

MIKE MITCHELL

A recent profile on the front page of the Washington Post Style Section describes Mike Mitchell as “a man who loves light.” This past summer he became known around the world when Christie’s New York auctioned 46 silver gelatin prints of his rarely seen photographs of the Beatles (taken when he was only eighteen years old) for over \$360,000.



Photo by
Marvin Joseph, Washington Post

He began his career as a magazine photographer while still in high school. After a life changing mystical experience in 1969, he realized that the photographs he’d now begun to do were actually art. One-person shows followed, in New York in 1971 and at the Corcoran Gallery in 1977. Reviews were enthusiastic but he says, “Somehow I knew it just wasn’t my time yet. After the 1969 experience, I’d been left with a kind of calling, an artistic imperative: there was something I could *do* with photography and if I didn’t do it, it wouldn’t get done. But I also knew I wasn’t ready yet, that I needed to grow more to be able to take on that “mission.”

So, he continued to make a living with photography here in Washington, eventually doing work for graphic designers, corporations, advertising agencies and government. But from 1963 to 2003, photography was not *just* a living, it was also the higher education for a very naive kid. “I learned about how the world works, and how people’s hearts work and I learned how to get things done, sometimes in very unconventional ways. I learned so, so much in all those years and I *did* grow.”

Between 2003 and 2004 a series of very unusual events led him to feel the time was finally coming. He began to photographically explore an intuition about the deeper nature of light. From 2005 to 2008, this effort blossomed into the photographs in his Lumi-Gnosis series followed in 2010 by another series furthering the same exploration.

Given his rather unorthodox career arc, Mike Mitchell might be called a “re-emerged artist” whose recent success at Christie’s now places him firmly into the 21st century world of photographic art.

“Light is one of the most profound mysteries in the universe! My photography is an exploration of that mystery and results from inviting light to photographically speak for itself. I do this by engineering situations where light is moving in ways that I’m NOT controlling. Sometimes it dances, sometimes it creeps but it’s always continually changing. The forms it makes are usually completely unexpected and convince me that the author Don Miguel Ruiz is correct when he writes, “everything is alive and light is the messenger of life, because it is alive and contains all information.”

I sense that light is what I call “alma-genic” (alma being the Spanish word for soul.) When we really open to light, it can grow the soul the way it grows a plant. Or perhaps it can even be said that it can give us stem cells for the soul. I don’t pretend to understand how this works but I know it does! I suspect that the potential has something to do with how we are evolving as a species.”

Mike Mitchell



The Beatles, Washington Coliseum, 1964

Fuji Crystal Archive Lustre Print mounted to 3mm White Aluminum composite panel



Lumi-Gnosis 4, 2005

Epson printed UltraSmooth Fine Art paper mounted to 3mm White Aluminum composite panel