

December 1, 2016 - NYC native Hak has been making music and creating art since he was a kid. Known as a founding member of the esteemed rap collective Ratking, he departed the group in early 2016 to focus on making his own music and pursue making visual art. In June of 2016 the 22 year-old musician released his first solo record, the appropriately titled *June*. He is set to release new music in the spring of 2017.



As told to T. Cole Rachel, 1880 words.

Tags: Music, Art, Inspiration, Multi-tasking.

Hak on trying to do everything

You do a lot of different kinds of creative things, like making visual art as well as music. What came first for you?

Visual stuff, I guess, from when I was a kid—drawing, painting, scribbling. Then writing, I was doing that before I got into the music side of things. I feel like it's cool now to look at all of these things as being on the same plane. On any given day I can go from doing one to another—from the computer to the wall and back to the computer. It's nice to see them more holistically now. There's a symbiosis now between doing all of these things, but it wasn't always that way.

Whether you're working on a drawing or you're working on a piece of music or writing something, do you find that all of these creative pursuits satisfy the same kind of creative impulse?

I'm not sure if they satisfy the same creative itch, but it's almost like I feel a need that has to be filled. Doing these things is the only way I can be content or have some sense of satisfaction about myself. Also, it's this weird dynamic of feeling like doing these things—being creative—is the only thing I'm really good at. It's the only thing that comes kind of effortlessly.

I know you because of the music you've been involved with over the past few years, but I understand that you've been putting a lot of energy into your paintings. How has that part of your creative life evolved?

At one point I was doing surrealism in my paintings—when I started getting serious about painting—and I was referencing iconic painters because the abstract work I was doing didn't seem to have any depth or tonal value. There was really nothing relatable about it. I started thinking about how we perceive these universal forms, and so now I'm looking more at things like that, plus the way light plays on things.

I feel like once you start to get into things like that, once you understand how these basic forms really work, then you get into the real language of painting. I didn't go to school or study this, so now I just try and look at the greats and try and understand what they did. I'm trying to get more technical and get into the minute workings of all this shit. Same as with music, I guess, but this feels different. I can express a different part of myself this way and I never really appreciated how important that was before.

Did you study art when you were a kid?

No. I wish.

Your parents were artistic though, right?

Yeah, they're photographers.

Were they encouraging of that part of your life?

They were for the longest time. Not so much at this point. *[laughs]*

They want you to get a real job?

They're actually very supportive, but they're also like, "Don't throw all of your eggs into one basket." They want me to look at lots of different outlets and have some sort of balance in my life, which I totally concur with. I've been doing this stuff—making art and music—since I was a teenager, but I'm only 22 now. This is a little sliver of my life.

So the music and visual art feel like totally separate paths?

I think of them as being in the same vein, but they are very separate pursuits. It's like, what do you want to do today? Do you want to work on a song and suffer? Or do you want to work on this giant painting and suffer? Suffer with your eyes or with your ears? It's all about suffering.

How so?

It's like having to suffer yourself. Making art is enjoyable and beautiful, but there are times when it's frustrating and that's when the angst comes, and that feeling of suffering. It's just a part of the process. At the end of the day I can't really complain because I love doing what I do. There's way more whack shit to be doing than trying to make things that are beautiful.

Did you always know that this would be the path that you were on? Was there ever a point where you were like, "Maybe I should go to school and become a doctor."

Not at all. Well, that's not totally true. The other day I was thinking that I want to go back to school and study biomimetics. I want to learn about how technology basically takes from nature and how that's involved in design and shit. Marine sciences. Every day I'm like I want to just pick up something new and try it but this is definitely my path. At the end of the day I see it all blending and molding together... almost like a painting. Having all these different interests and talents and figuring out how to blend them together feels very true to me... it feels like how the future will be.

You walked away from what was becoming a successful rap group. Why was it so important to go off and do your own thing?

I think at that time it felt very necessary, that need to step away. I felt like I needed to make something for myself and see it come to fruition. At that time I was really doubting myself, but now I feel good. I'm happy to run with it and see where it goes. That being said, there's so much power and so much encouragement and strength in a group or a collective. I'll always feel like those are my roots. It all goes in waves. You can always link back up with someone you used to work with at some point in the future... or just link up with a new person since there are so many talented people. I needed to know I could do things on my own, but that doesn't mean I won't work with other people again.

In a world where people are obsessed with popularity and making money and everything being about taking that next step onto something bigger, the idea of walking away is hard.

All of that fucks you up. It completely taints your vision. If you think about money every day in this desperate, hungry way... it's bad. I mean, you should think about money every day in the sense that you should be careful with it and try to save it—put a dollar aside, put five dollars aside, fuck it, put a penny aside—but if money is all you think about, it's no good. If it's all about the potential to make more money, it's no good. I've thought about it a lot and it absolutely ruins things for me. It's toxic. I always like to think that if you want money to come and you think about it in the right way and you put that frequency out, it'll come. But if you let money consume all of your thoughts and dictate all your decisions, you'll have no other ideas. It robs you. As for walking away... you know, it feels good to let things go sometimes. It's like a girlfriend or a boyfriend—it feels good to let things go and just do you. And yeah, it feels shitty sometimes, but then you remember why it happened and then it's like... yeah, I fucking left them. *[laughs]*

Your solo record, *June*, feels much breezier than anything you've made in the past. Where does your impetus to make music come from? What inspires you right now?

I think the impetus comes from just wanting my friends to hear it. It's very very selfish almost. I want people to be like, "Oh that's Hak! Damn!" Sometimes it's more spiritual, but mostly the desire to make music is internal and very selfish. It's purely for myself. At the end of the day you're lucky if you have anyone. Usually, you only have yourself and, like, your mom or something. So yeah, this music is for anyone but it's really just so people will say, "Hak makes really good music. I'm going to talk to him. I'm going to buy him a Snickers. I'm gonna take him out to dinner, buy him a drink." I just wanna make the kind of music I want to hear, the kind of music my friends will think is good. It's not super complicated, really.

Things I can't do without.

1. the sun
2. avocados
3. a stretch & a run
4. my family
5. my mind

Is it easier to make music just for yourself? There's a certain set of expectations that comes with making music for a record label, or when you make things knowing that it's really not just for you and that people are listening.

Yeah, but then again it's like people are always listening. People are always watching. As soon as you step outside your apartment, as soon as you step onto a train, people are always listening even when it seems like aren't. When are they *not* listening? It's the same with making art. People are very engaged with one another. Humans need to relate and need to listen and need to talk. I feel like it's definitely an illusion if you think no one's going to look at your work. The idea that people might see it or hear it shouldn't really change anything. It's nice to think that you're only doing this for yourself, but I think

we're always secretly trying to communicate something to other people... even when it seems like we aren't.

What's the most surprising thing you're working on right now?

I might start working as a cook somewhere, hopefully at this new restaurant that is opening later this year. I'm really into gastronomy, so I want to try it. My parents are great chefs and at the end of the day food is one of those things that brings everyone together.

That's a nice approach to take in life—maybe I'll do *this*, or maybe I'll do *this*... who knows?

Yeah! It's really not that crazy. People are hung up on the idea that you can only do one thing. It's OK to try shit, you know? Maybe I'll make some more of these paintings, or maybe I'll be a chef. Maybe I'll try something I know I'm really shitty at now but will try to get good at—like dancing. I feel like some nights I'm John Travolta in *Grease* and then some nights I'm terrible. I'd love to go back to dancing and shit. I took dance when I was little. Tap dancing.

I hate saying the word "blessed" because I feel like that word gets overused, but I really do feel that way. I may not get rich, but in some way everything that I wanted has somehow come to fruition. Not to get all existential or spiritual, but I think it just has to do with... you know, if you put that frequency out there into the world—I want *this* to happen—it's going to happen. It might not be easy, but you can make it happen. You give what you get and you get what you give. All these little things add up.

Name

Hak

Vocation

Musician, Visual Artist

Fact

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Photo: Ebru Yildiz

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