation**

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<td>Remix, Rewind, Repeat</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Mixed Media</td>
<td>12in vinyls</td>
<td>$35ea</td>
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</table>
Indiana State University
Department of Graduate studies
Department of Art

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Sound plays a crucial role in the formation of my pieces. My work then is much like that of a disc jockey (DJ) who carries around crates of music, to chop apart and reassemble music to appease what he/she believes is a shared taste. This explanation of the sampling process is how I initiate my work, splicing, looping, and blending different sources, thereby creating harmonious work that speaks to the visible elements of the collaging technique and effective use with the subject matter. I believe it is in the artist’s handling of the transitions between sections of a piece
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BRING THE NOISE: 
A View Into Hip-Hop and Art 
(BRING THE NOISE: A VIEW INTO HIP-HOP AND ART)

A Thesis in Contemporary Art 
By Derrick Burnett

Committee Members 
Professors: 
Nancy Nichols-Pethick 
Dr. Stephen Smithers 
Ray Chen

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the 
Requirements for the Degree of 
Master of Fine Arts

May 2011
Bring the Noise
Burnett 2011

"It can be done but only I can do it
For those that can dance and clap your hands to it
I start to think and then I sink
Into the paper like I was ink
When I'm writing, I'm trapped in between the lines,
I escape when I finish the rhyme"...
-"Rakim “I Know You Got Soul” 1987"

William Griffin aka (Rakim), one half of the rap duo, Eric B and Rakim put these words to his creative process as a hip-hop artist. There is much of the same feeling in my work, and it is apparent that I am not the first artist to think about the relationship between music and art or how the two share similar qualities when describing them. Romare Bearden drew from the contemporary music of his time, creating his own jazz music. (Fine, p.145) I think it is likely that music fed Bearden’s visual creativity and caused his inner responses to manifest themselves visually.

Peter Abbs writes about recognizing the actual moment of aesthetic experience across the arts. He breaks down the aesthetic experience into six areas that range from the initial experience of being overwhelmed, to the natural desire to share this experience with others that may or may not have been present (Abbs, p.78). It is in this final area, I believe my experiences with music move me to an outward visual response based on auditory stimuli. It seems to be a feeling that most share from some type of aesthetic experience in some other form of art. My relationship to hip-hop music and its global effect on pop culture now fuels my artwork. The body of work I have been preparing while attending the MFA program at Indiana State University has led me to think about the influence music has had on me. [Scratch 2]
As a collage artist I borrow, remake, and reuse materials. My work also addresses the breaking down and tearing apart of the old to create new works of art from existing images. Collage is not a new idea, but I took the idea of reformatting and reusing images that were available to uphold my version of the technique. My intent is to use this technique to speak to others visually. The most effective use for collage in my work is to play up designs and line, creating rhythmic patterns. I seek to create colors and textures in areas that are flat or void of space by including the spliced samples. Aside from starting with an image, I collect pieces of fabric and clippings from various printed materials. It is from these that I compare colors, textures, and look for areas that can be cut and joined together as seamlessly as possible. After this step, I gesso areas I wish to add paint to and paint in or paint out sections that I don’t need, or wish to enhance. Each layer serves to deepen the viewer’s interaction with the piece: Some response is better than none. De Furia and Scacciaferro described the sampling process in their book as: (De Furia, P.14) selecting your source to be sampled; sampling the source, editing the source and application of the sample.

Sound plays a crucial role in the formation of my pieces. My work then is much like that of a disc jockey (DJ) who carries around crates of music, to chop apart and reassemble music to appease what he/she believes is a shared taste. This explanation of the sampling process is how I initiate my work, splicing, looping, and blending different sources, thereby creating harmonious work that speaks to the visible elements of the collaging technique and effective use with the subject matter. I believe it is in the artist’s handling of the transitions between sections of a piece
that reveals how well he/she has solved the problem of making art that is believable versus producing something that is just aesthetically pleasing. I reuse or "loop" the circle in my work because it reminds me of the front of a speaker. Headphones represent the inclusion, or exclusion of, sharing music or communicating with others. The headphones allow you to shut out the world and begin to play in your own mind; removal of the headphones suggests an open invitation to interact with others around the subject. Most of the time, this would include the viewer.

I don't consider myself a street artist, but my art bears the urban aesthetic and influence of graffiti. In recent years, street art has expanded beyond graffiti into a worldwide version of urban art. The rhythmic colors and designs of graffiti have been the starting point for my pieces. Spray paint and the application of painted materials have some of the same qualities graffiti wall art possesses but it is my intention to create using more than only one medium. I am "sampling" from graffiti its use of materials, techniques (can control) and attitude. (Miranda, p.89) Collage and spray paint have been as important to me as a DJ who needs records and turntables for materials. I cannot conjure up sights and sounds without the layered effects of mixed media, time, scale, and most importantly color. Each layer is dependent on the next and the subsequent layers are made because the former is now used as a starting point. (Miranda, p.91) This is why I feel my work is a type of noise, a visual sound that is composed of layers that were once seen as complete but are no longer a finite solution to my aesthetic response. (scratch 3)
The works I have created also use sections of lyrics or song titles for their subject. The piece called *Wordsmith* was completed early in my studies at Indiana State University but has a direct connection to the work that would follow. Mos Def in his song entitled *HIP-HOP* wrote:

*Speech is my hammer; bang the world into shape now let it fall... (Ungh!!)*

*My restlessness is my nemesis*
*It's hard to really chill and sit still*
*Committed to page, I write rhymes*
*Sometimes won't finish for days*
*Scrutinize my literature, from the large to the miniature*
*I mathematically add-minister*
*Subtract the wack*
*Selector, wheel it back, I'm feeling that”*

Immediately the thought of a wordsmith (blacksmith) banging words into existence formed in my mind. It was an eureka moment, when I realized I could incorporate my visual responses to music in my work by translating portions of these songs into visual dialogue.

Sounds and noise are part of the work, just as a city has sounds, signs and noise. The capturing of auditory sensations manifests itself as speakers, or a gaping mouth and even the noise within the piece, through the intentional busyness of layers. Using overspray from spray cans and lines that resemble glyphs from graffiti
writing, remain part of my connection to street art. It is not just about making art; it also is about the feeding of the mind. There is a balance for me in the work that I am still striving toward, the serious versus the playful, the informed and the disillusioned, the honorable and the dishonorable. My work is a kindred spirit with music, or the art of music, in the same way that the arts all deal in creativity. The noise of music, of sound, of busy artwork comes from the same places. It is in the improvisations, rhythm and shared vocabulary used to illustrate art, also describes music. Noises drive me to think, process and associate visually what I hear and want others to hear or relate in my work. These thoughts I may not be able to verbalize, but I can paint a picture that stands proxy when my words are not enough. Each layer in my work serves to deepen the viewer's interaction with the piece: Some response is better than none. (Scratch 4)

Chuck D, of the hip-hop group Public Enemy, was once asked: what is the purpose of noise in your music? His response was that it was to agitate, make the jam noticeable. (Cepeda, p.201) The very nature of hip-hop is loud, braggadocios and confrontational. This was once an asset for hip-hop enthusiasts, but now it seems to be more about record sales and pure entertainment. As hip-hop is no longer in its infancy stage but has matured into adulthood and those who follow the genre have had to endure growing pains. Public Enemy played a serious role in the representation of the duality of rap music. Chuck D served as a militant voice with an emotional bravado that stirs minds and at any moment can ignite a riot. (Nelson, p.220) His counter part Flava Flav, always rockin’ an oversized clock and crazy
antics, as off the wall as he was, had Chuck D’s back. Together they represent the two veins that feed hip-hop’s more serious side versus pure entertainment. I create art that models this type of emotion and impact art that has qualities of seriousness, consciousness and realness but is mindful of the playful, entertaining aspects of how real or fake an artist can be. Rap music has a hidden agenda to educate and poke fun simultaneously. I achieve this in my work *Polar Ice*.

(Figure 2) Hip-hop uses concealed speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on or to challenge authoritative voices that oppose expression. (Nelson, p.225) This subtext can be used as subject matter when you consider how influential hip-hop culture has become. The figure in *Polar Ice* grew from the noticeable opulence of some hip-hop artists with their jewelry, fur coats and sunglasses at night, popular accessories for urban club goers.

A Polar bear, however, has a fur coat. This bear is wearing the fur of another animal. The question then is how did he obtain it? Did he find it? Did he take it from another bear? What will people do to be noticed and flaunt their seemingly endless personal resources in front of others? My intent with this piece was to pose such a question.
My MFA work is only a small fraction of what will be a life long exploration of music, art and culture. A career full of breaks, beats, rhythm changes, crashes and noise. Within the body of work I created for my thesis exhibition I drew on stereotypes, class, gender and hip-hop for sources of inspiration. The mixed media work Brass Monkey (Figure 3) uses an animal as a stand in hip-hop portrait. There is an attitude in his glance, but the fact remains that he is a monkey and is dressed up to play a role. This represents my feelings toward some rappers and their relationship with their record labels. Some artists are ignorant of the social impact that their image carries to others, the truth is some do not care and respond with...where do I sign? Brass Monkey also recalls a song by hip-hop group, the Beastie Boys, in their version they sing of the styled libation that makes you act 'ill'.

It could be a matter of coincidence or taste, but I have chosen artists who use musical influences or have similar interests in subject matter. Historically, my artistic influences range chronologically from the Harlem Renaissance to contemporary artists like Kehinde Wiley.
The Art of Sampling: the process of taking brief segments of sound (from a song, movie or elsewhere) and using that sound to form another sound or musical piece.

It is equally important to mention the contemporary and historic art references in my work. I use the term “sampling” like a DJ who puts together music using pieces of works he has created or borrowed from another source. The end result is a blend of sounds that make a new work that has echoes a previous form. Artists that use collage to create work borrow, or sample sources. However, the artist’s vision takes the pieces to a new state of existence. I have been most influenced artistically by the following artists: Romare Bearden, Jean Michel Basquiat, Kerry James Marshall and Kehinde Wiley.

"Practically all great artists accept the influence of others. But... the artist with vision... by integrating what he has learned with his own experiences... molds something distinctly personal." -(Romare Bearden)

The life’s work of Romare Bearden (1911-1988) has had by far the single most influential impact on me as an artist. It is because of his ideas of collage that I was able to sample his techniques for tearing and cutting papers to build new art.

Bearden’s quote makes it clear that, aside from technique, the sampling of others is a daily ritual and it is the unique vision of the artist that is to be most revered. I am able to identify with him culturally as well. The role of the black artist has, until recently, been subtle and quiet, with major gains within the last few decades. I believe that because of artists like Romare Bearden I have more of a voice in today’s art market. (Fine, p.27)

"I am not a black artist, I am an artist.”
-Basquiat
Jean Michel Basquiat’s shortened career (1960-1988), has left a lasting imprint on modern and contemporary art. His work began as street art and blossomed into an intentionally cynical view of his contemporary status as an artist. His transition from the streets to the gallery rocketed him to stardom. He lacked academic training but possessed a strong artistic eye for composition and subject matter. What sets him apart in his early works was the inspiration he drew from the graffiti tradition. (Sirmans, p.92) Similarly, my work comes from my experiences in graffiti and a love for hip-hop music. His creativity crossed into making music and performance art at the same time hip-hop was gaining momentum as a respected form of music. The deconstruction and reassembling of the work that came before it has its roots in graffiti, street art and hip-hop. Tearing apart social, historical and cultural norms feeds my ideas in art, and I would like to think that Basquiat felt the same while he created his vast body of work.

“Personality inflects not the selection, but the organization...with a particular point of view” – (Kerry James Marshall)

Kerry James Marshall’s work on unstretched canvas inspired me to paint place unstretched canvas on the wall and in some manner continue the rituals of graffiti without legal repercussions. Marshall’s work confronts head on the idea of race; he gives us a “black” subject in both skin color and culture. (Cesaire, p.46) His ideas about black culture and identity have pushed his work to the forefront of contemporary art in an art world that too often excludes artists from the African Diaspora. (Marshall) Within my work I also deal with issues concerning race and the perception of others when faced with diversity. We both create fragments of a
picture plane to increase the detail of the work by using collage. All of the afore
mentioned artistic styles are consistent with urban expression.

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