

Lasansky, Juan Perón and 'The Nazi Drawings'

In November 1981, Wallace Tomasini gave me a tour of the printmaking wing at the old Art Building and introduced me to Mauricio Lasansky and Virginia Myers.

I spent a spectacular hour with the two legends talking about life, war, trees, art, hope and despair.

Prior to my visit, one of Lasansky's colleagues had warned me that the experience could be quite "uneasy," to say the least.

"Lasansky's disciples think of him as the Almighty reincarnated," and added, "They needed God, and he was willing to be one."

Contrary to that, I enjoyed our first conversation and understood those who worshipped him and others who were intimidated by his stern look and his compelling pride.

Over the years, we only met three more times, and I had a chance to agree with some of his views and differ with others. However, I always considered him one of the pillars of 20th-century art and a pioneer who dared to turn to figuration in the wake of abstract expressionism.

Throughout decades of genuine creativity and intense passion, Lasansky ventured into epic images of savage brutality and torture with a personal agony that he seldom revealed to others.

I simply equate him with Goya, Velazquez, El Greco, Picasso and Caravaggio.

I asked him why not talk about his past?

"I keep it in my own realm, my emotional sanctuary where no one is allowed!" he said. "They always ask me how I knew the Holocaust that I have never seen? Therefore, I ask them back, 'Do you have to be crucified to believe in Jesus?' Do you realize that we have had our own Hitler in Argentina; a



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bloodthirsty fascist named Perón; I lived through hate and I know what genocide is."

Lasansky paused for a moment before asserting, "Yes, I have been there!"

Anti-Semitism prevailed in Argentina during the 1930s. As a young adolescent, Lasansky read Julio Meinvielle, who attributed capitalism and communism to an international Jewish conspiracy and identified Jews with the "evil imperialism."

Lasansky was a student when Gustavo Martínez Zuviria novels were very popular among young readers. Zuviria regarded Jews as the "diabolical race" of the Antichrist. In "El Kahal-Oro" (1935), published under the pseudonym Hugo Wast, Zuviria used the phrase "Kill the Jew" interchangeably with "Long Live the Fatherland."

Nacionalistas were professing anti-Jewish views everywhere in the country and plotted with German Nazis multiple violent attacks on Jewish-owned properties and stormed the Teatro Cómico de Buenos Aires for presenting Bruckner's anti-Nazi play, "Las Razas."

Lasansky was there when Union Nacionalista de Estudiantes and Acción Antisemita put up anti-Jewish posters around the country. He recalled reading, "Kill one Jew a day and you will clean our beloved fatherland of this sore."

Lasansky was 19 when Congregacion Israelita was bombed during Friday evening service. A few weeks later, Crisol's "Jewish News" and Clarinada's "Who is this Jew?" devoted



The portrait of Mauricio Lasansky was created by the world renowned printmaker's grandson, Adam Weinstein. Lasansky, a professor emeritus in the University of Iowa School of Art and Art History, died April 2 at age 97. SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-CITIZEN / ADAM WEINSTEIN

most of their propaganda to attack Jews. They printed grotesque caricatures of Jews as devils, spiders and monsters.

The commandment of Combate journal was "War against the Jew, hatred toward the Jew, and death to the Jew."

Before 1936 ended, Lasansky was appointed to run the fine arts school in Cordoba. Lasansky and Emilia Baragan married three years later during one of the darkest times in the entire Jewish history. Perón's Argentina witnessed its most fraudulent

election and the blood bath in Warsaw's Ghetto flooded the streets of Buenos Aires.

Lasansky's decision to leave home and seek refuge here was inevitable. It was simply a matter of surviving the "final solution."

Lasansky's gifted grandson, Adam Weinstein, who created Lasansky's portrait that you see here, has told me, "While I am so sad that he left, I am glad he didn't take his art with him."

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