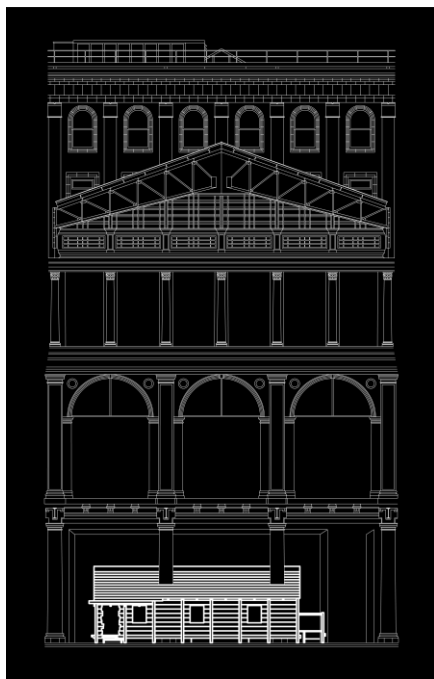


Press Release



Virgil Abloh (Rookford, Illinois, 1980–2021, Chicago, Illinois); Schematic drawing for SOCIAL SCULPTURE, 2022. Courtesy of Virgil Abloh Securites & The Gymnastics Art Institute. (Image © ALASKA ALASKA)

The Brooklyn Museum Presentation of *Virgil Abloh: “Figures of Speech”* Opens July 1, 2022, Surveying the Prolific Career of Late Artist and Designer Virgil Abloh

The exhibition will feature brand-new elements and never-before-seen objects from Abloh’s archive, presented in the Brooklyn Museum’s Great Hall.

The Brooklyn Museum presents *Virgil Abloh: “Figures of Speech”*, a sweeping exhibition tracing two decades of the late artist and designer’s visionary work. *“Figures of Speech”* is the first museum exhibition devoted to Abloh and was originally developed by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The Brooklyn Museum presentation features important objects from his multifaceted career, including collaborations with artist Takashi Murakami, musician Kanye West, and architect Rem Koolhaas; material from his fashion label Off-White; and designs from Louis Vuitton, where he served as the first Black menswear artistic director until his death in November 2021. The exhibition highlights how Abloh’s emphasis on collaboration reshaped popular notions of, and contemporary taste in, fashion, art, commerce, design, and youth culture. *Virgil Abloh: “Figures of Speech”* is organized by Michael Darling, former James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The Brooklyn Museum presentation is organized by guest writer and curator Antwaun Sargent and is on view from July 1, 2022, to January 29, 2023.

New for the Brooklyn Museum’s presentation of *“Figures of Speech”* is Abloh’s “social sculpture,” which anchors the exhibition in the central atrium of the Museum’s Great Hall.

Drawing on Abloh's background in architecture, the "social sculpture" offers a physical space for gathering and performances, and showcases Abloh's interdisciplinary inspirations from across the fields of music, design, and visual arts. The installation was designed by Abloh to counter the historical lack of space afforded to Black artists and Black people in cultural institutions. Other elements added for the Brooklyn exhibition include works from the past three years as well as never-before-seen archival material. The presentation will have a fresh design developed with the late artist especially for the Brooklyn Museum, and will include display cases in the form of architectural tables—a nod to Abloh's studio practice and training as an architect as well as a visual representation of his artistic process.

Anne Pasternak, the Brooklyn Museum's Shelby White and Leon Levy Director, says, "We've been working with Virgil and his exceptional team on the Brooklyn Museum presentation of his exhibition for more than three years, and throughout we've had a single goal: to celebrate his explosive talent and the ways he kicked open doors for young BIPOC artists."

"During our years of collaboration, Virgil and I have sought to think about his expansive practice in new ways," says Sargent. "The exhibition includes objects and materials from his archive that touch on the ways he blurred the boundaries of different mediums to make something entirely his own. The show also includes a new monumental sculpture, designed by the artist, that emphasizes how Virgil's creativity made space for young people to explore their own ideas in ways that re-center art and design."

The son of Ghanaian immigrants, Abloh grew up in the Chicago area. At a young age, he expressed an interest in the intersections of music, fashion, and art. His first experience with artistic collaboration came in 2007, when then-emerging musician Kanye West invited Abloh to join his creative team. It was at this point that Abloh pivoted from architecture, for which he had been pursuing a master's degree, to album covers, concert design, merchandising, and fashion with West and his team. In 2012, the artist launched Pyrex Vision, a fashion and art project that explored contemporary youth culture through film and a capsule collection of sportswear, drawing equally from collegiate lettering and canonical Renaissance art. Pyrex Vision was followed promptly by the founding, in 2013, of Off-White, Abloh's stand-alone fashion label based in Milan, Italy. Off-White is distinguished by its use of text, graphics, graffiti, and logos to explore the coded language of fashion and art, and its culturally imposed rules. While still maintaining Off-White, Abloh also assumed the position of Men's Artistic Director at Louis Vuitton in 2018, making him the first Black person to lead the storied luxury brand, as well as one of the few Black designers to helm a major French fashion house.

The exhibition includes garments from Abloh's signature collections at Off-White and Louis Vuitton; video from his runway shows; music highlights from his work as a DJ; and design examples from his collections of furniture, graphics, and other collaborative projects. The act of deconstruction as a design element is a common theme in Abloh's work, with the artist using the Black gaze to dismantle the traditionally white-crafted structures at work in fashion, design, architecture, and art. Abloh then reconstructs new work through the lens of the Black cultural experience, shifting its design just enough for the viewer to take notice.

"*Figures of Speech*" traces Abloh's exploration of the communicative power of design. His unexpected use of language and quotation marks turns his designs, and the people who engage with them, into literal *figures of speech*. This innovative take on language, and the ways people interact with it, resulted in a playful, Duchampian style. In addition, the artist often combined art historical references and popular culture aesthetics, such as

when he prominently featured a Caravaggio painting in his Pyrex Vision line, used a reproduction of a Surrealist painting by Giorgio de Chirico on a dress, and referenced the Italian modernist Lucio Fontana's slashed canvases with roughly cut patches and fabric scraps affixed to designs. He also collaborated with artist Jenny Holzer to develop video projections about the experiences of refugees, which scrolled across a screen during Off-White c/o Virgil Abloh™ Men's Spring–Summer 2018 Collection ("Temperature"), 2017. One of Abloh's longest running collaborations was with artist Takashi Murakami. The two worked together on numerous projects over the course of the past decade, ranging from the album cover design for Kanye West's *Graduation* to Abloh's first solo exhibition at Murakami's Tokyo art gallery.

The Brooklyn Museum exhibition also explores Abloh's relationship with New York City, in both his collaborations and his influences. He worked as a guest designer for Shayne Oliver's innovative New York label Hood By Air, in 2012, when the brand helped introduce the city's unique streetwear style to the world of high fashion. Abloh also frequently collaborated with rap collective A\$AP Mob, fronted by New York rapper A\$AP Rocky. Their relationship can be traced back to 2012, when members of A\$AP Mob were included in the video *A Team with No Sport*, which promoted the launch of Pyrex Vision. A notable through line in much of Abloh's work is his relationship with sound and the aesthetics of hip-hop, a genre whose history is largely rooted in New York City.

Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech" is organized by Michael Darling, former James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The Brooklyn Museum presentation is organized by writer and curator Antwaun Sargent.

Exhibition design for Brooklyn Museum is by Mahfuz Sultan, Creative Director, Clocks, in collaboration with Tawanda Chiweshe and Francisco Gaspar, Creative and Artistic Directors of ALASKA ALASKA, and Lance Singletary, Director of Exhibition Design, Brooklyn Museum. Exhibition design for previous iterations of *"Figures of Speech"* is by Samir Bantal, Director of AMO, the research and design studio of OMA.

The exhibition is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The exhibition tour is made possible by Kenneth C. Griffin. Special thanks to Virgil Abloh Securities for their partnership. Major support for this exhibition is provided by Nordstrom and Northern Trust. Additional support is provided by Braun.

Ticket Information

Tickets for *Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech"* go on sale to the general public Thursday, March 10, 2022. Members will have access to a pre-sale to reserve free tickets beginning Thursday, February 24, 2022. To become a Member, reach out to membership@brooklynmuseum.org. Because of COVID-19 capacity restrictions, all visitors must have a timed ticket.

Catalogue

A publication, published by Prestel, was produced for the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's presentation of *Virgil Abloh: "Figures of Speech"* and will be available for purchase at the Brooklyn Museum. The first section features essays and an interview that examine Abloh's pioneering practice through the lenses of contemporary art history, architecture, streetwear, high fashion, and race to provide insight into a prolific and impactful career that cuts across media, connecting visual artists, musicians, graphic designers, fashion designers, major brands, and architects.

The book also contains an archive of images culled from Abloh's personal files on major projects, revealing behind-the-scenes snapshots, prototypes, inspirations, and more, all presented with intimate commentary by the artist. A gorgeous, full-color, 101-page plate section offers a detailed view of Abloh's work across disciplines. The volume includes essays by curator Michael Darling; Michael Rock, Creative Director, 2x4; author and photographer Taiye Selasi; and writer and

curator Lou Stoppard; an in-depth conversation with the artist led by Rem Koolhaas; and contributions by Samir Bantal and Anja Aronowsky Cronberg.

Exhibition Shop

An exhibition shop will feature Virgil Abloh and Off-White merchandise. Items will include T-shirts, hoodies, pants, caps, tote bags, postcards, posters, and zines. Only exhibition ticketholders will be able to access the Abloh exhibition shop.