

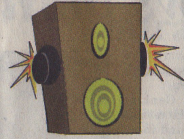
hours

Inside Today's 80 Hours

the weekend in Arts and Entertainment

Thursday, November 15, 2001

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• *DI* music reviewer Dave Strackany reviews the new live Radiohead album and Tuesday night's Martin Sexton show, 4C, 2C.

• Sycamore Mall unveils its new Cinema 6 this weekend; read the story, 2C.



“Dignity is not a symbol bestowed on man, nor does the word itself possess force. Man's dignity is a force and the only *modus vivendi* by which man and his history survive. When mid-20th century Germany did not let man live and die with this right, man became an animal. No matter how technologically advanced or sophisticated, when man negates this divine right, he not only becomes self-destructive but castrates his history and poisons our future. ”

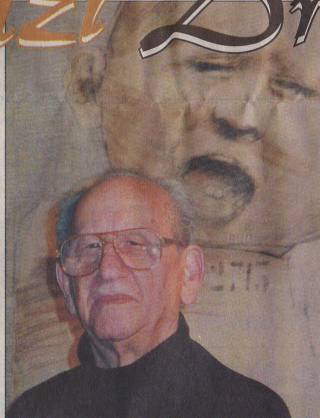
This is what *The Nazi Drawings* is about.

— Mauricio Lasansky, 1966



The Nazi Drawings

By Richard Shirk
The Daily Iowan



Top left: *The Nazi Drawings* No. 14.
Top right: *The Nazi Drawings* No. 17.
Center: Mauricio Lasansky poses in front of one of his drawings on display at the UI Museum of Art.

THE HAUNTING AND EMOTIONAL POWER OF THE HOLOCAUST IS OF SUCH MAGNITUDE THAT IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO ARTICULATE IN WORDS.

The Nazi Drawings is a renowned series by artist Mauricio Lasansky that attempts to capture these feelings through art. Lasansky's struggle and the drawings themselves are the focus of UI graduate Lane Wyrick's award-winning documentary, also titled *The Nazi Drawings*.

The Nazi Drawings, a series of 33 drawings meant to be viewed as an entire work, present stunning and disturbing statements about the inhumanity of war. UI Professor Emeritus Lasansky began painting them in 1961 and finished the majority of the works by 1966, with a triptych added in 1971.

Lasansky felt a moral obligation to express his repulsion and anger about war through the drawings — featuring starkly drawn victims and other horrors of the Nazi death camps in World War II.

"I was filled with hate and poison," says Lasansky in the documentary. "And I wanted to spit it out."

The Nazi Drawings was drawn with direct and simple materials, such as lead pencil and earth-tone watercolors, to reach people on a level that, although direct, is anything but simple.

The individual drawings are incredibly haunting works. The death camps are captured in the portraits and horrifically depict

the victims of the Holocaust in an unflinchingly straightforward way. The hollow features and mournful faces stare back at the viewer from life-size drawings, with the recurring motif of stamped serial numbers in the background symbolizing the millions dead. The drawings often return to the frightened and angry faces of young children.

When making his documentary, Wyrick was very conscious of the weight carried within the drawings.

"What I tried to do with this documentary was have a factual basis for what [Lasansky] was doing and provide some history, but concentrate on the gut response," Wyrick said.

This forceful and dynamic way of portraying the Holocaust has generated much publicity, with features over the drawings appearing in both *Time* and *Look* when they were first exhibited. Lines wrapped around the block when *The Nazi Drawings* was chosen to be one of the first showings at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City in 1967.

After his New York showings brought Lasansky and *The Nazi Drawings* worldwide attention, many expressed an interest in buying the drawings, although no one was willing to purchase them in their entirety. Lasansky has always been adamant over his intention to have *The Nazi Drawings* purchased and kept as 33 parts of a larger work. The UI Foundation offered to buy the drawings in their entirety in 1969 after a strong reaction by Richard Levitt.

"The drawings are so emotional for me," Levitt says in Wyrick's documentary. "I just

don't have the words to talk about them. They are just too powerful and disturbing."

The Nazi Drawings remain under the care of the UI Museum of Art, and components are often exhibited in the Lasansky Room of the museum along with Lasansky's other work. It was here that Wyrick first came across them.

He faced the daunting task of conveying the emotional impact that these important drawings have on people in a documentary-film format. "It was a somewhat intimidating task to know that these drawings are so important and powerful," he said. "I didn't want to do them a disservice."

Funding began to materialize in 1997, and Wyrick completed a final edit of *The Nazi Drawings* in early 1999. He got David Gompfer, the director of the UI Center for New Music, to compose the soundtrack and theater Professor Eric Forsythe to narrate the film. Wyrick himself handled all of the technical aspects of the film — editing, sound, and camerawork. He also wrote the narration with the aid of Lasansky's son Philip, who helped bring both feeling and fact to the film.

Through careful research and extensive interviews of Mauricio Lasansky and many others connected with the works, Wyrick has succeeded in not only documenting the factual details surrounding *The Nazi Drawings* but also in conveying the emotions attached to them. This complex sense of duality has not been lost on audiences or critics. The documentary has moved and informed thousands after being screened in dozens of film festivals, including such noted events as Telluride IndieFest 2K,

where *The Nazi Drawings* was chosen as Documentary winner. Wyrick's film also went on to win Best Director and Best Documentary at the prestigious International New York Film Critics Festival, and it has also been entered in the preliminary stages for contention for an Academy Award.

But the most memorable screening of *The Nazi Drawings*, which drew a crowd of 400-plus people.

"There was complete silence," he said. "I walked over to the VCR to turn it off, and it was like walking through very thick air."

Audiences were moved by the documentary in the same deep and stunning way that Wyrick was the afternoon he first saw the drawings. Many in the audience were crying.

Through Wyrick's thoughtful and comprehensive documentary, viewers not only learn about the factual details of the brutally honest drawings of victims of the Holocaust but also of the intensely compassionate struggle of Mauricio Lasansky to express his feelings of outrage and disgust about the inhumanity of the Nazi concentration camps. Wyrick hopes the documentary will make *The Nazi Drawings* better known and bring as many people into contact with its powerful message as possible.

Lasansky's works will continue to be on exhibit in the Art Museum's Lasansky Room, and footage from the Los Angeles premiere of *The Nazi Drawings* will be aired on public television on Nov. 21 at 7:30 p.m. and again on Nov. 24 at 9 p.m.

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