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Mauricio Lasansky, Master Printmaker, Dies at 97

By MARGALIT FOX
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Mauricio Lasansky, an Argentine-born master printmaker who was equally well known for a series of drawings depicting the horrors of Nazism, died on Monday at his home in Iowa City. He was 97.



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Lasansky Gallery

"Nazi Drawing #26" by Mauricio Lasansky, an Argentine-born artist and academic at the University of Iowa.

The death was confirmed by his son Phillip. At his death, Mr. Lasansky was emeritus professor of art and art history at the University of Iowa, where he established its program in printmaking, long regarded as one of the country's finest, after joining the faculty in 1945.

Although Mr. Lasansky was considered a wizard of printmaking technology, "[The Nazi Drawings](#)," as his series is known, used plain paper and ordinary pencil — the most humble, universal materials possible, he explained. Made over a six-year period and completed in the mid-1960s, it spans 33 images, tinted with washes of brown and rust.

The images depict a spate of depredations: in one, a Nazi officer wears a helmet that appears fringed with teeth, as if the skull of one of his victims were superimposed upon it; in another, an infant with sticklike legs emits an open-mouthed howl.

"The Nazi Drawings," now on long-term loan to [the University of Iowa Museum of Art](#), has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and elsewhere.

As a [printmaker](#), Mr. Lasansky was known for the grand scale of his images (some approach 4 feet by 8 feet), his vivid color and the complex layering of multiple techniques — including engraving, etching, drypoint, electric stippling and aquatint — in a single work.

His largest prints comprised as many as 60 discrete plates, each contributing a section of the image, and required many trips through the press. He used specially milled paper, made in France from a recipe he devised, that could withstand the repeated stress his methods entailed.

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Lasansky Gallery

Mr. Lasansky

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Lasansky Gallery

"Nazi Drawing #18," one in a series of works in pencil that represented a pronounced departure from Mr. Lasansky's usual focus on printmaking, which often involved multiple processes in the same piece.

His prints are in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Brooklyn Museum and elsewhere.

Mauricio Leib Lasansky was born in Buenos Aires on Oct. 12, 1914. His parents were Eastern European Jews; his father, who had made his way to Argentina via North America, had worked as a printer and engraver at the United States Mint in Philadelphia. He later gave young Mauricio his first instruction in those arts.

The younger Mr. Lasansky studied at the Superior School of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires. In 1936, at 22, he was named the director of the Free Fine Arts School in Villa María, in Argentina's Córdoba Province.

In 1943, Mr. Lasansky traveled to the United States on a Guggenheim fellowship. Settling in New York, he made a deep study of the prints — more than 100,000 — in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

He also became involved in [Atelier 17](#), the printmaking workshop founded by the eminent English artist Stanley William Hayter, begun in Paris and moved to New York during the war. (Other artists associated with the workshop in New York included Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock.)

With the rise of the dictator Juan Perón in the mid-1940s, Mr. Lasansky chose not to return to Argentina. He sent for his family and soon afterward accepted the post at Iowa; he later became a United States citizen.

Mr. Lasansky's wife, the former Emilia Barragan, whom he married in 1937, died in 2009. He is survived by four sons, William, Leonardo, Phillip and Tomás; two daughters, Rocío Weinstein, known as Nina, and Jimena Lasansky; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

In 1967, when "The Nazi Drawings" was exhibited at the Whitney, Mr. Lasansky spoke with The New York Times about the work's long, difficult gestation.

"The Hitler years were in my belly, and I tried many times to do the drawings," he said. "But I was too worldly about them, too aesthetic. The trouble was, I thought of them as art. But then I decided, the hell with it. Why don't I just put down what I feel? The fact is that people were killed — how cool can you play that?"

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