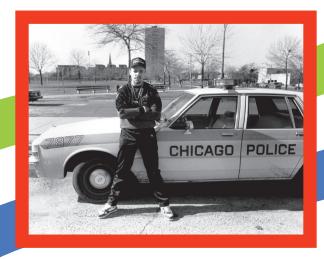


An Exhibition Catalogue by Mitch McGee for DePaul GD 330 // FALL 2021



Dedciated to the rich culture and aesthetics of the 90's rap scene.





A STUDY OF THE TYPOGRAPHIC TRENDS FROM HIP-HOPS GOLDEN AGE



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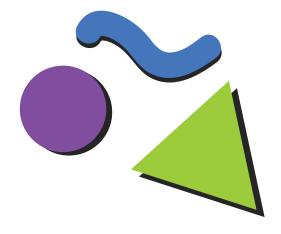
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HOW WE LIVE & INTERACT WITH TYPOGRAPHY

Typography is something that I've learned about as a graphic designer since my very first design class back in sophomore year of high school. It's always been stressed to us just how important typography is, and how every little detail that goes into it can affect the readability or effectiveness of the text. While we understand how important typography is when we are doing work in Photoshop or InDesign, it isn't until you take a look around your everyday surroundings and look for examples of typography, that you realize just how important it can really be. For example, at the start of this quarter, we were asked to walk around and photograph examples of typography in our everyday lives, inside and outside of our homes. While walking around my neighborhood and really paying attention to the details I wouldn't usually notice, I realized just how much of a role typography does play in our everyday lives, and how different variations of typography are all used for different purposes. For example, when observing signs such as bus stops or CTA train information, the text was all very bold, plain, and straight to the point. This is because they are trying to convey important information regarding public transit, and there is little room to try and worry about making it look super pretty or fancy. There was an active thought process behind the team who designed those signs when they decided to put the words "bus stop" in a bold sans serif font. They knew this would be easily readable and would allow the signs to be recognized from far away. There are even plenty of examples of typography in our own homes as well. While looking around my home, I realized that the typography I found was more decorative, as most of it was on shirts or posters in my room. Instead of being designed with the idea

of readability for thousands of people in mind, the typography on these shirts or posters was designed for a smaller scale, allowing it to be more decorative in nature. The typography we find in our own homes usually tends to be more decorative, as this type of text can afford to be much more expressive, allowing it to appeal to specific audiences who would want to purchase and wear or display it in their homes. While the style and purpose behind the text may be completely different, the typography we see inside and outside our homes are similar in that there was a full thought process that went into the designing of that text. Typography is just one part of design, but there is so much that goes into it that the average person may have never considered. I would encourage anyone to take a walk around their neighborhood and really observe examples of text that they walk by every day. Take a minute to look at it, and question why the designer may have made the decisions they did when arranging that text. Appreciating little things like this makes our everyday lives just a little more interesting.

TYPOGRAPHY IN 90'S HIP-HOP



AN IN DEPTH LOOK INTO THE TYPOGRPAHIC AESTHETICS OF 90'S HIP-HOP ALBUM COVERS



While thinking of examples of typography, one of the first concepts that came to me was the typography in 90's rap, specifically within the design of album covers. This immediately intrigued me because when you think of the iconic album covers of the 90's rap scene, they all have some sort of unique style of text that really make them stand out. The text isn't just unique for the sake of it either, it usually relates to the artists personality and fits the vibe of the music they created for the album. This is what my exhibition focuses on - the relationship between 90's rap and the typography that helped to build some of the most recognizable album covers from one of the greatest periods of a musical genre. From the playful, bouncy text we see on the album covers from groups like A Tribe Called Quest. to the sharp, calculated serif text we see on covers like The Wu-Tang Clan's "Enter the Wu-Tang", there is no shortage of variety when it comes to the typography of 90's rap album covers. Hip-hop is inherently connected with the streets and city life, where the genre found it's origins and it's most prominent stars were

born and raised. Because of this, early rap aesthetics were often connected with city life and art, such as graffiti. Graffiti text is known for being very intricate and decorative, completely different from the text you would read in a book or a newspaper. Many rap album covers even use graffiti types of text directly, referencing the origins of the genre. While most of the album covers of the 90's don't feature direct references to graffiti, I believe that the originality and expressiveness of the text we see on these album covers is influenced by this type of graffiti art and city life as it goes hand in hand with the roots of the genre.

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OUTKASTATLIENS

When I think of the dynamic hip-hop duo Outkast, I can't think of a more fitting album cover than that of their second album "ATLiens". The album cover features comic book like illustrations of the group's members Big Boi and André 3000 in a sort of sci-fi looking scene. If this wasn't absurd enough, the typography on this album cover adds so much character that fits the duo perfectly. At the top of the cover, we see the group's name, Outkast, in a bold serif font with a blocky, 3D shape effect behind it that was featured in a lot of

comic book designs from the time. We see this same effect applied to the bottom text, with the album's name ATLiens. However, this text is done in what appears to be a handwritten style. These typographic choices may seem odd at first, but I think it's perfect for Outkast. André 3000 and Big Boi are two of the most eccentric and experimental figures in hiphop, with Andre constantly pushing the boundaries of the genre and Big Boi always coming with electric, bouncy flows that keep their audience on the edge

of their seat. If the album cover's typography featured anything less quirky than this, I just don't think it would do the legendary hip-hop duo any justice.



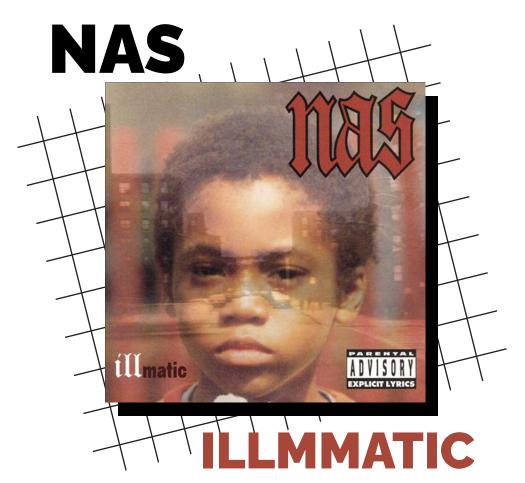


The cover art for the legendary rap group, A Tribe Called Quest's album "The Low End Theory", is largely considered by many to be one of the best of all time. On a list published by Complex of the top 50 rap album covers of all time, "The Low End Theory" was ranked number one. So, with this amazing album cover, we can of course expect some fantastic typography. The cover features a stylized painting of a woman kneeling with stripes of bright red and green going down her body, with the title of the album running down her back in a very natural feel. The text is written in a handwritten kind of style, almost as if it was painted directly on the cover of the album. It is written in the same bright green color that we see featured in some of the accenting stripes on the figures body, making it fit in with the very simple color

scheme of the cover. On the lower body of the figure, we see the groups logo, which is known for featuring hand drawn stylized text and figures in it.



This goes along perfectly with the handwritten look of the typography on the album cover. The type is very playful and smooth in the way it is positioned in relation to the main art of the cover. Playful and smooth is also almost exactly how I would describe A Tribe Called Quest's music. They are introspective and smooth with their lyrics, while also remaining playful in their songs with bright, brash beat selections and instrumentation.



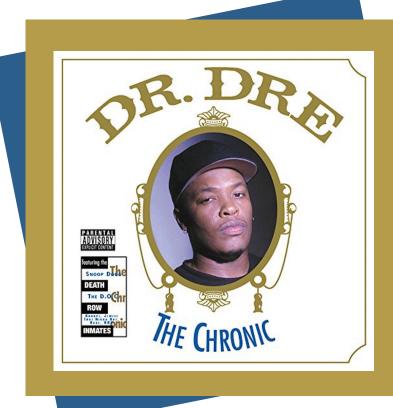
While the album covers we saw from Outkast and A Tribe Called Quest felt very bright and imaginative, the cover for Nas' classic album "Illmatic" gives the complete opposite feeling. The cover features a photo of Nas as a child, superimposed over a street block that represents the projects in which he grew up in. The entire cover is tinted in a sort of brownish red color, giving a very grimy feeling to the entire thing, which also reflects the overall sound of the album. As for the typography, it compliments this feeling as

well. We see the name Nas placed in the top right of the cover in a very classic type of graffiti text. This typography choice goes along well with the feeling of growing up in the streets, and the faded red color of the text helps it to fit in with the darker theme of the entire cover. Illmatic is widely considered to be one of the greatest rap albums of all time. On the album, Nas raps about his life growing up in the Queensbridge Houses in Oueens. New York. The cover art and specifically the typography capture this feeling perfectly and allow

the listeners to get an idea of the sound of the album before they even hit play on albums first track.

"It drops deep as it does in my breath, I never sleep, 'cause sleep is the cousin of death. Beyond the walls of intelligence, life is defined, I think of crime when I'm in a New York state of mind"

- Nas



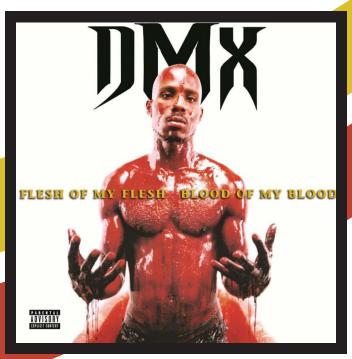
DR. DRE THE CHRONIC

When we look at the cover art for Dr. Dre's debut 1992 album, "The Chronic", the first thing we notice is how simple and clean it is. It features a plain white background, with "Dr. Dre" written in a decorative serif font at the top of the cover, and the album's title "The Chronic" at the bottom of the cover in a simple sans serif font. Both lines of text have a very grand feel to them, and they curve in a way that perfectly frames the center of the cover. In the center, we see a photo of

Dre, with a decorative frame around it. The concept for the cover is actually based off the packaging of Zig-Zag rolling papers which are used for rolling tobacco or weed. The albums name even takes

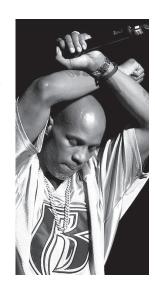


it's inspiration from weed, as chronic is a reference to high grade marijuana. As a whole, the design and typography of the cover art being based around weed culture is extremely fitting, as it was a big part of the west coast rap scene at the time. The Chronic is known as the album that redefined west coast hip-hop in the 90s, even launching the careers of famous rappers such as Snoop Dogg and Nate Dogg. Because of this, it is very appropriate that the typography and overall design of the album cover have a west coast feel to it.



FLESH OF MY FLESH, BLOOD OF MY BLOOD

DMX's "Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood" features one of the most original and also horrifying album covers in all of rap. The cover features DMX himself, absolutely drenched in blood, leaving listeners confused and scared, but also intrigued. In the back of the image, we see the rappers name "DMX" written in large black letters behind his head. The text is written in a very decorative style with sharp serifs. The font appears to be based off graffiti text, similar to what we saw in Nas' Illmatic album cover. This style of font is fitting for a DMX album cover, as it fits the extremely rough life he grew up with on the streets of New York. In the middle of the cover, we see the title in a yellow, more standard serif font. This is a much more traditional font when compared to the other text we see on the cover. I believe it was done in this style in order to not take attention away from the shocking imagery of the cover. This is one of the most iconic album covers in the history of hip-hop, so it's very fitting that it belongs to a rapper who was one of the genres most abrasive and memorable figures.



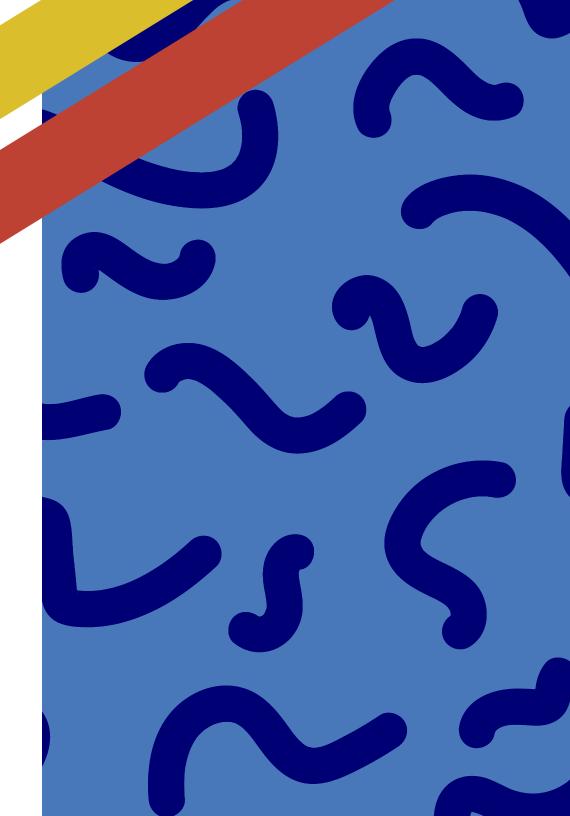




IMAGE LIST 🔷

i Ice T with Chicago Police, 1990

ii N.W.A Group Photo, 1990

A Tribe Called Quest, April 4th, 1990

Tupac, Nas & Redman, July 23rd, 1993

9 Ali Shaheed Muhammad, Phife Dawg & Q-Tlp, July, 1991

10 Outkast, ATLiens, August 27th, 1996

11 A Tribe Called Quest, The Low End Theory, September 24th, 1991

12 Nas, Illmatic, April 19th 1994

13 Dr. Dre, The Chronic, December 15, 1992

14 DMX, Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood, December 22, 1998

DMX X Sign, 1999

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This catalogue was created by Mitch McGee over a four week period in Chicago, Illinois for DePaul University class GD330.

Inspired by 90's aesthetics and using the typefaces "Raleway" and "Roboto".

"I start to think, and then I sink, Into the paper like I was ink. When I'm writing, I'm trapped in between the lines, I escape when I finish the rhyme." - Rakim



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