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The Culture explores a dialogue between hip-hop and fine art

A new exhibit at the Cincinnati Art Museum teases out connections between the gallery and the game, but leaves conclusions up to viewers.

By Vivian Medithi

Traipsing through *The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, on display at the Cincinnati Art Museum through September 29, 2024, I felt desperate to press my fingers against piece after piece, consequences be damned. There was the mercerized cotton of Jayson Musson's "Knowledge of God," a rainbow weave that seemed to thread Coogi sweater flexes to dreamcoats of Biblical yore, and the inky elastic durags of "CAMOUFLAGE #105 (Metropolis)" by Anthony Olubumni Akinbola, museum lights glinting off its surface like sun on waves. These works may have been static, but certainly not inert, eagerly reacting to viewers: the metallic forcefield of staples shrouding Wilmer Wilson IV's "RID UM" shimmered with prickly energy, offering a slightly different experience from each angle, while the lightweight silk of "Ascent" by John Edmonds wriggled under the slightest breath.

The tactile allure of these artworks mirrors the "graspable language" underpinning the exhibit, which highlights the surprisingly wide middle ground between the seemingly disparate realms of "high brow" visual art and "low brow" rap music. Initially conceived as a collaboration between the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Saint Louis Art Museum as a celebration of hip-hop's 50th anniversary, *The Culture* side-steps grand, definitive statements about where hip-hop has been or is going. Instead, the exhibit seems content to start an open-ended conversation — the specific conclusions audiences draw are less important than the simple fact of their reaction to the work in the first place.

