

# Funky figures inhabit 'World of Woof'



By Victoria Dalkey  
Bee Art Correspondent

Close to the entrance to Maija Peeples-Bright's retrospective exhibit at the Blue Line Gallery in Roseville sits a small crate. It held all of the worldly goods of Maija Gergeris' family when they escaped from Latvia, which was soon to be overtaken by the Russians at the end of World War II.

"My parents were teachers and we had heard that the Russians were going to round up intellectuals, so we escaped to a refugee camp in Germany," she recalled.

In 1950, her family found a sponsor in Orangevale and

the family came to the United States. Born in 1942, Peeples-Bright was 8 years old when she came to America. Here she found herself working on a farm, picking olives and peaches.

"I soon found it was harder to get a lug of olives than peaches," she said with a laugh.

Eventually the family found a home at 2012 D St. in Sacramento, and their daughter excelled in school. She won a math scholarship to Sacramento City College, then transferred in 1963 to the University of California, Davis, where her life changed forever.

Taking a required art class from William T. Wiley, she fell in love with making

art and changed her major. The rest is history.

She studied with Wiley, Robert Arneson, Wayne Thiebaud and other members of the prestigious art faculty at the Davis university and soon developed her own style of painting, which came to be associated with the Funk movement that arose in Davis in the 1960s. Wiley had a powerful influence on her.

"He liked me and would share books with me," she recalled. "I kept being late for calculus class, but a class was wonderful."

The show at Blue Line includes Peeples-Bright's earliest work, a 1965 self-portrait that is reminiscent of Matisse's "Woman in

Maija Peeples-Bright's "Sheep Sheiks" illustrates the playful use of color and animal shapes that characterize much of her work.

Blue Line Gallery

Hat." Nearby is a large canvas on which she memorialized the Davis art faculty, with Wiley at the center, looking at a yellow cow. It is wildly expressionistic and a precursor of what was to come.

In 1966, she painted "Beast Hay Stacks," a tribute to Monet in which she combined animal imagery with a patterned landscape. In 1969 she was well on the way to her mature style with "Goose Lady Godiva," a riotous canvas in which Lady Godiva's naked limbs and long hair are made up of geese.

Peeples-Bright was one of the first artists to show at the legendary Candy Store Gallery in Folsom, which was home to Wiley, Arneson, Roy De Forest, David Gilhooly and other prominent Funk artists (or "nut artists" as they preferred to be called).

When she divorced her first husband, David Zack, Peeples-Bright sought refuge

with Adeliza McHugh, the doyenne of the Candy Store. McHugh let her sleep in the gallery while she was looking for a home and would bring bread and coffee to her in the mornings.

"She was like a mother to me," Peeples-Bright said. "I was closer to her than to my own mother."

Soon she found a home in Folsom and secured a teaching job at Sierra College. She met her next husband, Earl Peeples, and they had a long, happy life together that ended in 1999 when Peeples died of cancer. Subsequently she married Bill Bright, who had been a close friend of Peeples. They now live in a home they built themselves in Rocklin, where Maija has a large studio and Bright has a woodworking shop.

Installed by Tony Natsoulas, the show at Blue Line is jammed with vintage and new works by Peeples-Bright, who is a true Sacramento treasure. There are too many works on view, over a hundred, to mention

many in a short space, but some that stand out include a lively scene from 1989 that includes jaguars, jockeys and jasmine and a large diptych that features lions, daffodils and toucans. Also compelling is "Sheep Sheiks," in which the sheiks' bodies are made up of fluffy sheep.

One of the recurring characters in Peeples-Bright's work is Woof, her beloved dog, who is memorialized in the vibrant "Woofus Vitruvius Water Way" done in 2001. Nearby is her tribute to Leonardo da Vinci, "Woofanardo." There is so much joy in these images that you can't help loving them.

The show is accompanied by a video monitor playing "The Spirit of Woofdom," a film by Laurence Camping that tells the story of Peeples-Bright's life and art.

In it, she says, "There is so much to discover and play with. ... It does not interest me to be a chronicler of evil things.

"There are no mistakes in art, just new and different surprises," she concludes.

The generosity of spirit in Peeples-Bright's heavily patterned, thickly textured, joyously colored works is infectious.



Peeples-Bright's "Goose Lady Godiva" from 1969.

## MAIJA PEEPLES-BRIGHT: MAIJA'S WORLD OF WOOF

Where: Blue Line Gallery, 405

Vernon St. No. 100, Roseville

When: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Tuesdays-Saturdays or by

appointment, through July 14

Cost: Free

Information: (916) 783-4117.

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