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Nº 9 - RETRATOS

Fernando Gerassi (1899-1974)

Por [Javier Rubio Navarro](#)

Porfirio Rubirosa led me to Fernando Gerassi. I was looking for Trujillo's son-in-law, Flor de Oro's husband. During the Spanish Civil War, he was an attaché at the Dominican Republic embassy in Paris. He is mentioned in some books, but Howson's recent work on the purchase of weapons for the war says that the famous seducer and sexual gymnast had acted as a fence for jewelry and other valuables from the Republican camp. It is even claimed that this, along with selling visas to exiles, was the source of his considerable wealth. There was nothing online about Rubirosa during the war, but there he was, in a link, Fernando Gerassi. I had never read his name. In 1999, on the centenary of his birth and twenty-five years after his death, a New York gallery dedicated an exhibition to him. The exhibition didn't seem to have a great impact, but the website remained, with the circumstances of its conception, his biography, an anthology of quotes, and reproductions of some of his paintings, especially those painted in America during the later stages of his life. A man with a fascinating biography, bordering on the implausible, due to the quantity and quality of the people and places depicted. What did our man have to do with Rubirosa? According to what was said there, they had met playing poker, and then the Dominican had given him a job at his country's Parisian embassy in 1939, upon returning from Spain, where he had fought in the war on the Republican side. Gerassi was not Dominican. He was born in Istanbul in 1899 to a Sephardic family. He adopted Spanish nationality thanks to Primo de Rivera's 1924 decree, probably in 1927, when Atatürk complicated the lives of the Sephardic Jews in that city. We don't know when he obtained his Spanish passport, but with his previous Turkish passport, he had gone to Germany to study in 1917 or 1918, perhaps fleeing from service as a soldier. First, he went to Berlin, where he attended Cassirer's classes. Then to Freiburg, to Husserl's, where he apparently met and became close to Heidegger. Later, he went to Munich, to listen to Heinrich Wölflin. His next destination was Paris, still the world's art capital, where he studied painting, his ultimate vocation. From there, he made his first trip to Spain in 1924. In Paris, in 1929, he married a Ukrainian girl, Stepha Awdykovich—born in Lvov, or Lwow, or Limberg, the capital of Galicia, a region successively Austrian, Polish, Russian, and German—whom he had met in Berlin when she was in a relationship with the musician Alban Berg. Simone de Beauvoir recounts in her "Memoirs of a Young Woman," how he fell in love with her when he met her at a friend's house in 1927. Beauvoir, Sartre. The couple remained friends for years. Their circle of friends included Ilya Ehrenburg, André Malraux, Alexander Calder, Picasso, Miró, and many others. Also Simone's sister, Hélène de Beauvoir, whom Ferdinand gave painting lessons and with whom he had an affair. The year of their wedding, they moved to Madrid. He continued painting, but when his family went bankrupt, he had to combine his art with financial work. This, and—one might suppose—his newly acquired nationality, brought him to Spain, where he mingled with more or less progressive intellectual and artistic circles. In 1931, Stepha had a son in Paris, Juan, Tito for the family, Jean at the French Lycée in New York, John, a philosophy graduate in London, a correspondent for Time in Latin America, a biographer of Sartre, and whom we'll discuss later. Fernando exhibited individually between 1930 and 1936 at the Layetanas galleries in Barcelona, the Ateneo in Madrid, Paris, and London. He also participated in various group exhibitions, including the Salon des Superindépendants in Paris on several occasions. His career as a painter apparently allowed him to dedicate himself exclusively to this field. Few paintings have been found from this early period of his work. The comments found on the Tamarin gallery website, where Rubirosa had taken us, tell us little about them, except for more or less general or friendly praise. The Gerassis lived between Paris and Madrid during these years. They were also in Tossa: a local scholar lists it among the artists and writers who chose that town as a summer resort. Given the people they associated with, it can be assumed that they were not far from Willi Münzenber's

orchestra, or, in other words, from the network or alliance of anti-fascist intellectuals that provided ideological cover for the Soviet Union. The War in Spain In 1936, a new chapter opened in Fernando Gerassi's life. The Spanish war and revolution entered his life and turned him into a soldier. One of the consequences was that he did not pick up his paintbrushes again until almost ten years later. Whether it was Malraux who told him this, or his friend, or a writer named Benavides, Fernando Gerassi abandoned his wife in Paris in July 1936 and went to Irún to defend the Republic against the rebels. After Irún, he apparently collaborated with Malraux in the purchase and transport of airplanes sponsored by de Gaulle's future Minister of Culture. Gerassi met two strong qualifications: he spoke several languages and had commercial experience. It doesn't seem easy to corroborate Gerassi's war exploits. After leaving Malraux, he joined Madrid in November. He was in the 11th Brigade and in the mixed CL, which he commanded for a few months. We find traces of him here. Castells, in his work on the International Brigades, mentions him several times. In a note, he says that an Italian believed he was Polish. He also gives us some dates: from May to July 1937, he commanded the CL, 150th Brigade. He left due to illness and was relieved for a month until it was disbanded. Less information is found under his name in César Vidal's book and in the one published in Moscow in 1974. The summer of 1937 was one of the most turbulent times of the war, with the communists determined to pruning and homogenizing to better adapt to Stalin's needs at any given moment. To this end, Largo was abandoned and Negrín was promoted. The annihilation of the POUM, among other sinister events, took place around this time. On the military front, the actions of Gerassi's unit were not very brilliant, neither in the attempt to take Huesca nor in the Battle of Brunete. In a recent book, his son John contributes a testimony to the book "L'Amitié André Malraux." He recounts how the great French writer interceded on his behalf with Vittorio Codovila, the Argentine head of the Comintern in Spain, alias Luis Medina, to prevent him from being shot, which he allegedly obtained by even threatening to withdraw the planes from his squadron. The condition of the famous planes could be traced back then. Gerassi Jr. justifies his father's arrest with a narrative of uncertain profile. He recounts the death of the division's commander, the Czech Mate Zalka, known as General Lukacs. He places it in Guadalajara, but it is known that on June 11, 1937, a 7.5 caliber shell hit Zalka's open-top car on the way from Barbastro to Huesca, as he was returning from a meeting with General Pozas, commander of the Eastern Army. He says that Gustavo Durán and Gerassi were with him, but along with him, in addition to the driver who also died, were the Soviet advisor Fritz and the 12th Brigade Commissioner Gustav Regler, both of whom were seriously wounded. Incidentally, Lukacs was honored as a hero after his death, when the NKVD order to kill him had already reached Valencia. In his fictional account, it is said that the reason for his arrest was that he clashed with the political commissars over their proliferation and excessive power. But the documents state that he was removed from command due to illness. From there, much scope is left to the imagination. Regarding his activities during the remainder of the war, I have found no further testimony. His biographers tell us that at the end of 1938 he went to Paris on leave and never returned to Spain on the advice of the ambassador. His son, in the biography of Sartre that we will discuss, says that he was in Barcelona until March 1939, being one of the last interbrigadiers to leave the city. He also mentions missions, arms purchases, that took him to Paris several times. Gerassi Jr. barely mentions his mother's role in the war, as she must have spent time in Paris, but it is known that she acted as an interpreter for the Izvestia correspondent, Ilya Ehrenburg, a friend of the couple in Paris and Madrid. You can read about her in Castells' book, which Martínez Amutio remembers ("Blackmail of a People," 1974), in his portrait of the journalist, writer, spy, friend, and survivor of Stalin. He describes her as the second secretary, along with another woman named Mari, and mentions that she was "the wife of a Spanish communist painter named Sherassi." Our civil war gave rise to vertiginous military careers, especially among the Popular Frontists, where politics promoted control of the army based on affinity rather than merit in battle. In less than a year, Fernando Gerassi went from complete inexperience in the trade to leading an International Brigade. Fellow soldiers had been in the First World War or had some other experience, but he didn't; he had studied philosophy and painting and spoke half a dozen languages: that, as far as we know, was all his background for carrying out the

responsibilities entrusted to him. The poor results in the actions in Huesca and Brunete in which he participated are neither surprising nor likely to be attributed solely to his inexperience. As rapid as his career is the darkness surrounding his performance from July 1937 onward. The matter takes on detective overtones if the allusions his son makes to me are true.

He carried out his duties in Paris related to the purchase of arms. Although his name does not appear in this section in the books that discuss it. More War If the years of the Spanish Civil War must have been dramatic and fateful, the following years were no less so. With all due caution, his son tells us that he worked as a secretary at the Dominican Republic embassy in Paris. A complaint filed by the Russian-born painter Nicolas de Staël led him to join the ranks of colonel in a French army regiment in the Vosges for the brief duration of the so-called *Drôle de guerre*. He returned to Paris, demobilized, and met again with Rubirosa, who appointed him something like the person in charge of the embassy office, from where he distributed passports and safe-conduct passes. He crossed Spain with his family on the way to Lisbon using a Dominican passport. There he was the target of an attack. He arrived in New York in September 1941. But his political and military duties did not end there. It is known that he received aid from the United States government in 1941. Gerassi was unable to obtain a residence permit because he traveled with false documents. Later, he was recruited by General Donovan to collaborate with the OSS. What we know about his work in the embryonic CIA is what his son tells us. According to his account, after working on codebreaking, he returned to Europe to prepare a network of saboteurs that would act in the event of the German army entering the peninsula. When this did not happen, he was removed from Spain and sent to South America, where he remained until the end of the war. In a letter from Donovan, preserved by the family, he states that: "Without your actions in Spain in 1942, the landing of Allied troops in North Africa would not have taken place." Gerassi rejected the decoration offered to him and left the OSS. New York and Putney Between 1945 and 1949, the Gerassis remained in New York. He worked for the News Service, and she did odd jobs. It is known that their son attended the French Lycée. His problems with immigration authorities were constant until his situation was resolved in 1964 thanks to the friendship of Alexander Calder (whom he had met in Paris in the 1930s) with Abes Fortas, Kennedy's advisor. In 1949, through the mediation of historian Meyer Schapiro, he obtained a teaching position at a school in Putney, in the Vermont mountains. There is further testimony to his presence there. In his online biography, pianist, Scriabin scholar, and music critic John Bell Young remembers the Gerassis. "At 14, (...) we moved to Vermont, where my four-year adventure as a student at the prestigious and notoriously progressive Putney School began. "My passion for Russian culture was fostered by my teachers at school. One of them was Stepha Gerassi, a Ukrainian aristocrat who had been a close friend and confidante of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in pre-war Paris. In "Memoirs of a Good Girl," Beauvoir devotes an entire chapter to it. There was also Fernando, her husband, a Spanish painter, a former general in the Spanish Civil War, who fought with the anti-fascist forces alongside Hemingway, studied with Picasso, and proudly declared that he could speak 12 languages, none of them intelligibly. Fernando Gerassi traveled to Europe once, in 1969. He visited Austria, Italy, and France. The rest of the time, he remained in Putney, devoted to painting, but removed from social life, until his death in 1974. He had returned to painting in 1945, after nine years of inactivity. What I have been able to see in reproductions of his work is not much, but enough to see that, trying, so to speak, to recover his voice, he experimented with various interwar styles, as was the case in New York from the end of the war until the 1950s. In Vermont, in parallel with what was happening in Manhattan, Gerassi drifted toward a more abstract painting, as Impressionist as it was Expressionist. He exhibited on several occasions, although without making much of an effort to pursue a career. A book about Sartre As we have said, almost everything known about Fernando Gerassi is due to his son John. Much of this has been written in a book dedicated to Sartre, published in English in 1989 ("Jean Paul Sartre, Hated Conscience of His Century," Chicago University Press) and translated into French in 1992 ("Sartre, Conscience Haïe de Son Siècle," Editions Du Rocher), which is the one I consulted. It is a strange book. Its author says that he undertook the task of writing the biography of his lay godfather—Sartre saw him as a newborn on July 12, 1931, even before his father—in 1970. Gerassi Jr., of

whom only one book has been translated in Spain, "El gran miedo de América Latina" (Península, 1970), earned a degree in philosophy in London and was a professor at Queens College in New York.

His professional career has been strongly marked by his far-left, internationalist, and Third World activism. In addition to the aforementioned book, his works include a study on North Vietnam, a biography of Fidel Castro, another of Camilo Torres, an edition of the works of Che Guevara, and another book on American volunteers in the International Brigades. In the 1960s, he worked with Bertrand Russell on the international tribunal set up to criticize the United States' intervention in the Vietnam War. According to his account in the aforementioned book, it was he who convinced Sartre to preside over the tribunal in 1966. Another of his achievements is that a few years later, he facilitated the only conversation Marcuse ever had with Sartre, a tragicomic scene. The last work he had submitted to his publisher was a biography of Camilo Torres, after which it was suggested that he write something with a wider potential readership. What else could he do? Perhaps a biography of Sartre? His editor thought it was a good idea, although he tried to disillusion him, given that the Nobel Prize winner hadn't accepted any of the many previously proposed nominees, and given his stated intention to write a sequel to "Les Mots," he didn't believe he would succeed. Sartre accepted John Gerassi's suggestion and even signed a commitment for his godson to write his biography. Gerassi was determined to do his work conscientiously and interviewed the French Nobel Prize winner many times on tape. He recently donated his tapes to Yale University. But as he accumulated material and extracted insights from Sartre and his entourage, the work didn't progress satisfactorily. The years passed, and the biographed subject lost vitality. He died in 1980, and the assignment was bogged down with 700 unsatisfactory pages, the juice of another 2,000 pages of notes. This continued in 1985 when Annie Cohen-Solal published what is still considered the definitive biography of the master, a book all of Sartre in 728 pages. The book had the beneficial effect of freeing Gerassi from his assignment. When he finished reading it, he destroyed what he had written on the same subject and considered doing something different. In this book, Sartre's life intertwines with that of the author and his parents. The Frenchman used Ferdinand Gerassi, and also his wife, as models for a character, Gómez, in the trilogy "Les Chemins de la Liberté." In the novel, John Gerassi explores Sartre's relationship with his friends during the war years, many of whom are reflected in it. Thus, "Sartre, Conscience Haïe de Son Siècle," apart from its contribution to the understanding of the French philosopher and writer, is a testament to Ferdinand Gerassi's life. "The Colors of Passion" Twenty years after his death, some New York gallery owners specializing in contemporary African art met John Gerassi in a small town on Long Island, and he agreed to show them his father's legacy. Unusually, they dedicated an exhibition to him in his centennial year, calling it "The Colors of Passion." This gallery has a website, tamarin.com, where I found it. At first, I doubted he had really existed. His biography seemed like that of a new Josep Torres Campalans. Just to try to verify this, I skimmed "The Roads to Freedom" and John Gerassi's book on Sartre. I followed his trail in books about the International Brigades and others about the period, without much success. I also spent a few hours sifting through the garbage returned by search engines on the global grid. Between 1930 and 1939, Fernando Gerassi lived, painted, made friends, and made enemies, against whom he fought for several years, in Spain. As a well-to-do colleague apparently once said, "If this Gerassi hadn't dedicated himself to playing soldiers, he'd be on our level today." Perhaps one day he will cross paths with a researcher, novelist, or gallery owner who will reconstruct his life in more detail or show us his paintings and drawings. Today, he is a complete unknown. Perhaps he shouldn't be so unknown. Postscript, January 2002: Two more clues about Gerassi. The first appears in the book "Spain Betrayed, The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War" (Yale University, 2001), which collects and discusses various documents from the Russian archives. Number 60 is the one sent in December 1937, shortly before disappearing as a victim of Stalinist terror, by the Hungarian Manfred Stern, known in Spain as General Kleber, one of the most important Soviet advisors in the service of the Comintern. Stern-Kleber remained in the peninsula for just over a year, from September 1936, and commanded several units of the International Brigades. The aforementioned report refers to Gerassi: "The commander of one of my brigades, the

15th, had to be relieved in the middle of combat. Gerassi, an artist by profession, had been promoted to the position of brigade commander by Lukacs, despite having no experience in military affairs or unit command. Earlier, in the Battle of Huesca, he had noted that Gerassi, despite other good qualities, could not continue to lead the brigade. At Brunete, his lack of suitability was confirmed again. General Miaja requested that he be relieved. The brigade was pleased to learn that he would be replaced by the Polish comrade Janek, commander of the Dombrowski Battalion. Gerassi's relief displeased some Russian comrades, advisors, who were friends of him and his wife, who worked as a translator in the advisors' organization. Comrades Gorsky and Loti (transport and intelligence advisors) sided with Gerassi and made me responsible for his relief. The matter was soon resolved when other higher-ranking comrades accepted my conclusions on the Gerassi affair." (p. 342) The second clue is more subtle. He is mentioned in Héctor Vázquez Rial's novel about Gustavo Durán, "El soldado de porcelana" (The Porcelain Soldier), Ediciones B, Barcelona, 1997. Page 565: "Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León were even more explicit than Menéndez in a letter dated Paris on May 21 (1939). They told him about Gerassi, about Mantecón, about the possibility of reaching Paris without a passport, about the possibility of obtaining a residence permit there, with them..."

Above was translated from Spanish to English by google.

Other URL:

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1957/5/25/fernando-gerassi-pas-a-young-man/>

Fernando Gerassi

Paul Schuster Gallery

By [Lowell J. Rubin](#)

As a young man, Fernando Gerassi, like a number of Spanish intellectuals including Ortega y Gasset, went to Germany to study philosophy. "I wanted to find out the meaning of life," Gerassi recalls. After studying with such men as Heidegger and Husserl he was disappointed, "I didn't find anything but speculations." To conquer his disappointment he went to Munich to study art history with the great art historian Wolflin. When it came time for him to submit a thesis, Gerassi fooled them again. "I decided to become a painter," he says, "and Wolflin really liked painting so he encouraged me."

Gerassi's first master was Stanislas Stueckgold of Munich, a student of Matisse. "Stueckgold died in poverty, virtually unknown, but he was a great painter," Gerassi claims, "and it will be a great happiness when his work is recognized." A period followed when Gerassi was influenced by Cezanne. He went to Provence to study where the French master lived and worked. Cezanne's influence can still be detected now and then in Gerassi's paintings, for example in the "Still Life with Oranges and Grapes" as well as an earlier work, "Three Figures."

With these few exceptions, the formal element in Gerassi's painting has been reduced to a minimum. What the pictures lack in content of line and structure, they make up in color and texture. The result is "a warm and sunny kind of innocence." Gerassi's preference for emotion over thought

is expressed even by the fact that curves take precedence over straight lines or angles. When angularity occurs it is usually accompanied by a more structural effort, where space and form are more defined, as in "Ulysses." But on the whole, the curve, that is the lyric sense, prevails.

Gerassi seems to strive for the elemental freedom and simplicity of Matisse. There are instances where he achieves this, but when he fails, I think it is because of a basic weakness in technique or an attempt to be overly primitive and spontaneous. Successful spontaneity is something earned by great genius or worked through to, by great effort. The failure of spontaneity is written in the unevenness of Gerassi's paintings not only from one to the next, but at times within a picture. A telltale sign is the smudges which occur in various places where the artist has tried to correct himself. For this reason, as well as others, the "Fighting Cocks," a brilliant picture, strikes me as more satisfying than the long bird that hangs to its left.

The desire to be as free of preconceived ideas as possible has allowed Gerassi to paint in a number of different styles. There are very abstract red blotches on green backgrounds that have an affinity with Pollock and the Rorschach tests, as well as recognizable still lifes and landscapes. In this sense, Gerassi reminds us of his compatriot Picasso although the fluent shifts in style by Picasso are motivated by a more intellectual problem-solving mentality.

The area of intellectual struggle, if it has been shifted from within the painting to the surface, is not entirely absent. "Sun Landscape" shows a successful and deeply probing resolution of the problem of color and texture. This painting radiates heat by close color combinations and it is no wonder that it has made some people nostalgic for desert country of the West. A very different but equally successful atmosphere is created in the more subtle here than usual, more wintry and thoughtful than the favorite spring and summer brightness of Gerassi's latest period.

It is only in this way that he suggests he was once a general in the Spanish Civil War. During his lifetime he has had as many as 50 different jobs which he believes have added to his ability as an artist. "50 jobs," he says, "makes one painter." He advises others to follow his example. "It is most important," he feels, "for a young artist to take a job so that he will be financially free to paint as he pleases. Never try to make money by painting what you do not feel by painting pictures as you would produce merchandise."

The philosopher is hidden in the painter, but Gerassi does come forth with a Spanish sense of tragedy combined with hope. It is reflected in pictures like the black and white jug with its tragic air or in such remarks as: "Each time you fail, you learn something. If you have faith in yourself, you go on. The more failures, the better."

<https://web.archive.org/web/20081215041910/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,937184,00.html>

SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURE

Monday, Mar. 28, 1955

PAINTER Fernando Gerassi believes that nothing succeeds like failure. "Each time you fail," he says, "you learn something. If you have faith in yourself you accept the failure and go on. The more failures the better." This philosophy has seen Gerassi through some dark times, and brought him to a point where he may have to abandon it. Gerassi's first exhibition in 20 years opens next week at Manhattan's Panoras Gallery, and is likely to be a smashing success.

The pictures relate to no particular school or fashion, carry no message. They are not meant to stun, dazzle, or instruct the viewer, but simply to be enjoyed. Gerassi clearly enjoyed painting each one. They have the brightness, boldness and paradoxical vagueness that six-year-olds generally bring to painting, but behind the pictures' ebullience lies a highly sophisticated intelligence. Gerassi's Magic Mountains (right) is done with rockbottom economy of means: a few horizontal stripes, one with a sawtooth edge. To those who demand recognizable details, it may seem little more than a close-up of a rusty saw. But taken on its own terms, as evocation rather than description, it can have the misty morning grandeur of a mirage that stays. The Sun Is Never Alone presents a more complex image in almost equally simple terms. The red and black crescent shapes supporting the sun's molten disk through the dusk can be read as clouds, a bird, a fish, a sailboat, or all four combined.

Painter Gerassi is a heavy-muscled, egg-bald man of 55 who talks with staccato forcefulness in a thick accent—English was the last of many languages he picked up. Raised in Spain, he first resolved to be a philosopher, went to Germany to study. "I wanted to find out the sense of life," he recalls. "I found out you don't find out anything but speculations."

A trip to Italy convinced Gerassi that what he really wanted in life was to paint pictures. To make a living while painting, he has tried his hand at some 40 different jobs. He came to the U.S. at the start of World War II, got an art teaching post at Vermont's Putney School three years later. Today his Ukrainian-born wife teaches modern languages at the school, while Gerassi paints in their two-room, picture-crammed cottage, or wanders over the Vermont hills.

Such peaceful, secluded living has served to heighten the chief quality of Gerassi's paintings: a warm and sunny kind of innocence. But the simplicity actually springs from an arduous process of trial and error—from "failures," as he says.

<https://www.frugalfun.com/gerassi.html>

The Colors of Passion: Fernando Gerassi's Centennial

Celebrating the birth centennial of influential Spanish painter Fernando Gerassi--friend to Picasso, Calder, Sartre and other intellectuals.

by [Francois Rojon](#)

This exhibit is for us much more than a simple virtual show. It is also a call to pay homage to a great artist as well as an extraordinary man. After intensive research in France, Spain, the US and Japan - research which still needs much more legwork - we were compelled to present to you our discoveries in the hopes that this would lead to recognition of a great artist. Below you will find extracts from the web page as well as amazing testimonies from Gerassi's friends such as Calder, Miro, Simone de Beauvoir, Meyer Shapiro.....

Fernando Gerassi was born in 1899 in Istanbul, Turkey...

His work and his life are inseparable: one explains the other. For, as one contemplates his canvasses, his paintings of astonishing colors, one cannot avoid being struck by the great hopes, almost exaltations, the violent passions, the loves and friendships of a whole life, but also the confrontations, the betrayals, the pulverized ideals... A film unwinding rapidly of Paris in the Thirties, of Barcelona in flames, of the mountains of Vermont at peace.

Fernando Gerassi's work is complex, dramatic, upsetting, uplifting. It follows closely his extraordinary history, as much his political commitment and his ideological trajectory. Between his first oils, in 1927, and his death in 1974, Gerassi travels the gamut of modern art. Yet, throughout, characteristic constants are clear: an inborn sense of color, which sometimes combine into a violent fugue.

Though unknown to the general public, Fernando Gerassi traversed his century in the company of those who thought, wrote and created in the last 50 years, folks as varied as Sartre, Calder, Picasso, Malraux, Meyer Shapiro, Miro, or Soviet Marshal Jukov.... Born in Istanbul in 1899, he was intimately linked to the major events of the 20th century, often thrown--or throwing himself--into the thick of such upheavals as the creation and collapse of the Weimar Republic, the pre-war revolutions of modern art of Montparnasse, idealistic Popular Frontism of Europe, anti-fascism of Madrid and Barcelona, of spying and counterspying of Washington and New York... A passionate, dramatic, agitated life ending in the tranquillity of Vermont's rolling hills "which look so much like the Basque country..."

Quotes and Commentaries

"Spain's best painting is in Paris today, and it is in Paris that it can conceive itself, feel itself, affirm itself as Spanish painting, as art and act genuinely representing Spanish genius." - Jean Cassou, Catalogue of the exhibition at the College of Spain of the Cite Universitaire, Paris, 1935.

"In June, Stijl and Fernando descended on Paris, highly elated because, after a long period of agitation, upheaval, and repression, the Republic had finally been established in Spain." - Simone de Beauvoir, "The prime of life," World, Cleveland, 1962.

"A unique painter's temperament, a rare understanding of painting." (Gallery Billiet-Worms, Paris.) - J. Laprade, "Beaux-Arts," Paris, March 1935.

"He affected me then more than any other man alive. He was an intellectual, like me. He was a painter, I was a writer. He had the same point of view, the same basic vision of life. To him, painting was more important than anything else. And then, just like that," he said clicking his fingers, "Fernando went off to the fight. This really upset me. We had both always wanted revolution, but then suddenly, here was an intellectual like me, saying in effect, intellectuals must do what they preach." - Jean-Paul Sartre, interview with John 'Tito' Gerassi (Fernando's son), Paris, 1971.

"He is a true romantic, following the direction of instinct. Often he works with a very thick past of color, shaping a motif of extreme simplicity." - Dorothy Adlow, "The Christian Science Monitor" Boston, May 1957.

"He ridiculed the "war in lace ruffles," but at the same time I knew that he could not find it in himself to condemn the magnanimity of the militiamen who, though they swore dreadfully and on meeting one another said "salud y dinamita ["health and dynamite"]," instead of "hullo," indignantly repudiated the idea of blowing up the Alcazar: "What are you thinking of? There are women and children inside!" - Ilya Ehrenbourg, "Memories, 1921-1941," World, N.Y., 1963.

"Ernest Hemingway, who was at the front, told me once in New York that Fernando did everything he had to that day but never stopped crying. Neither did Ehrenbourg." - John 'Tito' Gerassi, "Memoirs," New York, 1964.

"These are paintings done for the love of painting and though the dislocation of the war years has been costly, there are clear signs in this show of how far he can go now that he seems to have his grip on the brushes again." - "Art Digest," New-York, April 1955.

"To those who demand recognizable details, it may seem little more than a close-up of a rusty saw. But taken on its own terms, as evocation rather than description, it can have the misty morning grandeur of a mirage that stays."

- Alexander Eliot, "Time Magazine," NY, March 1955.

"A letter from the Gerassi which filled me in on their latest venom. They were stopped from going to France two years ago, and since they didn't cooperate they were warned that they would be deported to Spain, he an ex-red general in the civil war." - Simone de Beauvoir, "Letters to Nelson Algren," Gallimard, Paris 1997.

"Rarely does one see more energy symbolized in paintings today than in the work of Fernando Gerassi, artist of Putney, Vt., at the Panorax Gallery." - C. B., "N.Y. Herald Tribune," New York, April 1955.

"Ehrenbourg also shared his true feelings with trusted friends. To Stepha and Fernando Gerassi, he disclosed his anguish over Soviet anti-Semitism and the pressure Boris Pasternak was under in Moscow."

- Joshua Rubenstein, "Tangled Loyalties," Harpers & Collins, New York, 1996.

"The desire to be as free of preconceived ideas as possible has allowed Gerassi to paint in a number of different styles. There are very abstract red blotches on green backgrounds that have an affinity with Pollock and the Rorschach test, as well as recognizable still life and landscapes. In this sense, Gerassi reminds us of his compatriot Picasso."

- Lowell J. Rubin, "The Harvard Crimson," Boston, May 1957.

"The painter Fernando Gerassi, showing work at the Panora Gallery, for the first time in twenty years, turns visual experiences into emotional ones."

- S. P., "New York Time," New York, April 1955.

"Fernando and Calder knew each other since the Thirties. Calder had exhibited at the Gallery Billiet-Worms in Paris, in part thanks to Fernando. It was also Fernando who had the idea of naming the sculptor "Calderon de la Fuente" so that he could exhibit his famous "Mercury Fountain" at the Spanish Pavillion at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris."

- Recollections of Tito Gerassi.

"Works significantly and meticulously chosen: a noble homage to that genius by the best works out of the best veins of Juan Gris, Cargallo and Maria Blanchard, Boreas, Gerassi, Gregorio Prieto, Castellon, Dali, Gonzales, Bernal, de la Serna, Junyer, Miro."

- "Beaux-Arts," No 126, Paris, 1935.

Francois Rojon runs Tamarin Art Inc., a gallery in Lido Beach, New York, (516) 897-4207

https://www.askart.com/artist/Fernando_Gerassi/16993/Fernando_Gerassi.aspx

Born: 1899 - Istanbul, Turkey

Died: 1974

Known for: Modernist landscape, still life

Biography from the Archives of askART

Fernando Gerassi was born a century ago this year in Constantinople (Istanbul) Turkey. Jean-Paul Sartre called him Gomez in his trilogy, "The Roads to Freedom". Soldier, militant, revolutionary, but especially an artist, a great artist!

Fernando Gerassi--- a painter forgotten by history, an extraordinary talent whose time to reemerge has arrived.

His work and his life are inseparable: one explains the other. For, as one contemplates his canvasses, his paintings of astonishing colors, one cannot avoid being struck by the great hopes, almost exaltations, the violent passions, the loves and friendships of a whole life, but also the confrontations, the betrayals, the pulverized ideals.

A film unwinding rapidly of Paris in the Thirties, of Barcelona in flames, of the mountains of Vermont at peace.

THE WORK

Fernando Gerassi's work is complex, dramatic, upsetting, uplifting. It follows closely his extraordinary history, as much his political commitment and his ideological trajectory.

Between his first oils, in 1927, and his death in 1974, Gerassi travels the gamut of modern art. Yet, throughout, characteristic constants are clear: an inborn sense of color, which sometimes combine into a violent fugue. If the man makes no concession, neither does his work: Ideas and themes are pushed to their paroxysm. He pursues each new promising path to its inevitable end. The rest has no importance.

THE HISTORY

Though unknown to the general public, Fernando Gerassi traversed his century in the company of those who thought, wrote and created in the last 50 years, folks as varied as Sartre, Calder, Picasso, Malraux, Meyer Shapiro or Soviet Marshal Jukov.

Born in Istanbul in 1899, he was intimately linked to the major events of the 20th century, often thrown or throwing himself into the thick of such upheavals as the creation and collapse of the Weimar Republic, the pre-war revolutions of modern art of Montparnasse, of idealistic Popular Frontism of Europe, of anti-fascism of Madrid and Barcelona, of spying and counterspying of Washington and New York. A passionate, dramatical agitated life which ends in the tranquillity of Vermont's rolling hills "which look so much like the Basque country..."

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Name: Fernando Gerassi

Date and place of birth: Octobre 5th, 1899, Constantinople, Turkey.

Nationality: Born Spanish, American citizenship, in 1964.

Profession: Artist.

Family situation: Married, 1 son.

Education:

1906-1918, primary and secondary at the German lycee of Constantinople

1918-1922, philosophy in Germany with Cassirer in Berlin, Husserl in Freiburg, history of art with Heinrich Woeffflin in Munich.

Languages:

Turk, Greek, German, French, Spanish, English.

ONE MAN SHOWS:

1930 - Layetanas Gallery, Barcelona.

1931 - Atenao of Madrid, Madrid.

1932 - Sira Gallery, Barcelona.

1933 - Jean Bonjean Gallery, Paris.

1935 - Billiet-Worms Gallery, Paris.

1936 - Storen Gallery, Londres.

1949 - Putney School, Putney - Vermont.

1950 - Putney School, Putney - Vermont.

1951 - Putney School, Putney - Vermont.

1953 - Marlboro College, Marlboro-Vermont.

1955 - Panorax Gallery, New-York City.

1956 - Music Festival Concert Hall, Marlboro - Vermont.

1957 - Book Cellar Art Gallery, Brattleboro - Vermont.

1957 - Paul Schuster Gallery, Camgridge - Massachussets.

1957 - Country Life Art Center, Northport - New York.

1957 - Kalamazoo Institute of Art, Kalamazoo - Michigan.

1958 - Carpenter Art Gallery, Dartmouth college, Hanover.

1958 - Putney School, Putney - Vermont.

1959 - Bennett College, Millbrook, New York.

1960 - Westcorner Gallery, Crafton - Vermont.

1961 - Georges Guy Gallery, Westport - Connecticut.

1962 - Paul Schuster Gallery, Camgridge - Massachussets.

1965 - Newfane Gallery, Newfane - Vermont.

1965 - Windham College, Putney - Vermont.

1970 - Ward-Nasse Gallery, Boston.

GROUP SHOWS:

1926 - "Salon des Independants", Paris.

1927/35 - "Salon des Surindependants", Paris.

1935 - "Maison d'Espagne", Cite Universitaire, Paris.

1939 - D'Anjou Gallery, Paris.

1947 - Southampton Museum, Long Island, New York.

1947 - New Age Gallery, New York City.

1951 - Galeria Escondida, Taos, New Mexico.

1953/54 - Marlboro College, Marlboro, Vermont.

1954 - Boston Symphony Hall, Boston, Massachussets.

1956 - Northfield Chateau, Northfield, Massachusetts.
1957 - Cracker Barrel Bazaar, Newbury, Vermont.
1957 - Country Life Art Center, Northport, Long Island, New York
1958 - Springfield Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts.
1958 - Michigan Art Museum, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
1967 - Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
1968 - Ward-Nasse Gallery, Boston.

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- "Sartre: Hated Conscience of his Century", John Gerassi, Chicago University Press, 1991, Chicago.
- "Calder, Autobiographie", Maeght editeur, 1972, Paris.
- "Helene de Beauvoir, souvenirs", Librairie Segquier, 1987, Paris.
- "Lettres a Nelson Algren", Simone de Beauvoir, Gallimard, 1997, Paris.
- "Paris-Paris", Gallimard/Centre Pompidou, 1992, Paris.
- "Who's Who in American Art", Dorothy B. Gilbert, 1962, New-York.
- "Three Hundred Years of American Painting", Alexander Eliot, Time inc., New-York, 1957.
- "Tangled Loyalties", Joshua Rubenstein, Harpers & Collins, New-York, 1996.
- "From Spanish Trenches", Marcel Acier, Modern Age Books, Inc. New-York, 1937.
- "Memoirs, 1921-1941", Ilya Ehrenbourg, World, New-York, 1963.
- "The Prime of Life", Simone de Beauvoir, World, Cleaveland, 1962.

Submitted December 2004 by Francois Rojon, Researcher of the life of Fernando Gerassi.

The lists above are not exhaustive. They refer only to those exhibits and works which we have been able to track down. We are continuing our search.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Gerassi

Fernando Gerassi (October 5, 1899 – 1974) was a [Sephardic Jew](#) born in [Turkey](#). He was an accomplished artist who exhibited alongside [Picasso](#) before [volunteering](#) to fight in the [Spanish Civil War](#).^[1]

Personal life

In 1922 Gerassi met Stephania Avdykovich, a [Ukrainian](#), in [Berlin](#) and they were married in 1929.^[2] In 1931, their son, [John "Tito" Gerassi](#), was born in Paris.^[2]

Gerassi and his family moved to the United States at the start of [World War II](#) and he was hired by [Carmelita Hinton](#), a progressive [educator](#) who was the founder and director of the [Putney School](#) in [Vermont](#), to teach art at the school.^[3] Hinton also employed Gerassi's wife, Stepha, to teach "anything she wanted" and she would go on to teach a number of subjects during their years at the school, including [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Russian](#), [German](#), [ancient history](#), [Latin](#), and [European history](#).

[2] In 1955 *Time* magazine reported that to support his family while establishing his art career, he tried "some 40 different jobs".[3] From 1944 to 1964 Gerassi was harassed by the [CIA](#) who tried to [blackmail](#) him by threatening to [deport](#) his family if he would not agree to work for them.[2] One of his friends eventually reported the harassment to [Abe Fortas](#), then an aide to [Lyndon Johnson](#). Fortas obtained the CIA file and passed it onto the [United States Attorney General](#), [Robert F. Kennedy](#), who immediately gave Gerassi and his family American citizenship and apologized "in the name of America".[2]

Art career

Gerassi's early work was influenced by [Stanislas Stueckgold](#) and [Paul Cézanne](#).^[4]

In 1951 Gerassi shared an exhibit with American artist, [Georgia O'Keeffe](#),^[2] and then in 1955 he exhibited alone, for the first time in 20 years.^[3] His solo exhibition at the Panoras Gallery in [Manhattan](#) "elicited rave reviews".^[2]

Gerassi returned to Putney School where he painted until his death in 1974.^[2]

References

- Navarro, Javier Rubio (Spring 2017). "[Fernando Gerassi \(1899-1974\)](#)". *La Ilustración Liberal*. Libertad Digital. Retrieved February 20, 2018.
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 - "[Art: Success through failure](#)". *Time*. March 28, 1955. Archived from [the original](#) on December 15, 2008.
4. Rubin, Lowell J. (May 25, 1957). "[Fernando Gerassi – Paul Schuster Gallery](#)". *The Harvard Crimson*. Retrieved February 20, 2018.

External links

- [Official website](#)
- [Extensive article on Fernando Gerassi Archived](#) March 12, 2007, at the [Wayback Machine](#) (in Spanish)