

RIPON COLLEGE - Lon Michels "A real cool guy..."

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Lon Michels was an undergraduate art major at Ripon College in the early 1980s when he wrote a paper for me for a course on Italian Renaissance painting titled "Botticelli: A Real Cool Guy." I was in my first year of full-time college teaching, and I remember being initially pretty skeptical about what the quality of the paper was going to be. Today I recall absolutely nothing specific about that long-since-graded essay, but I do remember distinctly that Lon did manage to "pull it off," against all odds, and has continued to do so since then in other respects of his life.

Lon managed to leave Marquette, the little town in Wisconsin where he grew up (pop. 250 and falling) with his seven brothers and sisters (all of whose names begin with "L"), arrived in New York City (with less than \$50 in his pocket, as the legend goes), and end up in a short time apprenticed to Louise Nevelson, one of the most prominent female sculptors of the 20th century. He paid his dues, of course, but none of this stopped him from finally getting himself a floor-length mink coat and into a position where he could live from his painting. Now he sells his work as fast as he can paint it. Is it possible to exaggerate how rare that is in the art world today?

At any rate, Lon has definitely pulled it off, in spades, first in New York, then in Key West, where he was made an honorary citizen and given a key to the city. He even managed to return to Marquette, and to his alma mater in Ripon.

Lon is truly a real cool guy.

The Incredible Brightness of Being

Lon Michels paints the simple subjects of his everyday life: himself, his family and friends, the models who come to pose for him, his garden, common household objects, the storefronts down the street. By the looks of his paintings, you tend to assume that he is always in a good mood. "Colorful" is the simplest way to say it, but that is an understatement. Lon makes color come alive to dance ecstatically around in all kinds of shapes and patterns which have so much energy that they cannot contain themselves and are forced to spill out into the frame. The good mood is contagious; when you stand in front of one of Lon's works, you find you are suddenly in a good mood, too. In my opinion, Lon Michels' paintings are wake-up calls that jolt us out of whatever humdrum routine we may have been in and rouse us to the delights of the incredible brightness of being.

— **Eve1yn Kain**, *Associate Professor of Art, Ripon College*, March 1994