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SHOW & PROVE

GABRIEL URIST

Independent jeweller and sculptor

Hip hop, sports, street fashion, jewellery

Not only do the golden sneakers capture something elemental about the Breaking and the Olympics theme, but the twisting arrows and dynamic lines speak evocatively to the movement and space of the artform.

Gabe the Jeweler (aka Gabriel Urist) is a pioneering street fashion jewellery artist. In 1996, 17-year-old Gabriel told his father that his purpose in life was to marry metalsmithing, basketball and hip hop together. The rise of hip hop was a new world renaissance – like his father thought folk music in the 1960s was going to fix the world. American music was groundbreaking, sophisticated and cutting edge. At the time he thought this new music was the tool for change that we'd been waiting for that could bring people together, like a healthy new religion or something. It was senior year at an art high school in the middle of the woods. It began there – metalsmithing class. Fabricating pendants with sheets of brass and bronze and copper, with photos and paintings set inside, hanging on shoe laces. This was the beginning of his education in metal work. He practised cutting metal by making these burly, primitive, dusty – but somehow digital-feeling – medallions. From there, he would go on to pursue a new style of jewellery and accessories rooted in the culture of sport and music.

Gabriel went on to work in jewellery stores in New York. He worked for artists and sculptors and learned about casting and metal fabrication. He

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Figure 1: Gold shoes and abstract metalwork work by Gabriel Urist.

worked with designers, making necklaces, hair pieces and other accessories for fashion shows. He made a jewellery line inspired by Michael Jordan (silver and gold silhouettes of famous basketball moments as necklaces and earrings). He worked with Futura 2000 and made a line of jewellery for him. He made jewellery for stores downtown, like Alife, Supreme, Reed Space and New Era. He made basketball trophies for Kobe Bryant and necklaces for his Kobe System Nike campaign. He made a collection of necklaces and keychains and brooches for Virgil Abloh's brand, Off-White. He made 'shoelery' or things that go on fancy shoes for LeBron (gifts for Jay-Z and Kanye West for their *Watch the Throne* [WTT] tour). He made a jewellery collection for Wu Tang and pieces for other artists, rappers, brands, writers, designers, DJs, filmmakers, athletes, restaurants and sports leagues.

The sneakers – early versions of those you see on the cover of *Global Hip Hop Studies* (GHHS) 4.1 – came about in 2002. It was in his friend's toy store downtown where he got the idea to make a shoe pendant. He made a Dunk, an Air Force 1 and several Air Jordan models. He experimented with 3D scanning, making moulds and engraving. Then 3D printing was invented, but he decided the best results were achieved by carving the hard green wax by hand, casting the prototype, and touching up the details in the metal. He sold his sneaker chains at fashion stores around the world and was nominated by the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) for accessories designer of the year award in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Gabriel's early footwear and basketball-inspired jewellery designs would go on to change the way people think about jewellery. From sneakers and logos to skateboards, baseball caps and

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Figure 2: A row of golden sneakers by Gabriel Urist.

rap lyrics, Urist developed a system for creating super detailed precious metal miniatures of anything, often iconic cultural symbols, and often sports related.

In 2004, Nike contacted him to make a shoe for their new NIKE SB (skateboard) release. It was a signature shoe for Paul Rodriguez, the captain of their new skateboard team. Sixty silver necklaces were given away at the party and one platinum with diamonds was made for Paul. Supreme contacted him afterwards and said 'if you can make a shoe look like that, you could kill a skateboard'. So, he made a deck and other skateboard inspired pieces for Supreme and would go on to create custom pieces for rappers, DJs, NBA players, MLB players, artists, graffiti writers and filmmakers. He made the *WTT* dubrae in collaboration with Nike Basketball for Jay and Ye for their *WTT* album tour, bringing 'shoelery' back.

Urist has since had gallery shows in Spain, Italy, Japan and New York, exhibiting paintings and metal work, and has sold his jewellery in shops all over the world. And apropos of this *GHHS* Breaking and the Olympics Special Issue, in 2005, Mucho Muchacho, a rapper from Barcelona flew him to Ibiza to be a judge in a breaking contest.

Urist's recent work reflects on racism in America, Shakespeare, the origins of graffiti, the history of hip hop music, and pop culture. While the music that inspired his work blew up and changed the world and its economy, what was so meaningful about early hip hop was cultural, not monetary. It came from kids. It didn't come from the music industry. As Red Man put it, 'it's all we had' – talking about music and basketball.

There's nothing better than creative kids, and it never takes long for corporate America to copy, package and capitalize the trends. Jewellery and music,

both living breathing parts of our culture, in the streets or in the penthouse, Urist works to focus on and elevate the best of both worlds.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Artist Gabriel Urist (aka Gabe the Jeweler) works with precious metals to fashion jewellery and sculptures. His work is in several galleries in the United States, as well in Tokyo, Barcelona and Paris. Gabriel has been nominated by the council of fashion designers of America as 'Accessories Man of the Year'. He has created props for Matthew Barney and ancillary sculptures for Tom Otterness. Gabriel has designed collections for Futura 2000, Converse, Nike, Supreme, Alife, NBA, MLB, New Era, Wu-Tang and Staple. He's made custom pieces for Kobe Bryant, Duane Wade, LeBron James, Kanye West, Jay-Z, Paul Rodriguez, Ben Kingsley, A\$AP Rocky, Spike Lee and others. He has also made jewellery for runway shows for fashion designers Zac Posen, Miguel Adrover, Narcisso Rodriguez, Gary Graham and Marc Jacobs. Known for his unique style, Gabriel's pendants, rings, brooches, buckles and sundry other items in silver, gold and platinum are often commissioned with precious gems as one-of-a-kind pieces.

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