

Art Licensing

June 2000



Our special issue gives you an inside look at the growing market of Art & Design Licensing, with news, trends, profiles and more

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO

Art Business News

Rip-Roaring Adventures

Leonard Filgate's little mouse is turning into the Big Cheese of the licensing world.

BY JESSICA LYONS
Contributing Editor

CARMEL, Calif.—It all began with a gold jack. A painting of the larger-than-life play toy now hangs in artist Leonard Filgate's brick-walled studio in Carmel, Calif., along with paintings of Rip, Jesse, Abbey and Euripides—the cast of *The Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak*—also known as the Pip Squeaks.

“The jack painting is something I did as a break-away from maritime and landscapes,” Filgate explained. “It’s painted from the viewpoint of these toys—if a child laid his head on a rug, this would be from the child’s-eye view, or even a

bug’s-eye view.”

Pip Squeaks, fanciful elfin creatures with pointy rodent ears emerged, but the galleries labeled the creatures too serious, and a little scary. Some said painting babies was safe, but Filgate and his wife, writer Susan Yost-Filgate wanted to create an original animal character, “because the appeal of animals crosses racial barriers and ethnic barriers,” Leonard said.

So they went to work, developing a mouse, distinct from Disney’s grandfather of all mice and without delving into the realm of Hanna-Barbera animation.

A sister-mouse, a friendly cat and a thespian frog would follow.



“The Golfer” by Leonard Filgate

His background was in maritime art, and the vessels Filgate painted each had a distinct story in history.

“We thought perhaps we can create a theme, a backdrop to tell the story,” Leonard said.

“We added a cat,” Susan said. “We wanted to emphasize getting along with differences. We don’t have to be the same to be friends.”

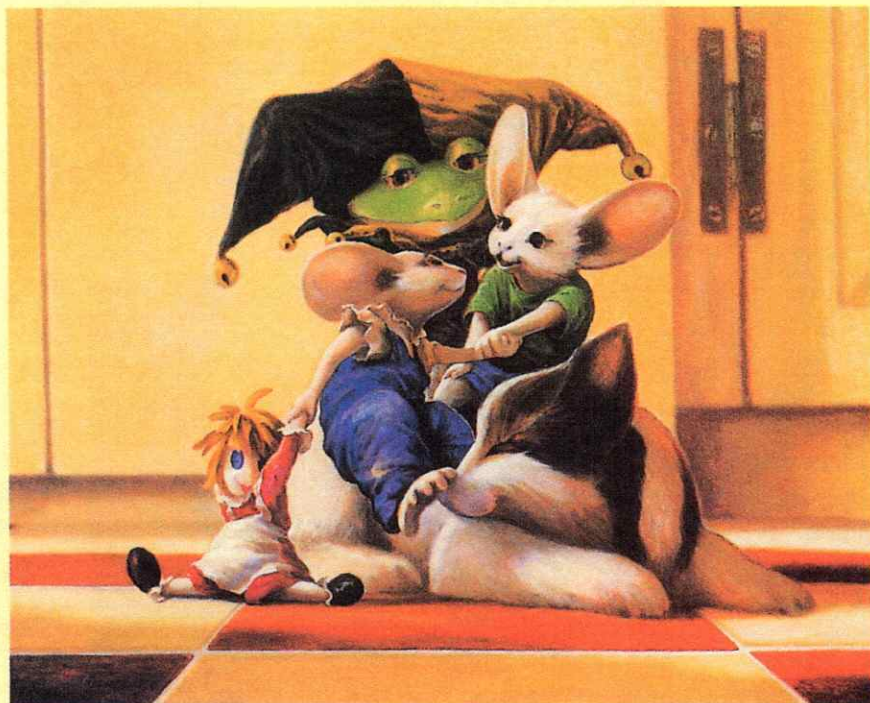
And that’s how Rip Squeak was born.

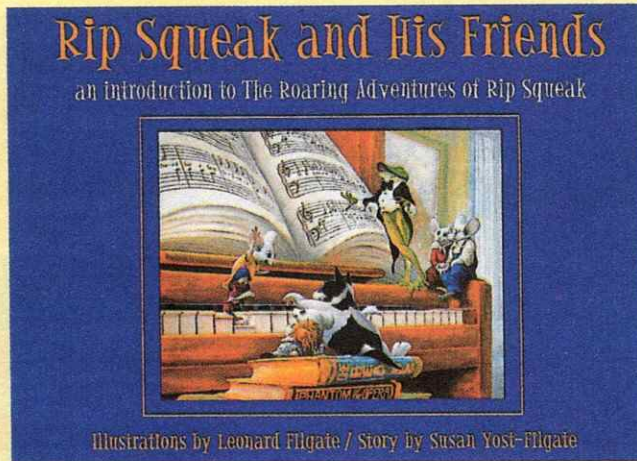
Susan writes the story lines for *Rip Squeak and His Friends* and *The Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak* while Leonard illustrates characters Rip, his younger sister Jesse (named after Leonard and Susan’s daughter, Jessica), an abandoned cat Abbey, and a unique frog Euripides, the amphibian version of Sir Lawrence Olivier.

“These buddies get together and have a good time,” Leonard said. “They seek out adventures.”

The unlikely crew made their debut at the Arexpo New York in March 1998

“Getting a Lift” by Leonard Filgate





Rip Squeak and His Friends is the book that launched the Filgates' beloved characters.

and at the Licensing Show in New York in June of that same year.

Since then, the original illustrations have been reproduced in a series of four posters, 15 limited-edition giclée prints on canvas, and three limited-edition lithographs, published and licensed by Rip Squeak Inc. A coffee table book, *Rip Squeak and His Friends—an Introduc-*

tion to the Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak, has been published in English by Rip Squeak Inc. and in German by Baumhaus Medien and are available at galleries in the U.S. and Europe.

Rip Squeak and friends decorate greeting cards, collector figurines, a CD, bookmarks, a 2001 calendar and a postcard book will soon follow. Television and

movie rights, and picture books are in the pipeline as well.

And while the adventures of Rip and his pals are essentially positive stories or harmony, understanding and tolerance, they are not without a healthy dose of reality.

"Some of the stories get a little dangerous," Susan admitted. "There are foes, but we feel children are sophisticated enough for that."

"There's not too much icing," Leonard added.

Indeed, both the story line and the artwork are unusually sophisticated for children's books. A painting of Rip, clothed in a yellow shirt, red tennis shoes and jeans, looks equally at home on the Filgate studio wall, as it would in a gallery, and on the pages of a children's storybook. It's that same timeless individuality—reminiscent of such childhood greats

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Paul Brent

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Applejack

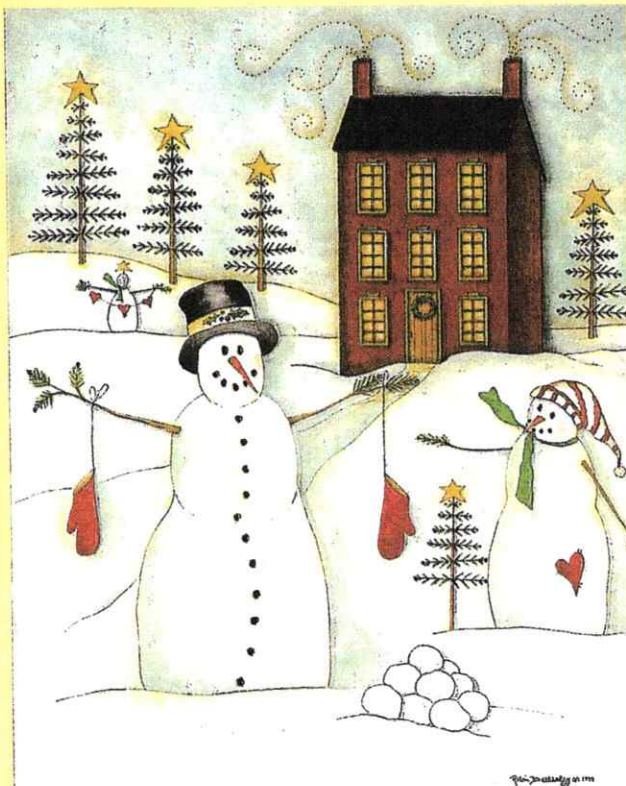
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turning Applejack artist's prints into puzzles for several years. One of the early success stories is the artist Heronim, Tidrick said. Heronim's first image in the puzzle line came in 1997. Three years later, his Americana landscapes cover more than 18 puzzles in Warren Industries 1,000-piece line, and the mini-mailers, tiny 500-piece mail-able puzzles,

"For the puzzler on the run," Tidrick said, admitting, "Sometimes I need that."

"Heronim's images have that emotional appeal, they have a lot of colors and details. His works lends itself to a good puzzle."

And a good licensee, Wheeler said.

"We look for artists who have a large body of work, whose style and technique we see as applicable to the market, and who has something really unique and different. A big component is someone who is hun-



Robin Betterly's licensed work decorates greeting cards, floor mats, crock pots and more.

gry to build a profile in the market."

And make someone's day a little brighter, through a greeting card, a calendar, a mail-able puzzle or a splashy pair of dragon-print tights. **AL**

Rip Squeak

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as Beatrix Potter, Roald Dahl and Charles Schulz—that attracted licensing contracts. Which also allows Leonard and Susan to do what they love.

"This is what gets me up in the morning," Leonard admitted.

They haven't lost track of why they created Rip.

"Licensing allows Leonard's art to reach a broader audience," Susan said. "When an artist just does original paintings, not too many people get to see the original."

"Essentially, what is important to us, is that the book is out there for the kids and their parents," Leonard added. "Other artists who have gone into licensing have taken 10 years."

Indeed, it's been a speedy ride up on the Rip Squeak express. In just three short years, Rip Squeak Inc. has produced more than 700 limited-edition prints, and 1,500 book copies.

Why this sudden popularity?

"I think Leonard is an incredibly talented artist. He's created these images that have a classic appeal, that are very endearing and that sells it," Susan said.

Leonard takes a more modest approach.

"A lot of galleries didn't want to touch [Rip Squeak] with a 10 foot pole because he was so different," Leonard said. "Artists so often have the creativity and the vision, but if you don't have the outlet, your art is not going to leave your walls. We are lucky. We had the material ready, and the right person saw it. It's begin ready for any opportunity and putting your best foot forward."

Or best paw, in Rip's case. **AL**

Colorful, contemporary, and exotic images of Birds, Bugs, Fruits, Flowers, and Sealife by California artist and designer Johnny Karwan.

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