

Ralph Auf der Heide @ CASA Magazine

ON THE WILD SIDE

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

THE WACKY, WONDERFUL WORLD created by artist Ralph Auf der Heide (1915-2008) is sure to light up a smile. Often inspired by snippets of stories from newspapers or the play-on-words and clichés we might easily take for granted, the artist's deceptively simple paintings reflect back an imaginative, playful view of the world.

"His spirit is an inspiration," said Rita Ferri, guest curator for the exhibition now on view at CASA Magazine and Curator of Collections for Santa Barbara Arts Commission. "No matter how hard a day you've had, these paintings will always bring a laugh to take you away. That's a good thing for art to do. Whether he's painting mermaids on motorcycles or gas guzzling SUVs, you tap into the joy of living he had."

"If my paintings are to have any lasting value it is because they depict my observation of the human condition in its most whimsical, absurd, conflict-and-surprise-filled states," wrote Auf der Heide in an artist's statement.

Auf der Heide began painting at the age of 72. Inspired by the *naïf* paintings he saw while traveling in Central and Eastern Europe with his wife and creative confidant, Lisl, he discovered that an imagination was the greatest source for creating



Ralph and Lisl Auf der Heide, 1970

art. "Being able to make a kind of reality out of oily pigments spread over a surface with hairs from some animal is, to me, a miracle," he wrote. "To be able to do this without years of enduring the slings and arrows of outraged teachers is even more miraculous."

With no formal training, he took to painting naturally and often spent five or more hours each day working in his Santa Barbara studio for the remainder of his life. He began perfecting his use of the *hinterglas* technique, or reverse painting on glass, which is much like painting backwards and inside out. "I use the ancient technique of painting on the reverse of sheets of transparent material so that the painting is viewed through the support medium," he wrote. "This means that I must paint foreground details first, followed by mid-range objects, then finally the background. If an actual scene is depicted, objects that the viewer will see on the left must be painted on the right."

Auf der Heide was born in Los Angeles in 1915. His working life reflected his varied interests, beginning with radio program production during World War II. He also worked for a recording company, collecting folk, jazz, and classical records. Locals may remember him as the manager and co-owner of the original Wine Cask, as well an author and wine educator for both private and adult education students. Throughout



Photo by Byron "Felle" Evans

Genetically Modified by Ralph Auf der Heide

GENETICALLY MODIFIED

You may wonder, is it chicken or sheep?
as computers continue to beep
but what can be seen
on a digital screen
may not be what you're willing to keep.

– Lisl Auf der Heide

his life, he also dabbled in various artistic mediums, including jewelry making, ceramics, and aluminum casting.

The collection of Auf der Heide's artwork along with several of Lisl's smart and sassy limericks are on display at CASA Magazine through the month of April. Have fun with it. It's what Ralph would have wanted.

CASA Magazine is located at 23 E. Canon Perdido. Hours are 9am to 5:30pm, Monday through Friday. For more information, call 965-6448.