

By Susan Van Dongen

# In the Spirit of Jazz

Whether making paintings or photographs, Steve Buzash awaits the surprise.



**"I love being in the darkroom and using the resources to bring (hidden) things in the images out," says Steve Buzash, who also paints abstract images.**

**A**T a time when everyone involved in photography is "going digital," Steve Buzash embraces film technology and the alchemy of the dark room.

The Hopewell resident, known for his abstract painting, only came to photography in the last year or so, but has really taken to it, blazing a stylistic trail that has garnered notice. Already he's been invited to be part of a three-person show at the Montgomery Center for the Arts at the 1860 House in Skillman, along with painters John Murdoch and Chris Carter. *N.J. Voices II*, curated by Eve Ingalls, runs Aug. 3 through 31.

Mr. Buzash's black and white portraiture is very recent and fresh — many of the images were taken and developed in the last few weeks, in fact. That's how he likes to work. Inspired by his wife Tara, a jazz pianist, Mr. Buzash takes a lot of his artistic cues from music and improvisation.

"I love being in the darkroom and using the resources to bring (hidden) things in the images out," he says. "For one thing, I twist the easel around to get a placement for creative composition. If you want perfectly clear centered photos, I'm not the guy."

Shooting 35mm, Mr. Buzash experiments with filters and also the development of the film, leaving it in the chemicals longer than purists might. This gives the images a grainy, high-contrast quality, de-emphasizing the details and actual physicality of the person in the shot. Twentieth century British photographer Bill Brandt employed a similar technique, aiming to capture the essence of his famous subjects, such as Dylan Thomas, Cecil Beaton and Benjamin Britten.

Interestingly, Mr. Buzash doesn't know about Mr. Brandt's work. He discovered the formula and aesthetic on his own. As it is with his paintings, Mr. Buzash seems to go on instinct with his creative endeavors.

"I'd rather emphasize the inner qualities of the person, the spirit in their eyes for example," Mr. Buzash says. "That's what I've always done, whether it's a rock or a stream or whatever — tried to get at the spirit of the thing. With photography, my printing technique washes out the features of the face so the

image becomes more like a charcoal drawing.

"It's interesting because this work is the opposite of anything I've ever done before," he continues. "My previous (paintings) are abstract, huge and non-process oriented. Now, these are 8-by-10 portraits, black and white, requiring a certain formula and process in the darkroom. It's funny how you get led around with different art forms. There's more than one universe out there."

With a mixed background that included nursing, landscaping and soldiering, Mr. Buzash came to central New Jersey from the Baltimore-Washington, D.C., area a few years ago. He decided to return to school and will be entering his senior year in the fine arts department at The College of New Jersey in Ewing. He's been painting since 1998, working mostly with acrylics and mixed media. TCNJ professor Wendell Brooks inspired Mr. Buzash to try printmaking, which he has also embraced. (Several of Mr. Buzash's dry-point prints are also on view at the exhibit).

A student of Hungarian painter Sy Mohr, Mr. Buzash names Van Gogh, Da Vinci, Jackson Pollock, Simone Martini, Fra Angelico and TCNJ student Diane Polchinski as influences. He has shown in juried exhibitions in New Jersey and Maryland.

In addition to creating art and taking pictures, Mr. Buzash teaches art at Montgomery Center for the Arts children's summer camp, and he has conducted workshops in motivational art-making for corporate employees.

"I'm not a big fan of 'school' and formal training," he says. "It's taken me 20 years, a handful of majors and a million credits, not to mention all the experiences in between, including the Army. But here I am. Art found me and I love it. It's my voice. I could create every day."

Just liked he discovered photography, his wife Tara introduced him to the realm of jazz and Mr. Buzash has incorporated its spirit into his work.

"Theoretically, the perfect jazz song is started by a note on the piano," he writes in his artist's statement. "The other instruments respond to that note — the drums will come in, then the bass comes in and they all communicate. An entirely fresh melody is born of the moment. An entire life is lived in the moment. That's how my paintings dwell.

"I hardly ever start a painting knowing how it's going to be and how it's going to end," Mr. Buzash says. "That's how it is in the darkroom, too. When I see a print come out, I'm so happy. It's faith. It's all valid, it's all good." ●

*N.J. Voices II, with photography by Steve Buzash, and paintings by John Murdoch and Chris Carter, is on view at the Montgomery Center for the Arts, 124 Montgomery Road, Skillman, Aug. 3-31. Artists' reception Aug. 9, 6-9 p.m. Gallery hours: Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; Sun., 1-4 p.m. (609) 921-3272; [www.mca1860.org](http://www.mca1860.org)*