



Inside Rihanna's Glitzy, Artsy Album Cover Launch
Singer also reveals album title at gala affair, but release date remains a mystery

By Steve Appleford October 8, 2015

Rihanna revealed details about her long-awaited eighth album at a Los Angeles art galley Wednesday night, unveiling the original paintings for the cover to her upcoming album, *Anti*. The cover depicts the singer as a child, with a golden crown covering her eyes as a message written in braille is displayed across the canvas. The singer swept into the MAMA Gallery dressed in gothic black as a DJ blasted Tyga's "Hookah."

A small room with a checkerboard floor filled with red balloons tied to red ribbons welcomed guests. On the walls were large white canvases covered in oversized braille inside frames burned just enough to leave a layer of charcoal. Guests were encouraged to don red blindfolds and smear the canvases with their charcoal-covered hands. Other pieces were hidden behind black cloth, waiting to be unveiled. (Among the guests were Nick Jonas and Straight Outta Compton actor O'Shea Jackson Jr. "How am I not going to come to a party that got Rihanna on it?" Jackson tells Rolling Stone.)

The cover was unveiled to wild applause as Rihanna introduced artist Roy Nachum. "He sees things beyond the surface, which is why we even decided to collaborate," Rihanna said, looking toward the artist. "It felt like there was another spirit, another layer to the art. After we met, we talked about what I wanted visually, what would make me the happiest girl in the world. This is my favorite album cover ever.

"This is me as a little girl," she said of the central image of a child. "I brought this one to him and he really reinterpreted it his own way with exactly the message that I wanted."

Afterwards, Nachum explained the cover in more detail. "The crown over the eyes is a symbol for the music," he tells Rolling Stone. "Here, I painted the young Rihanna bringing something new. She saw my work and I got a phone call that she wanted to collaborate on the cover to her album."

After unveiling the paintings, Rihanna went into a back room to type a note on a vintage typewriter she found there, said MAMA co-owner Adarsna Benjamin. The event came together in just 24 hours, taking the place of a planned East Coast event. The gallery's current group show, including work by James Franco, was taken down for one night. "It's definitely surreal and very different than what we're doing here, but I appreciate that they're trying to do something different," Benjamin says as hip-hop raged in the main room. "It's a party."

The singer also introduced Chloe Mitchell, a sometime collaborator with Kanye West, who authored a poem titled "If They Let Us" that is written in braille on the cover. It reads, in part:

"I sometimes fear that I am misunderstood.
It is simply because what I want to say,
what I need to say, won't be heard.
Heard in a way I so rightfully deserve.
What I choose to say is of so much substance
That people just won't understand the depth of my message."

Afterwards, Mitchell told Rolling Stone, "It's about being misunderstood, but still standing out and doing what you feel is right for you. It's about not conforming to what society says you should be and being a leader in your own right. Sometimes we feel out of place because we don't look the same, we don't dress the same, we don't speak the same. But being different is not a bad thing. Being misunderstood is not a bad thing. Everyone won't understand what you're trying to do when you have a genius. If you stand your ground and are comfortable with who you are, nothing else matters.

"We had a very good conversation just about life," she added of working with Rihanna. "She was telling stories, we were laughing and she told me what she wanted and I too that and ran with it."

Although Rihanna had revealed plans in early 2014 to work on a record to accompany the animated film *Home*, for which she voiced a character, news soon surfaced that she was also working on a standalone album. About a year later, she released the acoustic, soft-rocking track "FourFiveSeconds," a collaboration with Kanye West and Paul McCartney. Prior to a Grammys performance of the song, West announced that he was executive producing the record.

In March, the singer teased fans with cryptic art on Instagram, which turned out to be single art for new song, "Bitch Better Have My Money." In April, she released "American Oxygen" via the streaming service Tidal, which she co-owns with several other superstars; she also teased a new song, "Only If for a Night," and an interlude "in celebration of 4/20" titled "James Joint." Around this time, she also released two tracks from her *Home* album. By July, she released a torture-themed video for "Bitch" and a heavy-metal remix of the song, helmed by Korn. With no track list for *Anti* as of now, it's unclear which of her previously released songs will be included on the album.