

IN MEMORY of Ed Cervone

(1945 – 2001)

With the untimely passing of Edmund Cervone the world lost a unique artist, and Hubert and I lost a long-time friend of more than thirty years. This posthumous publication by Volker Janssen pays tribute to and once again presents a glimpse into the artist's world of fantasy.

Born in a refugee camp in Germany during the war's aftermath to a Latvian mother and German soldier, Eddie and his mother soon found their way to the US, first to New York, then Massachusetts and also to New Jersey. It was in Boston that his talents as an artist first developed. Combined with a study of Heraldry he used his artistic ability and expertise to create original hand painted Coats of Arms. As the cover to this volume shows, his fascination with heraldry endured throughout his life. His heraldic designs were well sought after as gifts for birthdays, weddings, and holidays. And many were the Christmas seasons that saw Eddie working around the clock to finish commissions in time.

However, it was after his move back to New York City in the 1970's that Ed emerged as an erotic artist and achieved notoriety. Sometimes referred to as *Ed of Manhattan*, Ed disliked the moniker, an allusion to *Tom of Finland*. And indeed, his original voice displayed little of the bulked-up stylized figures. Instead, he headed out in another direction, one of more suppleness and liveness. One might add, even whimsical. Eschewing models, Ed drew inspiration from the abundant wealth and variety of people who call Manhattan their home. Often while riding the subway or walking the streets Ed's eye would take a mental snapshot of someone. He used his mind as a sketchbook and later, through the workings of that fantastic imagination, these mental pictures would find their way as his artistic subjects. For fantastic imagination it was. Each of his figures is an individual and distinct, no two alike. No posing here. His figures seem to be caught at an instant of time. Even if standing still, they are in motion. No feigned seriousness here, either. Above all his subjects are always having fun. And the colors-- vibrant, often surrealistic. The backgrounds too never are just backdrops; but sometimes swirling; sometimes imbued with witty details, they enhance the action of the subjects.

It was not well known that Ed was also an outstanding landscape artist. During his yearly travels to Europe with his partner Ken Abel he frequently stopped at villages from the Netherlands to Italy to paint a captivating scene. Mountains,

fields, streams, trees and houses with tiled roofs became his subjects. But it was his love of the male form that dominated and led, on these journeys, to exhibitions in Amsterdam at the Rob Gallery. Internationally known as an illustrator for the male erotic press his artwork is part of the permanent collection at the Leslie-Lohman Gay Art Foundation in New York City. Not content to be confined to one genre he also received commissions during his later years from the straight erotic press and became adept at portraying the female figure.

A caring soul, in love with life, Eddie never denied giving of himself. After Ken's tragic death in a car accident in 1987, there were always fresh flowers placed on the Steinway. The piano was saved—for my use, and Ed always said that I kept Ken's music alive. Some of the happiest times were spent weekend after weekend as Ed shared his painting talent with Hubert. He taught Hubert, a novice who had never painted, to *see* and to find his own style. After a mutual friend lost his voice to cancer, Ed brought him into his home to nurse him. He became Benny's surrogate and advocate, maintaining his connection to the outside world—an outside world consisting of doctors and bureaucracies—while nourishing his interior spiritual world.

When Ed's own illness struck early in the winter of 2001 that resilience which had sustained him over a half century since war torn Europe became his master. Making no conciliations to the tumor that was stealing the use of his artist's hand Eddie each day, as always, would be at his desk. Progress became painfully slow, and in July, upon completion of his comic strip *Boys in the Hood* he declared his work finished. A triumph of the disease? Never. Still there was that indomitable spirit. Still his work was unmistakable Cervone—the wit, the colors, the fascination with life, all there. For Ed Cervone lived his life as a canvas to be painted.

Edmund Cervone expired early morning on December 3, 2001. Hubert was with him. We are proud to have shared his life and death.

Gerald Stanowicki
Hubert Porteners
New York, July 2004