



Leon Lambert McFadden

April 19, 1920 - September 20, 2012

Leon Lambert McFadden was born in St Paul, Minnesota on April 19, 1920. He died September 20th, 2012 at Madrone Hospice in Yreka from injuries suffered in a fall.

He was a kind man and a genius.

As a child Leon attended parochial school and was one of the “Whiz Kids” on the famous radio show. He studied art and took a degree in philosophy, earning a doctorate at the University of Hawaii.

Leon was in Honolulu when Pearl Harbor was bombed and joined the Navy. He served in the Pacific Theater as a photojournalist from 1942-46 and also taught judo to servicemen. Along with some British journalists, he was taken prisoner. After weeks of marching across Burma, one morning they found themselves abandoned by their captors in the jungle. When they finally dared to venture off, they came to a village and heard the Japanese had surrendered. The war was over. Leon said WWII convinced him there must be a better way to resolve our differences than by killing each other. He spend the rest of his life championing peace.

Leon was an artist and an inventor. He had many patents: one is a recording device used by NASA, one a take-off of an ancient Persian windmill, another uses a ball-like foot to move a small vehicle over rough terrain, and the zipping mechanism in Ziploc bags infringes on yet another.

He owned advertising agencies in Los Angeles from the late 40's until early 70's. From 1974-1975 he volunteered as a minority business consultant for

Vista. He moved to Siskiyou County in 1975 to pursue fine art.

He was a member of Mensa, Artist's Equity, The American Society for the Advancement of Science, and the Sierra Club. He is listed in Who's Who In America. He taught art at Chouinard in Los Angeles and at COS in Weed.

Primarily a painter, "McFoo" also made kinetic sculptures. He was a Divisionist in the tradition of Seurat, but used ink dots and squiggles as well as daubs of color to create abstracts, landscapes, and realistic portraits. He even used rubber stamps as a medium for some of his provocative pieces.

Leon saw art as dialogue. His last great project was a plan to construct a large-scale, new vision of the Statue of Liberty. Leon's version of "Lady Liberty" was to be constructed of hundreds of individual canvases that could be taken apart and reassembled and would travel from Paris to Perth to Moscow to Beijing. It would be the center of art fairs featuring works by each country's artists and performers. It conveyed the notion that "liberty" in the modern world was not an indestructible copper edifice like Bartholdi's in New York harbor or an icon frozen in time like Delacroix's in the Louvre, but something fragile that must be tended if it was to endure. He saw this traveling show as a new Chautauqua, a way for very different cultures to use art to talk to each other and perhaps to reach new understanding. Even though Liberty Painting was never funded and did not travel around the world, its very idea was a gesture of good will, and an example of one man's attempt to make a difference.

In 1987 Leon was asked by the Washington DC editor of Hearst newspapers to fly to the Moscow with a group of statesmen, thinkers and artists in the new spirit of diplomacy. A couple of years later when glasnost and perestroika had become buzzwords, Leon applied to an international order of Catholic nuns initiating friendship between America and Russia, for Yreka to be one of the first communities in the US to welcome guests from the USSR. His proposal was accepted, and three Soviet citizens were chosen to visit our community. The happening was applauded, contested, and eagerly awaited. Some naysayers invited Bay area members of the Afghani resistance to come to

Yreka at the same time to protest and disrupt the Soviet visit. Leon diffused ill will when he went to talk with the freedom fighters. He told them the Soviets were our guests, and as good Muslims, they must understand we were obliged to be hospitable. At another time, we would welcome Afghans the same way. He invited them to the gathering.

The reception was held at the Community Center. Hundreds of local residents, the three Russians, and the Afghans came. The freedom fighters dressed in battle regalia and carried swords but behaved as gentlemen. It was so well attended that a closed circuit TV was set up in the lobby, so everyone could see and hear. The Russians were seated on stage with three Yreka residents. The audience asked questions about life in Russia and America. In answer to a question about the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, a lovely actress named Gulsara from Uzbekistan, who was a member of the Communist Party, said that her son was a soldier there, and her heart went out to mothers of sons who had served in Viet Nam. She answered through an interpreter, and though her English was poor, at one point, she took Gordon Dunlaps's hand and said, "Grandfather. One family." There were lots of tears and laughter in the Community Center that night. It was an exciting time in the world and in town. Yreka was a tiny footnote in the giant sweep of the Iron Curtain coming down...all because Leon McFadden reminded us we were part of the bigger world.

Leon lived to be ninety-two. He prized independence. Because of poor eyesight, he could no longer drive or paint. Although many urged him to move to town or into a facility where he would have help, he chose to live alone at his studio on Old Highway 99. He took the bus or walked to town nearly every day to see friends at Nature's Kitchen and have a "cough of cuppie" or a bite to eat. He liked to initiate conversations about numbers and to ask if anyone knew why the sky is blue. He often pulled a suitcase behind him to load with food for the feral cats that lived outside his studio. He called them all "Dumb Thing," but would walk through a snowstorm to see that they didn't go hungry.

He will be missed.

Leon was preceded in death by his father, Frank Grover McFadden, his mother, Irene Manilla Lambert, and his sister, Peggy Deane. He is survived by a sister, Nancy Babigain of Sarasota, Florida and her husband George and by two nieces, Pamala Hirsch and Kathy Burns and four nephews, Bill Kees, John Kees, Richard Kees, and Don Redish. He also leaves a stepdaughter, Barbara Davis, her husband Jeff, and son Ian.

There will be a show of Leon's art at Liberty Art Gallery in Yreka. The opening is Friday, October 26th, and the show will run through November. After the opening, friends are invited to a "Big Burn" honoring Leon's life. The details and directions will be announced opening night at the show. Bring memories, something to eat and drink by the fire, and something warm to wear.

Contributions in memory of Leon McFadden may be made to Liberty Arts in Yreka. Or, leave a big tip for a crabby waitress; Leon did, surmising she might be nice to the next customer. Or, every time you take a walk, pick up a white rock, put it in your pocket, and drop it on the ground when you get home; there is a mountain of white rocks outside Leon's door. Or, feed a stray cat.