

Style[®]

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I find that in America we worship all things youthful, so I would say that contemporary style is defined by what my 15 year old daughter wears...

Unfortunately I have never been to Monte-Carlo, so I am unable to describe it. However, if you would like to send me a plane ticket, I'd be happy to come over and give you my two cents worth!

- Mark Ulriksen
for Style Monte-Carlo - San Francisco, September 2007





WEST COAST IRREVERENCE

...Mark Ulriksen specialises in figurative work that blends humor with psychological insight

by Stacy Cohen

on the melody of "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down" by The Three Stooges

In an art world teeming with overt gravity, it often seems that whimsy is what keeps the community and the people who love it, tethered to the earth, in all its outrageous, vigorous humor. Some artists and creators are downright masters at blurring the line between modern, visual wit and the wisdom and absurdity of daily life in the 21st century, but one of our absolute masters at it is illustrator Mark Ulriksen. Typifying the laid-back, relaxed oeuvre that is life on the West Coast, Ulriksen is a visual story-teller, coupling a decidedly urban subject matter and sensibility with what makes the art scene on the West Coast what it is: approachable, enigmatic, sophisticated, smart, and just plain fun. A regular contributor to the New Yorker's cover, Ulriksen's work often forces the viewer to do a double-take, whether his inspiration is politics, his beloved dogs, modern life or the simple magnificence that is 1950s jazz; we spoke with him recently to get his take on his work, his enthusiasm, and his admiration for Helen Mirren...

"I live in San Francisco and the light here certainly affects me, I get inspired all the time by the wealth of visual stimulation modern life provides. My wife's photography, movies, studying people in the neighbourhood, postcards and packaging from foreign lands. I just returned from a trip to Spain, France and Italy so I have much to digest. I find contrast is a necessary condition for understanding life, I love juxtaposing elements in my work, be it scale, colour or emotions. But nothing inspires me quite as much as seeing a painting, whether on the walls of a gallery or museum, or in the studios of my peers. I get inspired basically twice a day... around 10am when I start my working day and at bedtime when I am thinking about what I would like to work on the next day. I try never to work on holiday, I work enough as it is.

Like all things aesthetic, tacky is in the eye of the beholder. Tacky is often appreciated for its irony, my tacky could be your glamorous and vice versa. Just look at the work of Jeff Koons... If I could chose to be anyone or anything, I would chose to be an eagle. I would love to be able to fly and it would be doubly nice to be at the top of the food chain. Or otherwise, I would be Italian football star Fabio Cannavaro. But the culture that I am most inspired by is the culture of film. I watch plenty of movies and the compositions, colour and emotions of film is probably the major influence on my work. The movie "Hud", a black and white film from the 1960s has been on my mind a lot lately. Practically every other scene made me gasp with its visual poetry. It's very graphic, very minimal... The actors who to me represent a timeless quality are Cary Grant and Helen Mirren, these are people who will live on long after they have gone. They prove that greatness still exists, whether the masses know about it or not, but I do agree that the media help to spread the word. If I was an actor, I wouldn't mind playing Ms Mirren's lover! Any creative pursuit, be it art, acting or whatever is a calling. Once any creative pursuit becomes just a job, then you have lost the "calling"... To me, the essence of being an actor is the ability to look in the mirror and see your character. If you are George W. Bush, it would be the ability to never look in the mirror..."