

CULTURALDC

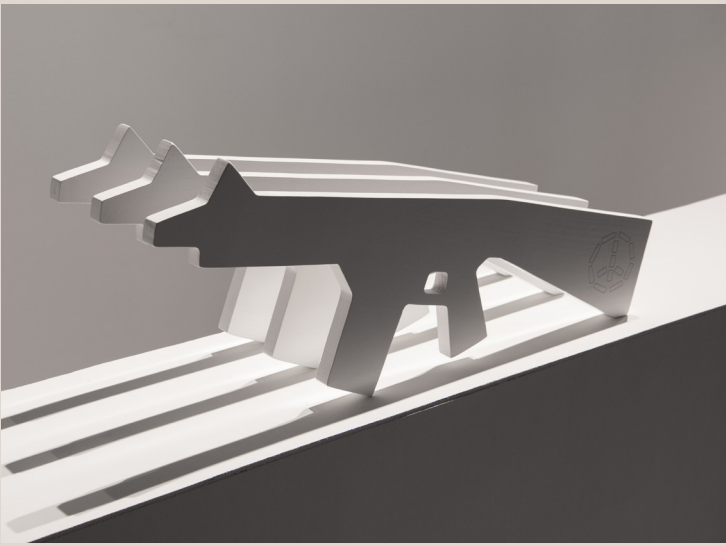


David
Jeremiah

AND

TERI HENDERSON

IN CONVERSATION



Photography: Vivian Doering

I first interviewed David-Jeremiah roughly a year ago after the opening of his first show in DC at Von Ammon Co. He briefly told me about a project he'd worked on for several years called FOGA or Felon Yoga. David-Jeremiah's work is deeply familiar to me: a North Texas transplant, a Black woman, living and working in Baltimore with family members who have been incarcerated in Texas.

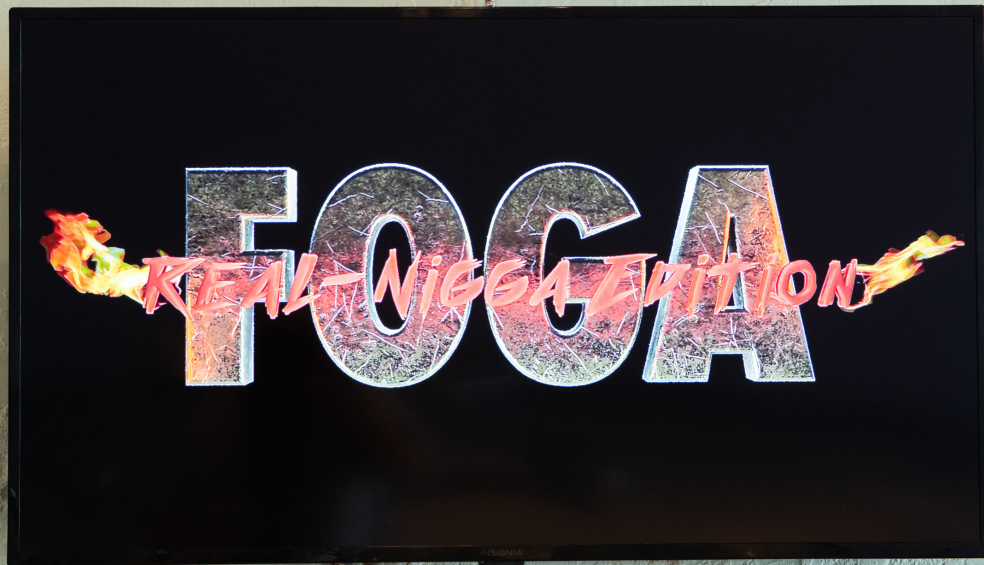
I sat down with him via zoom, and we talked for a while about everything. We laughed and discussed the development of his practice and his recent rapid meteoric rise, including a show opening in Los Angeles, a residency at Project Row Houses, and an acquisition by the Dallas Museum of Art. This conceptual artist designed every one of his art projects that you now can experience in real-life while incarcerated; he has manifested his artistic dreams into concrete realities.



FOGA: Real N*gga Edition opens in this nation's capital in unprecedented times. With the reproductive rights of women revoked, the looming recession, the ongoing trauma of racial violence, oppression, and the still lingering and evolving coronavirus, the world seems upside down. Art like FOGA allows us the opportunity to channel our flood of emotions in a creatively cathartic way.

I HEART MICAH (2020) was one of the first David-Jeremiah works I viewed. In that performance piece, the artist placed bumper stickers on cop cars in Dallas, recording the footage on his cell phone, following closely behind them. That act could have landed him dead or back in jail. David-Jeremiah's entire practice is incisive, intentional, radically beautiful, elegantly executed, and transformative. His body of work from video, and inverted performance pieces to his sculptures is infused with a clarity of self and position. He makes artwork for himself and for the world. FOGA Real N*gga Edition is a brilliantly real and absurdist exercise, a post-apocalyptic hellscape yoga program for the new world. With this project at Cultural DC, his second showing of artwork in Washington, he implores you to inhabit it and embody his vision, the cleverly designed the world of David-Jeremiah. — Teri Henderson

This conversation has been edited and abridged for length and clarity.



Photography: Vivian Doering

TH: Where are you from? Where are your roots? Where are your people from?

DJ: Oak Cliff, Texas. That's all I know. You know what's wild, bro? When I say that, it ain't just to say that. It is literally all I know. I hadn't traveled outside of the state my whole life until about three or four years ago. I might be pushing a little bit. I know at least three. My lady took me up to Portland. So when I say 'Dallas is all I know,' Dallas is literally all I know. Now as far as my people. Always out of South Dallas or Oak Cliff.

TH: How do you describe your artistic practice? What do you do? How do you describe yourself as an artist?

DJ: I'm a conceptual artist first, painter second. I'm a mathematician, man. I'll be getting in my feelings when these motherfuckers be low-key disrespectful. When they just lazily classify my work as angry, or that I'm trying to leverage or pander shock and all of that shit. I'm a firm believer in simple mathematics. Multiplication. A negative times a negative is a positive. If I had to put it in a nutshell, that's the objective of my practice. To multiply the conversations. Multiply past all the negativities built into it, all the time wasted in it. All the goddamn faking and shaking that's injected into it. Just to multiply it past itself.

if you take a negative or something that's even just perceived to be negative – because in this day and age it's all about “your truth” and “my truth?”, and all of that shit,

right? So even something that's perceived to be a negative, and you multiply it with another negative. Then those are simple mathematics...something positive has to come out of it.

TH: That reminds me of something you said in the first episode of FOGA. I can't remember exactly, but something about how bitching doesn't change circumstances. I think you were talking about being in traffic, and if you're bitching about being in traffic, you're still in traffic?

DJ: When I start going in about “if traffic wasn't traffic and it didn't slow you down and make you late... it wouldn't be traffic”, you know? Then it wouldn't be expressing itself. And when you bitch, the only thing that's not expressing itself is you.... if you real.

TH: Your work has really changed how I think and write about art. Even when I saw your show I.A.H.Y.F.F.A.W.D. / N.F.D.B.J.W.B.D. at Von Ammon Co., I was blown away by how much depth the work had, and how much meaning. That's why I wanted you to describe yourself in your own way. I think that some people would see the work and be like “oh, they're sculptures” or “he's a sculptor” or “he's a video artist.”

DJ: I'm a conceptual artist first. I could go in on that, bro. But you know, people are always kind of suspicious and shit like that, and I get it. They're themselves, so of course, they're gonna look at the art the way that they look at it.

I feel like you're one of the few people that are close enough to my practice to know beyond. Anytime you experience a body of my work, you know that there might be one or two percent of a piece of it that was a discovery, or a positive accident, or something that just came after the fact. But I really do break down the concept pretty much completely before I even get started. So that's what I mean when I tell people 'I'm a conceptual artist first.' I really mean that. But you gotta prove that to people over time. Lately, I've been determined not to be so goddamn, I don't want to say "generous" but in a way. Instead of just holding my art's hand forever. It's time for it to jump off the porch and scrape its knee or get bullied and fight back. But just know, the goddamn explanation for any question. It's always there.

TH: A year ago you had the show in the Hamptons and before the one at Von Ammon Co. So how have things changed for you from a year ago when I first interviewed you? What's new?

DJ: Well, you mentioned the Hampties. That's what I call them, the Hampties. I'm addicted to the Hampties, man.

TH: You told me there was some fried good chicken there. I need to go!

DJ: Bro, like, straight up. Straight up. That whole vibe, man. We gon' try to get there. I was so affected by the Hampties, that I been up here, [me] and my lady been watching that damn "Selling the Hamptons Show." That reality TV show. I'm telling you, bro, the Hampties, bro. The Hampties, my nigga.

TH: I need to go! That'll be a 2023 goal.

DJ: Shit is still on pace. I'm not gonna say "I slowed down." I mean, that'd be bullshit. It's a lot of energy. Like, you burn shit at both ends. And that's like my style anyway. The Project Row House Show, that required my most extensive relationship with fabricators to date. And FOGA is like logistically... I'm working with somebody in Portland. I'm working with somebody in Ithaca, New York. The projects that I've started to get the ball rolling on lately have required stuff that's beyond what I can do physically, and above just solely, my work ethic. I've had to kind of slowdown in certain ways, because it's just nothing for me to physically do, and it's caused me to have to focus on other aspects of the game. It's a learning experience and it's great and I'm glad that I could get it out of the way, and I've been fortunate enough for the work to still be just as good or better depending on how you feel about it. It's only gonna become even more of what it's becoming. It just keeps climbing. So that has changed. Just the level of, I don't want to say



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professionalism, but that is a part of it too because when you're working with people, hiring people... I'm learning how to balance the business side of things and also the quality product art side of things. So that's changed. I've stepped into more a professional embodiment of an artist. And I'm really thankful for that. Got my first museum Acq.

TH: Where is it?

DJ: The DMA. (Dallas Museum of Art)

TH: Oh, nice. And- and you were also at Dallas Art Fair. I saw that on my timeline.

DJ: That was on the bucket list, man. That was one of the things on the bucket list.

When I first got home, man. I went to the Dallas Art Fair. I was like, "Man, I'ma be in this bitch one day, bro. Fuck that." And it took a minute too, bro. It took a little minute. I mean, to me, it took a minute. I'm impatient. I was finally able to check that off the old bucket list, man. Dallas Art Fair.

TH: Congratulations! Let's talk about the title for the CulturalDC show. Tell me... what is the complete title for this show?

DJ: So, it's FOGA: Real Nigga Edition. FOGA meaning felon yoga. I don't know if you remember about five years ago, maybe it was longer, but the trend back then was all of these different renditions of yoga. You had some that were on the more comical side. And you had the ones that were on the serious side and you didn't realize how many versions of yoga there was. On the comical absurd side you had goat yoga, surfboard yoga- drunk yoga, all that

hoe ass shit. But then, on the more serious side, you were learning about and would hear about the Kundalini yoga and power yoga. Damn, I just thought yoga was yoga. FOGA, it takes place in this alternative, futuristically, ideal reality. Where the people who basically saved gun culture, are all the motherfuckers that aren't really supposed to have guns. And in this alternative reality, it's as if FOGA, as a brand, as a program, has turned into a chain, if you will. I envision it being, like, Bikram yoga or whatever the fuck that shit is. The thing is, FOGA: Real Nigga Edition, leaves itself open to other editions. So I don't know if you noticed this but the whole cast of characters in this edition of it are niggas. Everybody's black, you know. We all know that Jesus is really black. You know Jesus is in that hoe. What I see in this alternative reality is there potentially being a FOGA: Wood Edition, or a FOGA: Ese Edition. FOGA is its own thing. It's bigger than this edition. Is what I'm saying.

TH: It's going to be a thirty-day program?

DJ: Yeah. At CulturalDC. We're gonna set up a yoga studio/prison day room installation. It's gonna have a lot of elements of the "studio" that FOGA was filmed in. That was set up to kinda mimic a prison day room as well. The payphone on the wall, the aluminum trash can, the elevated shelf for the TV. Even the double-colored wall. That's common in the prison day room aesthetic. But it'll be a mashup of a yoga studio and a prison day room. So ideally what I would like to happen is for there to be four monitors. There would be two sets and a set would mirror each other, and there would be different elements of the show playing on loop simultaneously. There'll be some prison dining tables and some prison benches, and then there'll be a workout area where we have the mats, the FOGA blocks, and the props.

TH: Are you working with fabricators for that? Or is this stuff that's sourced?

DJ: I've already put a big dent into the objects. I just got the FOGA blocks. I just got those sandblasted. As you saw in the footage that's a play on a yoga block. But that's the thing about cinder blocks. Like I said in the program. Every ID unit I've been on is essentially made out of cinder blocks. They retain energy like a motherfucker.

TH: Yes, That stuck with me.

DJ: Straight up. I been in a cell where the cinder blocks was so damn cold. This is during winter. I was sleeping on a cell where the cell block was so damn cold you could basically cool up a drink just by having it hanging on the wall. So it just plays into what a yoga block is used for conceptually in relation to the project. The program. 'Cause it's all about energy transference.



Photography: Vivian Doering

TH: Yeah. I actually wrote that down. When you said, "Cinder blocks hold energy," and then later on you were like, "Prison can hold anything." I also wrote down, "When you bitch, all you do is argue with reality."

DJ: IF you a real nigga...that's the key to that. And that's Catch 22-ing the whole kind of trap that you're stuck in if you do decide to be on that real nigga stiff shit. 'Cause you can't do no bitching.

TH: I really love the idea of the daily meditations, and you and I have talked before about both violence and aggression. I've mentioned that sometimes I believe that violence and aggression are necessary. The irony of it being based off of a yoga box set, when yoga is often a release [in the US] for white people, while FOGA can be a release for black people who have to deal with the daily pressure of

living in this police state. I'm curious, what does FOGA culminate in? What is the program? What are the parts of the program and what is the final thing that happens?

DJ: You essentially hold guns during these poses... these movements, and you build up to an imaginary act of violence against an imaginary cop. So you don't do it in real life. So at the end of the day, this program is really like Pro-Cop. In a sense. You know what I'm saying? (laughs) It's really pro-cop.

TH: Yeah, 'cause you're not actually shooting them! So- (laughs)

DJ: Right. Nigga, you're literally doing the most so you don't. I mean this is how I know most people who try to ride down on me with their lazy fucking descriptions and shit like that are bullshit. And they're a huge part of the reason that I make the art that I make- cause I love exposing the motherfuckers. "How could you? How could you? How could you make this?" Bro, how could I make a piece of art that's, at the end of the day about not killing cops? Is that what you're saying? People expose the shit out of they self. Now we're going back to the part of my practice which I classify as inverted performance installation. I try to create and have as much of the conversation as possible to a degree where the only missing element is you. The person that's coming in wherever you're coming in at.

And since the conversation since all of the aspects of the conversation have already been had theoretically, except for what you have to say- that multiplies what you say. 'cause it's been waiting on you to say something. And if you say some bullshit, nigga, it's finna echo like a motherfucker. And you gotta live with it.

TH: I thought about- the game that you set up in DC last year. Was it the night before the opening?

DJ: And like, man, that shit was wild. But that's another thing, man. Like I said, it amplifies it. So most of the motherfuckers there was lame. And it made the event really fucking lame. Like, the energy was really just like... A nigga couldn't pay crickets to fucking ... Couldn't pay crickets to come in there and, move they legs and make them sounds.

For me personally, I guess what I hope- what I hope to be "the ending" achieved by FOGA is.... First of all, it's scripted, right? And there's a lot of admonishable characteristics of the main character. He comes from a very particular way of life, and he has an easily condemned perspective. Especially when we talk in relation to the mainstream. It's just easy to disregard or not take serious



Photography: Vivian Doering

or condemn hood shit. Especially if you're white. I mean it's easy for niggas to do it. Especially if you come from it and you done kind of rose above it and you're far enough away from it. You're like "damn, bro, fuck this shit." And there's a certain amount of truthfulness to that, too. It's no secret that a large part of our culture, I'm talking about hood culture, street culture, inner-city culture, is negative. At the end of the day, my nigga, it's supposed to be negative. But you know, it was made to be negative. Us being us, we made it the most goddamn mimicked thing on the whole face of the earth. So suck my dick with all that bullshit. It is what it is.

But the main thing is even though the character "Bleep Bleep" or "Blank Blank" or however the fuck you want to fucking sound that out. He was still able to contribute something this... human. That's the ending that I personally... If you want to transpose ending with message or or effect or whatever. That's the part of it that I really am attached to. You got this nigga that the shit that he says and some of the terminology that he uses would easily get him fucking canceled. That's the thing. Like, in this day and age, my nigga. You're able, if someone says something that- or- or does something that's good enough to rise above, all of these, built-in limitations and black marks, you know what I'm saying, that allows you to just disregard them or not take them seriously. If the thing that they do elevates them above that just by association or creation... then motherfuckers start focusing to see if they can find one thing about

it to disregard the whole thing. Now, instead of doing it to the person, they're doing it to what the person made... and elevate the past. Just a lower level of the bullshit that they're trying to run again, just on a more object-focused way. What's so crazy about it, so much gets wasted because of that bullshit. And I'm really excited about this because I'm not finna let you fucking kidnap my intent. Yeah, what I said might have offended you, or the characters might be in there saying some offensive shit, but my nigga, we don't mean it like that. If I offend you and I tell you, "well, I didn't mean it like that." Why is the way you took it more important than my intent and I'm the one who said it? There's weird shit going on. It's fine if you want to just not fuck with that if that doesn't make sense to you. We don't have to like each other. Like, it's okay. It's okay to not fuck with something, or somebody, or some group of people

But what's not okay is to act like we can't. I go through life every fucking day. I'll walk by people and shit in the grocery store and all of that shit ... "oh, excuse me. Oh, thank you. Hey, how's it going?" All of that shit. You think any of them stand a chance when it comes to my fucking son? Or my lady? Or me? I don't give a fuck about these people. Could give a fuck. And none of us really do. But a lot of this [is about] having something that's bigger than yourself. I feel like we get stuck in the ego part of that because it perpetuates a lot of shit. That's why I'm focused so much on multiplication, because if you expose yourself, then that gives me the green light to kind of just ignore

you. 'Cause you ain't out here really saying something. Let me be the artist. Let me continue to be the artist and risk my fucking livelihood, and put in all of this goddamn work and energy, and let y'all do the least, only to call my art "angry" and "shock art" and all that hoe ass shit. Let me deal with that. And you just stay the motherfucker that really ain't got shit to say in a real way.

TH: Do you want to talk about the online component of the show? I know there are the physical DVDs and then the installation. What's the online component?

DJ: It'll basically just be an access point to the program as an art object for all the people that won't be able to purchase the actual box set. Because this is what you gotta realize, at the end of the day. Let's say it [FOGA] blows up and then turns into a huge political thing. Whoever tries to hijack this shit. Just know, everybody just know that this is, at the end of the day, a fine art object.

TH: Something that jumped out to me was in one of the daily meds, when you were telling people to write to somebody actually who has shot a cop and immediately thought about I Heart Micah. And what was his name Christopher Dorner?

DJ: You mean the cop that shot the cops.

You know, that's a really fun element of the program. All of these real-world applications that, if you actually take the program seriously and you engage in it. One of my personal favorites is the drinking a hundred ounces of spinach and kale juice, so- (laughs) so you can basically have more blood in your body. And therefore, you can bleed out longer and hopefully make it to the goddamn ER if the cops wrongfully shoot you.

TH: There was another one where you only eat pork for one weekend.

DJ: Yeah, the weekend challenges. You only consume different parts of the pig because you are what you eat, and it's a way to internalize the energetic transfer—I forgot exactly how I worded it.

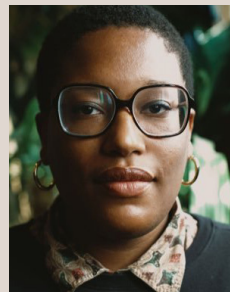
TH: I also loved how throughout, you were like, "Bacon goes way better on a cheeseburger."

DJ: Man, that's the tagline. The argument that it's wrong to kill cops, and "blue lives matter" and yada yada, whoop-de-whoop. If you're coming from that perspective, then you would have to agree that bacon goes better on a cheeseburger as opposed to fucking dead as fuck in the street, right? So, bacon goes better on a cheeseburger.

TH: That's the tagline. So it's 'FOGA: Real Nigga Edition, bacon goes better on a cheeseburger.' Are you going to teach any of the classes? Or are you going to do any performances?

DJ: No. I consider FOGA to be an inverted performance installation as well. This is another one of my concepts where I've literally fleshed everything out. And the only thing left is what you have to bring to the conversation. I seriously need you niggas in your living room doing this goddamn class. I seriously need you to take the class seriously, it's a legit class. It's a yoga program. It was kicking my ass. It's funny because some of those classes, we had to do like six or seven times. At the end of the day, it is an art object because there's a lot of physical elements to it. You got the box set, you got all of these other, objects affiliated with it. I classify it in that same lane of inverted performance installation that I've been fleshing out since the beginning of my practice. This prepackaged conversation based on simple mathematics. Multiplication. See that's the thing. A negative times a negative is a positive. So even if you get a bullshit motherfucker that come in and just make it all about them in the wrong way. The positive thing is that they expose they self, and we ain't gotta take them seriously no more.

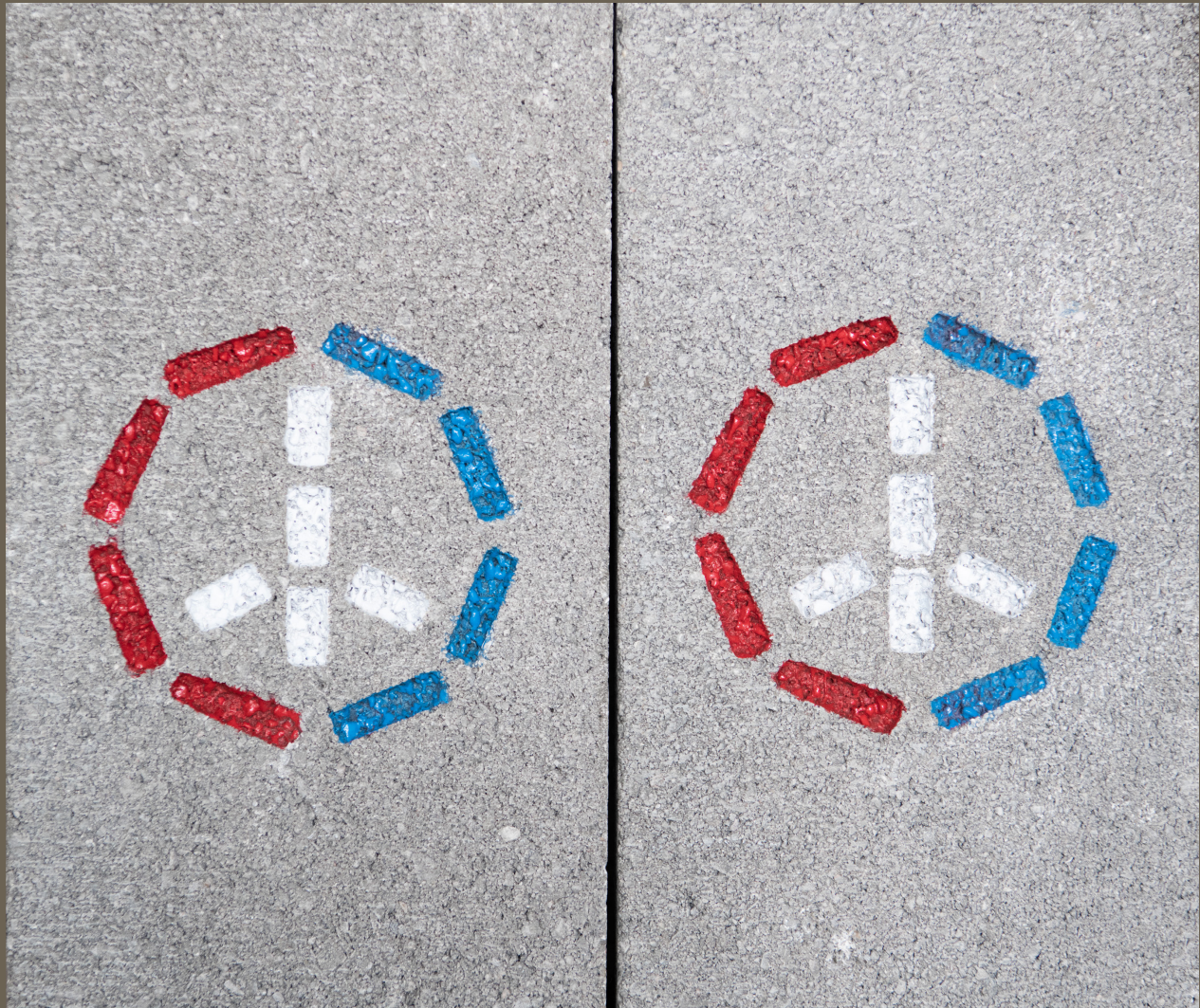
You can stay in the way over there. I wanted FOGA to, look as if a nigga that just got out of prison was on a mission and immediately fucking executed his calling. He thought of this in prison and just know that he gon' change the world and make everything right. You know what I'm saying? Everybody want to know when is the next Christopher Burden coming? When are the real conceptual artists coming back? Well, you won't goddamn let them.



Teri Henderson is the Arts and Culture Editor of Baltimore Beat. She is the author of the 2021 book *Black Collagists*. Previously, she was a staff writer for BmoreArt, gallery coordinator for Connect + Collect, and served as the Art Law Clinic Director for Maryland

Volunteer Lawyers For The Arts. Teri's recent work has included a preview of Irina Rozovsky's "Traditions Highway" for ArtForum, a profile of Murjoni Merriweather for BmoreArt, and a profile of rapper Jazz Cartier for Justsmile Magazine.

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Cover by J Taylor Studios;
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Presented by CulturalDC

David-Jeremiah's FOGA: Real N*gga Edition

on view from Saturday, July 16
to Sunday, August 28, 2022.

ADVANCE NOTE: CulturalDC strongly supports the right of David-Jeremiah, a Black artist, to present his work in a manner authentic to his creative vision. We also deeply condemn the use of the "N-word" by anyone not of Black heritage, including in quote repetition. In amplifying his latest project to an inherently diverse audience, we use the written stylization "n*gga" and the spoken stylization "N-word," though please note that the artist intends the artwork title to be stylized in an uncensored manner.