



Dark into light.

"ILLUSIONS OF LIGHT"

John Spears finds deep visions in color and depth

Duncan LaPlante

John Spears has been producing art since the mid-seventies since his time at Stanford University where he first got involved in the silkscreen process, but the current show at New Hope Arts is not a retrospective by any means. All the work in this show, with one exception, has been produced within the last 15 years. Overall, Spears' process is con-

challenge us to rethink what the medium has to offer. Spears acknowledges a few influences in his work that one might find immediately evident: Josef Albers and Mark Rothko among others. Painters and other artists have always pushed the limits of their respective crafts, and in a manner of speaking they honor those who have preceded them. Spears may be laying the groundwork for emerging

institutional installations, for these large pieces could be customized for the work. There are several stretched screens with an acetate cover in which the desired images are cut out, thereby allowing the inks to penetrate to the canvas beneath. Once the initial inks and paint have dried, layer upon layer is applied until the desired effect is achieved. There may be up to 10 layers in all, which is why some of these images take months to complete. Spears has coined the term, "spectrum printing" which simply means freezing the paint as it goes into the canvas. There is no one else working like this. It is worth noting that Spears' work is not digital. We are presented here with light sensitive creations that are authentically handmade.

Photographs by Gordon Nieburg

tal and illuminates with the LED lights but not in UV. Two of the larger pieces, "Building Blocks" and "Soft Pastel, Stained Glass" reflect the success of repetition, although they do vary slightly upon closer scrutiny. Another piece, "Hidden Chaos," recalls a rather odd road map of sorts, but with a closer look reveals yet more recognizable patterns. It is a rather complex experiment into our visual wonder.

In a way, this may be the perfect pandemic exhibit. Viewers are limited and each is provided with both an LED light as well as a UV light, both of which serve to illuminate the meticulous application of light illuminating inks within the prints. This is clearly not simply graphic or topographic art. It is technically flexible and artistically versatile in its process; these are all hand-cut screens with no digital embellishment.

This is not just a painterly device or visual trick; this is a move forward to exploring what may become an alternative vision into what printing might become in our future. Although some may not readily find an emotional connection to the work (no landscapes here) but on the other hand, there is much that is familiar here; the use of paint, the repeating patterns, and so on, but one shouldn't expect the often seen.

Rather, they open a window into the blend and experimentation of what the combination of new materials and new visions might have in store. One might not immediately form an emotional con-



"Purple Gold Metallic Color Field" with Michelle Kott of New Hope Arts.



John Spears surrounded by his "Illusions of Light" at New Hope Arts.

ent with most of those working in silkscreen (or the modern parlance, digital prints), but Spears has taken what has been a relatively straightforward procedure to another level. It's difficult to look at these pieces and see just a print. Several innovative techniques have made this show unique in its approach to printing and, in a way,

artists yet to be recognized. As art continues to embrace technology, the creative spirit seems to have no limits. At some point in the future, one might envision that the use of lights in this manner may be a part of everyone's environment. For now however, this innovation has its limits for one's home, but is certainly viable for

large, spectacular pieces within this exhibit, there are some that stand out, not for their grandiose (when lit up) appearance but for their painterly qualities. "Drip Glass II" has a delicate touch to it and when alighted brings on deeper visions into the inks and depth. "Glass Bars" is somewhat larger, worked with cool colors, it spans the horizon-



Sweatshirts by John Spears.



Licia and Pete Stevenson view "Revisiting Beyond" by John Spears.

nection but certainly there are those who shall. The show was put together by Rita Gekht who must have had a hell of a time selecting the work from the vast multiplicity of options. Installing this exhibit required not just a good eye, but a special awareness to lay out such a visually diverse show. Christina Wohl Ramirez assisted with the installation as did Kevin Bolger who also handled the lighting. Studio assistant Scott Reamer, also produced the video, which can be found on YouTube or through a link on John Spears website. In spite of our current milieu, this is a safe exhibit to view person-

ally. People can readily approach the art and are free to meander as they wish. Look longer, play with the lights and imagine the possibilities and the vision that went into creating these silkscreens. We may not often encounter work such as this. Should one choose to ponder the mathematics associated with this exhibition one's head might explode; so just enjoy the images, the light within the work, and the quiet space in which to view it. The New Hope Arts gallery is on the corner of Bridge and Stockton streets in New Hope Borough. Bucks County resident Duncan LaPlante writes on the arts and humanities.