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Laughing Owl The Way

Maija Peeples-Bright

September 10 to January 7, 2007

The Mutual Tower Gallery



Beastdonna and Child (1970)
handbuilt, glazed ceramic 21" x 22" x 17"



left: BuckBison's Brook (2006)
acrylic and glitter on canvas 24" x 18"

With Laughing Owl the Way, Maija Peeples-Bright - one of the founding artists of the California "funk" movement - exhibits works that are a joyful, irreverent cacophony of colour, image and form. Peeples-Bright was intimately involved with the Regina Clay movement of the 60s and 70s, when clay morphed into a valid sculptural medium that became the vehicle for a creative explosion. Peeples-Bright studied art at UC Davis under a series of luminaries that included William T. Wiley, Robert Arneson and Elaine de Kooning

During the late 1960s, California Funk artist Maija Peeples-Bright (then Maija Gregaris Zack) painted the trim of her Rainbow House in San Francisco's Fillmore District "every color made by Dutch Boy." "The redevelopment people wanted me to paint it beige," says Peeples-Bright. Inside the Victorian residence, her now-famous beasts ranged across the walls in murals, while a larger-than-life papier-mâché crocodile by sculptor David Gilhooly clung to the top story of the painted lady like a reptilian King Kong. Maija Gregaris Zack "Woof" Peeples-Bright possesss the fearlessness of a Viking raider when it comes to what (and how) she may decide to paint.

Still a gamine in her early 60s, she doesn't limit herself to canvas. She paints her shoes, her luggage, her clothes and her house flag. She embroiders on cloth and paints wooden blocks for the Art-O-Mat project (a series of cigarette vending

right: Love in BLoon (2001)
acrylic on canvas and wood 18.5" x 23"



Elephants in Edinburgh (1987)
handbuilt, glazed ceramic 10" x 16" x 16"



Turtle Tetons (1982)
handbuilt, glazed ceramic 12" x 19" x 17"

machines modified to dispense art). Her works on traditional materials such as heavy watercolor paper and large canvases are audacious in color, texture and pattern.

Her ceramics are intricate, colorful and playful. "Her work is very distinct," says Linda Welch of Sacramento's Exploding Head Gallery. "It's a very unique look, and she is like her art in her public persona because she always wears her art. She is her art." Peeples-Bright multitasks from project to project and room to room in her Greenhaven/Pocket Area home, painting, glittering, glazing and moving on. "I do like to work on more than one thing because that just kind of keeps it flowing," says Peeples-Bright. "I don't like to stand there and wait for something to dry." The artist's works convey the constant motion of their creator. Her compositions teem with creatures, both natural and composite, swirling up atavistically from patterned landscapes. There is often a linguistic link between a composition's subject and its corresponding creature. A Roman coliseum Peeples-Bright painted in the mid-'70s is stacked with charming little collies, creating a "collie coliseum."

Peeples-Bright claims she was "a different youngster" while she was growing up, missing a lot of what's considered typical American social life. She emigrated with her parents from Europe when only 9 years old. "We were in the displaced-persons camps in the English zone of Germany from 1946 to 1950," she says. "We weren't exactly prisoners, but we were kind of incarcerated. My folks got sent to work details and I got to kind of play on the big castle walls."

Of her work Peeples Bright states that she believes "Heroes are a great necessity in our time," she says. "Our heroes are getting big clay feet too early... I think a kid would like to believe there's a hero out there." Peeples-Bright's subjects are well-known historical figures (with punful names) that her favorite long-haired half-dachshund (and possible alter ego) Woof W. Woof would have adored, such as "Queen Wooforia and her Lionlamb and Nine Callas" with its accompanying "Queen Wooforia" ceramic bust, and

“Sir Woofac Newton and his Lincoln Longwool Chicken.” Each hero has a composite beast and representative flower. Of course, Woof also appears in every piece, including the busts.

Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery

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