

Artist Corner: Jim Hultquist

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"My life pretty much revolves around light," says Jim Hultquist, an Iowa native and local artist in the Champaign-Urbana area. Originally educated in lighting design at Rutgers University, Hultquist works for a theater consultant out of California and keeps photography as an "intense hobby" on the side. His newest photography exhibit, The Idea Project, which will continue to be on display at Pekara Bakery until June 24, is one of his two showcases that he's had at Pekara since he's moved to the area. Hultquist currently lives here in Champaign with his wife Alex and his new baby daughter.

How did you come up with the idea, no pun intended, for The Idea Project?

Well, I was playing with light bulb pictures because they're very self-referential. When you take a photograph of the light bulb, the light from the light bulb exposes the negative, and you can shine light through that negative onto the paper, and then you view the paper with light. So, there's a complete circle when you're photographing a light object. And I had originally intended on taking a lot of different pictures of a lot of different light bulbs, but the more I played with it, the more I just loved this single image. It just sort of popped out, and it's more iconic in a way.

I also read an Ansel Adams' quote about the negative being a piece of music or score and that the print is a performance of that. And I was sort of thinking about doing a wall of performances of a single negative, so I went through about fifty ideas and sort of settled on these.

What is your favorite artistic project that you've done?

My favorite project was one of the first projects I did when I moved to Champaign, which was a project on books. I showed the books in illogical ways, mostly with light emanating from them in different sort of ways ... I think it was probably my favorite project so far, and you can see it on my Web site, www.jhjd.com. But I gotta say, I really do enjoy this project. See, what happened was I did the books, and some of those photographs were shown at the Catherine Edelman Gallery in Chicago; and printing them is such a precious process, it's so easy to make a mistake. But what was happening was it was becoming not as fun because it has to be so perfect, which was part of the reason I did this project too. I just wanted to have a really good time and just work on things. But when you're doing gallery work, it just feels too precious in a way ... I guess the surmise is that my book project was my favorite photography project, but I think I had more fun working on this one.

Is photography the main medium you work in?

Actually, I design performing arts centers, [and} I'm a lighting designer by education. I used to do theater lighting design almost exclusively. And then I sort of got into theater consulting, which is one step before lighting design because I design all the pieces that theaters would use to do the lighting design. And then photography is a very intense hobby, I would say. It's not a profession; I don't make a living at it. I do make some money from it, which is good because it pays for the materials and things, though it's not my primary professional focus. But it's great. One thing about lighting design in theater is that it is very much a collaborative art; there's always lots of people with their fingers in the pie. When you design a show, there's directors, actors, set designers, costumers, and they all have something to say about the lights, which is the way it works. But with photography, it's very much an individual pursuit. You go in the dark room, and you can play with an image until the cows come home, and then bring out the one you like, versus doing all the

work in front of an audience, basically.

When did you first realize your passion for photography?

I was living in Chicago, right before I went to Rutgers, and my sister was living with me, and I had this Cannon 81 that I bought when I was in the Navy in 1986; it's a really old camera, but it works really great. And my sister and I were screwing around, and I took these pictures of her buried in socks. There's a King Missile song called "Too Many Socks," and the song goes on for like three minutes about him screaming about how his socks have taken over his life. And we were just screwing around, and I took these photographs of her buried in my socks with just like some eye sticking out, and it's one of my favorite photographs.

What is your most embarrassing moment?

When I was in graduate school, they spent three years telling me - I have sort of a temper - that you can't yell at people, you can't raise your voice, you have to be a nice guy all the time or you won't work ... So, I was working on my thesis show, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, and I was lighting it with a really, really difficult director, and he used to be a lighting designer himself. So, he basically kept trying to design the show for me, and he was very persnickety about everything. And it was fine, and we worked together, but it was a swallow your pride kind of thing ... The night before the preview of the show at dress rehearsal, the director comes over and just starts screaming at me, "Oh my god! You changed everything we worked on! Why did you do that?" And I hadn't changed it at all because it's all on computer disk. And I finally stood up and said, "Yeah, that's right! That's what I'm trying to do! I'm trying to destroy your show because I'm just an asshole!" and I just went off on him. About a week later, I had to go to my committee review of the show, and I think I'm gonna get creamed. I say it's my most embarrassing moment because I was horribly embarrassed after I did it because they spent three years telling me not to yell at people, and here I am at my thesis show, and I scream at somebody. And I get into the committee and they say, "You know, we thought you handled the director really well."