Michael Lenson Art Deco Mural Study American

Reference:

MPD-004630
Description
MICHAEL LENSON
"MURAL STUDY"
PENCIL, SIGNED
AMERICAN, C.1960
12 X 24 INCHES

Michael Lenson
1903-1971
Michael Lenson was born in Galich, a Russian city of 25,000 situated on the eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains. “In winter, peasants from the north packed their horse-drawn sleighs with kindling and drove into the town across frozen Lake Galich,” Lenson later recalled. “Haggard monks paraded through the town carrying icons, then banged on our door to solicit alms. Wolves roamed through the streets in the dead of winter, and the Tsar and his family stopped their private railway car at the Galich station every summer to receive gifts of locally made leather boots from the local town officials.” Although Lenson and his family emigrated to New York when he was only seven years old, those vivid childhood memories stayed with him, and may have sparked the dream-infused imagery in his paintings and drawings.
By 1928, Lenson was a struggling art student sharing a coldwater flat on East 116th Street in New York City flat with fellow artists Louis Guglielmi (1906-1956) and Gregorio Prestopino (1907-1984). He studied at the National Academy of Design and sketched at the Metropolitan Museum. To keep meat on his bones, Lenson was working in the Post Office at night, and airbrushing shoes for mail-order catalogs during the day. But that year, Lenson’s life changed dramatically when he was awarded the much-coveted $10,000 Chaloner Prize for Painting.
“It was fantastic, absolutely fantastic,” Lenson later told an interviewer for the Smithsonian’s Oral History Project. “All of a sudden my worries fell away and I was aboard ship. All my relatives who considered me a no-good deficit to the family were on the dock waving farewell to me.”
Thus the Russian born artist was able to return to Europe for four years of travel and study. At the University of London’s Slade School of Art, Lenson logged long months sitting at a drafting table, mastering the drawing skills that would remain a hallmark of his work. “You could say that the instruction there was academic,” he later recalled, “but boy, did they know their stuff.” While in London, Lenson also assisted the noted muralist Colin Gill.
Moving on to Paris, Lenson occupied a Chaloner-funded apartment near the *Jardin de Luxembourg*. He enrolled in the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and began to paint large figurative canvases that were strongly influenced by the old master works that he studied at the Louvre. Beyond studying, Lenson made the most of his years in Paris. He and a circle of American expatriates congregated at Le Dôme Café in the evenings for camaraderie and drinks. He heard Chaliapin sing and saw Ravel conduct. He escorted glamorous women, including Henrietta Schumann, the phenomenal young Russian-American concert pianist who had just arrived in Paris to study with Alfred Cortot.
Lenson later said that when he returned to New York in 1932, “I was no longer the conquering hero. I came back to nothing . . . absolutely nothing.”
Although the Great Depression was dawning, Lenson’s first one-man exhibition at the Caz-Delbo Gallery was a notable success. In a review in the April 30, 1933 *New York Times,* distinguished critic Howard Devree wrote:

“He stands at the beginning of a very promising career, without close allegiance to any

of the great names or schools. Yet in the best sense of the word he is traditional . . . The best of his things strike a good working balance between [color and form]. His figure studies . . . show him at his best . . . His still life is restrained both in color and form - refinement without academicism. The portraits show a sympathy with the old masters of the French school and yet are thoroughly modern. His landscapes are well worked out and lighted. His later things give evidence of growing freedom in the use of clear, rich color and of gathering powers of simplification."

Margaret Breuning, another noted critic, said of Lenson's work in her review in the *New York Evening Post* on May 1, 1933:

"He is a young artist who works in the tradition, particularly in his excellent portraits, but is finding a growing power to enrich tradition with personal expression . . . All the work has an integrity and soundness which warrant a belief in the artist's future performance."

Such interviews did not feed artists in those bleak Depression days. Before long, Lenson found his way to New Jersey, where he joined the Federal Arts Project and quickly secured a mural commission for an immense wall in a tuberculosis hospital in Verona, New Jersey and soon painted murals for the New Jersey Pavilion of the 1939 World's Fair. By then, Lenson had been appointed supervisor for all WPA mural projects in the State. Other mural commissions followed, including his eight-panel "History of Newark" in the City Council Chambers at Newark City Hall and his "Enlightenment of Man" panoramic mural in Weequahic High School in Newark. Another extant Lenson mural is "Mining," completed for the U.S. Post Office in Mount Hope, West Virginia*. Who Was Who In American Art?* calls Lenson, "New Jersey's most important muralist." Recently, Lenson's remarkable contributions to WPA art were covered extensively by Nick Taylor in his book, *American Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA.*
After the demise of the WPA, Lenson bought a studio home in Nutley, a town seven miles north of Newark. He married June Rollar, an aspiring poet, and had two sons. Later, he taught painting at Rutgers University and the Montclair Art Museum. During the last sixteen years of his life, Lenson served as art critic for *The Newark Sunday News.*
Michael Lenson's paintings are in numerous private collections and in the permanent collections of many institutions, including the Johnson Museum at Cornell University, the Princeton University Art Museum, the Maier Museum of American Art, and the Quick Center for the Arts at Saint Bonaventure University, the Wolfsonian Collection, the Newark Museum, and the Montclair Art Museum. In 2010, the Art in Embassies program of the United States State Department selected Lenson as an American artist whose works will hang in American embassies abroad.

Price:

$2,250.00

Main Image: 

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Papillon Gallery