

"The experience is a celebration for the culture that has been a big part of shaping who I am as an individual and creator: HIP HOP. This year marks the 50th year of its existence and the 35th year in my life. HIP HOP has inspired me to do whatever it is I feel called to and has always been the motivation to go hard for what you want to create in this world. HIP HOP is living proof that we all can make something out of nothing. HIP HOP has motivated me to express myself confidently, boldly, and unapologetically. In *The Mecca* I wanted to bring awareness to New York City HIP HOP in particular, as Jadakiss said in his versus battle against Camron and Dipset, New York is the mecca of HIP HOP, where it all started. I chose to highlight two icons in HIP HOP fashion, emblematic of NYC, the Jesus piece and the wheat Timbs.

The Jesus Pieces (*The Commission*) represent three of the most influential HIP HOP artists from NYC in my life. Jay Z, Biggie, and Nas. All three of them have influenced me in very different ways and in different times in my life. Biggie being one of the first artists earlier on as I used to hear my parents bump Biggie around the house along with other artists. I remember him being super smooth and confident and a crazy lyricist as I would watch his videos as a kid. I remember him putting his people on (Jr Mafia) introducing them to the world and bringing them up with him as he was coming up. Nas I remember also being super smooth with a very unique flow. I will never forget that crazy diss album *Stillmatic* as he was battling Jay Z, maybe the top dis album of all times. I also will never forget Nas playing in one of the most epic movies in HIP HOP history, *Belly*, and his cool demeanor alongside the great DMX. And of course Jay Z and all he has done for HIP HOP, from being independent and starting his own record label following the footsteps of Master P and the very few others who have done so, to making one of the most iconic record labels ever created, Roc-A-Fella, to giving some of my favorite artists a space to shine and now continuing that today with Roc Nation, to being such an amazing artist, blessing us with so much great music, so many great albums. There are so many artists coming out of NYC but to me these are some of the most influential in my life.

*The Commission* also features an AR element from my friend and collaborator Yanis Sabir. He has created another dimension to the chains where you can interact with Jay, Biggie, and Nas by scanning the QR code and pointing your phone at the faces of the chains and pressing play. You will hear each of them spit one of my favorite verses/moments on top of a piano vibe created by Yanis.

The *Balloon Release Timbs* are a continuation of a HIP HOP shoe tour I'm working on in celebration of HIP HOP's 50th Birthday. For this tour, I go to different places around the world and create the HIP HOP shoes of that place. I made the Air Force 1's in Baltimore and my hometown, St. Louis. I made the Bapesta in Tokyo and now coming to New York I had to create the Wheat Timberland boots. I threw them over the wire to represent a memorialization for the people we lost. The last few years we have lost a lot of people. All of us have and I wanted to create a space for that. I named them *Balloon Release Timbs*. I have a tradition in my family where if we lose people in our lives we have a ceremony called a balloon release where we write the names of the ones we lost and maybe a message to them and release them in the sky. In the process of making these boots I lost two people to car accidents back to back. When this happened I was working on these pairs of Timbs for this show and my way of grieving was through the completion of these shoes. They are ironically made completely out of car parts.

*The Bigger Than Me 2* title came from a continuation of the last window show made in 2018 at The New Museum. That show was work, not about me but about subjects that were much bigger than myself. I feel that this work holds true to that as well. And in the spirit of HIP HOP this show is a "single" to the "album" that will drop at Anton Kern Gallery January 11, 2024."

—Aaron Fowler

[@aaronfowlerstudio](#) / <https://www.aaronfowler.art/>