

Thinking

Big

LEONARD FILGATE

takes his tiny subject matter to new heights.

Leonard Filgate may stand 6 feet, 5 inches tall, but he has a keen sense of miniature forms.

Filgate, who has painted such large objects as naval vessels, recently turned his attention to four very tiny subjects: two mice, a cat and a frog, who make up the cast of *The Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak™*, a children's story that Filgate's wife, Susan, wrote.

The tale revolves around a mouse named Rip Squeak™, his sister Jesse, Abbey, a cat looking for friendship, and Euripides, a frog who is an actor,

artist and teacher.

Filgate says the size of the subject matter all depends on your perspective. "When I was a sailor, we would always be looking at things on a different level," he explains. "We would be right there in the water looking up at a large ship—that's a very dramatic effect."

Now, Filgate uses that experience to create a sense of drama. His characters experience things from more of a bug's-eye-view and he uses familiar everyday objects to illustrate

their stories. From Filgate's point of view, giving the gift of images and stories to children is one of the most important things he can do with his art.

"I want to add something positive to the world," he says. "I like the idea of using adventure without violence and allowing kids to be kids."

Filgate and his wife, who live in Carmel, Calif., frequently reminisce about their childhood experiences, using them as the building blocks for their stories, illustrations and prints. Now 52, Filgate still has



memories of the adventure stories that impacted his youth, including television shows like "Davy Crockett" and "Hopalong Cassidy," stories like *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Of Mice and Men*, and movies like Disney's *Fantasia*.

He also attributes a great deal of his artistic knowledge to *Harper's Magazine* illustrator Maxfield Parrish, art-nouveau painter Gustav Klimt and even Leonardo da Vinci. Filgate notes that his art is a constant learning process, one that continues to evolve.

He uses acrylics instead of the oils he once favored and has changed the tones in his palette. He changed his medium, he says, when his now 15 year old daughter, Jessica, came into his life—"Acrylics are] a lot safer because babies tend to get into things." The change in colors, meanwhile, reflects the brighter moods of children's illustrations. "It had a lot to do with who I'm painting for," he says. "When I do each painting, I think of the kids."

And Filgate also still looks to his own inner child for inspiration. He notes that of all the *Rip Squeak™* characters, he relates best to Euripides, who he describes as gregarious, outgoing and fun-loving.

"People say I'm rather animated when I let loose," Filgate says with a chuckle.

—Lisa Thiels



"Out of Order" by Leonard Filgate.