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‘Hip-hop reflects the truth, and the problem is that hip-hop exposes a lot of the negative truth that society tries to conceal. It's a platform where we could offer information, but it's also an escape,’ (Busta Rhymes). Expression and storytelling in music finds a great home in the hip-hop genre. Hip-Hop grew out of lower income areas, giving a form of poetic expression and release to young people. Hip-Hop as a genre has evolved greatly over time, growing from low income areas to reaching the main stage of music. Though the music has made it to the spotlight, many famous artists started out in such areas, using hip-hop as a form of release. Their words and stories relate to many others, keeping the origins and roots alive. These traditions keep the genre as a means of channeling stories of pain, anger, happiness, and hope into a creative form. ‘I think a number of the leaders are, whether you like it or not, in the hip-hop generation. And when they understand enough, they'll do wonders. I count on them,’ (Maya Angelou). Hip-Hop inspires and motivates as an art form, with its ‘coming up from struggle’ ideals, but also never forgetting the past and where you came from. The people involved and the inspiration provided has encouraged so many to express themselves through this medium. Hip-Hop provides this incredible form of storytelling that interests my work. I am curious about how a visual form could accompany this media. I have worked with local hip-hop artists in the past, working from their music to create illustrative works such as album cover art etc. Gaining an understanding of

the hip-hop artist in their ideas and expression and then translating into a visual form gave me a sense of understanding and new enjoyment in illustration and a new sense of the music. The process of feeling through the music and artist to create a visual form I find to be extremely engaging and interesting. Through my work I want to explore the genre further in itself and through my visual expression of a piece. The idea of creating a story greatly intrigues me, in how hip-hop often revolves around a journey with a past and a present, and looking toward the future. I intend to explore the genre and its place as a means of storytelling through the work of an individual to better understand and portray a form of expression.

‘You could argue that anytime a rapper puts pen to pad or steps into the vocal booth, they are telling a story,’ (The Art of Storytelling). My ideas began through the work of a friend and past client, Omoregie Iyoha (Obie). When approaching my work I came to the conclusion that my experience throughout working from lyrics and music would bring greater understanding through the work of someone who’s story I can explore. With the ability to talk to and ask questions about the journey and the work I will be able to gain a more personal understanding of the artist. The work does not reflect that of a commissioned album illustration, but a project conceived that utilizes the work of a peer. As a person I can relate to and receive feedback from, it was important to me to create a visual work through someone I understand personally. Approaching the project I started with an initial work of Obie’s, a writing and poem that introduces his 2012 album ‘The Low Key’ the writing of which portrays the ideals of journey and struggle. My aim was to create a visualization of the words bringing forth the meaning visually and conceptually. My initial progress and ideas had been formulating around this single set of lyrics. As this idea has been progressed and reviewed, the idea of portraying a story

through his work took over. The notion of using more than one set of lyrics and looking at his work as a whole seems more intriguing and definitive. Looking at his past work and focusing on his music collection in the album 'The Low Key' I have spent time dissecting the music, pulling through quotes and themes in the lyrics. I want to create a deeper level of familiarity with the music and lyrics and how they relate to Obie's journey and view and person. The idea I want to translate through his work, is the story and journey within the genre and how he personally relates in this way to hip-hop as a whole. By highlighting key phrases throughout his music, I am creating a sequence of ideas to create a story of the music. The isolation of thematic ideas and contexts throughout gives an overall sense of his place in the genre and how he expresses himself and life through it. Correlating illustration with selected quotes brings a visual sense to the music from my perspective as a listener.

The style of hip-hop began to formulate in the late seventies, stemming from musical and lyrical notions found in style of music called 'Reggae.' Music Speaking of hardship and reality spoke to a sect of those who were growing up in hardship. The music began to represent something deeper, breaking away from the 'feel good' styles and stemming into tales of reality. 'It's about you and me, connecting one to one. That's why it has universal appeal. It has given young people a way to understand their world, whether they are from the suburbs or the city or wherever,' (Chang). Hip-hop has a relatable feel because it is rooted in such a personal means of expression. It has stemmed from individuals and their real lives and experiences. This gives the music a level of relate-ability, no matter where you come from. 'Hip-hop has always been about having fun, but it's also about taking responsibility. And now we have a platform to speak our minds. Millions of people are watching us. Let's hear something powerful,' (Chang). Given the

wide spread familiarity of expression from this genre, hip-hop artists have the means to connect with people in a way to promote powerful messages and ideas. A lot of the hip-hop culture has been critiqued and stereotyped in so many ways, but in the roots of hip-hop and many expressions created through it, a true voice of the people can be found. 'It's a fitting testament to human creativity that a generation of deprived kids in the burnt-out poverty of the boogie-down Bronx managed to create a lifestyle, a music and a culture that was shortly to sweep the world,' (The Roots of Hip Hop).

The genre and journey of hip-hop is inspirational in itself, looking back on the roots and growth of a style and how universal it has become. The idea of taking a look at this style through visual work and a subject immersed in it brings new light to the creativity of what the genre is all about. Storytelling in hip-hop often folds itself into a few categories; tales of advocacy, 'I got issues,' cautionary tales, multiple perspectives, tales from the dark side, and 'freaky' tales. 'Rappers are great storytellers and often command dynamic technical prowess to turn their anecdotes into near cinematic gems. Fresh imagery, imaginative points of view, and surprise endings are chief among the tools employed by our best storytellers,' (Pop Matters). There are so many ways of approaching storytelling in hip-hop, it can flow down through many different ideas and avenues. In terms of my relation to it, I feel the stories that speak the strongest are those of the individual, journeys, and struggles. Though not all hip-hop is revolved around struggle the ideas i'm interested in exploring are in creating a more personal and moving tale. From hip-hops roots to the individual, hip-hop started through struggle, highlighting hopes and hardship and the exploring of ones past, present and future. Through the subject, Obie, I see exploring his collection of music as a continuous journey, though the songs clearly vary in mood

and conveyance, a pattern can be seen throughout. I want to showcase this commonality through his work to express the larger means and ideas of how hip-hop is and has been created. The flow of ideas throughout his collection, and the stringing together of phrases to create a rough greater story reflects on all these aspects. Through the means of illustration, I want to convey his ideas as poetically and conceptually as needed. The images reflected should illustrate the words and also create a greater sense of understanding for the viewer through my own means of expression and translation. The graphic narrative of Obie's collection of work will create a theme of the work as a whole, while touching on individual ideas in each piece. The work as a whole will reflect his journey and expression, while creating individual moments in each piece.

As the work continues to progress my aim is to isolate ideal quotations and phrases throughout Obie's work to create a feel of an integrative story. Once the sequence has been explored, the illustrations must then be contemplated. I want to create a consistent visually language to link the illustrations and the phrases. Each illustration will have the ability to stand alone as an illustration but also work in the piece overall through the feel of a narrative. My concept is to create each individual image in the sizing of a traditional album cover scale. To link the illustrations to the traditions of the music industry and to create the feel of individuality between the songs. The final illustration will be displayed as the conventional front cover, while the text will be accompanied with process drawings of the final image. These process drawings will reflect on the idea of creation and expression. Showing how my progresses, gives the notion of a progression and story reflecting in the music. Overall the images will create a square shaped exhibition to also create than integrative album feel and to allow each piece to flow in the storytelling manner. The continuous circle created by the 'O' type shape will give an overall

cohesive feel to the piece, touching on the continuous motion of the music. My aim is to create a visual experience of the individual that reflects the work and the roots and style of the hip-hop genre.

*Chang, Jeff. Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print.*

*"The Art Of Storytelling: 10 Great Stories Told Through Rap Songs." HipHopDX RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2014*

*"The Roots of Hip Hop." The Roots of Hip Hop. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2014.*

*"Hip-Hop Storytellers: The Vignette." PopMatters. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2014.*