

NEWS RELEASE

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Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences

Exhibition Inspired by Henrietta Lacks' Story to Open at NAS

WASHINGTON – Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences announces “Surface from Under the Microscope: The Henrietta Lacks Series.” This painting exhibition by Baltimore-based artist Jeffrey Kent is inspired by microscopic imagery of the immortal cells of Henrietta Lacks. It was curated by Carol Rhodes Dyson and will be on view Sept. 30, 2019 through March 13, 2020 at the National Academy of Sciences.

Kent’s paintings are characterized by bold content and a thoughtful use of layered material and color. The works are inspired by the story of Henrietta Lacks, an African American tobacco farmer who moved to Baltimore in 1941 from southern Virginia and died in 1951 of cervical cancer at the age of 31. Her cancer cells—taken months before she died without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine, vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, in vitro fertilization, AIDS and Parkinson’s disease research, and more. Lacks’ cells, known as HeLa cells, have been bought and sold by the billions, yet for decades she remained virtually unknown and her family uncompensated.

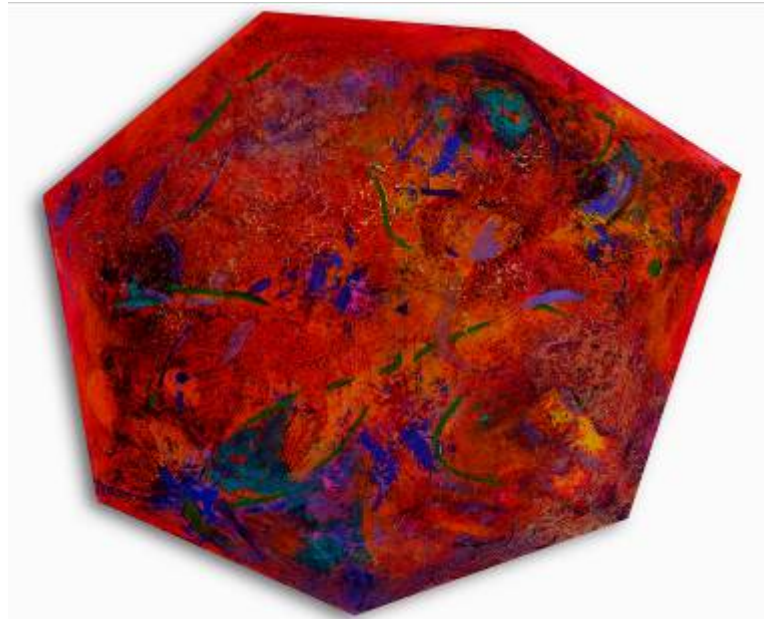
Kent’s abstract paintings reference the contrast-phase microscopic imagery of HeLa cells to pay homage to the woman from whom they were derived. Inspired by the undulating shapes and forms of cellular structures, Kent playfully suggests that “they appear as celestial bodies floating in an atmospheric universe.” Yet, considering Lacks’ story and the history of medical testing on African Americans without their consent, the artist also intends to raise questions about medical ethics, patients’ rights, and race.

Jeffrey Kent is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice includes mixed media painting, sculpture, performance, and video. Using everything from paint, to water jugs, to books, Kent orchestrates visual perplexities that pose many questions to the viewer. His artworks are created in series as conceptual analysis of society and investigations into past decisions that affect people in the present and future. The artworks are exposing and encouraging social discourse that is often overlooked and uncomfortable. Kent holds an MFA from Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore.

“Surface from Under the Microscope: The Henrietta Lacks Series” will be on exhibit at the National Academy of Sciences building, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. The galleries are open weekdays between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. A photo ID is required and there is no charge. An exhibition catalog featuring excerpts from Rebecca Skloot’s bestselling book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, winner of a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Communications Award, will accompany the exhibition. For more information, visit www.cpnas.org.

Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences sponsors exhibitions, the D.C. Art Science Evening Rendezvous salon, theatrical readings, and other events that explore relationships among the arts and sciences. The National Academy of Sciences is a private, nonprofit institution that recognizes achievement in science by election to membership, and -- with the National Academy of Engineering and the National Academy of Medicine -- provides science, technology, and health policy advice to the federal government and other organizations. **(Continues on page 2)**

Press images:



Left to right from upper left: *HeLa No. 1*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, framed in oak, 32 x 32 inches; *HeLa No. 249*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 inches; *Split Decision 2*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, framed in oak 40 x 30 inches; *Culture HeLa No. 10*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, framed in oak, 16 x 16 inches

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