

The Early Life of Lucienne Bloch

by Kent Judy

On January 5, 1909 in Geneva Switzerland, Lucienne Bloch was born. Lucienne always had a wonderful fascination for art and she deeply expressed it at a young age. Her father Ernest Bloch wanted the best for his children so he would send her and her siblings off to music lessons. “Lucienne, an imaginative and artistic child, didn't show much interest in music lessons, so the young teacher gave her an edition of Lewis Carroll's: Alice in Wonderland books, some watercolors and a brush. Lucienne's first experience in art was filling in the pictures while listening to her sister take lessons” (Old Stage Studios: The Artwork of Lucienne Bloch).

Lucienne's father moved their family to America in 1917 due to the tensions of the war and that influenced much of her work. While in America, Ernest sent Lucienne to study the theory of music. Lucienne continued her lack of interest in music and she was caught writing “I would rather do art” on a blank piece of paper. Her father let her use his library of vast books on art, and she began studying artists such as, Van Gogh, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Gauguin. She was eager to learn everything she could about art. She loved to sketch, draw, paint, and print, and at the age of 11 she had written and illustrated a children's book but it was denied by the publishing company.

In 1923, the family moved to Cleveland, Ohio. Lucienne excelled in her artistic abilities at Hathaway Brown school for girls. However, when it was time for her to start high school she yearned for a more artsy environment. She took tests to see if she could qualify for the Cleveland Institute of Art, and she passed all of the tests. Only 15 years of age, Lucienne Bloch was the youngest pupil to ever attend this prestigious college. In a letter from the registrar at that time, Lucienne was described as “... one of our most talented students and a young woman of unusual ability for concentration and application” (Old Stage Studios: The Artwork of Lucienne Bloch). Lucienne received that talent of concentration from her father who was a music director at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He was the one who was responsible for setting up the tests in which she took to qualify to go to college at such an early age.

In 1925, her father got the job of director at the newly founded Conservatory of music in San Francisco. He sent her to Paris with her mother so she would grow greatly as an artist. There, she studied at Ecole National et Superior des Beaux Arts. Lucienne's classmates were mostly Americans so they did not know the French language like she did, so she was one of the only ones who could understand the teachers and she oftentimes had to be the translator for the students. Her biggest influences, while in Paris, was the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle and the painter Andre Lhote.

One of Lucienne's most famous prints is called “Land of Plenty”. It depicts the life of a family in the midst of the great depression walking through a cornfield with huge power lines in the background. In a review, James R. Hugunin said, “Huge power poles emerge like giant stalks of corn from an abundant cornfield, conflating nature/culture into a single force for utopian aspirations” (James R. Hugunin). This print was symbolic of how the United States was changing from an agricultural country to a nation of technology. Lucienne also created a lithograph for the Rockefeller Center in 1933 entitled “Diego Rivera.”

“Lucienne Bloch, an acclaimed muralist whose most significant contribution to art may have been a series of surreptitious photographs she took in 1933, died on March 13 at her home in Gualala, Calif. She was 90” (Thomas 3).

Works Cited

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