

Book Review by Peggy Kinstler

Rip Squeak and His Friends and Pirate Tales and More

By Susan Yost-Filgate

Illustrated by Leonard Filgate

Introductions by Sheri Barnes & Lois Sarkisian

Rip Squeak, Inc.

Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA

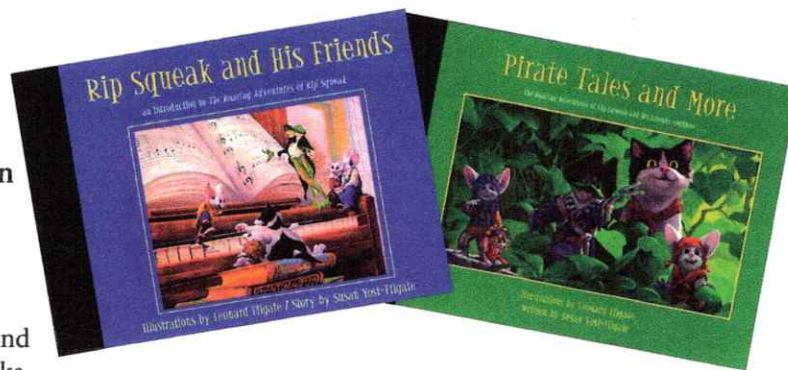
64 pages each

On the surface *Rip Squeak and His Friends* and *Pirate Tales and More* look like typical children's books, but once inside, it becomes clear that the volumes are as much about art as they are about Rip and Jesse, two mice; Euripides the frog; and Abbey the kitty. By far, the majority of pages in each book is devoted to lush reproductions of Leonard Filgate's paintings (mostly acrylics) of this melange of pals and their innocent adventures.

Pirate Tales and More, the second in the series with more promised to come, should probably be read first as it covers the creative process behind the books, gives examples of how Filgate's sketches grow into the finished works, and tells how this husband-and-wife team came to pool their talents in the character of Rip Squeak.

In the forward, Susan Yost-Filgate, wife and writer, gives a brief history of the collaboration with her husband Leonard. "In November 1997, the first original painting in the series sold within days after it was put on display. From the very beginning, people asked for the story that went with the 'story-telling art.'" The story, *Rip Squeak and His Friends*, was first published in German and finally in English in 2001. *Pirate Tales*, also published in 2001, has no story, as its focus is the art. It includes a section about *Rip Squeak and His Friends* with images not included in that first picture book, and a preview of the third volume (the second children's picture book) *The Treasure*, which is due out later this year.

From the forward of *Pirate Tales* is a summary of the philosophy behind this series. "As writer and illustrator, we have tried to keep a certain thread in all we do with Rip and his friends. Rip Squeak has been a charac-



"Leonard's work, from first glance, is timeless," she writes in the introduction. "The Rip Squeak stories remind me of what I find missing in so many of today's children's books. Partnered with the texts of Leonard's wife and soulmate Susan Yost-Filgate, the stories of the shy yet curious young mouse Rip Squeak, his playful little sister Jesse, and their friends Euripides and Abbey become contemporary in a style that is emotionally correct, but never needlessly or obnoxiously hip."

For the art lover, the most intriguing parts of *Pirate Tales* are the sketches – of the characters, of the house and grounds where the stories happen, and the wonderful sketches that were the thinking behind the painting "The Musicians." It's fun to see how Leonard gets these characters and compositions from his imagination (he has no models in real life) to paper and finally into a painting that tells a story that Susan has written or one that he simply imagines.

The first book *Rip Squeak and His Friends* begins like any child's book with a story illustrated by fun pictures of cute little critters viewing the world from close to the ground. Then the story is over, but the book is not. One turns the following pages and finds an abundance of artwork, illustrations previously seen amid the story text, and more, all in generous, full-page format. The images are able to stand on their own as charming pieces of art, but they also connect back to the story with captions from the text. The Filgates have quite seamlessly woven a children's picture book with a coffee table art book, creating something all...