

## MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Ronald Markman

1931-2017

Sick children entering Riley Hospital in Indianapolis, nervous at what they might encounter, will see, already at the entrance and on any of the five floors to which the elevator will transport them, a wonderful diversion. Displayed on the walls is a world both imaginary and as real as a child might conjure up. It is a world, or rather many worlds, in which birds, airplanes, toy soldiers, taxis, turtles, and a host of other creatures, all stemming from the rich imagination of Ron Markman, jostle for space on the hospital walls that the Riley board commissioned him to paint in 1986.

Born in the Bronx in 1931, Markman came of age in the 1960's during the era of American pop art, which, in the work of artists like Lichtenstein, or Oldenburg deviated from "high art" and turned popular objects and cartoons and images often assembled in a manner reminiscent of surrealism. While Markman's work does not stem from pop art, the movement's popularity gave him license to be humorous, and to celebrate popular rather than high art. It also allowed his own nonconventional art to find acceptance in a prestigious mainstream gallery—Terry Dintenfass Gallery—in Manhattan, where he had several one-person shows.

Since these beginnings Prof. Markman's work has been shown and collected all over the United States, notably in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Hirschhorn Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, among others. It has also been exhibited in Manitoba, London, and Rome.

As a child, Markman read *Krazy Kat* and *Smokey Stover* comics and listened to Jack Benny, Fred Allen, and Edgar Bergen on the radio while doodling or drawing at his kitchen table. Their influence can be seen in the canvases of Markman's *Mukfa*, a make-believe country with its own map and its full cast of characters involved in preposterous acts of crime and heroism depicted with wit and humor. Their influence can also be seen in the format of his latest works. Just as cartoons, radio programs, and serial films present sequences that progress from episode to episode, Markman moved away from the limits imposed by the rectangular dimensions of canvas by painting on small pieces of masonite; these segments are then joined into a sequence that allows a larger painting to develop into a synthetic whole, and to assume unusual and even three-dimensional shapes in its final form. This gave his images, with their rough edges and their quirky, cockeyed forms, the freshness and directness characteristic of self-taught artists.

Markman's animated musical comedy film, *Ever Since the Bad Thing Happened*, which premiered here in Bloomington in 1994, was the result of a Lilly grant awarded him in 1989. This work again harks back in influences on his childhood; from the age of twelve or thirteen until his induction into the army in 1952, his parents took him to all the musical comedies being performed on Broadway. During his tenure at IU, anyone present on the fourth floor of the Fine Arts Building could attest to his constant presence in his studio, singing along loudly to Broadway musicals while painting.

It was almost by default that Markman, as a student at the School of Industrial Arts in Manhattan, was drawn to "high art." Lured by the Museum of Modern Art's showings of early silent movie classics, he was inadvertently introduced to the paintings exhibited on the museum's walls and fell in love with what he saw. He enrolled in the Art Students League, in which he had the luck to work with George Grosz. He also studied at the Brooklyn Museum as well as at Cooper Union.

After a stint in the army, into which he was drafted during the Korean War, Markman used the G.I. Bill to apply to the Yale School of Art. He was accepted by the renowned artist and teacher Josef Albers, under whom he studied from 1955 to 1959. Albers was an exceedingly demanding teacher who insisted that you must “say what you mean in your paintings, not outside them.” Famed for his color studies, Albers, upon first seeing Mark’s work, had said of it, “you have a good sense of color” – praise that Markman likens to the Pope’s saying “you’re a good Catholic.”

It was Albers who got Prof. Markman a job as a color consultant for Hallmark Cards in Kansas City. When he found himself unsatisfied with a career that kept him from painting, it was Albers again who was instrumental in getting him a job, this time at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he taught in the school for four years. During these same years he received a Fulbright to Italy. Once again it was popular culture that had determined his choice of location: not Florence but Rome, city of Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*. Rome can be said to have been the catalyst of his life as a painter. Feeling acutely isolated from his own culture and not knowing the language, Markman started to make etchings that expressed in both image and word a nostalgia for the culture he had left behind. It was the beginning of a lifelong involvement with etchings. In these, one can discover one of his strong points: the images, a visual delight in themselves, are accompanied by zany and witty verbal play on their meanings.

Professor Markman began his career at Indiana University on September 1, 1964. He was promoted with tenure to Associate Professor on Sept. 1, 1968 and to Full Professor on August 1, 1972. He retired on May 31, 1995, as Professor Emeritus.

His students transmit his legacy in departments across the country, demanding in their turn the same high standards and exercising the same tolerance for their own students’ artistic directions.

In addition to his daughter, Ericka Markman, Prof. Markman is survived by his partner of 21 years, Barbara Cabot. His wife, Barbara Miller, died in 1991. In 1998, he moved to Annapolis, Maryland, to be closer to his daughter, and died there of pneumonia on May 30, 2017, at the age of 86. His life was commemorated in a lengthy obituary in the June 14, 2017, *New York Times*, which featured many examples of his work.

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