



Virgil Abloh

The late, pathbreaking designer's vision is still unfolding, as "Figures of Speech" at the Brooklyn Museum demonstrates.

AMERICAN DESIGNER VIRGIL ABLOH WAS AT the height of his influence when he died unexpectedly last year at age 41, victim of a rare form of cancer. As the first Black artistic director for menswear for French style house Louis Vuitton, and the creator of his own brand, Off-White, his work today enjoys global popularity and is esteemed by the highest echelons of the art world. His work with musician Kanye West, artist Takashi Murakami and architect Rem Koolhaas, among many others, has given his name resonance with audiences far beyond fashion. He remains one of the most important artists of our time.

In July, Brunswick was able to support the Brooklyn Museum in the latest incarnation of “Figures of Speech,” a major exhibit of Abloh’s work that the artist helped to plan when it was first mounted at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Collaboration and confrontation are hallmarks of his designs, which frequently incorporate text, turning media into design and commentary, and turning the wearers of his clothing into literal figures of speech. Yet his fashion designs were only one aspect of a body of work that touches many areas of art and architecture, everywhere maintaining the same playful critique, a socially aware irreverence.

A centerpiece of the exhibit is Abloh’s “Social Sculpture” (top right), a wooden, cabin-like space designed to showcase performances and events by other artists, offering a built-in platform for the development of new talent and new collaboration.

In a recorded interview excerpt that served as an introduction to the Off-White Show at the most recent Paris Fashion Week, Abloh noted that the value in his extraordinary success lay in his ability to open opportunities for others. Too often, he said, the art world closely guards the “codes” to entry for young artists and consumers, screening out people and aspects of culture that grow out of minority experience. “For me, I know it’s my duty,” he said. “I’m not just having these experiences for my own glorification or my own enjoyment. It’s because I’m meant to share the codes.”

Antwaun Sargent, writer and Guest Curator for the Brooklyn show, which runs through January, emphasized the importance of this aspect of Abloh’s art in a recent interview with *Time Magazine*.

“The fact that we’re having this exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, in an encyclopedic institution, is a testament to how boundaries were reshaped by Virgil in a way that allowed for Black creativity and concerns within spaces of architecture, fashion and art to be fully recognized.” ♦



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM



The irreverence and openness of Virgil Abloh's art is evident in the displays themselves at the Brooklyn Museum show. Long tables (below) and clothing racks (bottom right) that might be found in the designer's studio, are used to exhibit his fashion designs, and painted wall murals (top right) hint at the public art aspect of his work.

