

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



## CLASSIC MATERIAL

Jay 'J Berd' Keating

November 5th - November 25th, 2016

Opens Saturday, November 5th from 3-6pm

Jay 'J Berd' Keating (b. 1976) is a self-taught artist living and working in Hagerstown, Maryland. Keating has been performing as an MC since the late '90s under the name J Berd. This exhibition marks Keating's first presentation of paintings.

**Freddy:** Hi, Jay. How was your day? You worked today, right?

**Jay:** Good, good. Yeah. I worked and then I picked up my son. He needed new shoes so we went and got new shoes. And, ah, that was my life today.

**Freddy:** I'm going to ask you a couple basic questions to get started. What's your birth name?

**Jay:** Jason Paul Keating.

**Freddy:** Are you Catholic?

**Jay:** Yeah, my mom is Catholic. My dad is non-denominational. My DJ is Jewish and he keeps saying he's gonna bring me in, you know [laughter].

**Freddy:** Have you been making art for a long time?

**Jay:** I used to write graffiti a lot when we were in school, but then, you know, I kinda stopped.

**Freddy:** How old were you when you started writing graffiti and how old were you when you stopped?

**Jay:** I was probably fifteen when I started and stopped at about twenty.

**Freddy:** How long have you been painting or when did you start painting?

**Jay:** I started painting on canvases, ah God, probably in 1995 or '96.

**Freddy:** And you were born, when?

**Jay:** I was born in '76. When I got outta high school I went to community college, so that's when I really first got to paint on canvas.

**Freddy:** Is there anybody in the Fine Art world you are influenced by or is it mostly from the Hip-Hop world?

**Jay:** Well, I always liked Hip-Hop, but my mom liked to paint so she was an early influence.

**Freddy:** Your mom paints?

**Jay:** She doesn't paint a lot now, but when I was a kid her paintings were on the wall so that was cool. I don't know a lot, but I took some art history at Frederick Community College and learned about Romare Bearden. I like Romare Bearden's work a lot.

**Freddy:** Were you born in Frederick, Maryland?

**Jay:** I was born in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, but I never lived there. My father was in the army and we were down here waiting to get military housing and we were staying above a gas station in Emmitsburg, Maryland, which I think is in Frederick County, but is almost in Pennsylvania so I guess the hospital in PA was a better choice.

**Freddy:** But, you were raised in Frederick?

**Jay:** Yep, raised in Frederick.

**Freddy:** You and Josh grew up close to each other? I know you went to school together, right?

**Jay:** Yes, I met Josh in 6th grade or sometime in middle school.

**Freddy:** What kind of music were you listening to then? Were you guys skateboarding?

**Jay:** I listened to Hip-Hop, but also Punk and all kinds of stuff. Whatever was in a skateboard video—that became the thing that everybody liked. You'd see new tricks, new songs, even the way people dressed would change with that.

**Freddy:** So skateboard culture was big in your life?

**Jay:** Oh, yeah. I think it's like, you know, kids that were kinda 'out there' or left to their own devices—first they get into skateboarding and then they get into graffiti. So, it's like the same kind of thing.

**Freddy:** Do you still skateboard?

**Jay:** Yeah, I do. And, actually, my nephews like to skate and I would take them around, this was like six years ago, and they were so good and I actually ended up breaking my arm and I went to the doctor and the nurse said, 'Aren't you a little old to be skating.' And I said, 'Yeah, but would you ask me that if I was playing ball?'

**Freddy:** It's interesting how stuff we once considered counterculture has been absorbed by the mainstream...

**Jay:** All these things, we got to watch them at the beginning stages. You know, it's hard for me to explain to my son when we're watching skateboarding on ESPN or something like that that this was something that people used to say, 'Ah no, stay away from that.' There was a stigma around skateboarding when we were young and now it's embraced. With graffiti it's like, you know, my son can talk with his high school art teacher about writers that he saw up in Kingston [New York] or wherever. It's almost surreal to me. I'm not mad about it because it's cool to take my family to the Smithsonian and see a skateboard exhibition or there's a Stretch and Bobbito show at the Kennedy Center and that's cool to see. But, it's weird and I think 18-year-old me might be like, 'Fuck that.'

**Freddy:** Is there a part of you that feels that the establishment acceptance of this stuff is at odds with the attitude it stood for in the beginning?

**Jay:** Right, yeah. I would say it's true; it's a contradiction. It's become normal now. So what is the 'against the grain' thing now? I don't know. It depends on why someone does something. I do these things for myself. There's no goal or motive beyond that.

**Freddy:** How did these recent paintings come about?

**Jay:** We were doing this monthly Hip-Hop event called Last Saturdays in Frederick. We took all the shit we didn't like about going to Hip-Hop shows like when you go to a show and there'd be twenty artists performing so we cut it down to more like four artists performing. And we wanted quality people and we didn't have much of a budget, but we had pretty good lineups every time. It lasted about ten months. We really couldn't pay most of the artists so I just made paintings for them. It wasn't a business transaction or anything, I just wanted to paint some of these guys and give them something for performing. That's really why I started these paintings. I was teaching at this juvenile facility; I don't want to call it a lock-up because it really was run like a school, but they were definitely locked up because they couldn't go home. I taught a barber class there and they had these clubs. They made each teacher pick a thing to do for each club so I picked Art and started painting with some of the kids and that also got me back into painting again. It was pretty cool.

**Freddy:** Are you a barber?

**Jay:** Yeah, I'm a barber and I'm also a barber-teacher in Hagerstown, Maryland.

**Freddy:** Do you live in Hagerstown?

**Jay:** Yeah. It's twenty minutes from Frederick. We moved here eight years ago. It was cheap. My wife was working here at the time and we just decided to do it. Hagerstown is more spread out than Frederick. The cool thing is that there are a lot of trains here. I go to train yards and take photos of the graffiti. There are a lot of people from New York here.

**Freddy:** Don't you have some connection to New York State?

**Jay:** Yeah, my mom and my dad are both from Kingston, New York. And I have a lot of family in Staten Island and I have cousins all over the place. I did a show up there recently. We opened for this guy, Upgrade.

**Freddy:** Tell me what you do musically and who you work with.

**Jay:** I just rhyme. Basically, I rap. I work with different producers. My DJ is Blaze Daily. We do a lot of shows. We usually do one show a month at least. I also have a crew called Makeshift Deluxe—guys I do shows with, do music with. We record a lot together. Oh my God, my dog just knocked over all my stuff [laughter]. Makeshift Deluxe—we've been doing stuff together since 2003.

**Freddy:** Where did you guys meet?

**Jay:** We all just knew each other from around Frederick. My friend, Skeet, used to have a home-studio and he let us record a couple songs there and then we just started doing stuff all the time.

**Freddy:** Do you consider yourself a lyricist?

**Jay:** Yeah, definitely. I used to freestyle and battle when I was younger, but the more I got into recording the more I realized I would rather just make recordings.

**Freddy:** When does your music or your painting happen?

**Jay:** I just don't sleep a lot when those things happen. It's weird, cause sometimes you paint and you keep painting and it might become another day. Like even with music—sometimes I write a whole song at once and other times I can't write shit. And other times I can write every day for a week and then I won't write for two weeks. It's the same with painting. It's also if I have anything to paint on too. I'll have canvases lying around and I'm just painting the background and if I get an idea I'll use it. Sometimes I paint on cardboard or whatever 'cause that's what's around.

**Freddy:** Did your love of music come before painting or the other way around?

**Jay:** I used to doodle and make little drawings all the time—before I listened to music.

**Freddy:** When you first started writing graffiti, what music were you listening to?

**Jay:** Souls of Mischief, Hieroglyphics, Black Moon, Smif-N-Wessun, Gang Starr, all the '90s New York stuff, The Pharcyde. My brother was always into Hip-Hop. All's I had to do was go in his room and I'd sneak his tapes and stuff. He's a little older than me and he always had dope shit. Now he likes Action Bronson and, you know, he's like this 40-something-year-old-real-estate-guy and nobody would expect him to know this stuff.

**Freddy:** Do you like Action Bronson? I like your painting of him.

**Jay:** I do. Thanks. He seems like somebody I would hang out with—I like the sports and the old '80s references and stuff.

**Freddy:** Does the type of music you make fit into a specific 'category' within the Hip-Hop genre like East versus West or whatever? How would you describe your sound?

**Jay:** I would say the beats are sample heavy; traditional boom-bam type Hip-Hop. The lyrics are 'conscious' with smart-ass sensibilities.

**Freddy:** Has it ever been tough to be a white guy in the Hip-Hop community?

**Jay:** I don't think I was treated any different in the community. I was definitely hyper-aware of the fact that I was in a black art form, but I think nowadays it's not an issue at all because a lot of the people in Hip-Hop, it's kind of, you know, crossed over to where it's not the same as it was in the '90s when I might have stood out more. I never experienced anyone making me feel like I wasn't a part of the culture because I was never taking away from the culture. I always respected the culture and felt like I was contributing to it.

**Freddy:** Do you have a favorite Hip-Hop artist now?

**Jay:** Sean Price is one of my favorites. He passed away not too long ago. We did a couple shows with him in Baltimore and DC. Black Thought from The Roots. I feel like he's underrated. I like this dude, Blu. And Phonte from Little Brother. He's really dope too. Joell Ortiz. Oddisee from DC. Kenn Starr and the guys from Low Budget Crew are dope. They performed in Frederick when we were doing Last Saturdays. Oddisee, obviously, did not 'cause he's like all around the world somewhere. He's in Morocco or something.

**Freddy:** Anybody you don't like?

**Jay:** I don't even know the people I don't like 'cause I don't listen to them. Sometimes my son will ask me, 'Hey, do you like Little whoever,' and I say, 'I don't even know who that is. Play a couple seconds of it.' Then I'm like, 'Nope.' I took him to see Joey Badass and that was dope. We both like him. I take him there and the first person I see is this dude, Grap Luva, and he's actually Pete Rock's little brother and he's in Low Budget. I say, 'Hey, this is my son.' And he says, 'Oh, shit, I brought my daughter.' And his daughter is sixteen and my son is fifteen and we were just buggin' because Joey Badass is something we like and something our kids like and that sorta thing doesn't happen too much.

**Freddy would like to thank Rachel Willis for conducting this interview with Jay 'J Berd' Keating on October 6th, 2016.**

**The exhibition is on view by appointment only. For more information (including exact location) and images please contact [info@freddygallery.biz](mailto:info@freddygallery.biz)**

**Please note: This exhibition marks the end of Freddy's programming for this season. Freddy will operate as an affordable live/work space for the winter and early spring. For more information please contact [info@freddygallery.biz](mailto:info@freddygallery.biz)**