

GIANTS

Art from the DEAN COLLECTION *of*
SWIZZ BEATZ *and* ALICIA KEYS

Presented by  MN Center for Racial
& Health Equity



Exhibition Guide

Teen Kit

Giants: Art from the Dean Collection of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys

March 8–July 13, 2025

From March 2025 to July 2025, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia, like the girls' name) is excited to host “Giants: Art from the Dean Collection of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys.” The exhibition consists of five themes: Becoming Giants, Giant Presence, Giant Conversations: Critiquing Society, Giant Conversations: Celebrating Blackness, and On the Shoulders of Giants.

A few Giant rules:

Keep at least one foot away from the artworks to help protect them. This shouldn't be too hard since they are so gigantic you'll have to step back to see them.

Respect the Giants who made these so you and others can see them forever—please do not touch.

This kit is a tool to help teenagers (ages 13-19) explore the exhibition. It breaks down the five themes of the exhibition and includes information on both the collectors and the artists they collect. Experience each room of the exhibition with the corresponding portion of the kit. Take as long (or as little) as you'd like with the artwork. Use as much of the kit as you'd like; there is no such thing as complete or incomplete.

Giants: Art from the Dean Collection of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys is organized by the Brooklyn Museum.

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Cover: Esther Mahlangu. *Ndebele Abstract* (detail), 2017. Acrylic on canvas. The Dean Collection, courtesy of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys. © Esther Mahlangu. (Photo: Glenn Steigelman)

Who are the Deans?

“As artists ourselves, we have a deep concern for fellow living artists and ensuring they receive fair recognition for their work. Our aim is to create a vibrant community where everyone receives the recognition they rightfully deserve.”

—Alicia Keys

The Deans are Alicia Keys and Kasseem Dean, or Swizz Beatz, as you might know him. Alicia Keys is a singer, songwriter, and most recently a musical composer and star. Swizz Beatz is a producer, rapper, and DJ. As you will see, they are also art collectors. One important aspect of their art collection is that they highlight artists of African, African diasporic, and African American heritage. The couple started their collection by sticking to the classics— influential Black artists of the past like Gordon Parks and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Today, the Deans strictly collect work by living artists. They get to know the artists personally before acquiring an artwork and stay connected following it.

We’ll talk a lot about Giants. What do we mean by that?

Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys are Giants in the music world. They are also art collectors who are dedicated to collecting, protecting and respecting Black artists.

The artists whose work you will see in the exhibition are Giants in the art world today, in the future, and in the history of Black art.

Many of the artworks are enormous with very big stories to tell.

THEME 1

Becoming Giants

Get to know the Deans, the collectors behind the work you'll see today. Looking around the room, how might you guess that the Deans are musicians? What objects might you include in an exhibition to show who you are?

Look at the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Dean. What words would you use to describe these portraits? What do you like most about them? What do you wonder about the portraits? What do the portraits make you wonder about the subjects? How do these paintings show you that these two people are Giants?

THEME 2

Giant Presence

Look at the artwork in these spaces. How do you feel when you look at this giant artwork by artist Meleko Mokgosi, the largest work he has created to date? What about the artwork makes you feel this way? How does the size of the artwork impact your feelings? How might you feel different if the artwork were smaller?

As you keep looking, what else do you see in the space? What do you wonder about?

The Deans prioritize large-scale work when collecting. When commissioning new works, they encourage artists to work as large as they can. Larger than they may feel comfortable with! The Deans often buy works that won't even fit on their walls, because they don't want to limit the artists who are challenging themselves to work at this scale.

"We want you to see that you are also a giant, that you are special, incredible, unique, one of a kind; that every person with work in this exhibition that's hanging on the walls is just like you and me." — Alicia Keys

How are you a Giant? What makes you special, unique, one of a kind? If you were to commission an artwork reflecting your uniqueness, what would you ask the artist to include?

THEME 3

Giant Conversations: Critiquing Society



Soundsuit, by Nick Cave

Giants are not afraid to talk about the hard things. They critique the world around them through symbolism—the use of symbols to represent things, often things that can’t be pictured in concrete ways, like ideas or thoughts—as well as allegory, the use of symbols that convey another, hidden meaning. Look at this work by artist Nick Cave. What do the materials he uses convey? Are they soft, hard, welcoming, intimidating? What do you think he is trying to say through this work?

This section of the exhibition addresses issues facing Black people in the 20th and 21st century. Nick Cave made his first Soundsuits in response to the race riots over thirty years ago. He uses his Soundsuits to show how Black people, particularly Black men, might put on a sort of costume to protect against violence. Do you think a Soundsuit that hides race, class, and gender could provide protection? How might they do that, or why not? How have you seen people adopt these costumes in your community? Imagine putting on the Soundsuit. Does this change the way you feel about it?

Works within this theme offer a lens to see the world and the problems we face. These works urge you, the viewer, to imagine a collective solution.

THEME 4

Giant Conversations: Celebrating Blackness

These spaces celebrate the concept “Black is Beautiful,” commemorating the collectors’ love for “people with melanin tones of all shades,” according to the exhibition catalogue. The artists highlight the pride, style, culture, and talents of their communities.

Find two collages of young children. The artist, Deborah Roberts, makes collages and paintings to combat stereotypes about Black children. Describe each child. What do their expressions portray? What about their clothing? Their poses? What do you wonder about these children?

Early in life, artists’ ideals of race and beauty were shaped by photos and old European paintings. This is all they knew! These images impacted how Roberts viewed herself and her community. In her artwork, she shows children with their

own unique identities. They are individuals, growing and figuring out what makes them special (sound familiar? Think back to Giant Presence!).

Now, find something that sparkles. Mickalene Thomas is known for her mixed media works using jewels, sequins, and rhinestones. As a Black lesbian, her work addresses Black femininity and centers sexuality. Her subjects are often looking right at you, challenging what art historians refer to as the male gaze (or showing woman as objects for heterosexual male viewers, looking away shyly). How does it feel to have the subject staring at you? If the subject were looking away, how might this change your response to the work? How does Thomas’s use of materials celebrate Blackness, particularly femininity?



Detail of *The Visionary*, by Deborah Roberts

THEME 5

On the Shoulders of Giants

This final section showcases some of the classics we mentioned earlier—Basquiat, Parks. The title takes from the phrase “standing on the shoulders of giants,” which dates back almost a thousand years. Before we give it away, what do you think this phrase means? To help you, find the photographs by artist Kwame Brathwaite. Braithwaite coined the phrase “Black is Beautiful,” inspiring a movement by the same name in the 1960s and 1970s. How do these photographs celebrate Black beauty? How have they influenced how we celebrate Black beauty today? Think of famous people who uplift Black beauty—how do they do this?

You got it: the phrase refers to learning from the people who came before us, to continue making progress. In other words, if we recognize the endeavors of past artists, who faced similar struggles, we can build off their knowledge. The artists in this section have experimented across decades, influenced by traditions and social and political unrest. Their work captures the complexities of the moments they lived through. They lay the framework for future generations of artists: modern-day Giants like you.



Detail of *Untitled (Natural Hairstyles)*, by Kwame Brathwaite