



THE UNEXPECTED COLLISION OF CHESS AND HIP HOP CULTURE
OCTOBER 9, 2014 – APRIL 26, 2015

LIVING LIKE KINGS

The Unexpected Collision of Chess and Hip Hop Culture

The mission to celebrate the role of chess and its intersection with history and culture provides the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) with incredible opportunities to explore a variety of subjects both obviously and not so seemingly connected to the ancient war game. In the Fall of 2014 and the Winter of 2015, the WCHOF is examining the unexpected collision of chess and hip hop culture. Inspired by the work of Adisa Banjoko and the Bay Area-based peace and knowledge-promoting Hip-Hop Chess Federation, *Living Like Kings* centers on an immersive, multimedia experience created by Saint Louis artist, Benjamin Kaplan. Nicole Hudson executive produced this 27-minute video installation, commissioned exclusively by the WCHOF for this show. It includes archival and original videos, music, photography, custom-designed type and illustrations, and a series of interviews with figures from both the hip hop and chess worlds. The first-floor gallery will also include murals featuring chess clocks and boomboxes by local street artist Peat “EYEZ” Wollaeger. By focusing on Saint Louis talent and experts, the WCHOF is ensuring that the exhibition showcases the living, breathing regional scene.

The birth of hip hop in the 1970s coincided with a surge of interest in chess among Americans, inspired by Bobby Fischer’s landmark victory in the 1972 World Chess Championship. As a new generation of players enthusiastically competed over the board, hip hop flourished in the nation’s cities. *Living Like Kings* celebrates themes that chess and hip hop grew to share: history, strategy, spirituality, process, creativity, education, and symbolism.

Through this inspirational presentation, visitors will see powerful connections between the two cultures.

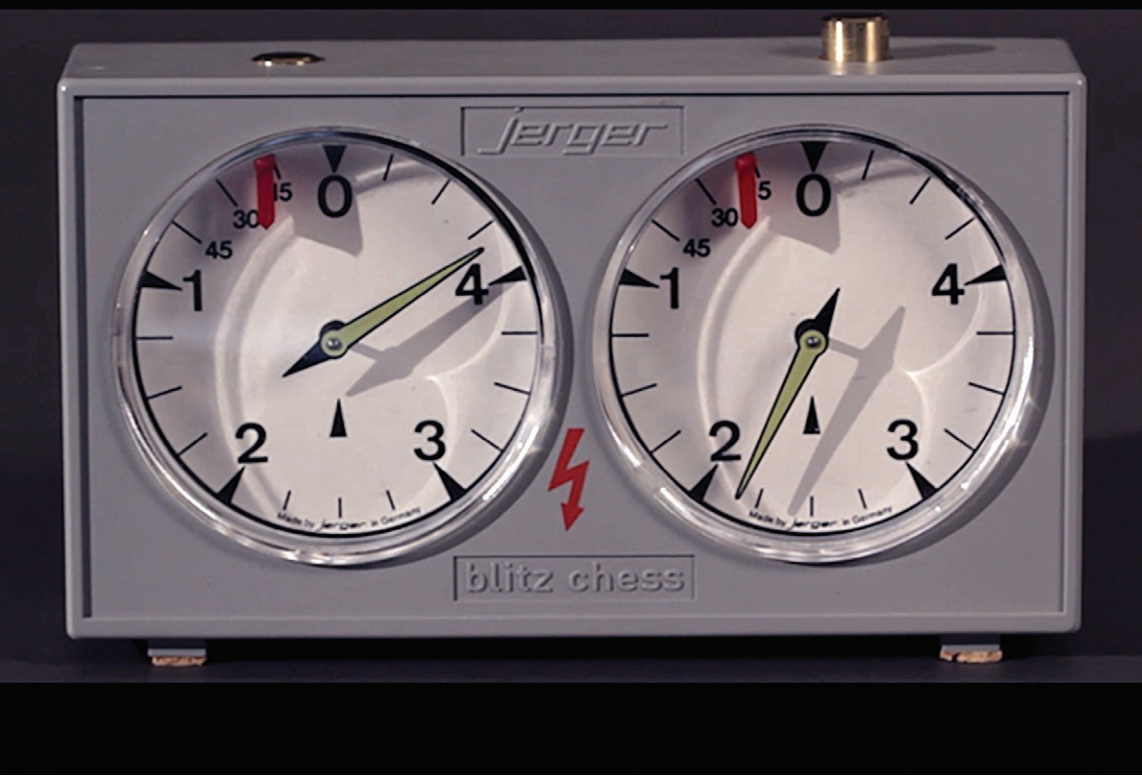
In addition to Kaplan’s full-gallery experience, the WCHOF will also dedicate one floor to an interactive Learning Lab. Evolving over the course of *Living Like Kings*, the Learning Lab will host multiple projects and exhibitions, exploring aspects of both chess and hip hop culture. Some will last the span of an evening, while others will run the length of the show. Through photography exhibitions, graffiti and lettering murals, music and video stations, hands-on art activities, and educational presentations, the World Chess Hall of Fame hopes to present visitors with opportunities to both contribute to this changing presentation and make it their own.

The Learning Lab will open with graffiti-inspired exhibitions by two local artists. Photographer Adrian O. Walker’s powerful images of graffiti from the Saint Louis area showcase an art form that many consider vandalism, but is often beautiful and extremely vibrant. Daniel Burnett is curating *Pieces and Placement*, a series of murals that will be created by a team of artists throughout the run of *Living Like Kings*. Each month, a new artist will create a work based upon a different chess piece, beginning with Burnett’s images of the pawn. As the entire *Living Like Kings* project grows over the six months of the show, the World Chess Hall of Fame will seek to inspire understanding and learning, acceptance and tolerance, and a deeper appreciation for both the game of chess and the rich history and influence of hip hop.

—Shannon Bailey, Chief Curator,
and Emily Allred, Assistant Curator,
World Chess Hall of Fame, 2014

TOP IMAGE:

Jerger Chess Clock
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,
gift of John Donaldson





The King's Remix

Living Like Kings is, at its core, the essence of hip hop: a remix, a mashup, a sum of parts. It is symphony of rhythm and rhyme constructed from individual shards, disparate sources—samples if you will—combining to tell a complete story. As in any hip hop experience, history rides shotgun. A fresh form is created, built upon the foundation laid by its forefathers.

Living Like Kings also embodies the spirit of chess. The piece is strategic, thoughtful, and passionate. Steeped in years of preparation and knowledge, it is constructed from small, incremental moves that build into a powerful crescendo, using misdirection and illusion to create a sense of surprise.

A study in contrasts, *Living Like Kings* explores the collision of hip hop and chess as well as the contradictions inherent in the king, who is the central character of the piece. He is the most important piece on the chessboard, the powerful ruler who must be protected at all costs. Players sacrifice other pieces to defend his position, and they execute and abandon entire strategies to safeguard his status. However, the king is also one of the most limited pieces on the chessboard. Only able to move one step at a time, his existence is fragile, and he must rely on others to defend him, often seeking shelter in corners and behind other pieces. He is simultaneously the ultimate insider and the “other.”

This fascinating contradiction is both the thesis at the heart of *Living Like Kings* and the engine that drives my inspiration for the piece. I also drew insight from the film work of François Girard, Errol Morris, Adam Curtis, and Stan Brakhage; the design work of Kyle Cooper; the innovative radio work of Joe Frank, Studs Terkel and Jad Abumrad; the sound compositions of John Cage; the collage work of Robert Rauschenberg; and the 360 degree film I saw at Epcot Center when I was 15 years old.

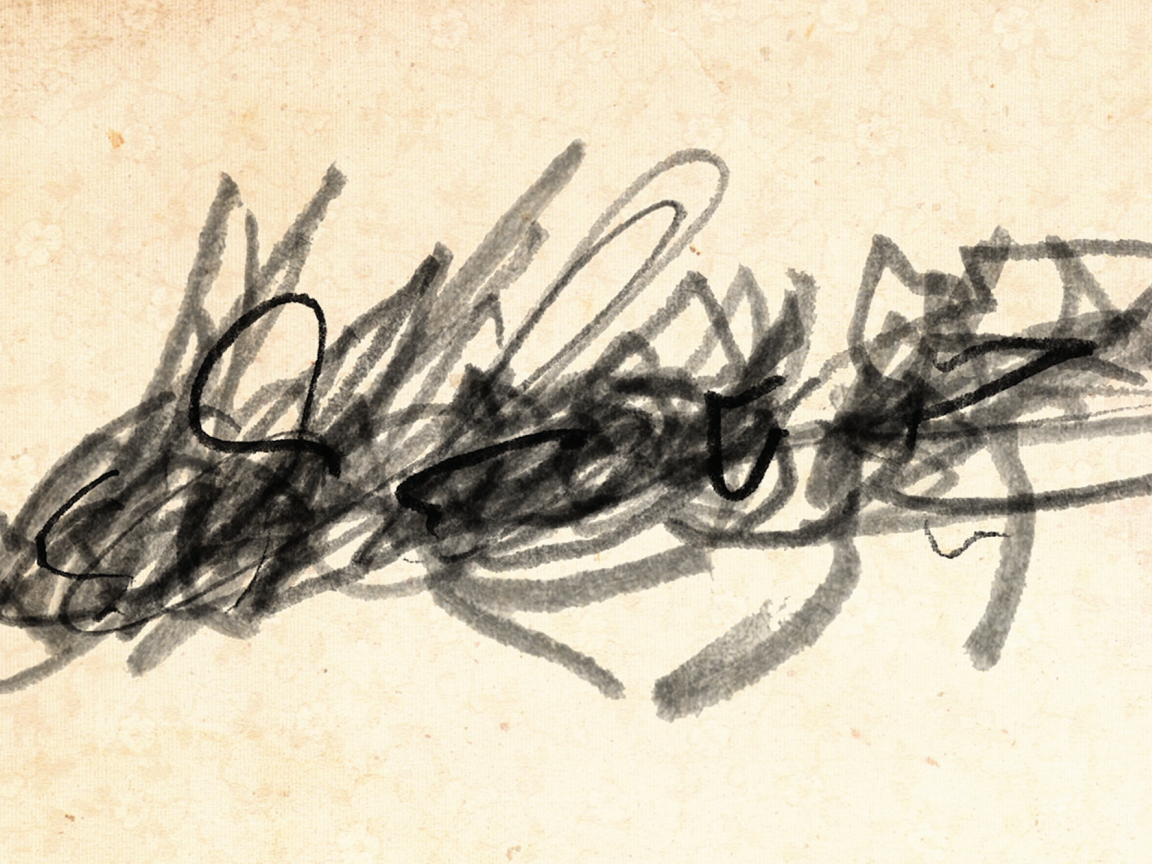
I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s in rural, Central Pennsylvania, at the northern tip of the Appalachian Mountains. Being

both Jewish and artistic, I was somewhat of an anomaly for that area, an “other” for all intents and purposes. I have carried this sense of being on the outside with me throughout my life.

When I was very young, my father and grandfather built a family room addition to our house, as my parents started adding more kids to their growing family. The room was close to 1000 square feet and housed the kitchen table, the couch and TV, bookshelves brimming with books, a desk for my father's “paperwork,” a bathroom, and a laundry room. It is where I did my homework, watched my Saturday morning cartoons, ate my family dinners, played my video games, and where, as a 6th grader, I began my journey towards hip hop. The family room had a linoleum floor and, as you may know, this makes for a great surface for a young boy to try out his dance moves.

During my formative pre-teen years—that time where you begin to expand your world beyond your parent's record collection and whatever was on Casey Kasem's top 40—I acquired a record called *Breakdance*, distributed by KTeL, at the one record store located in the one mall on the outskirts of town. The cover was beautiful, depicting a purple graffiti cityscape above a brick wall covered in tags. It beckoned you inside where it promised to teach you the Moonwalk, the Electric Boogie, how to do footwork, headspins, and more—all the while introducing you to artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, The Sugar Hill Gang, and Spoonie Gee. This record blew my mind. Played over and over and over again, it became the gateway to a new way of thinking about music, fashion, and being a teenager.

I can tell you this, there were no visible signs of a hip hop community in the small town in which I grew up. While my friends were learning about Zeppelin and the Stones and wearing ripped faded jeans, I was absorbing Slick Rick and the Treacherous Three and wearing Adidas and makeshift Kangol hats. The mystical MCs, the shamanistic DJs, and the hyper-kinetic dancers all sparked my imagination and creativity. The electronic beats and sampled



grooves resonated with me. The fashion intrigued me, and the dance moves...well, let's just say there weren't many seventh grade kids in rural Pennsylvania throwing breakdance parties in their parents' living room whilst attempting to scratch records on their console stereo.

As we flash forward to present day, I am presented with the opportunity to pay homage to those early heroes in a unique and innovative way, with that culmination of experience manifesting itself as *Living Like Kings*. My goal is to envelop the viewer

in a multi-sensory narrative. Weaving together hundreds of images, thousands of seconds of film footage, millions of pixels, and hours and hours of interviews, *Living Like Kings* surrounds viewers on two sides with the unique perspectives of those whose tangible experiences place the viewer within an authentic conversation. Two screens battle it out, like in a chess game or a B-Boy battle.

—Benjamin Kaplan
Creator, *Living Like Kings*, 2014

64 Squares in the Cipher

At a glance, the idea of fusing chess and hip hop may seem so absurd that it could be easily dismissed. But the streets of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., don't lie. In each city you will find clusters of people gathered in the parks going hard on the sixty-four squares of infinite combat. Listen to what is being played as the opponents lock horns—it's hip hop.

Street chess grew in popularity across America in the 1970s as hip hop emerged from its embryonic stage. On the corners where street chess thrived, rap, DJ, and dance battles also took place. The same strategies and insight required to win on the chessboard assisted those clashing on the mic, the turntable, and the dance floor. Like the game of chess, each of the elements of hip hop became defined by the beautiful irony that they were war games that could also be used to promote peace around the world.

In 1993 the Wu-Tang Clan released *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*, which shifted the axis of contemporary hip hop culture through innovative street tough lyrics blending chess and martial arts references. The Wu-Tang Clan, most notably RZA and GZA, remain firmly at the core of a

group of MCs dedicated to perfecting the fusion of chess and hip hop. Surrounding this nucleus are the works of myriad MCs, including artists like Public Enemy, X-Clan, Will Smith, Apathy, and Jay-Z. Every few months a new rap lyric, album cover, or music video utilizes the game of kings to illustrate ideas about street survival, politics, history, and philosophy.

The lessons one can learn from the mic and the chessmen are universal in nature, transcending race, class, faith, and culture. Rap and chess require the use of both logic and intuition, analytical, and creative thinking. They teach us that patience always overcomes power and that actualizing our good thoughts is an art within itself. Ultimately, we hope that the two activities help us to become better human beings, students, citizens, neighbors, and friends to those unlike us.

Not all of the lyrics are sugar-coated or filled with positivity. Hip hop is an art born from the souls of autodidactic poets, painters, dancers, and DJs. Like hustlers playing chess on the street to eat, everything is not all fun and games. Nevertheless the bulk of what connects hip hop, one of the most popular music forms, and chess, one of the oldest games on earth, is deeply inspirational and educational.

—Adisa Banjoko
CEO, *Hip-Hop Chess Federation*, 2014



THE LEARNING LAB

STREET BEAUTIFICATION

October 9 – November 23, 2014

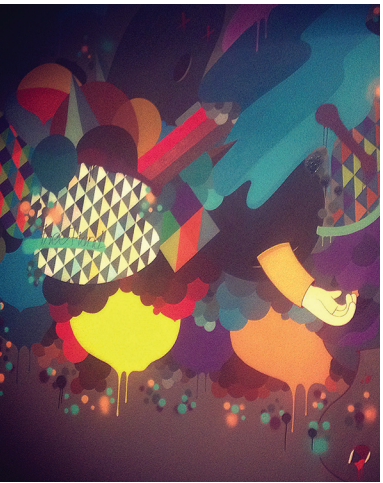
Adrian O. Walker grew up in Saint Louis, Missouri, where he is currently based. After earning Bachelor of Arts degrees in sociology and photography from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Walker traveled throughout the United States as a freelance photographer specializing in music and lifestyle subjects. Using both film and digital formats, he creates new experiences through his photography by connecting his audience to the beauty of everyday life that they may often overlook. Urban settings provide inspiration to Walker, who creates imagery that encourages viewers to address the culture of one's surroundings.

Believing that culture is the heart of what is real, Walker takes photographs depicting graffiti both in his own neighborhood in North Saint Louis and throughout the city. They capture the works of a vibrant, diverse group of artists whose creations transform their environment.

PIECES AND PLACEMENT

October 9, 2014 – April 26, 2015

Evolving through the course of *Living Like Kings*, *Pieces and Placement* features a series of large-scale works inspired by the game of kings. Each month, a new artist will create a work based upon a single chess piece, beginning with the pawn and ending with the king. Selected by Daniel Burnett, the group of artists includes Ruben Aguirre, Christopher Burch, Stan Chisholm, Nice & Lucx, and Benjamin Pierce, each of whom has a personal connection to hip hop culture. While the artists represent hip hop's multifaceted elements and diverse makeup, their scope is much larger than any genre or catch-all label. Each also has a relationship with chess—some through a passion for the game, while others feature related elements in their work, such as a strong sense of line, grid, or pattern. Together, the artists will act at the intersection of chess and hip hop, exploring the rich history and symbolism of the two cultures.



TOP:

Adrian O. Walker, *Warning on Cass*, 2014

BOTTOM FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Daniel Burnett, *Untitled*, 2014

Nice and Lucx, *Gone Swet Gone (detail)*, 2013

Benjamin Pierce, *untitled*, 2012

Christopher Burch, *The Guide (detail)*, 2014

Ruben Aguirre, *Uncalibrated connection*, 2012

Stan Chisholm, *New Pop I (detail)*, 2010



FILM

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Archival photographs
of the Cold Crush
Brothers © Joe Conzo
and Cornell University
Library

Hip Hop Party and
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Archival newsreel videos
courtesy of British Pathé

The Fischer Library
of Dr. Jeanne and
Rex Sinquefield

Artifacts from the
collection of the World
Chess Hall of Fame

Graffiti Rock courtesy
of Michael Holman

Tracks from *Street
Games Vol. 1* courtesy
of the Hip-Hop Chess
Federation

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Tony Rich, Chris Shaw,
Mike Speckhard,
MK Stallings, Kelcey
Towell, Kelly Wells,
Peat "EYEZ" Wollaeger.

IMAGE:
DJ Needles, 2014
Photo © Patrick Lanham



LIVING LIKE KINGS

October 9, 2014-April 26, 2015

Related programming and a pdf of this brochure are available for download at worldchesshof.org.

WORLD CHESS HALL OF FAME

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COVER IMAGES:

B-boy Nick Gates, 2014

Photo © Patrick Lanham

INTERIOR IMAGES:

Living Like Kings film stills, 2014

Courtesy of Benjamin Kaplan



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