

Coastal Point

Abstract artists emotes feeling through work

By Ryan Saxton

Staff Reporter

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Abstract artist Jonathan Spivak in his Ocean View studio.

There's something about the boldness of local artist Jonathan Spivak's artistic creations that seems so awry, yet structured at the same time. For him, the talent comes natural, as an outlet to be himself and portray inner emotions and thoughts. Although each piece can conjure a variety of interpretations from viewers, all can agree that each is unique and original in its own way.

This year, the 13th Annual Southeastern Delaware Artists Studio Tour (SEDAST), on Friday, Nov. 23 and Saturday, Nov. 24, welcomes the return of Spivak, abstract artist and restaurateur, whose original and notable style has provided him with the versatility and freedom he'd always envisioned, in both painting and profession.

"I had done [SEDAST] in the past," said Spivak, "but I took some time off from it. I needed a break. Art can sometimes get that way." Spivak, proprietor of Sedona, the creative American restaurant in Bethany Beach and former owner of Rehoboth restaurant, Fusion, has managed to balance his time between a love for food and customer satisfaction with the individuality of creating art. Since coming to the area 15 years ago, he's waged the opportunities that each provide.

"I always knew art was just another voice," he said. "Any form of art — poetry, writing, dance — these are all voices you can use to express yourself. That's sort of why I got into the restaurant business, too. It was a way to express myself in two ways: the restaurant is a combination of art and theater. Theater's out in the dining room and art's in the kitchen. To me, painting was just another voice I had to express my feelings."

Growing up in New York City, it was virtually impossible to avoid the influence of art all around him. "I was exposed to art as a kid," he said, "though, I never did much with it. I was surrounded by all of this great art, art galleries everywhere and the best museums in the country — the Museum of Modern Art,



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the Guggenheim. There was all of this exposure for me, so as I got older, I wasn't that frightened or intimidated by it."

It wasn't until his late teens that Spivak really approached art as a potential avenue. "The generation of the 1960s was a remarkable period for me," he said. "It was then when I decided to fool around with art. I didn't take it completely seriously at that time, but I wanted to see if there was anything in me that could be expressed in that form."

Most of his inspiration is drawn from the works of other artists, be it abstract or not. "I love most art," he said. "I'm a dangerous guy that way. I'm not a picky guy. It's a lot like the restaurant. I haven't found too many wines I haven't liked."

Despite more and more people conveying their feelings through art, Spivak is worried that the appreciation is still lacking. "The difficulty, to me is that the universe of artists has probably increased over the years," he said, "but the universe of those who buy and collect art has not."

Spivak's initial works are usually direct representation of mood and feeling. Though he had attempted other alternatives, it was abstract art that provided the comfort and expression for which Spivak was searching. "My art is abstract because I can't draw," he said, bluntly. "I can't draw a face, or a landscape. But with abstract art, it's a natural flow of what's inside me. It's very expressive of what I feel. I believe color is representative of what you feel."

Many of the bright, bold and deep tones he uses are echos of his sentiment. "You can say black represents the unknown, fear or death," he noted. "Yellow, to me, has always represented the future: brightness, what's to come, optimism, and that's associated with the sun — growth, starting a new day. Blue represents calm. For me, I feel all those emotions, maybe not simultaneously, but at some time. I am not limited in what I create."

His talent sometimes even takes him back to childhood. "The closest thing I can compare it to is finger painting," he said. "As a little kid, I would finger paint. That was free expression. You could do anything, and it didn't matter what it looked like afterwards. It was a way to express yourself and how you were feeling."

When first attempting abstract art, Spivak started with hard-edge, a very precise style that incorporates painting sharp angles with taped-off edging. At this year's SEDAST tour, he will display three paintings interpreting authentic Navaho rugs, using a similar hard-edge style. "Each took about 90 hours to do," he said. "They're very complex, but the result is beautiful."

After the straight-laced techniques of hard-edge, Spivak ventured more into a more liberated style. "Five years ago, I decided I wanted to go more free-form," he said. His system now typically involves completing a painting, then cutting it in 1-, 2- and 3-inch squares, reassembling them in a unique fashion.

Virtually everything that Spivak sells is the genuine original work, though he has been known to recreate his works in prints and glicées. "The net result of that is this is not an easy business," he said. "There are some people on the tour who make a living off of what they do. My heart is in that one piece that you don't replicate, just knowing that there's that one finished work with nothing else exactly like it in the entire world."

Spivak noted that his artistic style is not frequently sought-after, though he doesn't expect that to stop him from doing what he loves. "There's not a great demand for abstract art down here," he said, "but I'm not ready to move, and I'm not ready to change what I create. People who come here to look at art generally want something representative of the ocean, beach life or something like that."

Some of his work has a mariner's feel, including "The Wave," his piece that will be raffled off in SEDAST's Art-in-the-Hat raffle. Money raised from the raffle will be donated to art programs in local schools. "There's not enough time in schools being spent on art," said Spivak. "It's been taking a back-seat." Tickets for the Art-in-the-Hat raffle are \$10 apiece or three for \$25, and can be purchased the day of the tour at all of the studios, for any artist.

Currently, Spivak shares a gallery with fellow artist Theresa D. Richard on Route 26 in Ocean View. One of his dreams is to help commence locally what has been operating in Alexandria, Va. for years, the Torpedo Factory Art Center (TFAC). The TFAC is one of the largest and most successful visual art centers in the country, originating as a torpedo factory, build just after World War I. It now houses artist studios, galleries, workshops, an art school and archaeology museum. "It's a great concept and it really helps get people involved," he said. "You really start to see how serious the artists take everything. I hope this area grows more attune to the arts."

The tour, which originated in 1995, is scheduled from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Nov. 23 and 24. Participants can travel from studio to studio of featured artists from the Bethany Beach, Dagsboro and Fenwick Island areas, taking in the splendor of different crafts and artwork. For more information, including studio locations and additional artists featured on the tour, visit www.artstudiotour.com.