

SILKWORM



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In This Issue:

Great Beginnings with Asher Katz

The Magic of Layers

D. C. and Maryland Chapter News

Great Beginnings with Asher Katz

By Ashley Nichols

The phrase “all great things must come to an end” can be rather misleading. Many people have proven that quite the opposite is true. Ending could signify a lack of vision or a petering out of passion.

That is contrary to everything for which Asher Katz and his company, Jacquard Products, stands. For Asher, it’s more like great things come from great beginnings and hopeful futures.

Asher’s father, Michael Katz, started Jacquard Products in the early 1980s as a small business that ran, primarily, from their family garage. Fast forward a few years and the company soon became a distributor for some select labels and merchandise catering to silk painters. Now, Jacquard is the leading manufacturer of textile artist materials with two sister companies – Jacquard Inkjet Fabric Systems and Silkconnection.com – and an ever-growing dedication to making quality art supplies.

Asher always had an appreciation for art, but it took music to grow that appreciation into something deeper. Like most adolescents in high school, Asher wanted to do his own thing. Coincidentally enough it was this desire that led him right back to his father’s personal passion.

“Growing up, I spent a lot of time in the darkroom. I have always had an affinity for process-based art-making, and I think this comes from my early experiences manipulating light and chemistry to make photographic work. In high school, when I wasn’t in the darkroom, I was primarily focused on playing music. I got interested in making t-shirts for my bands, and that led to DIY (do-it-yourself) screen printing.”

As he dipped his toes into the vast world of silk painting, he realized just how many possibilities there were: an endless supply. In the true fashion of most silk painters Asher says that, “needless to say, once I started working with fabric, I was hooked.”



After high school Asher attended college, where he “studied literature...and minored in art, basically by accident, just from having taken so many studio art classes.” Although he does not regret this decision of majoring in English, as opposed to art, he does at times feel like an outsider in a world of professionally trained artists. “I’m just winging it and learning as much as I can as I go.” This is really what most artists – trained and

untrained – seem to do. It takes courage to expand one’s horizons by experimenting with different mediums in order to create something truly great. Asher lives by this philosophy of taking things as they come. So far it has guided him into a world that, as a young adult, he could not have imagined.

During Asher’s years in college, his father would send him care packages full of unconventional goodies. Where most

students received ramen noodles, laundry detergent and fast food gift cards, Asher's often included an assortment of Jacquard products: "fabric paints, inks, dyes, chemicals, resists – so many exciting materials." It was as if his father knew Asher would love Jacquard as much as he did, and would maybe one day succeed him in running the business.

Several years later Asher eventually did work at Jacquard as an Artist Educator, which involved "traveling all over North America teaching workshops, doing demonstrations and staff trainings, primarily at art supply stores." Of course, he also set aside some time for his own artistic development and explored the different avenues of artistry that Jacquard provided.

Jacquard Products has been growing since it began and like a child, it requires constant attention and coddling. Naturally it became tiring, and after almost 40 years of running Jacquard Products, Asher's father decided it was time to retire and pass the baton off to his son.

"Several years ago my dad told me he wanted to retire and that if I was interested in taking over his business, it was now or never. I didn't know much about the business or manufacturing at the time, but I decided to go for it. Slowly he [father] started to stay at home more and more."

"I now own and run the business myself, with a staff of about 30 people, many of whom have been with my dad since the early days. I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to take on Jacquard and run with it."

As if running a company, finding time to be an artist and leading workshops isn't enough, Asher has managed to create some of the products that Jacquard offers.

"A few years ago I developed a new product for Jacquard, SolarFast, which is a light-sensitive dye that allows you to print



photographically on fabric (as well as paper)."

This unique development allows for almost instantaneous prints on fabrics – the entire process takes less than 20 minutes, which is revolutionary. SolarFast is a dye that can be applied to fabric or paper by a variety of techniques, including batik, screen printing and more.

What makes this method of image transferring so interesting is that it literally uses the power of the sun, which eliminates the needs for harsh chemicals or heat setting. Because it is a dye, it essentially becomes part of the fabric as opposed to an ink that sits on top of it. Jacquard, being a customer-oriented company, provides simple step-by-step instructions on how to use this, and other products, on their website.



It is because Asher takes pride in what his company produces that leads him to strive for better quality and better products – the mark of a good business owner. Asher uses and tests his own company's materials out of a true passion for them. Maybe it is out of habit that he gravitates towards Jacquard dyes or possibly it is



because they are the best on the market. Regardless of the reason, Asher's utilization of his products allows him to experience what his customers experience. This helps him enhance the quality of future merchandise.

"Now that I own and run Jacquard, I am glad that I came to textile arts in this organic way. I have become intimately familiar with every product we make, and not just because it's good for business – I use every single product in my own work, and did long before I got involved with the business of manufacturing."

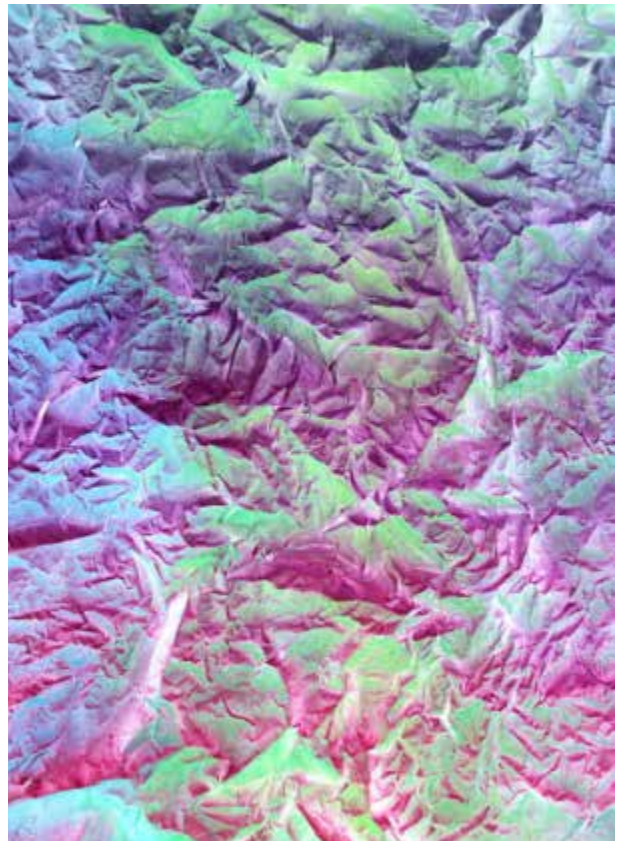
Although Jacquard offers a wide range of mediums and dyes, Asher's preference is silk. When asked why he enjoys silk dyeing, Asher simply replies: "silk is a magical material that takes color like nothing else." Similar to SolarFast, the dyes he uses on silk become part of the fabrics as opposed to sticking to them, like paint would. Asher primarily uses the Jacquard Acid Dyes and Red Label Silk colors (which are modified fiber-reactive dyes); occasionally he also uses the Jacquard Dye-Na-Flow

(fluid acrylic paints).

One of his many passions is different fabrics and materials, and seeing how they interact with a variety of dyeing agents.

"As an artist and manufacturer, I am especially interested in materials. Because dyes are totally transparent and the silk I like to use is shiny, the colors are wildly intense – much more vibrant than any paint. To my mind, the idea that the artwork is in the fabric as opposed to on top of it honors the materiality of the silk."

Asher also enjoys playing around with silk and uncovering the different types of depth he can create in order to highlight and to further recognize the truly "magical" versatility that it provides.



“I try to give the work an illusion of depth and texture. What I attempt to do is create dimension in the painting without actually creating any dimension on the surface. It is sort of an optical illusion, but for me it draws attention to the uniformity of the surface. The effect can be disorienting and almost frustrating, which is also the emotional experience I am trying to capture.”

“All the pieces are stretched on frames or panels (like traditional canvases). None are under glass. They are all flat—the wrinkled effect is the illusion I am going for. I have shown some pieces as free-

hanging silks, but I like to stretch them because it emphasizes the illusion of being crumpled.”

These seemingly textured stretched silks are something to behold. He displays these, among a collection of his other artistic pieces, on his website. Although the digital format does not do the real work justice, they are nonetheless breathtaking and intriguing in their complexity and form.

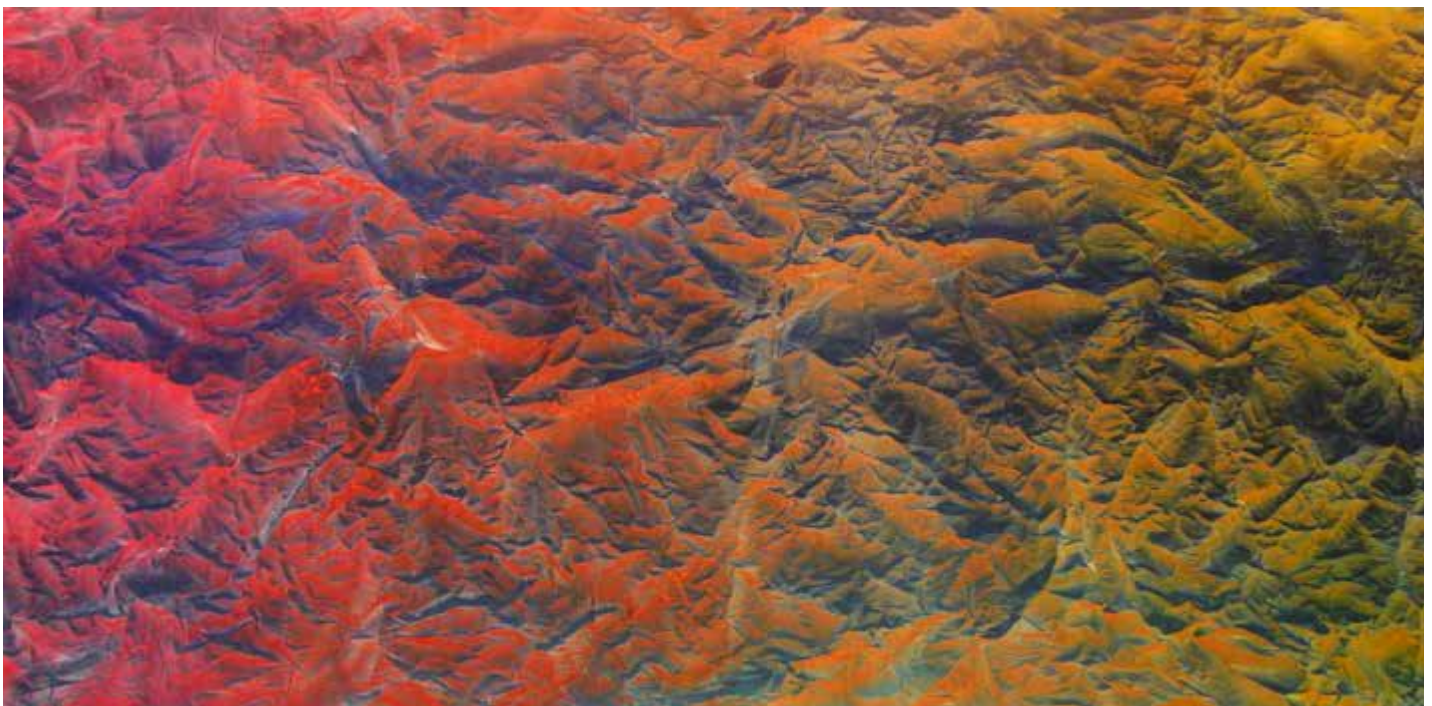
By browsing his collection of works, you will find that a majority of his pieces are untitled, but they remain unnamed for good reason. Art, for most artists is a form of free expression in which they pull from the soul inspiration that is mystical and nameless; it requires no names. In fact, titles can sometimes hinder a viewer’s perspective of a piece, unless that is the artist’s intentions. “Naming the pieces is the hardest part for me,” Asher indicates. “Because these works are non-objective, giving them titles feels somehow unfair or wrong. It is like

naming an instrumental song – these are pieces of art that exist on a plane separate from language. They come from something nameless and internal. I also find that giving something a name can change it, much like describing a dream can change your experience of the dream. Only occasionally does a title feel successful. Usually titles are sort of embarrassing and I wish the work could just stand on its own.”

Recently – October 19, 2014 to January 1, 2015 – Asher hosted a show entitled Asher at La De Da Salon in Santa Rosa, CA, where he displayed some of his pieces. This opportunity was possible due to his connections from being the owner of Jacquard, as well as to his talent and hard work.

“In a way, my ‘career’ as an artist was derailed when I decided to take over Jacquard. It is hard enough to find the time to make art now that I am running a corporation, let alone pursue galleries and press. On the other hand, being the head of Jacquard has given me a kind of exposure I never would have had otherwise.”

In the past several years, Asher’s shows have remained local to California, giving them a more intimate feel, but looking towards the future he would be elated at the prospect of showing his work in galleries across bigger cities.



“As much as I would like to be showing my work in high end art galleries in New York City or Chicago, I am just as happy to be hanging work in local coffee shops or salons if there is enthusiasm for the venue.”

His humble attitude is an admirable characteristic that truly reflects his intentions and passions for what he does. Although a little recognition via a large gallery viewing is any artist’s dream, Asher does not let his beginnings dampen his goals or outlook for future possibilities. Each step in his life has only led him to better things, and most great things take time or the right timing, but mostly they take patience and an insatiable appetite.

When asked why he does what he does, Asher replies very honestly: “I’m not sure why I am compelled to create art. I wonder about this myself. Like most artists, I have drawers upon drawers, files upon files of artwork that I just don’t know what to do with. Admittedly, this is one reason I am interested in showing more.

All I can say is that I feel compelled to create art. If other people appreciate it and think I ought to keep doing it – or better yet, want to hang it on a wall – all the better!”

Although Asher’s attention is constantly divided, – between running a company, being in his studio and traveling – his passion and dedication to art and Jacquard Products is not. It takes a true undiluted passion to do what he does, and he has what it takes to continue in greatness both for Jacquard Products and his personal artistry.

See more at www.asher-katz.com



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