BALLROOM

'Ballroom,' 'Ball culture,' or 'Ballroom scene' is the term used to describe an underground LGBTQA+ subculture that originated among young African Americans and Latin Americans in New York City, USA. In this subculture, people walk (or compete) for prizes and status during events known as 'balls.'



*LGBTQA+ represents a collection of terms that denote the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities.

'Ball culture' consists of 'balls' that combine performance, dance, and the movement language of models on a catwalk. From the end of the nineteenth century, members of the underground LGBTQA+ community in major cities began organizing masked balls, known as "drags," as a resistance against laws that prohibited wearing clothing associated with the opposite gender. Participants in those "drags" were primarily young African Americans and Latin Americans from the LGBTQA+ community. Although some balls were integrated, the judges were always white individuals, and African American participants were either excluded from prizes or unfairly judged. In the early 20th century, African Americans and Latinos began organizing their own balls. The ball culture then primarily evolved into a community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender African Americans. Participants dance, walk, and support each other in categories designed to embody different genders and social classes. These categories also provide an escape from the harsh (heteronormative) reality they face in their everyday lives.

HOUSES

Houses serve as alternative families for LGBTQA+ individuals. They are intended to provide shelter, comfort, and safety to those who are often ostracized from their original families due to their LGBTQA+ identity. The 'houses,' named after fashion brands, are led by "mothers" and "fathers," usually older members of the ballroom scene, who offer guidance and support to their house "children." The children of a house are referred to as each other's "brothers" or "sisters." Houses that win numerous trophies and receive recognition attain the status of "Iconic" or "Legendary."

COMPETITION

At the balls, houses compete against each other in various categories. They are judged based on the requirements of that specific category, including costumes, appearance, and performance. Participants dress according to the category they are competing in and are expected to present what the category demands. Some of the largest balls can last up to twelve hours, featuring dozens of categories in a single evening/night.

In the first round of a category, participants must achieve their '10s' as a preselection. In this round, participants must demonstrate the basic elements of the respective category to be approved by the jury. If not, participants receive a 'Chop' and are not allowed to proceed to the one-on-one battles of that same category.

KIKI BALL

A Kiki Ball is an event similar to a traditional ballroom competition, but it is specifically aimed at youth within the ballroom culture. Kiki Balls are often less formal than traditional ballroom competitions and may have a more experimental and inclusive approach. They provide a platform for young (novice) members of the ballroom community to participate, learn, and express themselves.

EN

GENDER IDENTITY, EXPRESSION, SEXUAL ORIENTATION

To keep the competition fair and account for diversity within the LGBTQ+ community, categories are often subdivided based on different aspects of the spectrum, such as gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.
The Ballroom community has historically made significant contributions to increasing visibility and acceptance of diverse gender identities and expressions. The ballroom scene has shaped concepts like "ballroom categories" and served as a social space where people could embrace their true identity and expression, contributing to greater awareness and understanding of diversity within the LGBTQ+ community.

Open to all (OTA): This category is open to all gender identities and expressions.

Female Figure (FF): An overarching term encompassing all individuals presenting as 'Femme.'

Femme Queen (FQ): Transgender women, drags, or transfeminine individuals.

Male Figure (MF): An overarching term encompassing all individuals presenting as men.

Butch Queen (BQ): Gay, bisexual, or cisgender men or transmasculine individuals.

Drag: Cisgender individuals who dress or present as women.

Butch: Male lesbians, bisexuals, or gay cisgender women.

Cis women / man: Individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.
Transwomen/Transman: Individuals whose gender identity does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) / Non-Binary (NB): Both terms reflect the diversity of gender identities and expressions beyond the constraints of the traditional binary gender system of female/male. Recognizing and respecting these diverse identities contributes to a more inclusive and understanding society.



