

Tinfo, painter with many hats

By Zoe Yudice, reporter@mendocinobeacon.com, [@MendocinoBeacon](#) on Twitter

Thursday, April 28, 2016



Walking into Ilja Tinfo's studio it is hard to imagine all of the work comes from the same artist. There is a wide range of pieces from abstract surrealist paintings to still-lives to sculptures.

Tinfo has been painting ever since his uncle, who was an animator, gave him a set of oil paints as a teenager, and he has continued to paint off and on throughout his life. For the last seven or eight years now since he's retired from construction work, Tinfo has been able to focus exclusively on painting.

Some of Tinfo's best known work is his abstract surrealist paintings, which he is attracted to for its creative freedom.

"I have always liked to see what happens. Soon as you make a brush stroke that will lead to something else, and that will lead to something else and it keeps building until you get something or you don't," said Tinfo.

Since coming to Mendocino, his work has evolved in style, medium and subject matter.

Tinfo moved to California from Manhattan in 1975 after a high school friend, who had purchased 20 acres in Philo, invited him to come help him on his land.

"I was ready to get out of New York. I was living a hard, fast life. I had a good job, made good money but I wanted go to California and I wanted another motorcycle, and where is a better place than California to have a motorcycle?," said Tinfo.

After spending some time in Philo, he made his way up to Mendocino when his money ran out, and found a job at the Sea Gull Cafe.

"I came out here and found all these interesting objects on the beach and I started putting them together to make paintings, and then I discovered the rocks down in Salt Point and I started painting them," he said.

Tinfo will be exhibiting a collection of his rock paintings - old and new work - at The Restaurant in Fort Bragg in May.

When asked what it is about these rocks that attract him, he says it is their beautiful form.

Form has also influenced his most recent work, which are paintings of distressed antique sculptures mostly from the Parthenon.

“The forms fascinate me, I think they are just striking,” said Tinfo.

Tinfo is also working on copies of paintings by the “Old Masters” and contemporary master paintings, and a series of still-lives with Mickey Mouse

“My paintings tends to be enigmatic,” Tinfo says.

“It is all unconscious. I am not trying to make them weird or strange. I don’t know what I am doing, but I just do it and keep doing it and something comes out of it. I won’t let it go unless I think it’s something worth looking at. I just hope whoever looks at it finds it intriguing, interesting and wants to keep looking at it,” explains Tinfo.

Tinfo’s collection of rock paintings being exhibited at The Restaurant will be available for viewing starting on ‘First Friday,’ May 6.

URL: <http://www.mendocinobeacon.com/general-news/20160428/tinfo-painter-with-many-hats>

© 2016 Mendocino Beacon (<http://www.mendocinobeacon.com>)