



Meet Clay Carmichael and Mike Roig. She's an author and illustrator, and he's a metal sculptor. What happens when they get together? An explosion of creativity.

## drawn *together*

Two artists meld art and life in their Carrboro home.

WRITTEN BY: ANNE ALDRIDGE WEBB

**A**n oft-repeated private joke between Mike Roig and Clay Carmichael references their so-called exotic life as artists. They laugh about it as local school children take a field trip to their sculpture garden or as visitors arrive at their doorstep expecting to tour a public gallery. Living and working together in their Carrboro home and studio, Heartworks, is far from ordinary. But for Roig, a metal sculptor, and Carmichael, a children's book author and

illustrator, their life together is simply about doing the work, loving the creative process, and supporting each other every day.

### **A Carrboro landmark**

Everyone in Carrboro knows Heartworks, and visitors soon find it. The striking metal sculptures in the front yard beckon passersby of all ages. Roig creates these in his work area behind their home, where he welds metal into beautiful



and captivating pieces known for their movement. Inside the house is Carmichael's studio, where she tells stories and creates the visual images of beloved characters. Books in her popular "Bear" series continue to win new fans each year.

Carmichael is a Chapel Hill native, and she and Roig were both living and working in the community when they met through mutual friends. "He literally swept me off my feet ... across a friend's terrace," she says with a laugh. "That was when I got the idea that he might be interested." They married in 2001, and Carmichael's sizable yard made her home the ideal spot for Heartworks. Roig moved himself and his work in while Carmichael was traveling, causing a friend to remark, "Does Clay know what you are doing to her house?"

Little did they know they were creating a Carrboro landmark, as neighbors quickly discovered and enjoyed the sculpture garden. Children from local schools began coming by for field trips, seeing not one but two artists in action. Roig built a transparent partition so that little ones from a nearby day care could safely watch him work, and visitors dropped by to tour, assuming the lovely home was an art gallery rather than a private residence. Carmichael eventually had to put a sign by the front door and take visitors by appointment only.

#### Caution! Artists at work

Carrboro is not the only North Carolina community to benefit from the work of this duo. Roig's sculpture can be found in public spaces in Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Lenoir, Boone, and Pinehurst. Private and public collections in other states and as far away as Canada also possess Roig's work. Carmichael's books are sold everywhere and have been translated into many languages. She holds presentations in schools all over the state. Some are one-day author/illustrator visits, and others are longer writer-in-residence programs, taking students through the process of telling a story.

Although both have won numerous awards and are highly regarded artists, Carmichael and Roig maintain that most of their days are actually quite simple. After breakfast and a morning workout, Roig goes outside, and Carmichael stays inside to work. They generally check in with each other,

**CREATIVE SPACE:** Inside their home, Clay Carmichael works on illustrations in her studio (**top**), while outdoors, her husband, Mike Roig, works on large metal sculptures (**opposite**) in his backyard welding studio (**bottom**).



often with Carmichael ringing the bell hung by the back door. This enables Roig to hear her over his noisy tools. Sometimes they are completely lost in their own labor for hours, and sometimes they bounce ideas off each other. "Art is often created in solitude," Roig says, "I'm lucky to have a partner with an artistic sensibility. I really value her opinion."

Next spring art will imitate art, as Carmichael's new middle-grade novel, *Wild Things*, (published by Front Street Books, an imprint of Boyd's Mills Press) features a sculptor as a major

character. Roig is also interpreting two of the book's characters in sculpture form, creating a true combination of their individual creative endeavors. They feel fortunate to share a life and a work space and, in doing so, have added much to Carrboro's rich cultural mix. □

Heartworks online:  
[www.claycarmichael.com](http://www.claycarmichael.com) • [www.mikeroig.com](http://www.mikeroig.com)

#### THE OTHER O.C.: MORE ART, LESS DRAMA.

Carmichael and Roig are both members of the Orange County Artists Guild. This group, like others of its kind, works together to encourage arts in the area and to help showcase the work of its members. The organization's annual studio tour will take place during the first two weekends in November. Last year there were more than 60 participants.

The tour allows interested patrons to view selected works, meet the artists, and see the artistic process in action. Both Carmichael and Roig will participate this year. For specific information about the upcoming tour, see the Orange County Artist Guild website: [www.ibiblio.org/ocag](http://www.ibiblio.org/ocag).



Visit [showcase.ncsignature.com](http://showcase.ncsignature.com) to find out author and illustrator Clay Carmichael's favorite children's books, and enter to win a free copy of her new book, to be published in the spring!

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