



New Threads

An artist on how he works

IN THE SMALL TOWN OF Stockertown, Pennsylvania, Emil Lukas divides his efforts between two studios. In one, a converted barn, he makes the thread paintings for which he's best known: for these he winds polyester thread in various colors around nails driven into wood frames. The results are cloudlike atmospheres of color that, from a distance of only several feet, look uncannily painted or projected. For his other paintings he collaborates with fly larvae, coaxing them to squiggle through ink or paint, thereby creating extraordinary abstract compositions.

ALL IMAGES EMIL LUKAS AND SPERONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK



"I don't work out the color in advance. I start with one, say yellow, and react with a color that's not yellow. You go with it—it's very much like jazz, and I don't really bother trying to explain it once I'm done."

"There are three ways to work on the thread pieces. One is horizontal. Two is on brackets that hold them off the wall at a diagonal. And toward the end, I hang them on the wall and finish them in a vertical orientation."



"The larvae paintings are all about control of the atmosphere, because you can't control the larvae. They're going to do what they're going to do. First I prepare the surface—the larvae will care, they do. If it is rough or smooth, they change their mark."

"Are you going to put one larva down or five thousand? The choices change everything. Is it going to be humid or dry? Light or dark? Am I going to vibrate the painting or leave it still? Or am I going to spin the painting? If so, how fast?"

