



ILA ROSE WITH HER FIRST PUBLIC MURAL IN THE WHITEAKER AT 5TH ALLEY AND BLAIR BOULEVARD

PHOTO BY ATHENA DELENE

POSTER CHILD

Artist Ila Rose makes her mark with the 2016 Oregon Country Fair poster

The Oregon Country Fair poster is as much of an institution as the Fair itself. Around May each year, the OCF poster committee reveals the winning design and, like a harbinger of summer, it becomes increasingly ubiquitous, pinned to bulletin boards and taped to storefronts around the region.

Artist Ila Rose had submitted work to the committee in the past, to no avail. This year, she nabbed the commission — in a year that, according to the poster committee, had a record-breaking number of submissions.

The timing seems right. Rose (née Ila Kriegh) grew up in Eugene and, after leaving home to suss out the art scenes of Portland and San Diego, she's returned, and seems primed to make a mark in her hometown.

"It's a big deal," Rose says of the OCF poster commission. She sits in a gravel parking lot in the Whiteaker where the juicy colors of a mural she's working on pop behind her. The mural is another local commission — this one for the Whiteaker Community Art Team. The consummate artist, her jeans, arms and face are speckled with paint.

"I'm from Eugene. My art totally fits the vibe. I relate to the land and environment."

Rose is right. Her concepts lean trippy, spiritual and environmental. Flora and fauna are prominent but, while fitting the local vibe, Rose also elevates a Eugene aesthetic that often falls into an echo chamber of decoration and craft. The work Rose creates is sophisticated, haunting, ethereal. There's urgency to it, evoking a feeling that this artist will have things to say with her brush for years to come.

"Painting is something I'm compelled to do," Rose says. "I wouldn't be myself if I wasn't painting."

And it's this community that has helped cultivate her career, Rose says. Her family

embraced her as an artist from a young age, and she credits her fifth grade teacher Merrill Watrous, with whom she remains close, for encouraging her to pursue it.

Even while chatting in the Whiteaker parking lot, local artist Kiki Metzler — a mentor, or as Rose puts it, her "artist mamma" — stops by to check on the mural's progress.

And the list of community partners who donated scaffolding, food and time is too long rattle off here. Rose says some of the neighborhood's homeless people have brought food, helped move equipment and generally kept her company. They also guarded the mural, she says, after someone spray-painted a large tag on it that she had to fix.

Fellow artists Nathan Vieland, Wendy Kai, Bayne Gardner and the Whiteaker Community Art Team helped prep and paint the wall. Metzler and fellow muralist Kari Johnson, another of Rose's artist mammas, helped brainstorm the concept.

Metzler's daughter, Kia Metzler, is Rose's "artist sister" and another confidante in creativity. The two may (wink wink) make a secret appearance in the OCF poster, in which Rose painted in acrylic a hybrid heron-dragon clenching in its blue, leathery talons that iconic peach. She's drawn to dualities, darkness and light — a common theme in her work — she says of the creature, as well as the reclined figure in the mural.

In the background, Rose — who doesn't describe herself as "Fair Family" but has been attending OCF since she was a child — captures perfectly the hazy, dust-filled sunshine that hangs over the paths of the fairgrounds, undulating with bodies.

Looking at the poster, it's clear that summer, and Rose, have not only returned, they've arrived.

Ila Rose will be signing posters at the Oregon Country Fair where the original acrylic painting of the OCF poster will be on auction. Rose is also preparing new work for her solo September show, "Coniunctio," opening Sept. 9 at Portland's Rising Room Gallery. See more of Rose's work at ilarose.com.