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## Local Artist's New Series Critiques Anti-Marriage Equality Sentiment

By Querin Brown



Photos by RaRah.

People come from far and wide to visit the historic Lexington Market, but they might not know the unsuspecting treasure that is quietly tucked just a block away. A careful stroll across the Light Rail tracks and a brief descent to the sub-basement of a stylish Howard Street building, and you will find 13 years of expressive, eclectic creations, created by veteran artist, Jeffrey Kent. A knock on the door, a kind handshake, an espresso, and our interview leads to a tour of the studio and a sneak peek of Kent's upcoming exhibition, *Preach! New Works by Jeffrey Kent*.

A Boston native, Kent left his job as a car salesman some 13 years ago and has never looked back. Named the "Best Visual Artist" (2008, *Baltimore City Paper*), Kent is the founder of the Sub-Basement Artist Studios, a 12,000 square foot underground artist studio where he gives back by mentoring and allowing new and mid-career artists to use the space. He was also a contributing artist to an exhibition titled *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe: The Contemporary Response*, a Walters Museum and Myrtis Galerie collaboration, on display last month.

The vision for Jeffrey's most recent series, *Preach!*, was sparked shortly after the 2008 presidential election. Kent was inspired by stories of the African-American voting statistics for California's Proposition 8, a measure that banned gay marriage in the Golden State. A controversial dialogue within the African-American community ensued, with many arguing that proponents of the measure were contributing to blocking the same types of rights that their ancestors have spent centuries fighting for.

Kent addresses some of these conversations with thought-provoking pieces that illustrate parallels between the civil rights movement and the ongoing debate over marriage equality in the United States. Reminiscent of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jeffrey Kent uses brash colors, gravity defying drips (they flow up the painting) and inverted and backwards messages to "grasp the observers' attention, persuading them to slow down and think," he explained. The reversed messages are also expressive of some of Kent's personal frustrations growing up with dyslexia.

With titles such as "Justice, Peace, and Genuine Respect for All People," this color popping assemblage of art expresses Kent's belief that "people are people first, not gay or black and that all people should have the same rights," he told Gay



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Life. "I have grown past some of my own judgments while studying people who are in judgment of others." He defines "creativity as nourishment and art as a blend of ideas for others to experience."

And with this collection, Kent exemplifies Baltimore's best in creativity, art, and contemporary artistry.

Sponsored by the Exhibition Development Seminar (EDS) at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), *Preach!* will be exhibited at the Frederick Douglass–Isaac Myers Maritime Park Museum in the Herbert Bearman Art Gallery.

***Preach! New Works by Jeffrey Kent***

February 7–March 31

Frederick Douglass–Isaac Myers Maritime Park, Bearman Gallery  
1417 Thames St.

[JeffreyKentArt.com](http://JeffreyKentArt.com)

[MICA.edu](http://MICA.edu)

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