

# Peter Lee Brownlee @ 90

by StuArt

Peter Brownlee will be 90 years old on Christmas Day. He's no saint but he is an amazing larger-than-life character. He manifests the style and liberalism of San Francisco (where he was born and raised) mixed with the toughness and tenacity of the Merchant Marine and New York City. Peter has spent much of that time painting his surroundings in a "naive style" that is colorful and lively. Sometimes called a cake decorator because of the way he likes to glop paint on his canvases, I like to think of him as a hip Grandma Moses.

I spoke with Wendy Elkin about the documentary she is making about Peter Lee. She met Peter a number of years ago when she was working for the Mill Valley Art Commission. Wendy saw Peter's colorful postcards at the Book Depot and asked if he would donate some cards for a fundraiser.

"I was so touched by Peter's generosity that I took him a big bouquet of sunflowers." Wendy said.

Wendy wanted to do something for Peter and she teamed up with Linas Phillips, a young filmmaker from New York City to do a film portrait of the 90 year old painter.

"Linas and I met thru my husband Wayne. Wayne was at the Arco station in Mill Valley and Linas was doing his movie "Walking to Werner" - a 1200 mile walking pilgrimage from Seattle to Los Angeles to Werner Herzog's home. Its about Linas' pilgrimage and the characters he met along the way. Wayne was one of the characters in the film. It won lots of awards in the film festival circuit."

Wendy and Linas discovered that you can't really talk about Peter Lee without showing Bolinas and the film has spilled over into portraying the colorful cast of characters that surround the painter "Like a king in his court." Wendy told me.

The theme of the film has evolved into a story about the trials and tribulations of presenting an art exhibit by 90 year old Peter Lee Brownlee. Wendy arranged to have a showing of Peter Lee's artwork at the O'Hanlon Center for the Arts in Mill Valley (616 Throckmorton Ave.) She has managed to assemble 14 original paintings of San Francisco, New York, Bolinas, Sausalito and Mill Valley.

The opening reception for Peter Lee's show is this Sunday from 1-5pm at the O'Hanlon Center. The opening is actually a staged event for the film, and everyone present will be asked to sign a release. Wendy hopes that the exhibit at the O'Hanlon Center will encourage a patron of the arts to step forward and offer to sponsor a larger show of Peter Lee's art in the Spring.

"I hope Peter's Bolinas friends show up for the opening." Wendy said. "Linas and I are looking for a colorful, lively culmination to "Peter Lee Brownlee, A Celebration of the Human Spirit."