

# in TOWN TAMPA

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## Exhibit, storybook illustrate message on tolerance for kids

**TAMPA** – MacArthur Galleries is host to an assortment of animals depicted in acrylic paintings and as characters in a new book.

By **ESTHER HAMMER**  
Tribune correspondent

There's a mouse in the house. And a cat and a frog, too.

They're all over the walls of MacArthur Galleries in downtown Tampa. As paintings, drawings and prints, of course.

Depicted in vivid colors are Rip Squeak, the mouse, his sister Jesse, a cat named Abbey and Euripides, the frog.

The creatures are the joint creations of Leonard and Susan Filgate, a husband-and-wife artist-and-writer team from California. They are taking the idea of diversity and tolerance into the realm of children's books.

"Our characters are all about getting along despite differences," said the painter and writer via e-mail.

"The mice seemed a natural small animal to play with toys. We liked the idea of having a cat in our little group because cats are the natural enemies of mice," they added.

The duo have recently published an art book, "Rip Squeak and His Friends: An Introduction to the Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak," featuring 61 pages of tender-hearted text augmented by more than 30 full-page color illustrations. The limited edition book is self-published and sells for \$35 in a selected market that does not yet include bookstores.

"For now, we wish to keep the art book exclusive for our galleries, our Web site, etc.," the Filgates said.

The illustrations are what cap-

tured the interest of MacArthur Galleries owner Deborah MacArthur.

"I collect children's antiquated storybooks. On a trip to New York over a year ago, I came across Rip Squeak," MacArthur said.

She brought some original drawings back and hung them in her office. She got such a positive response to them she decided to bring the Filgates to Florida.

### The show

■ **WHO:** Leonard and Susan Filgate, artist and author team.

■ **WHAT:** Reception and exhibit for their children's book and its paintings.

■ **WHEN:** Opening: 6 to 9 p.m. Friday. Exhibit: through April 16.

■ **WHERE:** MacArthur Galleries, 100 Madison St. at Ashley Drive in downtown Tampa. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

■ **COST:** Admission to the gallery is free.

Friday through April 16, MacArthur Galleries will host an exclusive Florida show and sale of the Rip Squeak book and of the fanciful illustrations that fill it.

Leonard Filgate's work has been called "storytelling art" and, as such, is usually not found in traditional art galleries.

Gallery director Sophia Nakis said, "Deborah and I both believe strongly in illustrators. We both fall in love with the narrative quality of illustration."

The Filgates will be at the opening reception from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday to meet the public and sign copies of their book. Also at the opening will be two actors from

Stageworks, a nonprofit professional theater company in Tampa.

Jessy Leros and Nathan Burton will perform a variety of theatrical and musical numbers that emphasize the theme of diversity. MacArthur Galleries will donate a portion of the opening night art sales to Stageworks.

MacArthur has also donated copies of the book and a framed illustration to Orange Grove Middle School for the Arts, Philip Shore Elementary School of the Arts, and the Tampa Downtown Partnership Elementary School.

The gallery hopes through Rip Squeak to become a resource for schools and children, connecting learning with art.

"I wanted the children to know about the book's important message, which is diversity through art," Nakis said.

For their part, some of the children made finger puppets depicting the characters found in the book. The puppets will sell for \$10 each opening night only, and all proceeds will go to the Hillsborough County Council of the International Reading Association, a literacy advocacy group.

The Filgates, also strong literacy advocates, like to share their success.

"We often work with charities in different cities donating a portion of profits back to charity," they said.

In Tampa, throughout the exhibit, all proceeds from Rip Squeak sales will go to the Rotary Club of Tampa to help purchase and distribute school books in the Bay Area.

"So every time somebody buys a book, they're placing a book in the hands of a child," Nakis said.

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