

Northside artist challenges minds

By Lauren Bishop

lbishop@enquirer.com

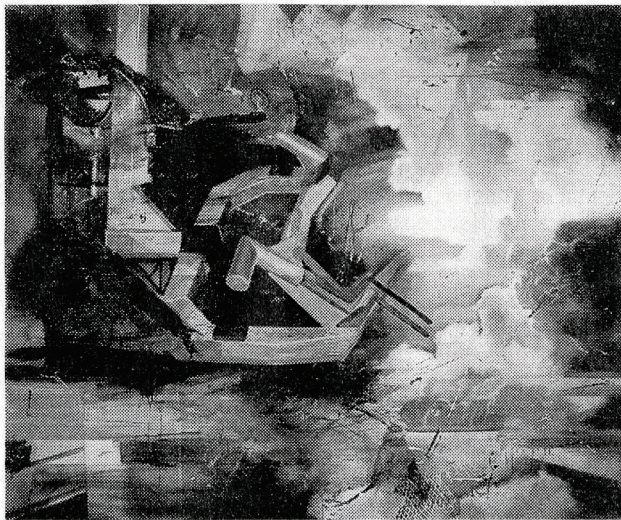
If you're a young artist aiming for your first solo museum show, the Contemporary Arts Center – one of the first such museums in the country – is a pretty nice addition to the résumé. And if you really want to pack people in, you couldn't ask for much better than to open alongside Keith Haring, one of the most recognizable names in American contemporary art.

And that's exactly where Jimmy Baker, 30, Northside-based artist and adjunct Art Academy of Cincinnati

instructor, will find himself Friday night, when Remote Viewing, his solo exhibition of 10 new paintings, opens alongside Keith Haring: 1978-1982.

"It kind of feels like a homecoming," says Baker. He hasn't had a solo show in the area since 2006, although work by the young artist – who received his master's of fine arts in painting from the University of Cincinnati in 2004 and his bachelor's of fine arts from the Columbus College of Art and Design in 2002 – has hung in galleries, museums and collectors' homes all over the world.

Baker's work couldn't be



Provided / Tony Walsh

Jimmy Baker's oil and ultraviolet ink painting "Pareidolia" is on a 70-inch by 84-inch canvas.

more different from Haring's, although both are very much influenced by the politics and social issues of their times.

Born in the small town of Dover, Ohio, in 1980, Baker came of age with the Internet. Punk music served as his introduction to politics and gave him a reason to create art, he says.

And Baker turned to the Internet to find the images that serve as the basis for his new paintings, which reflect his longstanding fascination with conspiracy theories, spying and military secrets.

At first glance, the paintings appear to be landscapes or portraits, all somewhat bleak and unsettling in nature. But they are vastly

more complex, the result of a painstakingly planned and time-consuming process that involves digital printing on top of paint.

Baker takes seemingly unrelated digital images – say, of a plastic surgery-altered actress with a bloodied victim of combat – and heavily alters them, erasing parts of images or ripping apart the source code to create distortions and jagged fragments of images. When he's done, it's nearly impossible to tell exactly what the original images were, and where they end and the painting begins.

Baker stresses that the paintings are not forms of protest or judgment. Rather, he hopes that the works will

start a conversation about the ease of accessing and manipulating images, what happens when they're taken out of context and the repercussions of a culture that seems more interested in celebrity than with what the country is doing in other parts of the world.

"These works are definitely really challenging," he says. "I wanted the show to be difficult."

CAC director Raphaella Platow called Baker's paintings "remarkable."

"He totally defies and transcends the idea of collaging things together that are still legible in a coherent way," she says. "You feel like you are on shifting sand, and there's nothing really to hold onto other than these illusions."