

Art

Mark Lombardi: 'Index'

Pierogi
177 North 9th Street, Brooklyn
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Through April 3

Vatican Hit Men Conspiracy, corruption, and the mind of Mark Lombardi

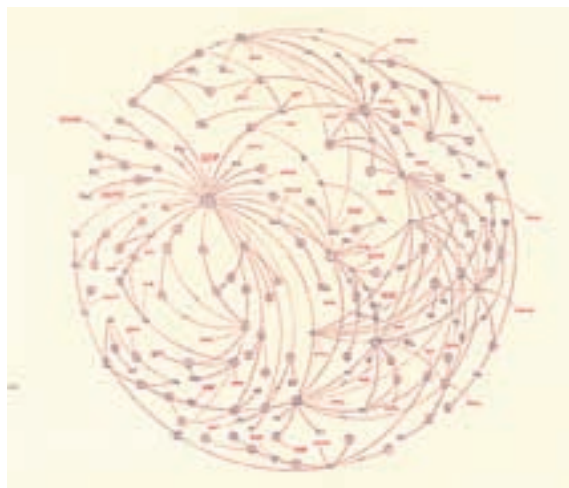
BY R.C. BAKER

The meticulous line work in Mark Lombardi's huge, hand-drawn chart about the 1991 BCCI bank collapse is interrupted by a pattern of rusty drips: The sprinkler system in the artist's studio went off a week before the 12-foot-wide piece was to be exhibited at P.S.1 in 2000. Although the reddish splatters add a vibrant expressionism to the surface, Lombardi couldn't view this accident as a serendipitous enhancement the way Duchamp accepted the cracks that careless truckers left in *The Large Glass*. Lombardi worked feverishly on a pristine copy for the exhibition, replicating his signature

lines, arrows, circles, and lettering, which graphically enmeshed Arab sheiks and U.S. officials in a web of fraud. Then, during the run of the show, he hanged himself.

How much cause and effect can be divined from these events is impossible to know, but the concise overview of Lombardi's career at Peirogi, titled "Index," includes the splattered BCCI drawing and early works featuring mangled typography. A vitrine holding the colored pencils, documentary tapes, and index cards he used to keep track of criminal convergences provides fascinating context for his obsessions and working methods. Shelves of books from his library offer backstory for his visual investigations: Rapacious financier Robert Vesco rubs shoulders with disappeared Jimmy Hoffa amid the spines of hundreds of volumes, which visitors can peruse.

Many of the tomes focus on epic financial scams. In a catalog note, Lombardi once wrote of the "foreign ghost companies" the Vatican employed to make "discrete contributions to Papal causes like [Poland's] Solidarity trade union and Irish republicanism." While supporting



John Berens/Courtesy Donald Lombardi and Pierogi

noia, as if turning to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil itself."

Such rococo prose is echoed visually in Lombardi's flowing "narrative structures," as he described them. Gracefully drawn tendrils arc like fireworks, connecting the Vatican to contract killers and securities fraud. Lombardi worked to pull away the interlocking veils of personal avarice, institutional corruption, and governmental expediency to render elegant

constellations of nefarious relationships.

But it's the title addendum (*5th Version*) that reveals the Sisyphean poignancy of Lombardi's art: Vast conspiracies throw off facts and theories like sparks sputtering in the darkness, making conclusions ever elusive. Courts deliver final judgments, but the 25-year sentence Sindona received in 1980 doesn't explain why his disciple, Roberto Calvi, was found hanging beneath London's Blackfriars Bridge two years later. In *Power on Earth*, Tosches asked a warden for his opinion of his most famous prisoner. "After a while, you just don't know," the official said of Sindona. "You stop trying to figure it all out."

Perhaps Lombardi's curse was that he couldn't stop trying to figure it out.

Solidarity may have placed John Paul II on the side of the angels, Lombardi's drawing *Inner Sanctum: The Pope and His Bankers Michele Sindona and Roberto Calvi, ca. 1959-82*

(*5th Version*) painstakingly charts a tale of greed and murder. According to one book in Lombardi's library, Nick Tosches's *Power on Earth: Michele Sindona's Explosive Story*, fervid speculation over the infamous financier's crimes—murdering John Paul's predecessor was a favorite—had made Sindona into "the Antichrist, the Devil in chains, to whom the world turned to slake the cravings of its credulous para-

**World Finance
Corporation and
Associates
c. 1970-84:
Miami, Ajman,
and Bogota-
Caracas
(7th Version)**