



MiddletownPatch



[Patch Newsletter](#) [Nearby](#) [Sign Up](#) [Login](#)



Editor [Elaine Van Develde](#): Heard some news you want us to check out? Let me know:

Elaine_Develde@patch.com

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Events](#)

[Places](#)

[More](#)

Search

[Opinion](#), [Arts](#)

Memorial Portrait of Artist Lou Rudolph

Known for his signature performance painting, the former Monmouth County resident is not forgotten

By [Elaine Van Develde](#) [Email the author](#) 6:00am

[Email](#)

[Print](#)

[1 Comment](#)

Related Topics: [Acrylic](#), [Arts](#), [Lou Rudolph](#), and [World AIDS Day](#)



Artist Lou Rudolph's life was as colorful, vibrant and bold as his paintings.

The former Middletown resident, guest lecturer at Brookdale Community College and friend to many in Monmouth County was nationally renowned for his giant avant-garde acrylic paintings in which he captured the energy of countless performers from the east to west coast, many of whom were, yes, famous.

Sporting a sly, toothy grin, twinkle in his sky blue eyes, Lou Rudolph harbored a true love of seeing to it that talented people leave their mark somewhere in this world. So, he'd show up at show after show, uncontracted, to memorialize many an artsy moment for arts' sake.

Mammoth canvas parked against a wall and jars of vivid paint spilling at his feet wherever he arrived, Rudolph would sink into whatever staged scene he found before him, dance to the music and paint.

Stopping to stare at his subjects every few minutes, clamping down on his tongue in study, you'd see him tapping his toes and splattering his color all the way through.

It was how he lived his life — taking in the art of life's tantalizing morsels and spewing out his brightly hued vision for all to see and share.

Lou Rudolph painted many pictures and captured the energy of infinite moments. The saddest was when he was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. It was then that he reworked his self-portrait. This time it was in black and white. So was his diagnosis. It was a death sentence — the end of his chapter on earth, but not his story.

That was nearly 20 years ago now. Lou Rudolph died in 1992 at 41. Had he gotten ill even months later, he may still be alive today at 60. He died during an era when people suffering with AIDS were shunned and death after an HIV diagnosis was as inevitable as bleeding from a deep cut.

Monday was World AIDS Day, celebrating a theme of "getting to zero" new infections and intolerance for those afflicted.

Wishing Rudolph had been one of those who had survived and benefitted from present-day advances toward a cure and tolerance, those who knew him and his work are still celebrating his short life's gifts ... never forgetting.

Many people, across the nation, have a Lou Rudolph story, painting, sketch, or all three. He had the gift of being a colorful, soulful, undiscriminating life led by love and a large canvas on which to illustrate it.

He made friends with many people, well known and unknown. There were many well-knowns whose stories would casually slip out of Rudolph's mouth from time to time.

[Close](#)

READ MORE IN OPINION

[Teach Your Kids Gratitude and Someday They'll Thank You](#)

He knew celebrities like Whoopie Goldberg, with whom he performed at clubs in San Francisco when both were young, starting out (and he was actually more famous). He has also provided portraiture work to the classic Lena Horne and Tina Turner. He did a lot of painting in the underground punk rock and leather bar scenes of the early 1980s in California and knew all its stars.

It was there that he studied under Rosalie Ritz, the famed courtroom artist who documented the Angela Davis and Patty Hearst trials, and honed the performance painting style shot him to celebrity status on the west then east coast.

After seeing many of his friends in San Francisco start to die off from a rampantly spreading AIDS epidemic, Rudolph thought that escaping to the east coast would offer his sullened heart a reprieve. He ended up in New York City, performance painting and exhibiting his work at galleries such as Soho Visual Arts and on the S.N.A.F.U Nitespot cable television show.

With maternal family ties to the shore area, he then ended up migrating to Middletown and setting up house with his partner Mike in a home on Thompson Park in Middletown and then in Long Branch, a departure from his norm.

He etched the Americana homestead pictures on the parkland and enjoyed life in suburbia as he continued to paint at clubs all along the Jersey shore, such as the Stone Pony, Green Parrott and the Brighton Bar and become a very active member of the Monmouth County Art Alliance, Monmouth Museum and participant in Brookdale's arts programs. He exhibited his work in juried shows for all of these organizations, all over the area.

He told his life stories to his friends as he welcomed many of them into his "family," replete with unforgettable parties, milestone celebrations and holiday galas. He painted and drew it all.

That's Lou Rudolph's story. I have one of my own.

I met Lou while reluctantly exploring the punk rock scene with a friend in the 1980s.

We became close friends and kindred showfolk spirits. We shared arts experiences, backyard barbecues, the best of holiday fetes and, most importantly, he was my son's godfather. And he was the best there was.

He took the job seriously and planned on being a forever for presence in his life. And he is.

Lou Rudolph lives on in my heart, my son's and the hearts of myriad others who were forced to let him go all too soon.

His signature was always punctuated with a heart with wings — his reminder to keep what you love in your heart, but give it the freedom to fly. He took many people under those wings and helped them soar.

Lou Rudolph was always watching, observing, listening, truly hearing and enveloping hearts with his wings.

Of his life with AIDS so many years ago, he explained his feelings best in the strokes and words on a self portrait, "Looking so hard, I can't see ... Feeling too much to understand." Understood, Lou.

For a glimpse into the art and life of Lou Rudolph, take a look at the slideshow above. You may just recall a Lou Rudolph story of your own.

Photos were provided from Lou Rudolph's Facebook page, courtesy of his family.

Email me updates about this story.

Keep me posted

[Email](#)

[Print](#)

[Follow comments](#)

[Submit tip](#)

[Add photos & video](#)

[1 Comment](#)

[Nature's Emporium](#)

8:02am on Friday, December 2, 2011

A beautiful article and tribute, Elaine.

[Flag as inappropriate](#)

[Log in to reply](#)

Leave a comment

Submit

READ MORE IN OPINION

[Teach Your Kids Gratitude and Someday They'll Thank You](#)

[Close](#)