



Above, the painting "Foreclosure," by Max Ginsburg, 40" x 65" oil, 2011, depicts the anguish and frustration of people in foreclosure. Of this painting, Ginsburg, shown below, says, "It is unconscionable that people are being evicted from their homes, especially when banks and corporations are being bailed out. This injustice is not supposed to happen in America."

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF MAX GINSBURG

# True to what's real

*Painter Max Ginsburg records the social condition and his own political views with vivid realism*

BY JOANNE ZUHL  
STAFF WRITER

In the 1950s and '60s, when the world of art went headlong into the abstract, artist Max Ginsburg was bringing his view into tighter focus. Ginsburg's world wasn't fuzzy around the edges. His was vivid, animated and all too real.

"Realism is truth and truth is beauty," Ginsburg has said, explaining his love of a style that was not being taught when he was a student, and shunned when he was a teacher. Even today, the anti-realism sentiment remains strong in a modern art world that he says too often celebrates difference for difference's sake.

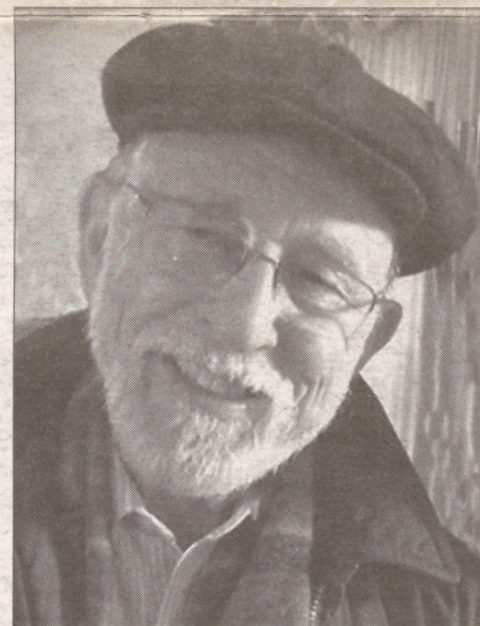
Ginsburg was born in 1931 in Paris, but from the age of 2 he was raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., the son of a painter and a pharmacist. From living room labor meetings to growing up Jewish during World War II, Ginsburg was exposed early to social turmoil, political activism and the hardships of poverty and oppression: To view it all, one had to look no further than the streets of New York, where Ginsburg's eyes linger to this day, most recently at the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations.

He grew up with racial prejudice, anti-Semitism and the fear of being murdered by the Nazis. But he was also exposed to left-wing and progressive thinking in reaction to the world around him. His father, the painter, encouraged his interest in art. His mother, the pharmacist helped organize a union in the hospital where she worked and nurtured Max's political will.

"That was the beginning of my feelings about the world, about the social structure, the ideas that took place," Ginsburg says of his environment as a youth. "And that's the beginning of why I began to paint more like I did."

Ginsburg studied at the legendary High School of Music and Art and then at Syracuse University, holding fast as a student of realism even as the world went head over heels for abstract expressionism and assorted related 'isms. He became a teacher at the High School of Art and Design in 1960, and he did commercial illustrations from 1980 to 2004. If realism wouldn't sell in the gallery, it would on the cover of romance novels, but only to sell unrealistic concepts. "During my years in illustration, I was trying to make a living. Painting these illustrations required a high degree of skill, but unlike my fine art my personal expression of reality was missing."

Ginsburg is a realist's realist, from style to subject. His paintings project a simple honesty that is as complex as any moment in time. He paints the social condition, both beautiful and brutal, incorporating his own political views. His "War Pieta" scene is rendered through precise strokes as a bloodied American soldier dying in his mother's arms on an Iraqi battlefield. The scene expresses Ginsburg's condemnation of "blood for oil," using the Renaissance Pieta imagery to make a point. In homage to Caravaggio's images of Christ on the cross, Ginsburg has masterfully, and vividly, illustrated an infamous torture scene from



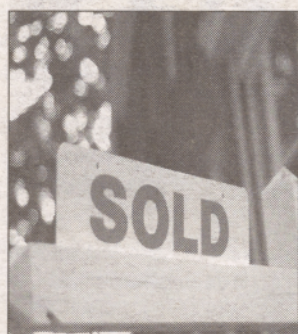
the Abu Ghraib prison, again symbolically pointing out the hypocrisy of our leaders who claim to be religious followers of Jesus Christ.

In September, Ginsburg came out with a new book, "Max Ginsburg - Retrospective" of his decades of work as a fine artist, teacher and illustrator. It includes more than 150 of his paintings, some of which are now part of a large retrospective exhibit (1956 to 2011) at the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio.

In a recent conversation with Ginsburg, the

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