

# losing my religion

Status is the new god and shopping is the new religion, according to a young artist, who uses his religious upbringing to make a strong anti-consumerism art statement

is not unusual for young artists of this generation to make art which questions currently held beliefs of modern mass marketing and covert consumerism.

But what is unusual is an emerging artist using religious iconography as a central tool for anti-consumerism comment.

In his new solo show, the cleverly titled *Saints to Saints*, Jeremy Piert does just that, resulting in a powerful and successful use of such a motif. Piert's body of work, on show at Mermaid Beach, is an exploration of the 21st century pop culture and branding. The underlying theme is the artist's fundamental views regarding the familiar products and the corporations which have become the new markers of this generation.

In his relaxed, yet painterly works, Piert likes to present receptive visual comment, such as torsos weighed down by a heavy burden of brand icons, while at the same time shrouded in oblique religious iconography.

The work is reflective and evocative, explicit yet inviting of comment, presented in that particular mood of restrained mystique, so familiar in traditional religious art.

In this, the Melbourne-based artist refers back to his childhood religious education, with its tales of Christian morality and the lives of saints in a traditional Catholic upbringing.

"I noticed, as I became older, my interest in these saintly aspirations waned, and they were followed by aspirations to follow high school trends and brand loyalty," he says.



Jeremy Piert's *Mary Mary*

Piert now sees this time as the birth of his own teenage consumerist ideals, which now at 32, he seeks to shed.

"The idea of brand loyalty is not unusual to us any more," he says.

"We believe that wearing a shirt may make us a better person, that certain shoes may make us run faster or be more attractive.

"No longer do we have to pray for these things; now, we can just buy them."

His work, therefore, speaks of the cult of the dollar as the new religion. His paintings, however, are the opposite of in-your-face consumerist



McLovin by Jeremy Piert

art, presented in muted, cloudy tones; whitewashed, with occasional pools of deep darkness, using acrylic and oil paints, charcoal, oil stick, pencils and ink.

These give a glimpse into one man's complicated relationship with religion and commerce, and the possible relationship between the two.

His creative process "consists of a lot of observation of both people and culture – sitting around just watching people in everyday life and thinking until all of those pieces click together".

He freely admits that he can't explain what those pieces are 'but once they come together you just know. It's then usually an explosive week or putting all of those ideas onto canvas'.

"I really prefer to get the piece or most of it done in one sitting, which can take anywhere from two hours, or a few sittings, which can take up to two weeks," he says.

"Devoting that much focused concentration leaves me wrecked."

Through his imagery Piert takes the viewer through and then past his

religious upbringing and onto deeply held views on the 'dollar', which encourages the young to buy their personalities through consumer goods and their status through what they afford to own.

He is, of course, familiar with the sides of this process, having himself commissioned to create artwork for various well-known youth bands.

Graduating last year with honours in visual arts and applied design at Uni SA, Piert has a solid six-month exhibition schedule behind him, a number of honours, including the 2007 Adelaide Art Society Award for painting and drawing and the SA Great Rising Star Award.

He does not believe in a simple message, but rather a theme to mediate.

"I don't like to have a take message for people," he says.

"They take as much or as little from it as they want."

Jeremy Piert: *Saints to Saints* is on until May 28 at 19 Karen Contemporary Art, Mermaid Beach