

The Greatest

Taschen, ESPN Set Ali Book

When famed adman and designer George Lois decided he was going to create a visual biography using Muhammad Ali's own words to proclaim Ali not only as the Greatest of All Time, but also the world's first rap artist, he knew exactly which publisher he wanted to work with on the project.

"I told Benedikt [Taschen], 'You did the biggest book in the world on Ali, now you are going to do the smallest book in the world on Ali,'" Lois told *PW*. (Lois and Ali have been friends since before Lois shot the *Esquire* cover with Ali posed as martyred St. Sebastian in 1968, when he refused to be drafted.) At 600-plus pages, *Ali Rap: Muhammad Ali the First Heavyweight Champion of Rap* may not actually be the smallest book on Ali, but its 5.5"×7.7" flexicover and its \$24.99 price tag is in stark contrast with Taschen's *GOAT*, the 20"×20", \$5,000 book it published about the champ in 2004.

Taschen, however, won't be publishing *Ali Rap* alone. Through Lois's connections, ESPN heard about the project and immediately wanted in on the action. Lois hooked up Benedikt Taschen with the powers that be at ESPN, and Taschen held back production of the book, which now has a November 2 laydown date. The



Ali the rapper.

result is the first copublished book for both companies, with an announced first printing of 100,000 copies and a marketing plan that will include many of ESPN's media entities.

The book is timed to honor Ali's 65th birthday in January and the 25th anniversary of his last fight in December. ESPN has three Ali-related programs planned through those months, including a documentary adapted by Lois from *Ali Rap*. In addition, the network will air five- to 20-second clips of Ali footage in November and December. Print promotion includes excerpts in *ESPN* magazine and *Vibe*. At press time Taschen and ESPN were discussing the possi-

bility of a boxed set for the holidays that might combine the book with a DVD. The coordinated marketing efforts will also include ESPN online and radio programming.

Kora Krines, sales director of Taschen USA, said the book should appeal to rappers and rap fans who may be too young to know Ali's full historical significance. "That's really the reason I did the book," Lois said. "Everyone loves Ali, but a lot of people don't understand why he is such a great man—especially young people."

Whether Ali can participate in the promotion of the book will depend on his health, said Lois. But plans are in the works for a huge publication party in New York at the end of November and famous young rappers will be on the guest list. "It took me about five minutes to come up with [the title] *Ali Rap*," said Lois, "because I always said he was rapping before they called it rap." —B.K.