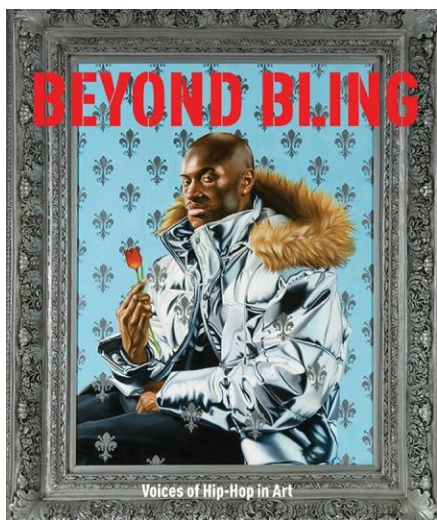


**Beyond Bling: Voices of Hip-Hop in Art**, by Matthew McLendon. Scala, dist. by ACC, October 2011. 128 p. col. ill. ISBN 9781857596977 (pbk.), \$19.95.



*Beyond Bling: Voices of Hip-Hop in Art* addresses new evidence of hip-hop's influence on the art world (the "bling" in the title is slang for flashy jewelry). The catalog accompanied an exhibition held in the summer of 2011 at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, where the author serves as Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. While much of the visual literature on hip-hop has focused on the culture's street origins and graffiti-saturated evolution, *Beyond Bling* is unique in that it covers only developments of the past ten years and focuses exclusively on studio-based artists. The media represented are primarily two-dimensional, encompassing painting, photomontage, collage, digital design, photography, and assemblage. Though the book falls on the modest end of the spectrum, it complements the limited number of existing catalogs, including the

exhaustive, concurrent retrospective *Art in the Streets* by Jeffrey Deitch with Roger Gastman and Aaron Rose.

Author Matthew McLendon contextualizes the generous visuals with an essay and brief but satisfying interviews of six of the ten exhibited artists. His nineteen-page essay weaves sporadically throughout the book, beginning with an overall review of hip-hop's relationship to the art world and then delves into analyses of the featured artists. At times, the writing feels a bit slight, hence ultimately best suited to an undergraduate or lay audience. Following the essay, the interviews compensate in depth, coaxing out meaningful narratives on each artist's creative growth. Highlights include the artists' surprisingly varied assessments of the breadth and depth of hip-hop's influence on their work. One minor caveat is that cover artist Kehinde Wiley isn't one of the featured interviewees and his portraits figure only minimally in the illustrations. However, since Wiley is likely the most well known of the ten, it stands to reason that the author chose to highlight less exposed artists.

Forty large, full color illustrations are printed throughout, with well-chosen detail photos that complement the larger works. Despite the volume's modest size, the judicious use of color and placement of the photos are among its most rewarding features, and it never feels too small. A handful of the panoramic shots, full illustrations, and details span the margins and run to the edge of the pages. The binding is standard for an affordable paperback and the pages are semi-glossy and substantially heavy. Front matter consists only of the author's acknowledgements and a foreword by the museum's Interim Director, T. Marshall Rousseau. A single page of notes closes the author's essay, with no index provided.

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