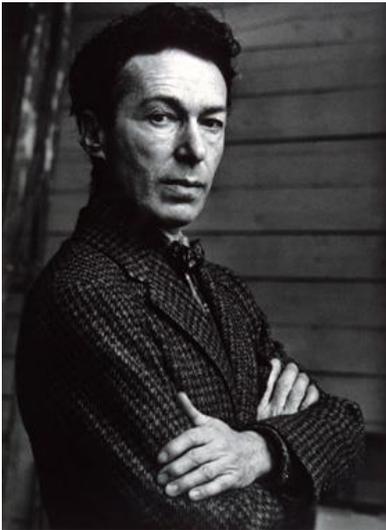


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## Hananiah Harari

(1912-2000)

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A native of Rochester, New York, Harari began to paint while still a teenager. He studied first at the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, and from 1930 to 1932 at the School of Fine Arts at Syracuse University. In Paris in 1932, he studied with Fernand Léger, André Lhote, and Marcel Grommaire. Through portrait commissions Harari was able to extend his stay on the city's Left Bank for several years. In Paris, Harari sought out Impressionist and Old Master paintings as well as modern works. He spent a year doing copy drawings from the collections of the Louvre.

After a trip to Palestine, "where visual richness but little hard cash awaited him," he returned to the United States in 1935. Harari settled in New York City, and joined the circle of young abstractionists working on the WPA's mural project under Burgoyne Diller. For Harari, as for a host of others, the WPA experience provided unencumbered time to develop their art "in an environment of purpose and animation. . . ."

After returning to New York, Harari became involved in the vanguard circle of the American Abstract Artists. Never a doctrinaire abstractionist, even in the early years of his career, Harari moved freely between abstraction and a lyrical expressionism that incorporated figurative elements: Harari was unwilling to relinquish the rich possibilities the natural world offered.

Moreover, the strict avoidance of recognizable forms advanced by geometric abstractionist members of the American Abstract Artists (Ad Reinhardt for one), precluded expression of Harari's irrepressible wit. Their approach, he wrote, "denied too much of art's potential and too many of its glories; in elevating neatness and order to a high altar, it failed to give adequate weight to the enriching concept of random upset (disorder, derangement, derailment)—a phenomenon abounding in all of life. I could not accept the idea that a formally pure art in and of itself denoted an evolutionary advance over an art of forms rooted in the natural world; to the contrary, I saw the former not leading forward, but, within its logic, veering toward a void."

Within the American Abstract Artists, Harari was by no means alone in his unwillingness to renounce themes drawn from his experience of the world. In a letter to the editor of *Art Front*, drafted by Harari, and signed also by George McNeil, Byron Browne, Rosalind Bengelsdorf, Leo Lances, Herzl Emanuel, and Jan Matulka, the group declared: "It is our very definite belief that abstract art forms are not separated from life, but on the contrary are great realities, manifestations of a search into the world. . . ."

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This desire to connect with the world at large is apparent not only in Harari's paintings but also in various letters to editors he wrote during this first decade of his career. Social and political concerns, and a desire to educate those unfamiliar with modern art, color his philosophy about art's significance and potential. Several paintings from the late 1930s and early 1940s reflect his horror at the political oppression and social atrocities taking place in Germany.

Around 1939, Harari became fascinated with William Harnett, and began doing trompe l'oeil paintings. Several of these he also executed according to a Cubist vocabulary. A 1939 painting entitled *Man's Boudoir*, a trompe l'oeil painting of a table top with the accoutrements of a man's toilette that won the first Hallgarten Prize at the National Academy of Design's 1942 annual exhibition, has, as a pendant, a Cubist version of the same subject

In 1943, Harari was inducted into the army, and at that time he ended his association with the American Abstract Artists. An active, early member of the group, Harari's artistic interests after the war no longer coincided with the group's program.

In the 1940s he produced artwork for the covers of magazines, including *Fortune*. He also contributed cartoons to *The New Masses*, which led to his being blacklisted in the 1950s during the McCarthy era. Using his gifts for Realism, he became a successful portrait painter affiliated with *Portraits, Inc.* One of his portraits is in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C.

Harari taught at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan from 1974 to 1990, and at the Art Students League from 1984 to 1999,[5] where most of his classes were filled to capacity. He stopped teaching when he could no longer see. With the Reagan presidency, his political leanings became increasingly conservative. A patriot to the end, and per his request, his coffin was draped with the American flag. He was elected into the National Academy of Design in 1990 as an Associate member and became a full Academician in 1994.

He died in Halthorne, New York in 2000.

Harari's works can be found in the collections of many major museums including: the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Smithsonian, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Yale University Art Gallery and The Amon Carter Museum (Fort Worth, TX), The British Museum and the Brooklyn Museum.

*Biographical sources: Smithsonian Institute; Papillon Gallery; Wikipedia*