

Love of animals, Arizona guides painter's work

Paintings by Ann Coe

Through Dec. 29 at the Elaine Horwitch Gallery, 4211 N. Marshall Way, Scottsdale. Information: 945-0791.

By Kiana Dicker

Tribune correspondent

As the sun shoots its fiery farewells over the Superstition Mountains, a woman and her dog walk the desert foothills.

Amber light bounces off the rocks and illuminates her crown of Celtic curls.

From her adobe-style Apache Junction home, Anne Coe, accompanied by her wolf-dog Virginia Wolf (known as Wolfy to her friends), wanders the desert seeking inspiration for her paintings.

Her trademark images of mutant gila monsters and coyotes joy-riding in pink Cadillacs, painted in bright acrylics, have a humorous ecological message.

Usually, she paints in series, each image a chapter in an unfolding story.

Last year, her work depicted a fable of untamable coyotes wreaking havoc in her Santa Fe-style home, an idea that grew from an incident when Wolfy ate the food just before guests arrived for a dinner party.

However, in her latest show, Coe has broken this tradition. "There is not one story



Anne Coe's acrylic on canvas *Space Age Diner*.

here," she says. "I've gone on an exploration researching different animals, which has produced a technical realism."

This expanded animal vocabulary extends to the tropical zone, underwater scenes from Baja and bears breaking into diners.

But the Southwest theme is also present. "I'm a daughter of the Southwest," Coe says. "I'm a regional painter — and proud of it. I've traveled and lived in other countries, but

I'll never leave (the Southwest). And I love all animals."

The desert is in Coe's blood. A rare breed, she is a fourth-generation Arizonan on both sides of her family. Her great-grandparents were medical missionaries to the Pima Indians.

One of the reasons Coe has broadened her geographical range in subject matter for this show is that she is lending support to four

small, local ecological groups.

A percentage of sales will benefit the Arizona Rainforest Alliance, PAWS (Preserve Arizona Wolves, a group that is striving to reintroduce the Mexican wolf back into Arizona wilderness areas), Friends of Arizona Rivers and Arizonans for Safety and Humanity on Public Lands. She has designed T-shirts for PAWS and the Rainforest Alliance.

A deeply committed environmental activist, Coe has allowed the focus of each group to influence her painted images. Inspired by the Friends of Arizona Rivers, *Another Arizona Water Project* portrays giant mutant gila monsters destroying Adam.

"Although the subject matter is serious," Coe says, "I'm never pompous. These paintings are not made to make people feel guilty but joyous. My work is full of hope, as I am in life."

Arizonans for Safety and Humanity on Public Lands are working to have leg-hold trapping outlawed. This is an issue dear to Coe's heart after Wolfy was caught in a leg-hold trap from which it took 10 people to release her.

In *When Good Dogs Have Bad Dreams*, Wolfy sleeps on a crimson couch with all of the elements of a canine nightmare surrounding her, from scorpions to snakes. At the base of the sofa are two open leg-hold traps.