

1974 CAP WINNER O'SICKEY'S WORK HAILED IN BUCHAREST

An exhibition at Youngstown's Butler Institute of American Art that paired work by acclaimed painter [Joseph B. O'Sickey](#) and his late wife, soft sculptor Algesa D'Agostino O'Sickey is still commanding attention in Europe. A lengthy piece on last fall's show that appeared in *Ziarul du Duminica*, in Bucharest, Rumania, has been reprinted in its entirety in the respected literary magazine *Observer Cultural*. Now 92, O'Sickey, whom Steve Litt has called "the dean of painting in northeast Ohio," has made his home, since 1968, in Twin Lakes (near Kent), Ohio.

Excerpts from "O valentina pentru Algesa," by Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, *Observer Cultural* (January 2011):

Joseph and Algesa O'Sickey, two artists of international reputation, have been reunited, four years after her death in 2006, in a memorable joint exhibition. Taking its title from an original card he made for her that is reproduced on the catalog's cover, *A Valentine for Algesa* celebrates the love and the 60-year partnership that produced the art of this extraordinary couple.

Several of Joseph's drawings and paintings explore the world of the circus: Bathed in light, performers cavort, clowns and animal trainers go about their business, tigers' eyes shine like spotlights. O'Sickey's use of unmodulated colors and sharply delineated "flat" areas suggest collage in a way that recalls the turn-of-the-century Russian art movement *Mir Iskusstva*, while Algesa's drawings and watercolors put one in mind of ancient Greek vases decorated with black and red figures, and the allusive symbolism of Aubrey Beardsley.

Joseph O'Sickey is a colorist of great strength and talent: His gardens vibrate and glitter as though caressed by a startled breeze—while Algesa has traded chisel and ébauchoir for scissors and sewing machine to create whimsical soft-sculpture figures of the "Heroes" of her youth as an avid reader and puppeteer: Shakespeare wields a jester's stick festooned with bells; Chopin sports an elegant dressing gown; a spindle-thin D. H. Lawrence leans naked, except for chestnut beard and pubis, against a huge open book; Matisse, in striped pajamas, works with a scissors at one of his collages as if seized by inspiration in the middle of the night.

Joseph's earlier oils feature stark silhouettes of hawks, peacocks and ravens against a blue, green or ocher background that are less colorful, more cryptic, and rendered in darker shades, than the beasts in the Circus series. These eerie birds have an apprehensive quality about them; they would work as illustrations for Edgar Allan Poe. O'Sickey's gazelle, a descendant of the great he-goat in Goya's *Los caprichos*, presents an arresting contrast with Algesa's first soft sculptures, which were assembled from bits of dolls and toys rescued from garbage cans. Staring from their plump porcelain faces, these fragile creatures wear feathers, hats with veils, and elegant 1920s ballroom shoes adorned with shining pearls and sequins.

In the enormous workshop the couple shared, Algesa's workspace has been left unchanged, untouched. She was, and clearly continues to be, a spiritual presence whose palpable lightness of being (she bore a strong resemblance to Audrey Hepburn) both anchored and energized her husband's daring explorations of new paths and sometimes scary visions. This couple knew how to live the life of art.