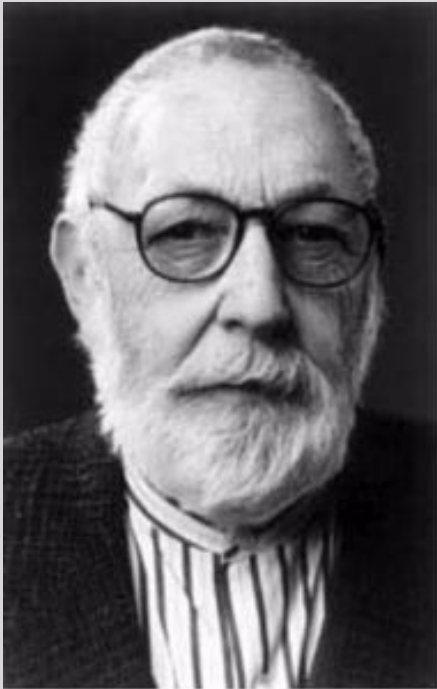


Artist Leonard Baskin



Unknown Artist, *Portrait of Leonard Baskin*, n.d., photograph.

Leonard Baskin (1922–2000) was a sculptor, wood-engraver, book-illustrator, graphic artist, writer, and teacher. Born in New Brunswick, NJ, Baskin’s father was an orthodox rabbi. By the age of 15, he began to study art formally, later attending a Jewish religious college. Much of his work was influenced by biblical stories, mythology, literature, and history. During World War II, Baskin served in the Navy and later returned to Europe to continue creating art.

Baskin created many works on the Holocaust, including the bronze statue Holocaust Memorial in Ann Arbor, MI. Baskin said it took him fifty years to be able to create work on the subject of the Holocaust. “The woodcuts make but a faint stab at the appalling actuality of the Holocaust, but they have granted me a gesture to somehow deal with the crashing reality of the Holocaust.”

His artwork *Man of Peace* in the GVSU Art Museum Collection shows a man holding a dead rooster with the middle section of his body covered by barbed wire. He is wearing only a shirt and has a solemn expression on his face. The symbol of the rooster is present in various works that address the subject of the Holocaust and World War II. One interpretation of the presence of the rooster is that it is symbolic of an Orthodox Jewish ceremony called Kaparot, traditionally performed the day before Yom Kippur. This ceremony consists of circling the rooster above one’s head nine times while reciting text from the Bible in order to transfer one’s sins from their person to the fowl. The rooster is then slaughtered and donated to the less fortunate or sold. The rooster could also symbolize the coming light of day, which in this work takes on a dark meaning as the rooster is dead. Artist Vera Klement offered another interpretation for the rooster as a symbol. She stated that the crowing of the rooster was seen as a warning for Jewish people that a pogrom, or state sanctioned attack, was coming.

Ultimately, we do not know what the rooster signified to Baskin, but he did create many works of roosters and man-bird hybrid creatures.

Prompt

As you consider your entry for the Henry Pestka Art and Poetry Contest, first remember that the Holocaust was a real experience; millions of people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, died due to government policy. We honor the survivors, and do not want to trivialize their experiences, even unintentionally. As you think about your poem or art piece, remember that your piece should be respectful of those real experiences

Think of a symbol that represents resilience or hope to you. Create an artwork of your symbol and its message or hope and resilience.



Leonard Baskin, *Man of Peace*, 1952,
woodcut on thin cream Japanese paper,
2017.48.1



Man of 1904

Fig. 10

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