



Story by
Josh Krauter

Photo by
Matt Miller

Inspired Ancestry

LEV SCHIEBER, a senior art major, says his visit to Auschwitz changed his life. But less than half of his art, such as the painting in the background, represent Schieber's feelings about his visit.

Artistic Differences
An ongoing look at ethnic contributions to
Nebraska state culture.

Art student
creates
portraits
from family
experiences
of the
Holocaust

Lev Schieber doesn't remember when he first became interested in art. It's just something he's always done, even when he was growing up in an Atlanta suburb.

"I lived out in the woods, and as a kid, I would get logs and carve stuff out of them."

Schieber, a UNL senior art major, traded his log for ceramics and a paintbrush, and now concentrates on painting and sculpture. Most of his art concerns himself, women and human emotion, but a recent trip to Poland took some of his work in a new direction.

Schieber's paternal grandparents are survivors of Auschwitz. But the artist never spoke with them about their experiences there. While studying in Europe, Schieber visited the Polish camp his grandparents were forced into. What he saw changed him.

"Everything is intact," he says. "Birds don't fly over it for some reason."

Schieber says 35 percent of his art uses Holocaust imagery, but he doesn't use any specific images he witnessed there, such as the wooden beds where the prisoners were kept, the piece of cement he brought back with him and the train tracks that brought his grandparents and many others there.

He says he just wants to capture the atmosphere. However, his Jewish heritage is not a primary influ-

ence on his paintings, if it is an influence at all.

"I'm not a practicing Jew, I just think the Holocaust is everybody's business, not just Jewish people," he says.

Schieber's primary influence is the Italian Renaissance painter Caravaggio.

"He painted really realistic things, war stuff, chopped-off heads and swords. It's pretty gruesome."

Schieber would like to paint just as realistically, but he says it takes years to become accomplished at realism. Right now, he says his strength is in representation.

One of his representations, "Dignity," a painting of prisoners of war, has been his most acclaimed piece. He has shown it at Yia Yia's, the University of Nebraska at Omaha and a student show, where he won a grant for \$100.

His first showing wasn't as successful. "It was at the Coffee House. I didn't know what I was doing, and my paintings all fell off the walls."

When Schieber found out his paintings were on the floor, he gathered them up and took them home, rather than continuing the show.

Now over his early embarrassment, he is currently working on three projects, a series of portraits of a friend, paintings about his father and a Polish ghetto scene of a Jewish street child.

"I'm not a practicing Jew, I just think the Holocaust is everybody's business, not just Jewish people."

LEV SCHIEBER
UNL senior art major

Schieber prefers working on his own to the set curriculum of school, but he says the university's influence was positive in that it forces artists to produce.

"Because of the time restriction, you can end up with something that's really half-ass," he says, "but if you have one good idea in mind, and it will take you 10 paintings to get there, the school can push you to get those paintings done."

Schieber wants his work to sell and hang on gallery walls. But he says that material success is not the reason he makes art.

"At the end of the day, I'd just like to drink a beer, look at the stuff I've made and just hang out with it."