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Lasansky exhibit demonstrates nuance of Nazi deception

By AMANDA PIERRE
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In his book "Justice not Vengeance," concentration camp survivor Simon Wiesenthal wrote: "I don't think there is any other solution than constantly coming to terms with the past and learning from it."

That statement is in line with the reasoning at the Cedar Rapids Museum where an exhibit of "The Nazi Drawings" by Mauricio Lasansky is opening today, coinciding with Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Lasansky's images are like the powerful memories we struggle to confront. By choosing whether to casually take in or to excavate these images, viewers decide just how deeply they want to deal with their most affecting, and sometimes horrifying, aspects of their lives.

The Argentine-born artist has said his work is about the ravages of all human brutality, said Lane Wyrick, who created a documentary about the drawings. "He didn't want them to be just specifically time-related to the Jewish experience," said Wyrick, who interviewed Lasansky for the 1999 documentary, also called "The Nazi Drawings." "He wants people to see it as representative of all kinds of atrocities committed."

Lasansky created the series of drawings in the 1960s, after seeing U.S. military footage detailing the horrors of the Second World War.

He wrote: "Man's dignity is a force . . . When mid-twentieth 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."

Lasansky's style has been partly devoted to social commentary. He originally left his home country out of disgust for increasing political oppression.

DETAILS

WHAT: The Nazi Drawings
WHEN: Today through Oct. 3
WHERE: Cedar Rapids Museum of Art
OPENING RECEPTION: 2-4 p.m. today, with remarks by Phillip Lasansky, the artist's son, at 3 p.m.
ALSO: "The Nazi Drawings," a documentary by Iowa filmmaker Lane Wyrick, will air on Iowa Public Television at 5:30 p.m. today. The documentary features interviews with the artist, Mauricio Lasansky and scholar Edward Honig, with an extensive biography of Lasansky and his explanations and explorations of the artwork. Not for all audiences, the documentary also contains some graphic concentration camp footage.

Other arts events commemorating Holocaust Remembrance Day

A local composer and Drake University law professor has been working on an opera centered on the lives of a German Jewish family during the Holocaust. Cathy Lesser Mansfield is directing a performance of "The Sparks Fly Upward" at 8 p.m. Monday to showcase her work so far and to try to gain exposure for it.

The performance, in Drake's Harmon Fine Arts Center, 25th Street and Carpenter Avenue, will last about an hour. It is free and open to the public.

The opera entwines a family's in hiding story with the story from the Book of Job, about a faithful man who undergoes various trials for his beliefs.

Mansfield researched the opera at various institutions in the U.S. and abroad that house official and important documentation of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust. She read unpublished biographies of Holocaust survivors, news accounts and books for historical accuracy.

Created in the Jewish musical tradition, the opera will feature Rabbi David Kaufman of Temple B'nai Jeshurun and Drake faculty and students such as senior Thomas McCargar, who recently won first place in the Music Teachers National Association competition in Kansas City, Mo.

An exhibit on the Nazi Olympics, Berlin 1936 will open at the State Historical Museum in Des Moines on Tuesday and be on exhibit until Sept. 30. It was organized by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The exhibit tells the story of the controversial era surrounding the 1936 Olympics, which the U.S. and 48 other countries participated in, even after Hitler's rise to power.

Photographs, writings, film footage and athlete testimonies from this time tell the

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studied under Stanley William Hayter in 1943, after Hayter had fled Nazi-occupied Paris. Lasansky came to the University of Iowa in 1945 where he eventually established the print department in the School of Art and Art History. He has received five Guggenheim Fellowships, the most ever granted, according to the American Association of Museums.

Lasansky retired from teaching at the University of Iowa in 1984. Now 90, he continues to live in Iowa City.

"The Nazi Drawings," 30 works and one triptych, are drawings made with pencil, printed pages, wash and earth-coloring. They are being shown in Cedar Rapids for the first time, on loan from the Richard S. Levitt Foundation.

"Mauricio only wants all 33 to be shown at once," said museum curator Jane Milosch. "It's about sequence and impact. I think he's indicating how one can slowly be deceived."

They start with a profile drawing of a Nazi, whose helmet seems to have teeth. He is bound up tightly in his uniform. As the soldier pieces progress in the first part of the series, the images gain interesting nuances, such as darkening eyes. The last soldier in the series becomes an almost life-size depiction of the man, except that his hat has grown to something that looks like an alligator head. Blood drips from his fingers, which are raised in a "Heil" position, and he appears to be caught with his pants down.

story. The exhibit also chronicles the Nazi rise to power, the Nazification of German sport, stories of athletes who boycotted or were barred from competition, those who participated and the aftermath.

Also at the Cedar Rapids Museum:

"Art in Roman Life: Villa to Grave" continues. It is an exhibition of ancient Roman artifacts arranged in rooms that recreate Roman domestic areas, kitchens, and tombs. It is one of the largest exhibits of its kind in the Midwest.

"Goya to Gauguin: 19th Century Romanticism" also continues through July 25. This exhibition of 26 works taken from the CRMA's graphics collection, includes work by Honoré Daumier, Eugène Delacroix, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and rare examples of print work by Paul Gauguin.

Jane Milosch, chief curator of exhibitions and collections at the Cedar Rapids Museum of art for 31/2 years, will leave her post this summer. She is moving on to join her husband in Washington, D.C.

She will continue her work as guest curator for the upcoming Grant Wood exhibition, "Grant Wood: The 5 Turner Alley Studio Years, 1924-34" which opens in September of 2005.