



BROOKLYN MEDIA GROUP/Photo by Jesse Lent

Michael McLeer – aka, Mr. Kaves – poses with one of his paintings, the Brooklyn-inspired “Under the El.”

# Local graffiti artist makes good with Metallica

BY JESSE LENT

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In the late 1980s, Michael McLeer was a teenage graffiti writer growing up in Bay Ridge, doing his best to stay out of the path of law enforcement. Unbeknownst to him, members of the soon-to-be-world-famous heavy metal band Metallica were visitors to the neighborhood at the time – performing at rock club L'Amour, a centerpiece of the local scene.

More than 20 years later, McLeer – a musician, painter and tattoo artist who goes by the professional alias Mr. Kaves – has used that moment in time as the inspiration for a painting in an upcoming art show curated by Metallica.

“While they were playing L'Amour's a few blocks away, we were being creative,” McLeer said of the inspiration behind his painting.

On January 20, McLeer's piece will be featured in “Obey Your Master: A Visual Salute to Metallica” at Exhibit A Gallery in Los Angeles. The group selected 30 artists work-

ing within the fields of art, fashion, film, music and skateboarding to represent their music in the visual form. Other selected artists include professional skateboarder Tony Alva and Shepard Fairey, best known for designing President Barack Obama's “Hope” poster for the 2008 election.

“It's great to do something for a band as big as Metallica,” McLeer said. “[Their story] is one of trials and triumphs. I love the Rocky Balboa spirit of it all.”

The Bay Ridge native is no stranger to band art, creating the cover for hip hop group The Beastie Boys' “Intergalactic” DVD in 2000 and several clothing designs for rap artist Busta Rhymes. Although he describes himself as a hip hop kid during the era of Metallica's popular ascent in the 1980s, he also admits he was a fan.

“They were our Rolling Stones,” he said. “I definitely was a fan of their work. How could you not be? Metallica just came in and blew the doors off that genre of music. But I wasn't a metal head.”

McLeer has had his own career in music; he has released several albums with the

rap group he started in the early 1990s, The Lordz of Brooklyn. The group toured consistently up until three years ago, when they agreed to take a hiatus.

“Every year we were touring with the Van's Warped Tour, and we were missing our kids growing up,” McLeer explained.

The owner of Brooklyn Made Tattoo on 93<sup>rd</sup> Street near Third Avenue, McLeer has parlayed his skills as a graffiti writer into a lucrative career both as a tattoo artist and a mural painter.

His recent pieces range from the international – the artwork gracing the wine bottle for this year's Beaujolais Nouveau by Georges Duboeuf, to the local – the mural at newly opened neighborhood taco joint “Ho' Brah.”

He and his wife have raised four kids in the neighborhood. Ultimately, McLeer feels, it is all for them.

“At the end of the day, I just want something for my kids to be proud of – that their father made a mark and defied the odds,” he said.