

Measured Motion: Rhythm as the Common Denominator in Hip Hop Creative Practices

by

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ABSTRACT

With this document I will discuss and reflect upon the performance and art exhibition show which I presented as part of my MFA thesis at the MonOrchid Gallery in Phoenix, Arizona on February 10, 2017. The approach to my thesis comes from my perspective as a Hip Hop practitioner exploring the relationship between each artistic discipline that makes up Hip Hop. Through this lens I will show the knowledge that is built from both individual and the conventional collective understandings of Hip Hop. As a practitioner for over 20 years, Hip Hop has molded my mind to be multifaceted, giving me a strong interest in art making as a collaborative process. I believe the more you see the relationship between each medium, the more that connection manifests a larger cognizance for where these art forms can progress. The relationship between all of the mediums involved creates a rhythm; it is the understanding of rhythm that can connect all types of art. When you are able to understand the process of rhythm as a through line, you will be able to create from your own personal rhythmic qualities in all things. This paper will delve into how my thesis performance incorporated not only music production and dance, but the written form of Hip Hop culture (Writing), identity, and the fundamentals of design. I will use the discussion of these forms to explore the similarities of meaning in movement-making behind B-boying, the most fundamental aspect of visual art and in body forms within Hip Hop. My aim was to research what we (the dancers and myself) learned from the movement in conjunction with Writing. I will discuss how many ways this can be beneficial to exploring new interdisciplinary creative collaborations with

design, visual art, choreography, sculpture, and architecture. Rhythm is the connective tissue between these disciplines in Hip Hop culture.

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This project was possible because of the help and support of many others. I want to express gratitude to those who inspired me and who showed me the way.

To begin, I want to express my gratitude to the Rock Steady Crew whose contributions to Hip Hop and to my way of thinking have been monumental. I want to specifically point out Crazy Legs and Mr. Wiggles for their interest in me and personal investment in my growth as an artist and as man.

I wish to express sincere thanks to the members of my committee. To Eileen Standley, who believed in this project from the beginning and gave me guidance and encouragement to its completion. To Sabela D. Grimes for his insights into the various dimensions of this topic. To Robert Kaplan for his tutelage and love of music. To Melissa Britt for seeing the vision and convincing me to come back to school.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my Mother and Sister without whose loving care and enthusiasm I would not be able to do anything in life.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to those who never stop dreaming.

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GLOSSARY OF HIP HOP TERMS

Hip Hop Culture - Hip-hop is a type of music. It is also a culture, or way of life. It includes many types of expression-for example, rapping, deejaying, dancing, and graffiti painting. The cultural movement known as hip-hop emerged in the late 1970s in the predominantly African American South Bronx section of New York City.

Writin' - The original name of what people refer to as "Graffiti".

Tagging - The act of writing your nick name in a stylized way on a wall or train.

DJin' - The act of playing and manipulating records using two turntables and a mixer.

MCin' - Master of ceremonies. In Hip Hop an MC was the original term for Rapper. Mic Controller.

B-Boy/B-girl - Coined by DJ Kool Herc to describe the elite dancers at his partys. Here originally meant "BREAK BOY" but depending on what area you were from in the Bronx the definition could have been "BEAT BOY" or "BRONX BOY".

-ism - one's unique mannerisms.

INTRODUCTION

My history as a dance practitioner and scholar led me to question my personal art making and the art making in the Hip Hop community. My past research has led me to realize that certain concepts during the inception of Hip Hop in the 1970's and 1980's were short lived. The overall artistic vision of Hip Hop culture went through changes and possibly a division within its original model. The elements that make up Hip Hop as a whole are B-boying/B-girling (Breakdancing), Writing (Graffiti or Aerosol Art), DJing (Disc Jockey), and MCing (EmCee or Master of Ceremonies). They have existed in practice prior to Hip Hop having a name. However, is it possible the elements were not practiced enough in conjunction with each other once that image was formulated? In my humble opinion I believe not everyone shares the vision or sees a larger connection to the Hip Hop culture by participating in every artistic medium. Could that have led to a divide or were these practices never relative to each other to begin with? This led me to thinking that this idea of a creative collective consciousness through the elements was only shared by a few. This was a model that there was a wisdom in understanding each element as a part of the larger vision of Hip Hop. In a way saying that Hip Hop can't possible be Hip Hop without these certain elements and the knowledge that is attained by doing them. This ideology was introduced to me through a group of artists that later on I found were instrumental in the New York based arts movement called Hip Hop, The Rock Steady Crew. More specifically Crazy Legs, Mr. Wiggles and Popmaster Fabel were the members that I had direct connection to and had personally invested in me at that time.

Not only did they dance, but created visual art and also produced music. They opened up a whole new world of multidisciplinary art that was the perfect combination of everything I was interested in at the time. I aimed to explore this through my interdisciplinary art making, engaging in all of my experiences with each aspect of Hip Hop, and how they are relative to one another through the component of rhythm. In 2016 I created a short for my Documentary Film class on one of my mentors Jorge ‘Popmaster Fabel’ Pabón. Fabel, along with many others have developed an understanding between writing and dancing that have played a major role in the way I think today. I wanted to collect more context and history of what it is that made him think this way because his stories had such an effect on me in the midst of our relationship. “When I started to learn waves and popping and what have you, and started moving my body in those ways...I started making the correlation between the dancing and stylized lettering. It’s all about Rhythm really, that’s what it comes down to. Anything that’s Hip Hop related it’s all about Rhythm. That’s the common denominator. “

I sought to create a full visual experience for my audience during my Thesis presentation. I chose to present what the relationship between Writing and B-boying could be in an art gallery setting. The art gallery space was an ideal context to present my work in - it supported the visual art elements, projection, live music, dance, and sculpture which I brought together into my project presentation. I wanted the audience to get a feel for Hip Hop culture as well as for the art forms themselves. They were witnessing b-boying, elements of graffiti and music and most importantly they were experiencing them

while being in a community setting. This was important to me because it reminded me of my initial moments of being introduced to Hip Hop. I went to parties and small gatherings where people were playing or making music live, dancing and showing their art. These experiences have stayed with me until this day and influence the way I see Hip Hop in a community setting. I used a Rhythmic layer to tie all the elements together in the gallery space. The visual art on display was paintings, drawings, sculpture and dance. These were select pieces from my artistic research which provided a look at the process from my artistic point of view. Tagging , which is a stylized signature, normally done in one color, was represented with a solo dance by a ballerina. This dance popped up randomly during the evening's presentation. The choreographic process involved with this piece was a mixture of my personal aesthetic of line and the limitations of moving



Figure 1. - Ballerina with spray painted tutu and gymnastics ribbon performance.

the gymnastics ribbon throughout the space. There were certain line qualities that we had to bend a bit based on the momentum of the ribbon. I wanted to keep the flow of the movement and not break that or have the ribbon drag on the floor. If that were to happen, it made me feel as if you were simply stopping the flow of your paint which technically would make your tag not look clean or well crafted. It's all about the rhythm and flow of your signature.

For Writing, Tagging is the fundamental core of aesthetic, identity and overall design. With this piece I investigated the line quality and details of a tag's make-up and through the linear actions in the dancers' movement quality (which are so clearly articulated in ballet vernacular). This emulated the act of tagging through the dance. I wanted to convey a sense of the time, thought, and effort that goes into the technique of tagging and the attention and kinesthetic/visual awareness that is behind every stroke. In other words, I wanted to cultivate a sense of interactivity with the viewer. My aim was to engage them and offer an understanding of the line that they were seeing. I showed the process of forming a line in juxtaposition to graffiti style lettering as it could be articulating through the human body. The line could move from the paper to the space around us is in the dance. This is what I wanted the audience to visualize. The lettering comes off the page or in this case the wall, into three-dimensional space through the dancer's body.

When these spaces are articulated in 3D forms, they become part of the environment which then has the potential to become a design or form. Once they become fully realized we can then use the form to serve a purpose or have a function. This was shown through my chair design that was originally conceptualized from the stylized letter 'S'.



Figure 2. - The 'S' chair fully realized. (Product shot.)

The chair started as an idea years ago and originated from imagining what it would be like to have a graffiti designed world; Similar to a Super Mario World video game where everything in life is made and seen from a Hip Hop point of view. This was a good way for me to incorporate my studies of the body because we interact with objects in our environment every day. The goal was to create as many of these examples as

possible before the scheduled showing in January 2017. I also worked with other artists outside of my own talents to create these projects. This supports my thoughts about artmaking as a collaboration. I am invested in cultivating the relationship between dancemaking methodologies with other artistic practices. I'm interested in showing multiple ways to view movement as a creative tool by being able to visualize rhythm three dimensionally in the space.

In 2011, as a part of MoMA's Performance Exhibition Series the Trisha Brown Company presented a program of live performance and dance in conjunction with the group exhibition *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*.

“The dancing body has long been a subject matter for drawing, as seen in a variety of works included in this exhibition. These documentations show dance in two dimensions, allowing it to be seen in a gallery setting. But if one considers line as the trace of a point in motion—an idea at the core of this project—the very act of dance becomes a drawing, an insertion of line into time and the three-dimensional space of our lived world.” - (excerpt from the MoMA performance brochure).

The idea behind this performance inspired me to think about how to create a movement performance based on my research and statements about the curved line in Hip Hop. This inspired my idea to hold the thesis show an art gallery.

How can I disseminate this knowledge? And what ways can I explore the relationships between each medium? These were some initial questions that inspired my creative process and ways of realizing the thesis project. Since rhythm is the through line,

I dug deeper into identifying the rhythm in each art form. Finding the moments where it was present and then also how it inspired my creative process. Since the human form is a three-dimensional figure, the dancers' embodied movements and poses exhibit different geometrical relationships depending on the angle at which the piece is observed. Because of this notion, I decided to let the audience to be positioned as they pleased throughout the gallery and have the performance happen spontaneously around them. There were elements of improvisation in my pieces that helped the people and the environment bring these ideas into fruition. For example when the dancers would move across the floor there might be a small group of people standing in their path way. The negotiation between the dancers and the audience gave the space it's own unique energy and I believe it was the moments of communication between witness and performer that created to the rhythm in the room. I also like the idea of interactivity in performance and was challenging my tendency to work with a traditional proscenium stage viewpoint. For example the dancer who displayed the movement of Popping moved from piece to piece during his performance. His movements were based on the design of each art work that he interacted with. When all the art work was set in the space I asked him to come in a walk through the gallery with me without anyone inside. I gave him a few minutes with each piece to and prompted him to try to interpret the movement in each artwork. The purpose of this combination of art and dance was to demonstrate relationships between movement elements and those used in the visual arts. By displaying the similarities and ideology behind the creative mind of a Hip Hop artist, I am interested in promoting new

artistic possibilities and show how these ideas can influence all forms of art making in a variety of contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: THE RHYTHMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WRITTEN WORD AND DANCE

Visualization is the key, a school of seeing. Seeing motion. Meaning that arises from image-inspired movement became the dance. Visualization in this way is about a way of feeling and sensing spaces for the individual dancer, and so it is about inscription and how to write clearly from this perspective. “Space Writing” is a way of using the shapes of letters for capturing movement traces. It’s also used for reversing that process in order to use captured movement to create shapes.

The concept of writing and drawing within dance creates a structure or a supply of options for new forms and shapes to emerge. The letter generates the form and the dancer’s mind creates the movement within that form to create a dynamic shape. This is the use of space and movement ideologies in relationship to the written word. The connection between Writing (graffiti) and B-boying reveals a visual thinking tool unlike any other. It is unique to the Hip Hop lens and I demonstrated this with visual art and dance making in a way that was similar to how Forsythe used elements of improvisational techniques to generate a unique movement.

It starts as far back as your signature. This is the beginning of the choices we make in developing your ‘style’. Your ‘style’ ultimately defines who you are as different from anyone else; it is what makes someone an individual. We all have our own signature that is unique to our hand and our preference. After we develop our signature, it ultimately becomes something we draw instead of something we write. One’s hand flows in a way that is natural to them when writing their personal signature. I have examined this concept through the art of ‘Tagging’, where the Hip Hop lens causes that line to do things that most common writing techniques do not. For example, when I prompted the ballerina to trace in the air the letter S with the gymnastics wand she made her version of the S. As she did that I also drew what I saw. I then wrote a graffiti style S on the page and asked if she can trace the line of that S instead. The stylized S gave her a more exaggerated approach to her movement, with a few minor changes to the line based on the function of the ribbon. We tried to find a middle ground between the design and the limitations with the ribbon idea.

Tagging is Hip Hop’s version of writing a signature and once you develop your style it can become a part of everything you do. It becomes your name, a representation of you, and your identity. The ‘tag’ is created and develops into an expressive line of style, a stylized fashion signature that is influenced by Hip Hop’s principles in conjunction with our outside influences and experiences. It starts as simple as just writing the letters that make up your name, just as you do when you learn to write in school. Cursive writing in the world today is almost always done in cursive. This is the beginning

of understanding how to connect letters and to begin to ‘flow’. The flow of motion should always be connected in the name; it is a fluctuation of rhythm and timing. Flow is one of the most important components of motion. We must flow in order to continue with an idea and connect them to other ideas. The quality of one’s personal line speaks to who you are as an individual. These stylized line qualities are called ‘isms’. Similar to the meaning of the suffix from the dictionary, ‘-ism’ means a distinctive practice, system, or philosophy, typically a political ideology or an artistic movement. In Hip Hop, it also has taken on the meaning of ‘one's unique mannerisms’. These ‘-isms’ are also present within the dancing. In other words, you build from your own DNA to advance the genetic composition of your style.

THE LINE

Line is often referred to as the most basic element of design. Yet this simple element functions in complex ways. It is the starting place for most artistic creation whether one is starting a fine drawing, painting, or concepts for sculpture. Almost every design begins with line. Used effectively, line expresses a variety of verbal and visual concepts. It works either by itself or in conjunction with other lines to communicate messages and impact audience. These lines can impact the way we feel and react according to their qualities. I am researching how the direction and character of line can convey different states and emotions, as a powerful tool for design.

My investigations could be defined this way - “line is the path of a dot, point etc. through space”. This concept is often explored in dance. Dancers use line to explain movement. These lines are created by the dancers’ body and their gestures in space or in spatial relationship of one body part moving away from another. Dancing lines are created constantly during all body motions.

Following these ideas with my movement research I asked myself: What if this line had trajectory? What if it could explode and then suddenly arrow back onto itself? This is what the line of Writing ‘Graffiti’ does and coincidentally the movement of B-boying does as well. In B-boying, there is expanding and moving through boundaries of the kinesphere. This motion (or line of motion) then spirals back through the original path of movement previously executed. There is a way of thinking that underlies how line appears in B-boy motion. It is influenced by the cultural context that creates that type of movement in space by the dancer. This context is embodied in the movement through personification. The human characteristic is the quality that gets added to the choices of each movement within the line. This was explained to me when Mr. Wiggles mentioned that the T in my name is doing a Scarecrow, which is a style that is used in Popping. The letter itself embodied the stylistic movement of the dance and that opened up a new way of adding personality to my letters and their one within the shape of them. Some examples of these lines include: straight meets curved; bends connect to angles; extruding and protruding segments to create new pathways.

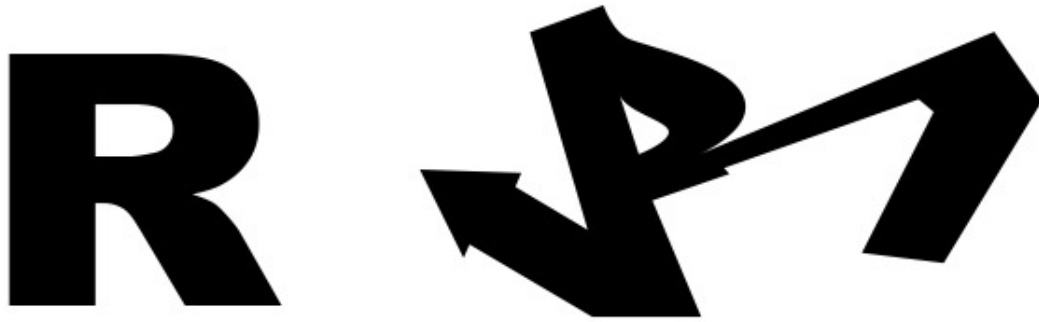


Figure 3. - The R on the left is how people see the world, the R on the right is how a writer views the world, 'stylized'.

In my thesis showing, I worked the most intensively with two B-boy dancers from Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. We applied for an apprenticeship grant through the Canadian Arts Council to help fund the time we would need to spend together to collaboratively realize my idea. The plan was to spend a full four months on creating the project through a close working relationship. The funding allowed us to be in the same place, have rehearsal space four times a week, and pay for any living expenses during that time. We built creative chemistry and understanding of each other's movement. This also gave us opportunities to try out some of the design concepts we were exploring on paper. Not unlike a journal, the dancers were prompted to make a drawing in their black sketchbooks everyday as part of their practice. This was to help them develop their eye for the basic design elements of line, form, shape, composition, and space that I relate to

the design aspect of our bodies in the space. This approach allowed us to build a shared vocabulary to describe what they are doing. This helped them to see the parallels between both art forms. They were able to relate a connection of movement to a connection between two letterforms and vice versa. If an extension of a letter was an arrow that doubled back onto itself then it would imply a switch or misdirection. What was done on paper became a way of seeing the links to other pathways. The more we can visualize the body or the space similar to how we were depicting it on paper is how we make the letters themselves dance and how the letters dancing in turn give us movement ideas. This heightened awareness and new knowledge developed together became present in their movements as I developed the choreography.

In Hip Hop culture (or in the approach to B- boying) it is customary to gather information that is all around you and turn it into pure inspiration and creativity. It is also encouraged to practice more than one artistic expression such as music, dance and visual art. This opens the eyes to the world and expands the vision for where the creative direction can go. It also promotes multidisciplinary art making and opens conversation for collaboration. The Hip Hop mind sometimes sees shapes and angles within empty spaces that are conceptually influenced by the music or a certain feeling. Some music will give an emotional reaction causing an unconventional angle or gesture to occur. I am interested in the creative mind that is individual to the Hip Hop experience with its distinctive method and form. For example, one might materialize an idea from a pathway influenced by the written word of Hip Hop (graffiti). The B-boy may envision a word or

particular letter shape on the floor and move along it's path. There are moments where the lean of a letter or it's angle can influence a position that the B-boy then emulates. There are continuous things that are influencing the B-Boy's (dancers) mind when they are submerged within the culture.

As a practitioner, I gather and create movement from my everyday experience and environments to make dance. A "space-consciousness" or having a consciousness or understanding of force and time offers the potential to draw upon in my Hip Hop movement practice. This was a concept brought to my attention from an article by Barbara Mettler. She explains the relationship between dance and the visual arts in a way that identifies a common knowledge base between how both practices approach space. We learn this through interacting with objects every day within our daily lives. Dance and other physical activities heighten our space-consciousness through practice. We become educated through the mastery of movement in relation to the spaces around us. (Mettler, 200).

In dance, being aware of line is the start of becoming aware of the space that is taken up by the body. Dancers learn to always be conscious of their bodies, whether in motion or standing still. They practice continually extending the body in multiple directions. Dancers are also aware of what works for their individual bodies. They should learn which angles can appear to shorten their lines, and which angles add length to their limbs. This brings us back full circle to our original understanding of 'the line'. When a dancer

becomes aware of their spatial surroundings then they start to become knowledgeable sense of line in relationship to space.

“Modern dance—contemporary dancers—are good. They give you great lines that I envision that in my head, and I do like that, but if they were hip-hop dancers doing the same thing, it would be rough, ‘cause they couldn’t do it. They’d be humped back—and that’s what I really like. It’s like that original aesthetic of jazz, that crooked line. That fucking off-beat, that twist, that’s what’s the hep cats did. That lean. That walk. When you’re talking about African-American history in this country, we’re talking about that crooked line. You wanna see who black people is? That diagonal right there. In Western construct, they want to glorify the structure, the line. And we like to look at our line as a guideline, not a god-line.” (Rennie Harris, 2009.)

This statement by Rennie Harris gives insight to the mind of a Hip Hop practitioner in terms of how they view a fundamental dance element such as line. In my research, I am using the ‘line’ as the most basic and easily recognizable way to explain the choreographic process of movement generation. Through my experience I have realized that there are rudimentary concepts visual art and design that are foundations upon which I have been expanding my choreographic ideas and movement research. This underlying thought process can be viewed in different ways, which develops new concepts. There is a valuable knowledge that reveals itself through B-boying. It informs a dancer’s unique spatial awareness, composition, timing and rhythm. Engineers and Architects alike create line drawings. These sketches outline the construction and the appearance of structures whether it is of a building or a piece of machinery. Similarly, if an architect (or an Artist) would draw the line diagram of a dancing body, such a drawing will show proper elevations, points, and contours on the human body. The end drawing would naturally be the result of how the dancer had presented his or her body shape in

motion. In my work, the movement research through my dancers as dancing body diagrams expressed and generated forms in space. The drawings they created in their black sketchbooks were the result of their personal research in line and form from the practices and discussion we had during our time developing the show. In B-boying, our line is unique. It is based on our personal rhythm and aesthetic; we distort the straight line or posture to display personal style. We have a unique vision in terms of our posture and movement that responds to and constructs the world around us from our perspective.

The development of my 'S chair' also articulates this idea of "line". The chair was an example of where the line can eventually lead. It was a design that progressed from 2D design on paper to 3D sculptural objects. In the thesis show, the 'S chair' became an interactive object with a purpose and function. The examples shown in the image of the 'S character study' (see figure 4) show the various rhythms that create each investigation. It is through the diversity and rhythm of my design that allowed me to have a myriad of styles for just one letter. I wanted the audience to get an idea of the method that is put behind finding the right shape and why. Not every line was going to be able to be used for the specificity of it needing to fit the function of a chair. I picked the more practical S line shape because of the purpose of it's function as a chair. From there I used another line and put them next to each other which created a design that looked like a ribbon. The array of lines helped to give me the idea of how to build the chair in a similar fashion with an array of cut plywood layered together. This also gave the chair a unique look and

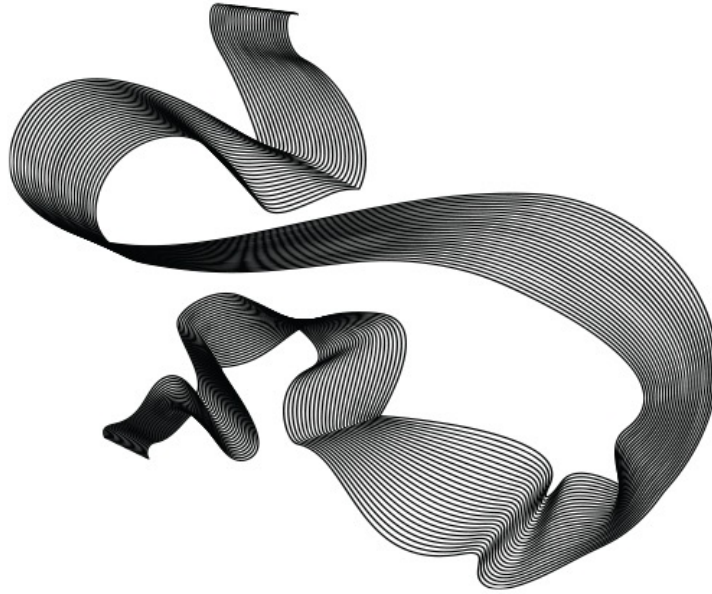


Figure 4. - S design made up of two separate pathways connected in an array to each path and point.

opened up the possibilities to hollow out the inside of the shape. In side that space I am planning on incorporating a speaker system into the chair in the near future.

MUSIC AND PRODUCTION

When it comes to rhythm, music is the most relative to that term. We know there is rhythm in drum and instrumentation, but what if we tried to produce music from the rhythm of what we see versus what we hear? I researched this question by creating a majority of the musical scores for my movement pieces. I looked for the rhythm in the dancers' steps, bodily gestures, limbs, and anything that gave me a feeling of a sound. I recreated music three times for the final dance piece because I was also looking for a

certain type of feeling that could be evoked from watching the movement. The first two attempts were not strong enough for me so I scrapped them and started all over. Once I found the connection between a certain rhythm of the music with the movements of the dancers, that's when I knew I had the right sound. Throughout my experience as a dancer I have always been intrigued by the way a movement was brought out by a particular sound and how it made me feel. I was searching for that feeling while creating the music for each piece. There had to be a quality that was met through the relationship of the rhythm in the dance and the rhythm of the sound. I noticed that the dancers would react a certain way, giving me their approval of how they felt while performing the movement which also helped the process. When I received that kind of feedback from them, then I sensed it was right. I knew they would translate that energy into the movement while they were performing. In my mind, I wanted it to be felt by the audience just as it looked. I try to convey this type of energy personally as a performer. Most of my professional career was based on my keen sense of timing and interpretation of the music. I wanted the movement pieces in the show to embody that same view, so I worked closely with each dancer's timing in order to bring my distinctive eye and ear to them.

ANALYSIS

Almost everything in my show was deeply thought through and created months prior to the show. I had a vision for what I wanted to do early in my studies during the

MFA program and each project I worked on throughout my education was leading into the larger thesis showing. I gave myself enough time to test things out prior to finalizing the show and to make the proper adjustments as things progressed. For example, there was a chance that the amount of people coming to view the show would be a large number which means there would be less space for the performance aspect. There were moments in the beginning and end of the piece where the observers crowded around the dancers. This made it difficult for me to see the performers and follow their movements with the music I was playing simultaneously. I had to follow my instinct as to where they may have been in the choreography based on the movements of the crowd. This ended up being a moment for me to respond differently than how we rehearsed it. I could only predict how the audience moved until we actually were physically in the space during show time. This caused me and the dancers to react in the moment giving us times where we would have to rely on the timing we've built through our creative process.

Overall, I have learned that the experience of producing the performance outside of the proscenium stage was very well received by the audience. This validated my creative choice to present my work in this way. The format of a crowd sitting significantly far away from dance in traditional proscenium settings has always posed as an issue to me as a performer and choreographer. Culturally, I am used to being surrounded by people when I would dance. The spotlights and distance have always given me a completely different feeling. Deconstructing my dance has given me the

confidence to take dance performance into different spaces where I feel the specific style of Hip Hop can thrive.

Given more time, I would present some of the dance slightly different and create pieces of visual art particular to the space that I use. For example, I have realized I am especially interested in the layer of the creative process that is the space itself. Spaces can provoke feelings based on their design and I want to capture the feeling of the space and then elaborate on it. If I can get enough time in the space prior to my upcoming show, I would like to design the pieces and movement based off of the space as much as possible. From being inside the space I feel the flow of rhythm from inside the architecture and that plays role in the human body experience that I want to tap into. I believe this has the potential to activate the energy within the gallery making the connection between the art and spectator more of a visceral experience. I've discovered through this process that the involvement of the witness is becoming much more essential. My creative process leading up to the show was trying to make each art piece support the other. Now, I'm thinking the art pieces will support the crowd experience, as well.

CONCLUSION

My early introduction to Hip Hop culture has left an impression on me that has now come full circle once I returned to Academia for my MFA. There has always been

this vision of an artistic movement from my own personal research that led me to create the work I am doing now and what I intend to make in the future. My plan is to continue experimenting with design while using the human body and movement as a creative tool and having Rhythm as the guide.

Now that I look back I recognize that the stories of Crazy Legs, Mr. Wiggles and Popmaster Fabel, my interest in fine arts and my love of music and dance all started to develop my interdisciplinary mind. I was introduced to drawing the human figure, perspective, color and lighting through reading comic books. The stories and the detailed drawings took me into the world of imagination. One of the first times I witnessed B-boying in it's entirety, the dancer spun up, crossed his arms and stood tall to finish his performance. It was dynamic, it was larger than life, this guy was a super hero to me! I was already interested in the music aspect of Hip Hop from making the connection of hearing some of the records in my home. James Brown was not played in my household, but once I heard a particular break entitled 'In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida' by the Incredible Bongo Band is when I felt included. That record was a percussive instrumental cover of a record my Mother played from the original band, Iron Butterfly. I recognized the melody of the song immediately and in that moment, I felt at home! Those personal connections is what made the journey all the more exciting and meaningful, they made me look deeper.

I identified early on that there was a similarity between music, dance and visual art because I seemed to create from the same place with each one, a rhythmic perspective. I did not know exactly what it was that led me to seeing a parallel between each practice, it just felt homogenous and I did not know how to articulate that at first. All I needed to do was work on the technique of what I wanted to create with. I had to learn the function of the turntable, develop the proficiency of the aerosol can and practice to master the moving body. This all took a great deal of time, but I had fun with it so I wanted to continuously learn more and more and I have not stopped since.

My interest in teaching comes from being aware that I have had a unique past within my personal practice and learned history. I recognize the important lineage of the Rock Steady Crew and their significance within the art form and legacy of the B-boy. I feel that my history and present day thinking has led me to a unique understanding of what Hip Hop can become in the future. I believe that in any artistic practice that one must know about the past by studying and doing thorough research as well as being aware of the present moment through their journey. Only then will they be able to have a clear vision for the future. To bring create such an awareness for Hip Hop dance I believe we need to start documenting more of the dance through writings and research. I am interested in creating visual aids for learning B-boy/B-girl techniques. That accompanied by some text can really help with students and teachers to develop a clear understanding of the movement and how it can be done. There are specific techniques that have been passed down person to person that I know are key components for establishing a flow in

movement forms. These are the structures that need to be realized and then also challenged so that they can be developed and improved.

After the success of my show at MonOrchid I was approached by the gallery's curator to do a residency there. I have been really interested in linking my current concepts with old Renaissance techniques and ideas. My vision is to create the art in a similar fashion and possibly experimenting with certain traditional painting techniques from that era such as fresco to give the artwork a timeless feel. I am specifically interested in the imagery from the religious and political views of that time period. I am interested in manipulating Renaissance imagery to give it a Hip Hop influence, with for example, the iconic Cherub paintings from Raphael. What if the Cherubs were B-Boys?



Figure 5. - Original concept sketch of Renaissance Art style cherubs in B-boy poses.

I've already started sketching out some ideas and I look forward to seeing how far I can get with this idea.

The greatest thing about my MFA experience was the ability to take my time and cultivate some of the ideas I have been investigating on a performative level and design. The creation of each dance piece and visual art piece was a culmination of years of thought as well as desire to create something new and exciting. I'm going to continue working with mix medium and try to engage the community in different ways. The gallery was a place where people can gather and interact. These things don't always happen in the theatre, I want my audience to get to know and meet each other while enjoying art and entertainment. I feel this can help me to engage more with the local community here in Phoenix, Arizona. In the past 10 years this is the longest I've staying in one place this long and I don't want it to stop at my thesis project but to continue to other spaces in and around the city. Shortly after my show at MonOrchid the curator of the establishment asked me to stay in contact about working towards a residency. I've also been asked to display some art for a hotel room installation at a hip new hotel called Found:re. I'm looking forward to continuing to establish myself as an Arizona based artist and contribute to the growing art scene here. I plan on impacting this community through my rhythmic approach of art making with mixed mediums that connects the art and the crowd.

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