David Sabastian has spent years shifting pop culture from behind the scenes, and affecting change out in the streets. Born and raised in Los Angeles, the forward-thinking fashion designer, painter, activist, and organizer is always moving. When he isn’t designing subversive merch for rappers like YG (see 2020’s sold-out [“Fuck the Police” collection](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.complex.com%2Fstyle%2F2020%2F07%2Fyg-4hunnid-drop-helping-black-owned-businesses-in-los-angeles&data=04%7C01%7CSamantha.Lorenzo%40warnerrecords.com%7Cd0e3b1ca184446547a9608d87ad9cf5b%7C8367939002ec4ba1ad3d69da3fdd637e%7C0%7C0%7C637394423197553583%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=MQxAl5iJFQL4KND93voTEZ%2BZYUOjTGiAsKHNqRx%2BYug%3D&reserved=0)) or painting vibrant murals for Dame Dash, he works to combat homelessness in downtown L.A. with his streetwear company [SkidRowFashionWeek](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fskidrowfashionweek.com%2F&data=04%7C01%7CSamantha.Lorenzo%40warnerrecords.com%7Cd0e3b1ca184446547a9608d87ad9cf5b%7C8367939002ec4ba1ad3d69da3fdd637e%7C0%7C0%7C637394423197553583%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=FeaOc6LofR3oY%2BJ3z7hObykcsFl4NYXLv2cpsbG7MJY%3D&reserved=0). Now, after a lifetime of working *around* music, Sabastian is bringing his creative, sociopolitical, and spiritual ideals to rap. He says he sees himself as part Tupac Shakur and part Deepak Chopra, and his music reflects those ambitious aims. Whether he’s backed by minimalist beats that thump concussively or simple suites of stirring piano, Sabastian spits with a captivating fervor, like a lyrical and streetwise evangelist of self-empowerment and belief.

“We all are products of our thoughts and our beliefs about ourselves,” Sabastian says, by way of explaining his expansion into music. When he had this epiphany, he knew it was time. “I did a few psychedelics, meditated, and found me. Within finding me, I found God. I stopped judging myself and created a new script for how I look at myself and how I want my life to go.”

On April 7, 2020, Sabastian began the second act of his movie-worthy career with the release of *We Are God*. Deeply philosophical and political, the album finds Sabastian questioning reality, encouraging others to realize their potential, and challenging the centuries-old racist structures of the U.S. Released independently on his Believe In Yourself Records, *We Are God* was originally only available for purchase via his website. After generating over six figures through sales and digital tips, Sabastian attracted the attention of industry heavyweights. This year, he signed a joint venture with Warner Records and The Blueprint Group to release an updated and expanded version on streaming services. *We Are God* is Sabastian’s opening salvo in his war against hatred and self-hate—the record reflects the world’s ills and aims to inspire listeners to change them.

Sabastian spent the first part of his life grappling with the adversities in his world. He inherited his artistic talent from his father—a painter and gallerist—but that was it. The man abandoned his family during Sabastian’s childhood, leaving his mother, “a strong Black woman with strong Christian roots,” to work long hours to keep them in apartments in Koreatown and, eventually, Torrance. While she was behind the desk at various administrative jobs, Sabastian spent his after school hours at home alone: drawing, listening to music, and immersing himself in the art books she gave him. Paintings by Renoir and Degas were scored by 2pac and Kanye West, setting the foundation for Sabstian’s ability to bridge the gaps between visuals and sound.

In high school, Sabastian’s creative precociousness and ambitions made attending classes feel like a chore. He was more enthralled with music and fashion—everything from designer clothes to his own hand-designed, heavily thrifted outfits—so he bounced around schools in L.A. before dropping out at 16. This was the defining moment of Sabastian’s first act, the moment where he chose to believe in himself and pursue his passion. “I always wanted to do music, but I didn’t want to drop out and become a rapper,” Sabastian says. He’d seen too many peers hit that dead end. “So I was like, ‘How can I do this and make people respect my aesthetic and my mind?’”

With a portfolio of his artwork and clothing designs, Sabastian traveled store-to-store on Melrose Boulevard to sell his work to any brand willing to take a chance on him. When he met the late Christian Audigier(Ed Hardy, Von Dutch), everything fell into place. Sabastian soon went from freelancing for Audigier to designing the entirety of Steve Aoki’s Dim Mak collection. “Drawing and fashion have always been like breathing for me,” Sabastian says. He’s an instinctive creator, often designing dozens of pieces (e.g. T-shirts, sweatpants) in a day or less. “It takes no thought.”

While handling bigger campaigns for more brands—including but not limited to PacSun, RVCA, and Von Dutch—Sabastian became the figurehead of a small cultural movement in L.A.: ANTI Society. An art collective with the spirit of ’60s hippies, they were basically Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters for those who loved Basquiat and shopped on Fairfax. They rented a house, meditated together, threw parties, and even organized a parade down—of course—Fairfax. Their goal was to create anything and everything while rejecting societally approved ideas and ways of living. Eventually, though, Sabastian realized he couldn’t change the world without engaging with it.

“Sometimes, the best way to be anti-society is to be a productive part of the world and help people,” Sabastian says. “That’s what I'm doing now.”

These days, in addition to recording his own music and designing for artists like Chris Brown(see the [“Indigoat”](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.grailed.com%2Flistings%2F11556963-tour-tee-chris-brown-indigoat-tour-tee&data=04%7C01%7CSamantha.Lorenzo%40warnerrecords.com%7Cd0e3b1ca184446547a9608d87ad9cf5b%7C8367939002ec4ba1ad3d69da3fdd637e%7C0%7C0%7C637394423197563578%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=%2Fi0brP%2F2pgxMKHqVlM8starxlYDGqdySyr9Gcg7SGyU%3D&reserved=0) tour merch), Sabastian helps run SkidRowFashionWeek, which he cofounded in 2019. More than a streetwear brand, the company donates part of their sales to programs that help those in downtown L.A.’s sprawling and underserved homeless community. They now have a storefront and manufacturing facility where they’ll employ residents of Skid Row to help them restart their lives. Sabastian also founded an organization called Just Draw It, which allows him to teach kids from disenfranchised sections of L.A. about art and abstract thinking. He hopes to instill in them the mindset that helped him achieve his dreams as a designer and musician.

*We Are God*is the culmination of Sabastian’s journey. Over instrumentals that strike a balance between poignant and banging, Sabastian delivers incisive commentary, clever punchlines, and arresting singing. With interludes that play like affirmations and tracks emphasizing the power of positive thinking (“Ballin”), *We Are God* is a conscious record that feels profound, not preachy. On lead single “The Sunken Place,” he criticizes the vapidity of much contemporary rap: “You trying to shine in the summer / I’m trying to end world hunger.” Sebastian hopes *We Are God*will change people’s minds about themselves, the world, and hip-hop music. Nothing less.

“Worldwide pandemics, presidential gimmicks—the last thing people need is another soulless record,” Sebastian says. “We need medicine to help us heal. That’s what I’m bringing.”