



B-More Unique

by Matt Hansen

B-MORE UNIQUE: STORIES FROM BALTIMORE'S MOST FASCINATING PEOPLE
FEATURING... DR. BOB HIERONIMUS

From his album art for a who's who of artists in the 1960s to his Baltimore art cars of today, from his investigations into The Beatles to explorations of the occult in America, Dr. Bob Hieronimus has never ceased to stun, enthrall and educate both his home city and the world throughout his winding and offbeat career — even stopping along the way to paint the "Apocalypse Mural" at our own Levering Hall. Now at the forefront of the biodiesel crusade in Baltimore, Hieronimus tells his story here:



"When Chester Wickwire [Chaplain of Hopkins] asked me to do the Levering Hall mural, I was painting album covers for Elektra Records. The record people used to tell me that Jimmy Morrison "could see through his fingers," stuff like that to keep me interested. I was getting paid 100 bucks an album cover and going on the road with bands like Hendrix and The Doors, then coming home to my cold studio with the rats bigger than cats and painting. I didn't want to do the mural at first but Chester was a great guy — he had defended me when I was almost locked up for painting a 12-foot coffin with the American eagle in it, an attack against corporations — so I agreed to paint it in 1968. I lived on the floor of Levering and painted. It was great because they paid me enough so I could finally eat — in those days, you didn't think about women, you thought about food. There were plenty of women but none of them could cook."



"Not soon after I finished the Levering mural, the grad students decided that they wanted a mural in their building, which was McCoy Hall at the time. They paid me \$250 plus all the burgers I could eat. I painted an interpretation of the Kaballah, which was still really unknown at the time. It was great being with the grad students because many of them were from the Far East and translated my words into Sanskrit for the painting. At the end of the day, really only the foreign grad students understood what I was doing."



"Baltimore never liked me. All my books, all my paintings have been released first in Europe. Baltimore was treacherous. In 1967, I painted my first art car. Old ladies would hit me with their umbrellas when I got out of my car, and call me a "hippie son of a bitch." The neighborhoods we lived in were the slums, because the black people there knew you were lower than even they were and accepted you. There were certain neighborhoods you just never went into, and those were the nice parts of town."



"I was invited to [Nixon's] Vice President Agnew's daughter's wedding. His daughter and I were good friends. I told her not to invite me because Nixon was there. Sure enough, when I arrived, the Secret Service grabbed me and wouldn't let me in. Finally, after talking to her, they relented. Nevertheless, the elderly women told me that I was ruining Towson with my presence. It was like that everywhere I went in those days."



"I'm so glad to see Baltimore's art scene growing today. I really believe it's one of the main reasons for Baltimore's growth. Everybody is an artist, I believe. When you make art, though it sounds corny as hell, you make contact with who you really are. We need as much of that as we can get these days. Artists are the only ones who aren't screwed to the wall."

— "Bob Hieronimus: a retrospective exhibit" is currently being displayed at the Baltimore Jewish Community Center.

