



## Hip Hop Legend Q-Tip Shares His Diverse Art Collection

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The artist known as Q-Tip has distinguished himself with an unimpeachable legacy in hip-hop. The rapper, DJ, sound engineer, and producer has been involved in the creation of some of music's most enduring works of art, whether it be classic albums with his seminal rap group A Tribe Called Quest; production work for Nas, Busta Rhymes, and Kanye West; or writing pop songs for Janet Jackson and Mariah Carey.

But there's a different view of the 49-year-old artist's creative vision currently on view at Bonhams auction house in New York: "[Q-Tip: The Collection](#)," an exhibition of 13 contemporary artworks collected by The Abstract, as he is also known. The show features works by [Richard Prince](#), [Nina Chanel Abney](#), [Hassan Hajjaj](#), [William Villalongo](#), [Hebru Brantley](#), [Torey Thornton](#), [Jeff Elrod](#), [Christian Rosa](#), [Harmony Korine](#), and [Fred Brathwaite](#), better known as Fab 5 Freddy. It's the first time the entire collection has been displayed together, though Tip is known to loan out pieces for special exhibitions, according to Bonhams.

The piece most recognizable to fans of Q-Tip's music is likely Prince's untitled 2015 work, a collage of white record sleeves made with ink and acrylic paint on canvas. It was featured in the cover art of A Tribe Called Quest's 2016 album *We Got It from Here... Thank You 4 Your Service*, comprised of a drawing superimposed over the Prince painting. And while the show does feature mainstream stars like Prince and Elrod, the collection—much like Tip's music—is decidedly Afrocentric, and the majority of the works are by Black artists.

Villalongo, whose 2017 pieces *Free*, *Black and All American No. 3* and *Flex* are in Tip's collection, remembers growing up on his music. "I ate it like Cheerios," he says, "A Tribe Called Quest, are you kidding me? 'Sucka Nigga'? Q-Tip is huge." He first met Tip in the mid-2000s at an opening at the [New Museum](#); he gave him his card, and years later, when Tip bought the two works through Susan Inglett Gallery, Villalongo realized he'd been following his work all along.

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"He seems deliberate in his thinking," Villalongo said. "He's doing his research, getting things that he seems to truly love and connect with."

Villalongo's *Flex*, in particular, is rooted in Black music, inspired by Brooklyn's flex dancing community—also known as bone breaking—a style of dance rooted in dancehall music that features dancers contorting their limbs into seemingly impossible shapes. "When I saw that dancing, I said that's it, this beautiful poetic metaphor about the types of contortions we have to make in society, in the world, really, within these bodies," Villalongo said. "It's both something that seems to be almost impossible but also profound when you see it happen. It's like breakdancing, it's like yoga...all of these things mixing. Black people do that profoundly, the mixture, the pastiche—turning all this stuff into something new."

The inclusion of Brathwaite's work in the collection is particularly notable; the artist was instrumental in connecting the burgeoning hip-hop community with the downtown art scene in the late 1970s and early '80s, appearing as a guest on Glenn O'Brien's public access show *TV Party* and in the films *Downtown 81* (2000) and *Wild Style* (1983). Along with his contemporary Lee Quinones, Brathwaite helped legitimize spray can art in the fine art world, propping the back door open to the galleries for a thriving community of artists previously relegated to rooftops and train yards.



Installation view of William Villalongo, *Flex*, 2017, and William Villalongo, *Free, Black and All American No. 3*, 2017, in "Q-Tip: The Collection," at Bonhams, 2019. Courtesy of Bonhams.

Tip's goals appear to be in line with Brathwaite's in terms of including hip-hop's perspective in the greater art discourse. Speaking to a guest at a September 23rd preview event in front of Nina Chanel Abney's 2014 work *Untitled (FUCK T\*E \*OP)*, he said: "My hope is that one day, you'll see these works like it was a Picasso or a Francis Bacon." While a Q-Tip-selected soundtrack blared from monitors in each corner of the gallery space, he mingled with the diverse crowd of dealers, collectors,

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gawkers, fans, and friends—including Wu-Tang Clan manager Sophia Chang—posing for photos and describing his relationships with the work.

None of the works from Q-Tip's collection on view at Bonhams (through October 4th) are for sale, but it's easy to see why the auction house might want to host the exhibition. Its opening coincided with the auction house's "Contemporary: Art, Editions & Design" sale. But just as Bonhams leveraged Tip's celebrity and pop culture cache to bring foot traffic to the works in that sale, it also brought a point of view rooted in hip-hop to Madison Avenue, and exposed Tip and his contemporaries to corners of the art world that may have previously been closed off to them. One art dealer in attendance at the opening told me she wasn't familiar with Tip's musical legacy, but was impressed with the works he had collected. "He's got a great eye," she said.

The opening night for "Q-Tip: The Collection" definitely had a more convivial atmosphere than your average vernissage, with music blaring, dancers floating through the space, and champagne and chicken sandwiches in abundance; the juxtaposition of the party vibes with artwork centering mass incarceration, the transatlantic slave trade, and post-colonialism was both jarring and wholly appropriate. The duality of bringing socially conscious dialogue to the party has long been the province of hip-hop—Q-Tip just brought it to the gallery.

"There's always been this thread in hip-hop of certain things that are for people that want to party, but want to impart something a lot smarter or thoughtful in it," Villalongo said. "And I always thought of [Q-Tip and] Tribe as the zenith of that sort of thing."