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fallen stars

Mark Lombardi

Raymond Cavanaugh Jr

Mark Lombardi was born in 1951 in upstate New York. While studying art history at nearby Syracuse University, he became involved with a collaborative effort on a multimedia collage, 'Teapot Dome to Watergate'. This work drew on high-ranking government corruption, particularly the infamous Watergate scandal of then-president Richard Nixon.

Lombardi's contributions impressed a prominent museum director who offered him a post-grad job as curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Texas. There, Lombardi stayed for 2 years before becoming a reference librarian. Such work compelled him to collect and categorise massive amounts of information; these tasks would influence his later creations.

During the 1980s, Lombardi produced abstract paintings, got married, and established an art gallery, which proved a short-lived endeavour. By the ensuing decade, he had returned to the theme of his undergraduate multimedia project and was conducting research on the prominent corporate scandals of the time.

Striving to understand the complexities of these scandals, Lombardi made countless notes, starting a process of index cards – to outlines – to diagrams featuring 'spider webs of illustrations'. These diagrams, while aiming to achieve an aesthetic effect, also attempted to 'document financial and political frauds by power brokers'.

One such work, 'George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stephens, ca 1979–90', explored certain Texas business deals and displayed a supposed link between the Bush and bin Laden families. In other works, called 'narrative structures', Lombardi even ventured to place high-ranking mobsters and intelligence officials in his diagrammed criminal conspiracies.

For years, Lombardi had lingered in almost total obscurity as an abstract painter. Now, with these controversial diagrams, his career found some trajectory. His work was the sole subject of a successful New York City art show in November 1998. In February 2000, the diagrams received further acclaim at a second exhibition.

On 22 March 2000, Lombardi's lifeless body was found hanging in his Brooklyn apartment. Friends of the artist were stunned that he would die by suicide while 'at the top of his game'. Considering his subversive subject matter, there was speculation of foul play. A current internet search of 'Mark Lombardi – suicide' yields some people who feel that the artist's death was not his depressive volition, but that he was, in fact, 'suicided'.

The medical examiner, however, declared that Lombardi had, indeed, killed himself. Lombardi had been described as 'manic' and would, at times, speak of 'deep depressions'; he would also sometimes evince isolating tendencies.

Ensuing media coverage depicted Lombardi's demise as the result of a bipolar disorder brought on by the pressures of approaching stardom, as well as the stress he encountered when one of his foremost works was destroyed by an indoor sprinkler.

Three years after his death, the 25-drawing exhibit 'Mark Lombardi: Global Networks' commenced a museum tour.

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