

**Les Yeux du Monde Gallery**

500 West Main Street  
Charlottesville VA 22903  
434.973.5566 *tel*  
LesYeuxduMonde.com *web*  
11—5, Tuesday — Saturday *hours*

page 1 of 2

## Clay Witt

Education	2000	Master of Fine Arts, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA <i>Thesis work in Painting and Printmaking, additional coursework in Arabic language and Art History.</i>
	2000	Summer Language School, Middlebury College, Middlebury VT <i>Intensive Arabic language program.</i>
	1999	The Arabic Language Institute, Fes, Morocco <i>Intensive Arabic language summer program. Arabic Calligraphy studies with Ustaz Hussein al-‘Abdi.</i>
	1991	Bachelor of Arts, University of Virginia, Charlottesville VA <i>Thesis work in Painting and Printmaking.</i>
Awards	2001	Fulbright Student Grant, Damascus, Syria
	1999	University of Massachusetts Graduate Student Fellowship
Employment & Practica	2008–09	Visiting Artist and Adjunct Lecturer, University of Virginia McIntyre Department of Art, Charlottesville VA <i>Designed, taught, and evaluated three Drawing I classes, and one Introduction to Printmaking class.</i>
	2008	Adjunct Lecturer, University of Virginia McIntyre Department of Art, Charlottesville VA <i>Designed, taught, and evaluated a section of Drawing II.</i>
	2003–07	Prop and Set Designer, New York NY <i>Designed and constructed sets and props for editorial photographic layouts for Time Magazine, New York Magazine, and the New York Times Magazine.</i>
	2004–05	Calligrapher, New York NY <i>Designed and executed Persian and Arabic calligraphy for two films: The Color of Love (Iranian/American, directed by Maryam Keshawarz. Premiered on February 15th, 2005 at the Museum of Modern Art NY), and Occupation: Dreamland (American, directed by Garrett Scott. Premiered on March 3rd, 2005 at the Rotterdam Film Festival, the Netherlands).</i>
	2003–04	Special Projects Assistant, Institute for International Education, New York NY <i>Worked to create a Middle East Fulbright Scholar Alumni group conference. Participated in the U.S. orientation of the inaugural group of Iraqi Fulbright students.</i>
	2001–02	Apprentice to Ustaz Zuhair Ibn Muhammad Ali Zarzour, Vice President of the Damascus Calligraphers’ Union, Damascus, Syria <i>Studied Arabic Calligraphy and Islamic Thought.</i>
	1998–00	Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA <i>Taught Advanced Drawing, Beginning and Advanced Painting, and Intaglio Printmaking to undergraduates. Responsible for course design, teaching, and student evaluation.</i>
	1995–97	Restorer and Gilder, Eastlake Galleries, Seattle WA <i>Responsible for the pricing and execution of various antique object and picture frame restoration jobs, as well as paper cleaning and restoration.</i>
	1990–92	Nightclub Designer, Charlottesville VA <i>Designed, fabricated, and installed the interior of the Tokyo Rose nightclub.</i>
Selected Exhibitions	2008	<i>The Peaceable Kingdom</i> (solo show), Les Yeux du Monde Gallery, Charlottesville VA
	2007	<i>Per Square Foot</i> , Dieu Donne Papermill, New York NY
	2007	<i>Emerging and Established</i> , Les Yeux du Monde Gallery, Charlottesville VA

Continued on next page.

## Clay Witt

### *The Peaceable Kingdom*

**5 – 31 December 2008**

**Les Yeux du Monde Gallery**

500 West Main Street  
Charlottesville VA 22903  
434.973.5566 *tel*  
LesYeuxduMonde.com *web*  
11–5, Tuesday – Saturday *hours*

---

page 2 of 2

Selected exhibitions continued.

- 2006 *Dark Light: Collaborative and Individual Work by Dean Dass and Clay Witt*, Les Yeux du Monde Gallery, Charlottesville VA
- 2006 *Love Letter Invitational*, Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville VA
- 2005 *The Land of Wandering*, Les Yeux du Monde Gallery, Charlottesville VA
- 2001 *Clay Witt: Paintings and Drawings*, Herter Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA
- 1997 *Clay Witt Recent Paintings & Drawings*, Ace Studios Gallery, Seattle WA
- 1996 *Clay Witt: Works on Paper*, Capital Theatre Gallery, Olympia WA

Reviews &  
Publications

- Brendan Fitzgerald, “Storm’s Coming: Exploring the Darkness with Clay Witt’s Latest Work,” *C-Ville*, 24th June, 2008, p. 27.
- Ruth Latter, “Student, Teacher Reach for the Sky,” *The Daily Progress*, 2nd August 2007, sec. B, p. 1.
- Laura Parsons, “Artistic Alchemy: Dass and Witt Mix It Up,” *The Hook*, 4th January 2007, p. 45.
- Erica Howsare, “Dean Dass and Clay Witt, “Dark/Light,” *C-Ville*, 26th December 2006, p. 40.
- Erica Howsare, “C-Ville Pick,” *C-Ville*, 5th December 2006, p.27.
- Sam Witt, “The Angels of Transfiguration Speak,” *Dean Dass & Clay Witt: Dark Light*, Charlottesville: Les Yeux du Monde Gallery, 2007.
- Ruth Latter, “Collaboration Glows with Visual Effects,” *The Daily Progress*, 14th December 2006, sec. B, p. 1.
- Clay Witt, et. al. (AKA “The Printmaker’s Left), *Exquisite History, vol. I: The Land of Wandering* (Charlottesville: The Printmaker’s Left & The University of Virginia Press, 2005).
- David Colman, “Tudor Revival: Lighting Designer Greg Yale Transforms a Hamptons Cottage with an Eye toward Industrial Chic,” *Elle Decor*, August 2004, p. 138.
- Arturas Valionis, “The Kiss,” trans. Clay Witt and Sam Witt, *The Drunken Boat: Lithuanian Poetry*, < <http://www.thedrunkenboat.com/valionis.html>> (10 June 2000).
- Rimdvysdas Stankevicius, “Menininkas amerikietiskai” *Rcspublika*, 3rd June 2000, p.6.

---

**Clay Witt**

*The Peaceable Kingdom*

**5 – 31 December 2008**

**Les Yeux du Monde Gallery**500 West Main Street  
Charlottesville VA 22903434.973.5566 *tel*LesYeuxduMonde.com *web*11–5, Tuesday – Saturday *hours*

---

## Clay Witt

### Artist's Statement

*The Peaceable Kingdom* is best known as a series of nineteenth century American paintings by the Quaker artist Edward Hicks. I have chosen this title for the largest painting in my show, and the show itself, because to me, Hicks represents the essential mystical folk artist of our country's nineteenth century adolescence, an artistic genre to which I feel a great aesthetic affinity. While it was never my intention to be a religious painter, I do traffic in mystical symbolism that, although primarily associated with Western Christianity, can be found throughout the mythology and art of humanity's varied expressions of theology. The burning bush, holy fire, and anthropomorphic themes can be found in religious art throughout history, but it is specifically our nineteenth century folk artists' use of these symbols to comment on contemporary ideas and events, which so appeals to me. In addition, I take inspiration from memorial art of the period, often made by the bereaved as an act of formalized mourning; a *memento mori* rather than a purposeful work of art. These genres of artistic expression often incorporated what are today sometimes dismissed as "artisan" (as opposed to "artist") techniques: calligraphic drawing, early cut paper collage (*Scherenschnitte*), and the formalized art of theorem painting, all of which have inspired my work in both process and theme.

While my works may at first glance resemble straightforward paintings, they are in fact expressions of an idiosyncratic technical style that I have developed over the past two decades, one that incorporates intaglio print-making, collage, gilding, and polished varnish layering into a final product that recalls the visual tropes of religious art as much as it does anything else. The idiosyncratic congregation of materials and technical processes that serves as the framework for the development of my work's conceptual form is ritualistically linked to the final product in that its physical limitations are defined by those of the material, both as a function of *tromp l'oeil* verisimilitude and as a defining set of visual characteristics.

If the medium is the message, then I find myself on a sort of mystical artistic quest, one that exploits the meditative qualities of my laborious and time-consuming process (I make no more than five large paintings a year) to create a self-revealing series of contemporary icons that, while not allied with any particular creed or dogma, do in fact reflect my interest and research into the artistic expressions of religious faith (of my many courses of study, most significant in this respect was the year and a half I spent apprenticed to an Arabic calligrapher in Damascus). In the last two years my work has taken a more representational turn, in that I place my golden symbols (idols?) in a sort of dreamlike context, one that combines familiarity with a jarring strangeness, all intended to further engage the viewer in my personal imaginings.

Thematically my paintings refer to the narratives most associated with humanity's religious and mythical expression. In a highly undisciplined and peripatetic way, I have compared analogous stories from a number of dogmatic systems, looking for the non-specific commonalities: for example, the tree alight with a fire that does not consume it, or the congress and cooperation of various species of animal in an all-too-human activity or quest. I have situated these pregnant symbols in an unspecific dark and wooded place (in itself a somewhat threatening mythic trope), the familiar form of which stands in unsettling contrast to their ill-defined and unlikely sources of illumination. It must be winter for the trees are denuded of leaves, which both saves me the trouble of having to address the foliage, and allows the lace-like filtration of light. The light source is internal, subject to the reflective qualities of gold, mica, and translucent glazes. There are, however, no human forms in my work, which in my opinion allows the viewer to participate in the image as a witness rather than voyeur.

---

## Clay Witt

### *The Peaceable Kingdom*

5 – 31 December 2008



## Les Yeux du Monde Gallery

500 West Main Street  
Charlottesville VA 22903

434.973.5566 *tel*

LesYeuxduMonde.com *web*

11–5, Tuesday – Saturday *hours*

# cville

## CHARLOTTESVILLE NEWS & ARTS

Issue #20.26 :: 06/24/2008 - 06/30/2008

### Storm's coming

Exploring the darkness with Clay Witt's latest work

by Brendan Fitzgerald

There are more than 60 versions of *Peaceable Kingdom* by Quaker painter Edward Hicks—different iterations of all creatures great and small, sleek-coated predators and skittish prey, hunkered down together wearing expressions that could make a Zen master jealous. The *Peaceable Kingdom* series comes from a line the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah (and, for brevity's sake, Curtain Calls draws from the King James version): “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.”

All this zoological camaraderie is supposed to be about the promise of salvation and the suspension of sin, but it's eerie to see. In many of Hicks' kingdoms, adult humans are visible, but never central; the draw is the collection of beasts, the suspension of their routines and their shell-shocked eyes.

“I'm immensely interested in folk art,” says Clay Witt, his finger tapping lightly against the book he holds, illustrating one of Hicks' scenes, then carries on. “Quaker art, Shaker art...” Witt half-chuckles, closes the book, then leads Curtain Calls to a table in his kitchen to look at a collection of animal etchings.

In 2006, Witt and his mentor, UVA printmaking professor Dean Dass, exhibited a collection of prints and collaborations at Les Yeux du Monde in an exhibit called *Dark Light*, one of the most ambitious bodies of work by local artists in recent memory. Immense, multi-step prints like *The Conference of the Birds*—a 4' by 7' lunar field, with an explosive central iris of lapis lazuli and rust—sold big and announced Dass and Witt as both well-suited collaborators and skilled colleagues. The aftershock of Witt's exhibit left many viewers as bewildered as Hicks' creations, as if they'd witnessed a small tremor of some immense shake-up to come.

And shake we will. Although Les Yeux closes its doors at the end of June, Witt says that the gallery still plans to show a collection of his recent work in December of this year.

“I really want to make sure that I have the right venue for Clay's work,” says Lyn Warren, director of LYDM. “It's so important.”

Witt's recent work, according to the artist, stays true to his interest in “a central, totemic image,” as he puts it. *Tree of Life*, a 2007 piece that won the juried *Artivism* competition at the McGuffey Art Center, continued the theme, but the four more recent pieces hanging in

Witt's home are more patient, studied explorations of the layered darkness that the artist has pursued and refined for years.

“My work is very redundant, self-repeating,” Witt says, again with a chuckle that suggests the artist's warm sense of comfort with his world. “There must be an easier way to do things, but I always considered it a meditative process—I self-consciously draw it out.”

Witt's work is all about alchemy and time, the pairing of chemical processes with traditional symbolism and imagery to generate images as contemplative for a person to view as they are for the artist to create. Witt speaks with

Curt about the chemistry at work—layered trees made of Japanese paper, the contentious process of emulsion played out on walnut panels, how water gilding and hyde glue intensify gold and how gold is tempered by rust.

Of the four pieces Witt shows CC, the highlight is “Burning Bush.” The very construction of the piece eludes simplicity: Each patiently hand-cut tree is part of Witt's drawn out process, but part of another layer of shadow-play for viewers to work their way through. Mica moonbeams split through the branches to shine upon a white gold tree engulfed in flames of rust; there is generation consumed by time in a single tree, surrounded by a forest ready to repeat the violent act.

Back in the artist's kitchen, Witt presides over a ring of paper animals he's modeled after images from a 19th-century encyclopedia, creatures he plans to pair with a burning Victorian cage inspired by Hicks. Witt says that he plans to collage the animals onto a canvas to give them depth, then leads Curt into his basement studio.

The 5' by 4' panel of walnut—the animals' canvas—is already murky with gesso, ready to be populated with the chemicals Witt will use against each other. From the ceiling hang tendrils of paper trees that, from beneath, look like roots. Witt points out the spot where he'll place the burning cage, another central totem.

“I want my paintings to be as dark as possible,” he says, “but still retain a sense of receding space.” Curt leans in closer to look, overturning the shadows on Witt's canvas and uncovering more shadows that beget more shadows. It occurs to him that the crucial difference between Witt and his audience is that, with each new work, viewers are drawn further into his canvases while Witt emerges, wide-eyed and dauntlessly moving towards the light.



Clay Witt finds his way through the forest with a series of exquisite new works, which will see the light of day in a December exhibit.

## Clay Witt

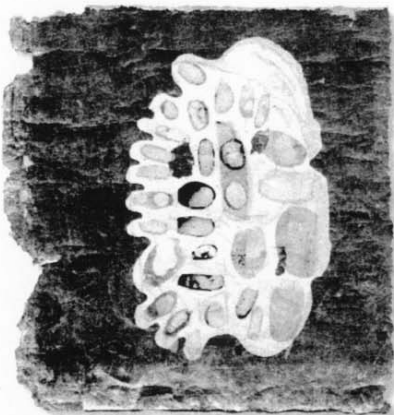
### *The Peaceable Kingdom*

5 – 31 December 2008

## ARTFEATURE

BY LAURA PARSONS  
ART@READTHEHOOK.COM

# Artistic alchemy Dass and Witt mix it up



COURTESY THE ARTIST

**ON** the wall above the mezzanine at Les Yeux du Monde, a few lines from 19th century poet Friedrich Hölderlin's melancholy "Remembrance" set the tone and reveal the origin of "dark light," the title of Dean Dass and Clay Witt's collaborative exhibition. What the show also calls to mind, however, is the witches' spell from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Double, double, toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

For there is conjuring going on in the gallery as Dass and Witt, individually and in tandem, combine intaglio prints with gouache, found images and unexpected scraps (e.g. hole-punched office paper, in the case of Dass), incorporating unusual materials like rust, lapis lazuli, and mica, to create abstract works pulsing with energy. Yet the visual spells each artist casts are distinct.

Dass fascinates with his ability to express the beauty of randomness. His shapes and placement of elements give the impression of being haphazard, yet his compositions culminate in an unlikely harmony and balance. Again and again, I found myself enrapt and wondering, "Why does this work?"

Tapping into viewers' "dark light" of nostalgia, Dass often plays with collages of Audubon-like bird images and transforms landscape photographs so they appear faded and all but washed-away. He subtly enhances the sense of lost time with evoc-

ative textures like creased plastic casing. In "Shield," he spreads pigment-flecked pieces of mica like confetti across a worn pillowcase, the iridescent ovals recalling small birds' eggs and fingernails.

Witt, on the other hand, takes a more structural approach. With a fondness for metals, he often builds his layered and textured images around a central shining vortex, twining with vines or enflamed, as botanical elements seem to emerge and recede beneath the works' diffuse surfaces. In "Gift Apocalypse: Hannah Cohoon," a raised silver whirl of Cohoon-inspired stylized flowers revolves around three concentric circles, while glimpses of green ferns swirl on the periphery.

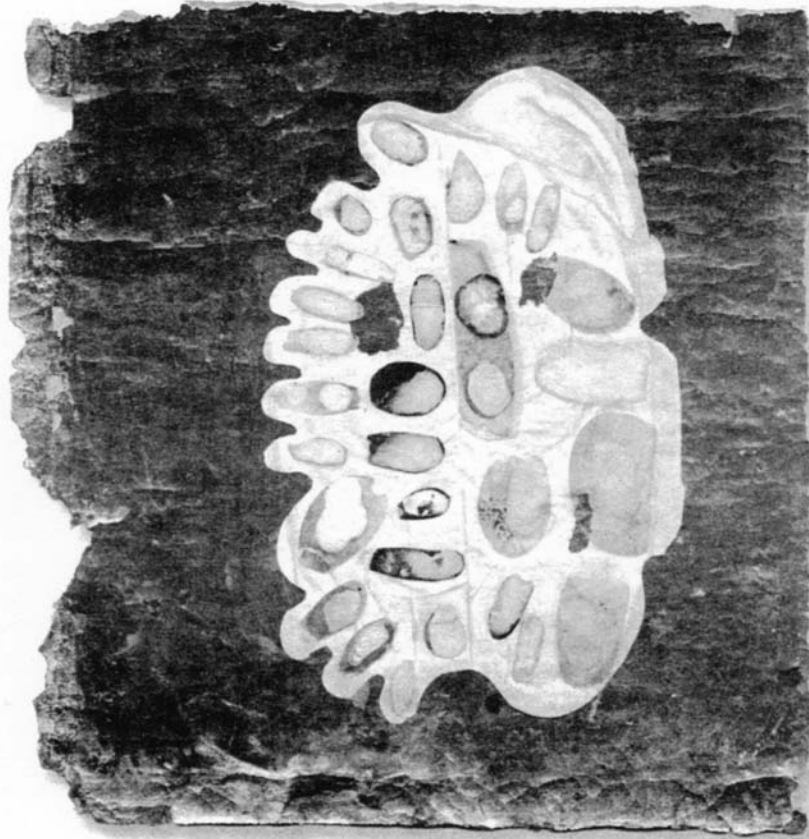
Despite their divergent aesthetics, when Dass and Witt stir the cauldron together, the synergy generated by their complementary styles is exhilarating. It's tempting—and not terribly difficult—to decipher who's contributing what to the mix, but such analysis detracts from the overall impact of their collaborative works. In the large "The Conference of the Birds," the centered composition and lapis blue may be due to Witt's influence and the numerous birds may originate with Dass, but the work's strength derives from a magic conjured through the artists' combined effort. ■

*"Dean Dass And Clay Witt: dark light" is on view at Les Yeux du Monde through January 20. 115 S. First St. (The Terraces). 973-5566.*

01.04.07 – 01.10.07 45



C-VILLE Weekly December 5 – 11, 2006



COURTESY OF ARTISTS

"Dark/Light"

**cville PICK**

The "**Dark/Light**" collaboration between UVA printmaking Professor **Dean Dass** and his former student, **Clay Witt**, is an exhibition about balance—between ancient techniques and new ones, spirituality and materialism, one artist's vision and another. Dass' prints and paintings combine landscapes and portraits with mystical images that spider off into the ethers. Throw Witt, a veteran of UVA's Printmakers Left group and recent Fulbright scholar, into the mix, and the results are modern and old-fashioned, as compatible and contradictory as dark and light. Les Yeux du Monde, 115 S. First St. Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-5pm. 973-5566.

## REVIEWS

CHARLOTTESVILLE'S CULTURE BIN

reviews@c-ville.com

### Dean Dass and Clay Witt, "Dark/Light"

Les Yeux du Monde

Through January 20

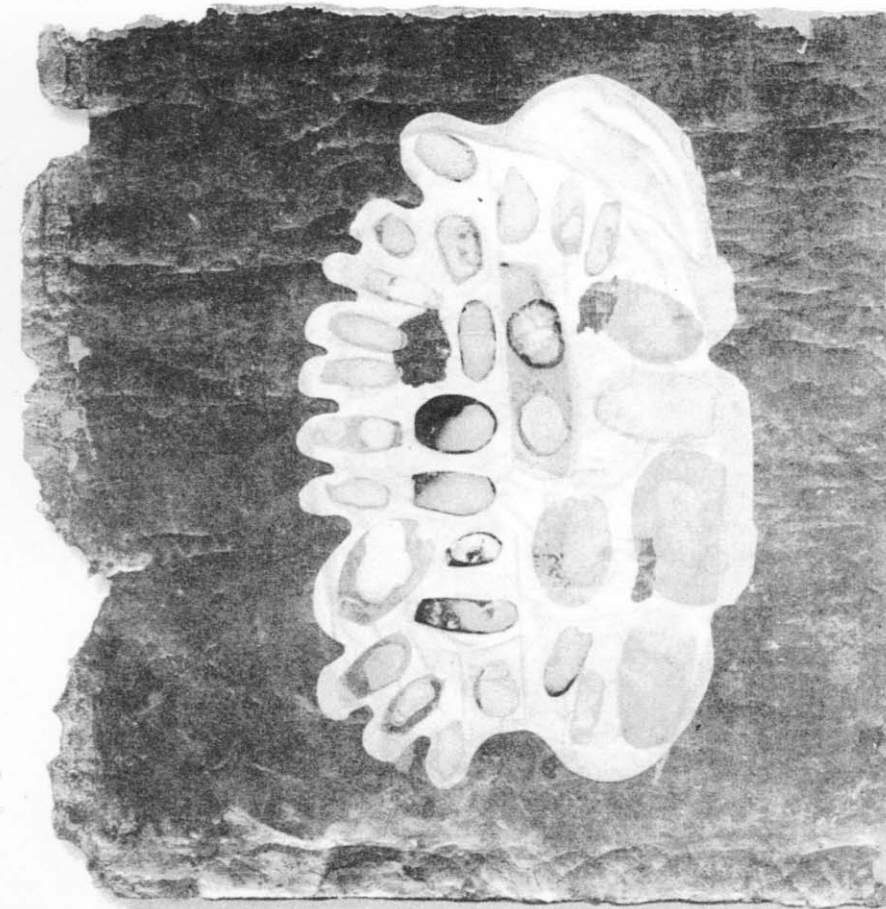
**art** Collaboration tends to attract a lot of puzzled-sounding critical ink—who made which part, whether the match is fruitful—but when artists with compatible interests work together, the work speaks for itself. Divisions of authorship, real estate-style, are not really the point, as Dean Dass and Clay Witt's show beautifully illustrates. Each artist contributes a body of work with its own obsessions and techniques, and in several collaborative pieces these strains effortlessly merge.

Both are working with complex, multi-stage printing techniques (including ink-jet and intaglio) that speak deeply of time and result in objects more precious than the gold leaf and lapis lazuli that bedeck them. Dass' delicate compositions often recall display cases in a natural history museum; for example, "Shield" uses a ground of hand-stitched linen, like a cleaned-up fragment of mummy wrapping, on which shards of mica and bits of gouache on paper form careful rows. Witt returns to central, circular forms; whether celestial or cellular (the lonely, waiting ovum), they function as ancient and elemental icons of nature.

The alchemy of the artists' processes—intensive and mysterious—makes for endless particulars: the fractal complexity of the surfaces, the nearly geologic layers that reach off the page and beyond the mechanically reproducible status of two-dimensional photos or prints. The works are almost sculptural in their response to materiality. Whereas Dass' work suggests human arrangement within nature's enormity, Witt's revolves around the abstract as it decays into something specifically, physically present before the viewer.

It's no less alchemical when the two artists work together. New forms emerge: the meandering gold thread in "The Eighth Day," for example. And these different approaches to the world's abundance of natural forms seem to agree with one another on a molecular level.—Erika Howsare

The alchemy of the artists' processes—intensive and mysterious—makes for endless particulars: the fractal complexity of the surfaces, the nearly geologic layers that reach off the page.



COURTESY THE ARTISTS

Clay Witt and Dean Dass fuse the ancient with the modern at Les Yeux du Monde. Sorry, shoppers—Grisham already bought one of the big pieces.



# LIFESTYLES | B1

The Daily Progress • Thursday, December 14, 2006

## Collaboration glows with visual effects

**M**any works of museum quality are thrilling viewers at Les Yeux du Monde gallery this season.

Mesmerizing images that describe our spiritual relationship to the sun, moon, stars, land and sea have been collaboratively created, as well as individually rendered, in fabulous paintings by Dean Dass of the University of Virginia art faculty and by Clay Witt, his former student.

Often, it is difficult to identify each artist's contribution to a single mysterious composition that vaguely alludes to nature. It is as if they speak with one mind, one hand, one brush and one voice.

For this show, Dass has created communities of vaguely identified creatures small enough to suggest exotic specimens in orderly rows.

Witt presents homage to a single looming planet poised in space like a huge medallion. Its surface bubbles, clouds embrace it. The globe becomes a celestial sphere, glowing and incandescent.

A familiar innovator on the local art scene, Dass enjoys an international reputation. He continues to astonish viewers with his imaginative blending of tradition with innovation.

Both artists create remarkable visual effects with a combination of ingredients that include gouache, gesso, malachite, marble dust, ink jet with archival inks, polymer emulsion, lapis lazuli and gold leaf.

Witt, who has traveled to Afghanistan to learn the techniques of the country's traditional decorative arts, is especially drawn to lapis lazuli, the beautiful blue mineral that has been popular since ancient times. The finest comes from Afghanistan.

The deep ultramarine crystals form haunting shadows in his splendid compositions that focus on a single planet. The blue suggests the cold, immeasurable sea with its swallowing depths.

The circle that dominates Witt's most



Ruth  
Latter



Courtesy Les Yeux du Monde

Clay Witt used lapis lazuli and gold for "Welter and Waste."

See GLOWS on B2

## GloWS

Continued from B1

awesome compositions on Japanese paper is mesmerizing. It glows with unexpected incandescence and suggests a fusion of the sun and moon as they might appear from a closer planet.

Born in Belgium to a family from Richmond, Witt grew up in England and has resided here since 1979. This is his first major show. It will remain on view through Jan. 20. Viewers are enthralled.

Les Yeux du Monde, at 115 S. First St. is one block off the Downtown Mall. Viewing hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.





**Les Yeux du Monde Gallery**

500 West Main Street  
Charlottesville VA 22903

434.973.5566 *tel*

LesYeuxduMonde.com *web*

11-5, Tuesday – Saturday *hours*

Facing page: Landscape-lighting designer Greg Yale in the living room of his restored 1911 cottage in Southampton, New York; the painting is by Michael Lee, a designer who collaborated on the interior with Yale. This page: *Not Yet Titled*, 2004, a painting by Clay Witt, hangs above the fireplace; the vintage leather ottoman is from Mecox Gardens. The bookcases were made of antique wood salvaged from a nearby estate. See Resources.



ELLE Decor - August 2004

ELLE Decor

"Tudor Revival", August 2004

Painting by Clay Witt, *Not Yet Titled*, 2004, hangs over fireplace.

**Clay Witt**

*The Peaceable Kingdom*

5 – 31 December 2008