

Philadelphia's Single-handed Spokesman:

Armond Scavo uses Rittenhouse photographs to promote the city

by: Diedre Wengen

It is snowing in Philadelphia and Rittenhouse Square sparkles with light, reflected from the surrounding buildings. Two silhouetted figures holding umbrellas make their way across the park, blurred slightly beneath the colored luminaries twinkling above. They are alone, walking side by side in other people's powdered footprints, blending in and standing out all at the same time. It is peaceful. It is magical. It is a photograph taken by artist Armond Scavo, owner of Earthlight Images gallery located at 800 South 8th Street. Although he lives and works on the other side of town, Scavo has a love affair with the Square – and he doesn't believe in being hush-hush about it.

Scavo, age 61, began experimenting with photography in 1969. "I received a camera for Christmas from my girlfriend at the time," he said. "A couple weeks later, I lost the girl but I kept the camera and have been taking pictures ever since."

The photographer's relationship with Rittenhouse began in 1999. "I was having breakfast one morning with my girlfriend Alice who lives in the Dorchester overlooking Rittenhouse Square," he said. "That morning it was snowing and I looked out and was reminded of photos I saw of Central Park from the

there is nothing like living in downtown Philadelphia

1950's. I got very excited and started photographing it at that very moment." Scavo developed a deep appreciation for the park and decided to shoot the Square year round. His work has grown to include the Square photographed in all types of settings, seasons, and light. "There was a time when I shot Rittenhouse Square almost exclusively," he said. "It became a very successful series."

After running a nursery school for 8 years and dabbling with a gourmet shop, Scavo opened Earthlight Images in 1985 as a way to showcase his work. "From attending art shows, I realized that people enjoyed my work," he said.

"This was the best way for me to make it accessible to the public." And while the gallery provides a home-base for Scavo, he continues to travel and display his work at art and craft shows along the east coast. "The gallery is not really how I make my living," he said. "I travel to about ten to twenty-five shows a year. I go as far as Milwaukee where my Rittenhouse work sells really well."

Scavo uses his photographs of Rittenhouse Square and Philadelphia as a way to promote the city. "I think I have a unique perspective," he said. "There are a lot of people who look at my work and don't think of it as a Philadelphia scene. People who haven't been here for ten years say 'Oh you're from Filth-adelphia' but when they see my work it makes them reconsider the city." Scavo says he has had people come from all over based on his recommendations. "One of the things I say a lot is that this is where United States history really began," he said. "I tell them that there is nothing like living in downtown Philadelphia."

At the end of October Earthlight Images will participate in Philadelphia's Open Studio Tours (October 20th-28th, www.philaopenstudios.com). Scavo will host a show dedicated specifically to Philadelphia. "I'm going to have an all Philadelphia show of my work which will go back about 20 years," he said. "This exhibit will be used to show how I see the city and include some of my favorite pieces." The artist's photographs of Rittenhouse Square will make up a large portion of the collection. Scavo hopes that the images will help people re-examine what they see and experience every day.

Although Scavo's work certainly speaks for itself, he has never minded putting in his two cents. "I think my personality and my gregariousness speak well about the city," he said. "It's pretty obvious from my work how I feel about Philadelphia and I will always love talking about it."

Appointments to visit Earthlight Images can be made by calling 215-592-8832.



above: 'Twin Urns' by Armond Scavo. A photo of a snow-covered Rittenhouse Square at night.

The Magical Day on South Street

By: Arthur Greene

Between 15th and 16th of South Street, stands a living mural of the great entertainers of yesterday: Bessy Smith, Fats Waller, Etta James, and Billy Paul. As I stood with my guitar to start our first set, I could feel their eyes watching me and their eternal minds wondering what four open hearted musicians would place to wake this sleeping community.

We began playing for those who dared to listen: The Best of the Conga Drum, Come the Praise, and Song of the Saxophone (which caused the flute player to dance with emotions). My guitar became a place to travel from this troubled world. Our freedom music echoed, shattering the windows of depression, internal pain, and the subconscious darkness. A crowd of awoken souls sat down on the ground to hear the world of the music.

From the beat of a child playing the cowbell, we heard the world of music. This miracle could only be done between 15th and 16th of South Street where there stands a mural of the great entertainers of yesterday.