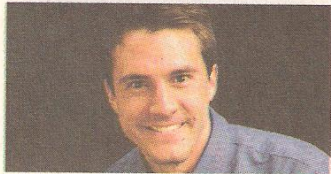


# Arts & Culture

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## Printmaking

# Merging music, prints



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**Vital's print interpretations of classical music will open for exhibition Thursday.**

**H**ere's another one for the "Wish I'd Thought of That" file. The prominent Swiss artist Not Vital (a common Swiss-Romansh name, pronounced Note-vee-Tal) cranked up a CD of classical music, dipped the tip of a conductor's baton in silver ink and proceeded to "conduct" the music over a lithograph stone. The inky tip left an abstract scribble on the stone's polished surface, onto which the artist then pressed a sheet of paper. He repeated the process with several different musical works and eventually sold the resulting print series for thousands of dollars.

Sound like a bunch of hooley? Well, hang on.

"A lot of people will look at an abstract painting and say, 'I don't get it,'" said Steven Vail, who will display part of the series starting this week at his gallery in Des Moines' East Village. "But as I remind them, much of the music they like doesn't make sense. I've always found an interesting correlation between the two, and in this case, it's what moved the artist."

Vital, of course, isn't the first artist to put more emphasis on the creative process than the final product. Leaders of the early 20th century



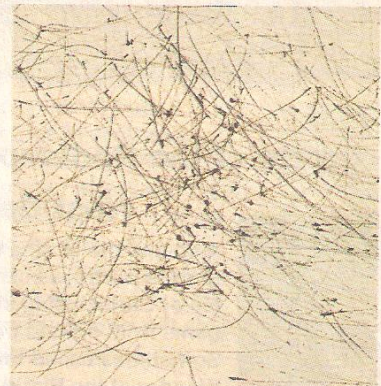
PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

**Swiss artist Not Vital, above, created prints by "conducting" music with an ink-dipped baton. Below is a detail of "Arabian Dance from Grieg's Peer Gynt."**

Dada movement, such as Francis Picabia, practiced a technique they called "automatic writing" by entering into a trancelike state and letting their hands move without conscious direction. A few decades later, Jackson Pollock championed "action painting" by dripping, flinging and smearing paint onto canvas in an effort to physically embody the gesture of the painting.

Vital, in fact, tore up one of his early efforts in the symphony series because he thought it resembled Pollock's work too closely, Vail said.

The half dozen prints in the Des Moines exhibition, which will mark their first showing in the United States, include the artist's interpretations of music by Jean Sibelius, Edvard Grieg and Carl Nielsen. (The artist chose only Scandinavian composers because he created the artwork during a trip to Copenhagen in 2004; the series title, "Dirigerer," comes from the Danish word for



"conducted.") They're valued at \$2,000 each or \$10,000 for all six.

The exhibition, which remains through Sept. 21, opens with a reception from 5 to 8 p.m. Thursday, with Scandinavian music provided by Des Moines Symphony harpist Mary Foss, at the Steven Vail Fine Arts Project Room, 500 E. Locust St. (515) 309-2763, [www.stevenvailfinearts.com](http://www.stevenvailfinearts.com).

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