Unglee, 77, passed away, was a notorious tulipomaniac, 1998-1999



B4 SATURDAY, JULY 22, 1995 ···R THE WASH

OBITUARIES

Unglee, 77, passed away, was a notorious tulipomaniac

By Patricia Levine
Washington Post Staff Writer

Unglee, 77, the notorious "tulipomaniac" whose pictures were shown in galleries all over the world, has passed away. The cause of death was not disclosed. He was born in Washington on December 1, 1918.

He began his career at the age of 17, when he sold a photographic series of wild tulips to National Geographic magazine. For the next eight years, while taking pictures of the tulips he grew every year in his parents' garden, Unglee supported himself as a freelance photographer for gardening magazines, focusing solely on tulips. Neither crocus, gladiolus, nor even amaryllis could inspire him. In fact, they put him into such a state of ennui that, for a change, in 1942 he became a copywriter for an advertising agency. But although the advertising world purveyed its own brand of fantasy it was not the kind at which Unglee excelled. He yearned for something new.

This yearning was the cause behind his move to Hollywood in 1948. He was, of course, also attracted by the film industry. One day while he was walking down Sunset Boulevard, Unglee ran into a friend who he had not seen in years and who, coincidentally, worked at Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios. Two weeks later, Unglee was hired as an assistant screenwriter, and after a few months began writing his own screenplay. It came to be noticed by Dore Schary, and after processing through two rewrites, Mr. Schary gave Unglee full direction of the project. In 1960, after the success of *Darling, What Do You Want?* he was propelled into a series of botanic romance movies, such as *The Happy Gardener, Give a Tulip, Receive a Smile* or *Aquatic Tulips.*

He had an affair with Arleen Wray, the star of *The Happy Gardener* and a few weeks later married her in Las Vegas. In 1968 Unglee met the composer Aldo Mettezetti and a year later left both his wife and the world of film. He was unhappy without his tulips, and wanted to devote the rest of his life exclusively to his botanic passion. He bought a house with a large garden in Santa Monica and returned to his first and unique passion.

Unglee spent three years growing and photographing tulips and held his first exhibit at the Ferus Gallery. It was an immediate success. Nevertheless, most of his neighbors considered him an eccentric who was

UNGLEE

to tulips what Liberace was to the piano. Indeed, Unglee did have odd moments : two years ago he sued the municipality of Santa Monica because it refused to change the name of his road to "Unglee Street", and seven years ago he refused to attend any of his openings outside Los Angeles unless he could stay at a Golden Tulip Group hotel.

Last month , knowing the end was close, Unglee began typing notes for his own obituary, saying that he did not want to cheat readers out of a final surprise ending. He specified that his ashes be placed in the library of the botanic garden of San Diego, in a tulip-shaped urn. His sense of humor often bordered on the macabre.

He is survieved by his ex-wife Arleen and one son.

Unglee
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barium print
30 x 24 cm
Unique artwork
courtesy Galerie Dix9 Hélène Lacharmoise