Artist Mitchell Freifeld’s new series of paintings is inspired by many of the places included in Michael Munk’s, Portland Red Guide: Sites and Stories from Our Radical Past, published by Ooligan Press.

Midnight at the White Eagle Café (at left) is the first in this series. We were curious about how this connection came about. Mitchell kindly answered our questions.

How did you come across Michael's book?
My wife, Nancy, heard about it on the Rick Emerson Show (AM 970, mornings) from his news guy Tim O’Riley. And Nancy knowing that my political philosophy is quite a bit more then 6 degrees to the left of our current regime, thought I might be interested. Checked it out from the library (prior to buying a personal copy) and during the introduction, I was already stalking around the house, performing dramatic readings from “The Guide” at concert hall pitch.

What was it that inspired you to use it as a guide for this series? Had you started the series previous to reading the book?
The Portland Red Guide is fascinating to me because it puts vital events and people in a physical context. Knowing the “Where” lets us share the space where a lot of very brave people did and said things for betterment of the human situation. They did so not without thought for themselves, but putting the self aside for “The People.” Many of them paid very dearly for their beliefs. Standing outside the White Eagle Café at midnight, I could almost hear Polish Worker’s voices raised in anger in the rooms upstairs.

As a painter, knowing the progressive movement history, will help me infuse a dignity and timelessness to these places; just common places for the most part. Places where Portlanders walk daily, not really seeing the buildings and byways, much less knowing what happened there. I hadn’t thought of a series on the “places” of the Progressive Movement in Portland before The Red Guide, but I have always considered myself an Ashcan School painter. Painting a diner has infinitely more interest for me then painting a monument to a 19th century industrialist or something like that.

What do you imagine the scope of the series to be? Is there a beginning point and ending point? How many pieces will be in the series?
The series begins with the White Eagle Café, for no other reason then I’d been thinking of painting it for sometime anyway. But suddenly the White Eagle Café became much more significant to me then another McMenamin’s restoration (Without the McMenamin brothers we would have lost much more of our history then we already have.) An Ending Point? Haven’t thought about that yet, but I’d like most of the paintings to be night scenes. Night! When drama happens. And I’d like to complete at least 5 to 8 canvases before exhibiting them as a group, maybe with a didactic along side each one about what happened there from “The Guide.”

We look forward to seeing more from this inspirational series, Mitchell. Good luck!

If you’d like to see more of Mitchell Freifeld’s work, please visit his site: www.mitchelf.com