

LET THERE BE LIGHT

With sellout shows and A-list fans including Elton John, the art duo Rob and Nick Carter can do no wrong, says **Talib Choudhry**

"I felt surreal talking to Elton John on my mobile," says Rob Carter. The pop icon was arranging a private viewing of the artworks that Carter creates with his wife, Nick. Elton ended up buying five pieces, one of which he gave to the Beckhams. "It's probably hanging in their loo," Nick jokes. This self-deprecation belies the critical and commercial success that their paintings have generated in Britain and America; Darren Star, the creator of *Sex and the City*, was among the scrum of buyers at the Carters' sellout LA show last summer.

In their west London studio, the Carters produce the abstract neon-hued pieces that have become their signature. They are not paintings in the strict sense of the word — light and photosensitive paper are used instead of paint and canvas. "It's the most basic photographic technique," Rob says. "We 'paint' with fibreoptic lights." In total darkness, the image is built up by exposing Cibachrome paper to increments of coloured light.

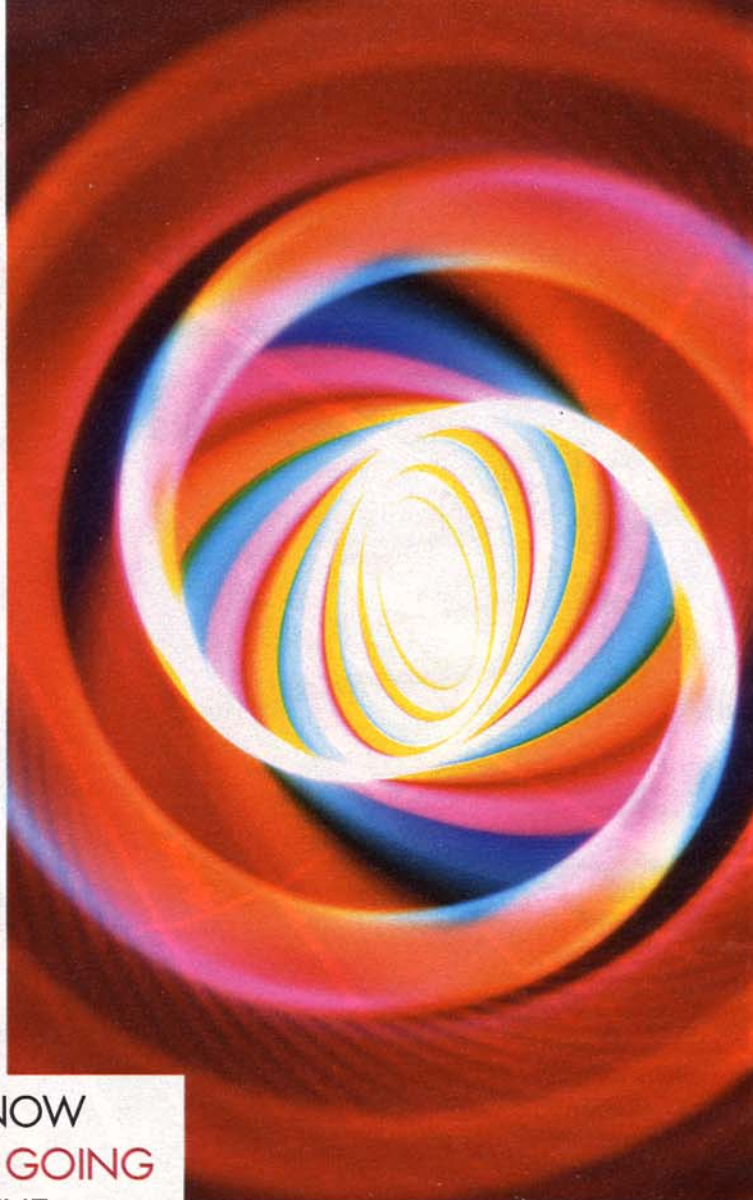
"We have an idea of what we want to achieve, but when you're working in the dark, you don't know what you're going to get until the piece is developed," says Nick. "Sometimes accidents work." It is this element of chance that gives their work such energy. Happy "accidents" are mounted onto sheets of aluminium, and paint is sometimes added to heighten the colour. Lush, high-gloss images, ranging from 2 to 4 metres in length, are the end result.

The Carters met at sixth-form college, but no romance blossomed until they met again 12 years later. In the meantime, Nick studied fine art at Goldsmiths, specialising in abstract sculptural works, while Rob worked as a freelance photographer. After five months of being a couple, they decided to combine their creativity. The experiment was an immediate success. "We laid out our first three pieces on the floor to dry, and when a friend came around, he asked if he could buy them," Rob says.

In the six years since, the Carters have acquired an impressive following. Along with Elton, Simon Fuller, Philip Treacy and Matthew Williamson have all invested in the duo's work. "I love their use of colour and find the images inspiring," says Williamson.

Obvious parallels can be drawn with op art, but the Carters haven't set out to create optical illusions. Their passion is the interplay of colour and light, which is why they are excited about developments in LED technology. "The colour-changing lights are an amazing new paintbrush for us. We can use computer programs to control how and when they change," says Rob. "One light can generate 16m colours, so there are infinite possibilities."

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WHAT YOU'RE GOING
TO GET UNTIL THE
PIECE IS DEVELOPED"



Top Colour Changing Spiral, XXII — a unique Cibachrome print, made by working with fibreoptic lights in the dark
Above Nicky and Rob Carter demonstrating how their work is created with fibreoptic lights