



## Leonard Farb

Len at Work, c 1946, Photographer unknown

Leonard Farb was born in 1915 in Libau, Latvia, and at the age of five, he emigrated with his family to Chicago. Farb became interested in art at a very early age and was accepted into the intensive art program at Marshall High School. During the early thirties Farb studied painting with Todros Geller, followed by an apprenticeship to John Groth, the first Art Director of Esquire Magazine. At the age of twenty, Farb was himself named Art Director of a large advertising firm. Not content with the advertising business as his sole creative outlet, Farb continued to seek new ideas and approaches to visual problems, and decided to study in the New Bauhaus School of Design's evening program. György Kepes and László Moholy Nagy were two of his teachers who were the most inspirational to him.

As Farb was employed during the thirties, he was not eligible for the WPA's Federal Art Project, but he was friendly with many Chicago artists during that time, including Aaron Bohrod, Mitchell Siporin, and Alex Topp, and exhibited his work alongside such well-known local artists as Max Kahn, Misch Kohn, Wes Sharer, Frank Vavrushka, and Isadore Weiner, among others. He also exhibited with internationally-famous artists such as Leopoldo Mendez and Pablo O'Higgins at various Chicago venues.

Throughout his studies at the Institute of Design, Farb continued to paint local industrial and urban scenes which he then exhibited at the "Chicago and Vicinity" exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago. Farb also explored printmaking during this time, most notably learning lithography under the tutelage of Carl Hoeckner at the Hull House studios. He also traveled to both the Southwest and the West Coast of the United States on painting trips with other artists, creating works that focused on the different light and forms of those distinctive natural and built landscapes. During two summers in Minneapolis, Farb concentrated his efforts on Minnesota industrial landscapes—from the imposing shapes of the large grain elevators to the devastation of the open-pit iron mines—utilizing them as his subject matter in a series of drawings, watercolors, and oils.

With his wife and two daughters Farb moved to Highland Park, Illinois in the late fifties into a modernist home of his own design. (This home was later nominated for the Registry of regional architectural landmarks.) Just as he had earlier been fascinated by gritty urban genre scenes and the often stark face of industrial development, he now became intensely interested in the new-found freedom evidenced by other contemporary artists in the sixties, exploring and combining new materials, and moving his paintings literally off the wall as he began to investigate three-dimensional sculptural forms in a variety of media. In Farb's work during this time period, painting and sculpture merged, defying easy categorization. Later, responding to his changed environs, he became absorbed by natural driftwood shapes he found on the beaches. Farb made hundreds of drawings and photographs of these shapes, and also wrote poetry about them. He collected these driftwood pieces as well, posing them aesthetically in his garden.

In November 2003, approaching his 88th birthday, Leonard Farb returned to Chicago, living near the beach on the site of the old Edgewater Beach Hotel. He continued to draw, completing a series on the international masks that he had collected over the years. He passed away on 23 December 2005, three days short of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## Chronology

### Education

- 1933 Marshall High School, Chicago. Diploma in Art, Intensive Studies
- 1934 Private Study with Todros Geller: painting and drawing  
Apprentice to John Groth: printmaking, cartoons, illustration
- 1940-41 Institute of Design, Chicago  
Classes with László Moholy-Nagy, György Kepes, and others in art, design, and photography

### Work History

- 1934 Glass Art Studio, Chicago  
Apprentice to graphic designers. Clients included Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward
- 1935 Critchfield and Company, Chicago  
Assistant to Art Director
- 1936-42 Critchfield and Company, Chicago  
Art Director  
Clients included John Deere, Inc.; Fisk Tire Company, Pullman Railroad Company, Fairmont Motors, Wheeling Steel Corporation
- 1942-43 Jerome Kalom Advertising Company, Chicago  
Art Director  
Clients included various fashion magazines and manufacturers
- 1943-44 Wesley Sharer Studio, Chicago  
Designer  
Clients included Lincoln Logs, Playskool, Tinker Toys
- 1953-55 Theatre Arts Magazine, New York and Chicago  
Art Director

1936-c1985 Len Farb, Designer  
Free-lance designer for local, national, and international clients, including Binks Manufacturing Company, Cat's Pride, Combined Fluid Products, Computer Franchise Corporation, Evans Corporation, Food Technology Magazine, Industrial Molded Products, Jewish Charities (later, Jewish Federation), Leo's Dance Wear, Methode Manufacturing Company, Misco Chemical, Popular Photography Magazine, Rand McNally Publishers, Rival Dog Food, Scott Foresman and Company Publishers, Solar Lighting, Sentinel Radio, Sterling Bolt Company, and Vassarette Lingerie.

### **Exhibition History**

1940 Art Aquatennial, Minneapolis, MN. First Prize, Photography  
1941 Forty-Fifth Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity, Art Institute of Chicago  
1942 Forty-Sixth Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity, Art Institute of Chicago  
1944 54<sup>th</sup> Place Studios, Group exhibition including Eleanor Coen, Max Kahn, Misch Kohn, Leopoldo Mendez, Pablo O'Higgins, Wes Sharer, Frank Vavrushka, Isadore Weiner  
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