

Classic Posters - A Short Biography of Artist Lee Conklin

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by Michael Erlewine

Lee Conklin was born in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey on July 24, 1941. He grew up in the small town of Monsey, New York, and graduated from Spring Valley High School in 1959. According to Conklin, he was always preoccupied with art during his school years, painting with an easel in his later teens.

After high school, Conklin attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he studied literature and philosophy and was again published as a cartoonist. It was there that he met his wife Joy; they were married in 1965, just before Conklin was drafted into the army. He did a tour of duty in Korea, where he continued to exercise his artistic skills by working on murals in the army mess halls. He was released from active duty in May of 1967, at which point he located himself in Los Angeles, where some of his pen and ink illustrations were published by the Los Angeles Free Press. He looked for work as a cartoonist.

After reading in Time Magazine an article about the poster artists and music scene in San Francisco, he decided to relocate there. Upon arriving he went to the Fillmore Auditorium offices, where he showed his portfolio to Bill Graham. To Conklin's amazement, he was hired on the spot, and asked to create his first Fillmore poster that very weekend. Conklin rose to the occasion and went on to contribute 33 posters to the Fillmore series

alone. Only Wes Wilson and Bonnie MacLean and, of course, David Singer have contributed more to this venue.

In the summer of 1968, after the first rush of the Fillmore era had passed, Conklin and his wife Joy left San Francisco and traveled throughout Northern California, living in an old bread truck. They eventually crossed the country, settling in Middletown, NY, very close to the town where Conklin was born. It was here that they started a family. During these years, Conklin worked in a psychiatric hospital as a therapy aide. He continued his art work in his spare time and sometimes would show his art at some of the regional art fairs in the area.

In the latter '70s, the Conklins moved back to Northern California, living for many years in the Petaluma area, which has been a home to a number of the poster people. Conklin worked with for many years with trees and reforestation projects. He now lives in lovely Columbia, California, at the foot of the Sierra Mountains, not too far from Yosemite National Park.

Lee Conklin continues to produce art and has in recent years produced a number of art prints as well as posters for venues such as the New Fillmore series and the Maritime Hall.

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