

LOU RUDOLPH

Mark Thompson



PHOTO: Mark Thompson

At midnight, Lou Rudolph lugs his canvas onto the stage of the Fab Mab, North Beach's notorious punk music hall. The six foot square panel looks big enough to be a section from a billboard or stage set. As Lou finishes the set-up and slips into a pair of paint splattered Levi's, the singer from that night's featured act nails a pair of leather strips into the wooden floorboards. A few minutes later, when the band is at a full roar, the singer slips his feet under the straps to keep from falling over. As he shouts out the lyrics the two women in the group bang their microphones with plastic hammers and the audience crashes and collides against one another. Lou surveys the scene with legs astride, as if on the prow of some turbulent ship. Then with one easy move he bends over, dips his brush in some paint and lays down a stroke on the white canvas. His body reacts like a seismic antenna as it picks up the musical shock waves and records them fast and furious with brush, fingers and paint right out of the tube. He has 20 minutes to capture the scene and when the last dissonant chord exhausts itself, he stops, turns his canvas around, and exposes the audience to an instant impressionistic postcard of what they've just experienced. The fiery madness, the emotion out-of-bounds is all there, and Lou, smeared with bright acrylic color, looks like he's stepped out of his own huge picture.

"Documentation is an important aspect of my art," he says a few days later, "but it's not the primary function of it. Sometimes I'm much more out to capture the energy. My paintings, in particular, lend themselves to this. My work is just not a documentation of people and places but of sound and energy. People often relate to my pictures more for the energy than with the subject matter. I'm working toward some artistic depth, not just making pretty pictures. Although," he inter-

jects with a sudden grin, "immediate gratification is one of my favorite things."

When I knock on his door Lou is reading a copy of Hunter Thompson's book on the Hells Angels. He lets me in, pulls on a pair of jeans, and then ambles across the room to retrieve the book from a large stack that includes Huxley novels and a manual on sign language. He flips to a scene where a woman approaches a group of Angels lounging around a small town park. He reads her words out loud: "I fuck, I suck, I smoke a lot of dope, so let's get started." We both laugh. It's a reaction characteristic of Lou -- an uninhibited sound tinged with a kind of wicked glee. The laughter also comes from the aptness of the quote in describing his own attitude about life.

Lou came to San Francisco eight years ago after growing up and wandering around on the East Coast. Six years ago he found his current living and studio space south of Market. The walls are almost completely covered with his drawings and paintings as well as photographs of favorite friends and places. "I love to have parties here and be surrounded by people that top any Warhol movie -- just in their earnestness in truly being out there," he says with another laugh. He takes pride in his friends, an amazing collection of New Wave musicians, local literati and experimental artists; turned-on men and women with their eyes wide open.

We spend much of the afternoon talking about perception. "Different cultures have seen in different ways," he explains. "A little bit of art history about the Egyptians made me acutely aware of this. The reason that all of their art was so flat and without perspective was because they did not have a sense of history or time. Everything was for the here and now, so there was no dimension to their graphic work. In our society we have these incredible tech-

nological means of making images and are convinced that this is how we see. We somehow believe that we see exactly like photographs and television. But if you try to imagine what something looks like you'll see it differently, disproportionately. Like Sappho says in one of her poems: 'A handsome man appears handsome. A good man will become handsome.' We see so much more than what's on the surface, beyond the realm of light and vision.

"In my own work I want to go beyond what we're programmed to see these days and try somehow to get my feelings out. Doing wild things like painting on stage and having to work fast draws me away from over conscious involvement with programmed ideas and lets the psychic/spiritual come through -- which is a much broader way of seeing. I want to let this unknown quantity out of me."

Lou's style is bold and powerful. The markings of his crayon or brush often seem to dig under the surface of the paper, pulling the viewer closer with their intensity. Lou does not compromise a scene; whether it be men in a bar, a friend alone, or performers on a stage, the pain, the angst, the human interplay, the charge of that particular moment is inescapable. His work has been exhibited on both coasts, most frequently in San Francisco's Ambush bar, where he works as a bartender three nights a week. His next show will be at New York's Hibbs Gallery this September.

"As far as the work is concerned, I'm definitely after fame as a focus of ambition. I'm giving up on fortune more and more because it's always a hassle. Notoriety will help communicate what I'm doing. It's a way for me to be effective as an artist. I didn't make the decision to be an artist until after I was able to make my own value system and discover what is really important in the world. I now see how art is directly tied with the very core energy of life. Its power is subtle, but not to be underestimated. Artists have to make people see and it's much more important for me to do that than design nuclear reactors. There's just no going home again, as they say."



PHOTO: Mick Hicks



Leo Rodolph 4-18-81