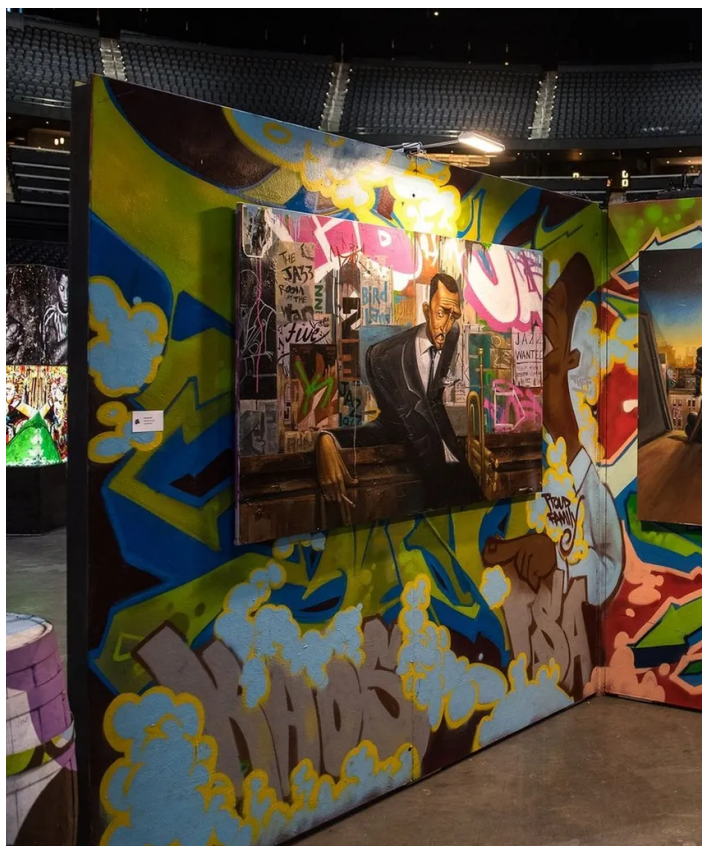


Visual Arts
The Seattle Times

Arts, Beats + Lyrics brings to Seattle its celebration of urban art, music – and cocktails

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Arts, Beats + Lyrics, which started in Atlanta, comes to Seattle for the first time in its 17-year history on Feb. 5, when it will be at the Seattle... (Kat Goduco / Arts, Beats + Lyrics) **More** ✓

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

The people behind Arts, Beats + Lyrics know that an artificial distinction between high art and pop culture creates barriers for nontraditional artists. So they established an

urban art and music exhibition to connect an appreciative audience with creative, individualistic artists whose work rarely appears in museums.

“It’s not solely the visual art, it’s a whole thing in and of itself. It’s a celebratory vibe, especially as a Black artist, to see yourself represented. In a city like Seattle, it’s needed that these stories are being told,” said Tariqa Waters, owner of Martyr Sauce Gallery and Pop Art Museum in Pioneer Square.

Waters is one of several local visual artists whose work will be shown in an international collection of urban art when Arts, Beats + Lyrics comes to Seattle for the first time in its 17-year history. Held Feb. 5 in the Seattle Center Armory, the free, 21+ event combines visual arts, digital images, interactive installations, live music and complimentary cocktails courtesy of event sponsor Jack Daniels.

Some of the pieces at Arts, Beats + Lyrics are pricey — if you have \$20,000 to spend on art, you can buy a portrait of Prince as Dr. Strange — but none of them are precious.

“The only criterion is dope work, because that is what connects with the audience,” said AB+L curator and co-founder Dwayne “Dubelyoo” Wright about the art selected for the show. “Our job is to take the artist’s work and show it in the best, most compelling way possible. When people come to the show, they’re getting an experience that’s more than just the regular white walls that you see in a gallery. It’s more of an environment and the music is designed to go along with that experience and keep the energy going.”

Producer and co-founder Jabari Graham elaborates. “From lo-fi to hip-hop to funk and house, we tend to play the B-side of things.” He says you won’t hear this music on commercial radio but might on a station like Seattle’s KEXP. “That type of vibe, that’s what we like to give off,” he said.

At AB+L, 8-foot-tall LED light boxes share space with paintings on the nearly 100 yards of wall space. These digital displays enable the participation of artists as far away as Serbia and South Africa. Interactive three-dimensional installations are another important part of the show. This year, Waters will create one of them. Another will be a giant **ice cream** cone, in honor of musical headliner Wu-Tang Clan's Raekwon.

“When we first started, there really wasn't a place where a lot of these artists could show. That's been our focal point since we began: to showcase people in the urban art community as well as musicians,” said Wright. “Back in 2004, a lot of artists who did paintings and also tattoos or graffiti, there really wasn't an open lane for them.”

Originally a local event in Atlanta, AB+L has evolved into an annual tour visiting nearly a dozen cities across the country. They continue to support the community-based culture of urban art by dedicating wall space and set times to local artists in each city. In Seattle, local DJs Lady CoCo and Arel will join the lineup with Raekwon and Atlanta's Wally Sparks.

“We want to highlight local artists, like Martyr Sauce's Tariqa. I don't want us to be that type of production where we go into a city and we're just a silo, not touching base with people,” said Graham.

Waters' connection with the event goes way back: “Arts, Beats + Lyrics is one of the first exhibitions that I showed in back when I lived in Atlanta.”

Waters said Wright was “a great comrade” on the Atlanta art scene who gave good advice and connected artists with resources and each other. They reconnected when Graham saw Waters on the cover of an art magazine while researching Seattle for AB+L.

“Jabari wanted to reach out to me,” Waters said, “and Dubelyoo was like, ‘I know Tariqa! What is she doing in Seattle?’” Now Waters is acting as a local liaison for AB+L, “connecting them to various artists or community organizers and people who play a critical part in the arts scene here in Seattle. It's been really fun, kind of a full circle moment for me.”

While the roster of local visual artists had yet to be finalized as of this writing, Waters says they are “artists that you may or may not have heard of, but you're going to be blown away by each and every one of them.”

Arts, Beats + Lyrics

Feb. 5; Seattle Center Armory, 305 Harrison St., Seattle; free with online registration, space is limited; masks and proof of vaccination or negative coronavirus test required;
[artbeatsandlyrics.com](https://www.artbeatsandlyrics.com)

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