

**WHAT'S REAL, from page 1**

80-year-old artist talked passionately, and sometimes quite emotionally, about his years as an artist, a teacher and a friend of the people in his paintings. Among his greatest memories is volunteering his time, early in the mornings, to teach students the technique of realistic painting, providing an opportunity not available in the regular high school curriculum. It was a role he relishes to this date, but true to the time, one that many school administrators and teachers in the union could not understand or disagreed with.

**Joanne Zuhl:** *And your own fellow painters couldn't understand that either?*

**Max Ginsburg:** They didn't like the fact that we were teaching "traditional old-fashioned" realism. But from my point of view, because realism is not in vogue, it is no justification for rejecting it. I feel realism in art, like truth, is aesthetically beautiful. I also feel that it communicates ideas strongly. If you look at my more recent work, like "War Pieta," "Torture Abu Ghraib," or "Homeless," you see the emotion strongly expressed.

And I feel that communication, which is not just cerebral, but also on an emotional level, is an extremely important part of art. So in addition to my aesthetically liking realism, I feel that it has an emotional appeal to all audiences. Artistic realistic skill is important to resonate the message with the public. It's not just the subject alone, it's that it's realistically done. There are abstract artists who agree with me on many social issues, but the communication of their ideas do not have as strong an impact with people as a realistically painted work.

Audiences are not exposed to this kind of art because the art establishment discourages its development and exhibition opportunities, and this lack of artistic

freedom is an injustice.

**J.Z.:** *The people in your paintings look like people I know, they're not symbols, or composites, an idea, or metaphors. They look like my neighbor, like people I see walking down the street.*

**M.G.:** They are.

**J.Z.:** *It's almost unnerving, it's unsettling to look at people in your painting, particularly "Homeless" or the "Foreclosure" or "War Pieta," it's like I know that guy.*

**M.G.:** I'm glad my paintings have communicated. Identification with the people about the social condition is my intention. I want the people in my paintings to be real people, individuals, not stereotypes without individuality. I try to apply John Keats' phrase, "Truth is beauty" in my art. Facing the truth is beautiful, avoiding it is ugly. Capturing the reality of individuals is beautiful, falsifying and covering up is not.

Yes, my "Foreclosure" painting was unnerving. Some felt it was too melodramatic; some people thought the melodrama was good. It is outrageous that people are being thrown out of their homes. Does greed and profit come before humanity? Melodrama is justified for real-life issues, not only for biblical narratives. You don't need a metaphor to explain something in emotional terms today. Don't be afraid to be a nonconformist on behalf of humanity.

I felt the same way about my "War Pieta." I was so outraged about this war that I felt that it was necessary to express my emotion, no holds barred.

**J.Z.:** *How is Occupy Wall Street fitting into your artwork? Are you going to paint that?*

**M.G.:** I went down there a few times. I'm 80 years old, so I don't know if I want to get arrested at this point. But I did go down there. And once I even painted with two

*Above, War Pieta, 50" x 60" oil on canvas, 2007, expresses Ginsburg's disgust for the "blood for oil" policies overseas, using the Renaissance imagery of the Madonna and Christ in the Pieta. At right, "Coffee Break," 16" by 16" oil on canvas, 2007, shows a Gulf War veteran, draped in the American flag, under the watchful stare of a policeman.*



friends. It was a matter of showing how I and other artists identify with this movement. And to identify, you've got to be there and show what you do. But I was there as another body among the people, the 99 percent, when they marched to City Hall. And I expect to go down more.

The Occupy Wall Street images are exciting. The action and determination of the mostly young people is a great idea for a painting, but right now I have been in the midst of a painting about unemployment. There are many figures and emotions involved, able-bodied people who don't have jobs, a sense of desperation. Some are sullen. Some have pride. Some are angry. All kinds of people: men, women, laborers, various kinds of workers as well as those who have been calling themselves the middle class for years. This is the kind of painting that will take months to do. But the Occupy

Wall Street idea is captivating and has a positive thrust. I may be doing two paintings at one time.

**J.Z.:** *Will we see the work that you created from that?*

**M.G.:** I hope so.

**J.Z.:** *You mentioned that you are inspired by Goya and Picasso. ...*

**M.G.:** In terms of style, I'm more inspired by Caravaggio and Rembrandt, because their style is more realistic. Like I said before, you can identify with realistically painted people. You know them. That's important to me. In terms of Goya and Picasso, it is the subject matter of Goya's "Disasters of War" and Picasso's "Guernica" that inspired me and,