

# Artist records the love of his life-'Isadora'

By HELEN ZUCKER

Competing with a lightning storm and the last night of "The Holocaust," a slide show depicting the ups and downs of Isadora Duncan's life was held at Lee Hoffman Gallery recently.

Watching scenes of the great dancer's life in chronological order, viewers could look an era in the arts—late 19th through early 20th century—whose influences are widely felt, and in many instances, just now beginning to surface.

The show, put together by Harriet Berg, proved absorbing enough to viewers to forget the thunder outside. In interesting ways, it pointed up the effect "The Holocaust" had on the arts. Very little art was created during the reign of The Third Reich, but a veritable explosion in the arts both preceded and followed it. Isadora Duncan was at the center of the initial explosion.

Ms. Berg, well-known local choreographer and dance teacher, has put together much memorabilia, as well as her extraordinary, rare slide collection over many years.

Fascinated with dance since her childhood, it is not surprising that Ms. Berg should exhibit a strong affinity with her subject. She has explored Isadora's life with the thoroughness of a scholar, researching what she feels history has understood and her calling to set straight.

**THE TIME IS RIPE** to do so. Interest in dance has never been higher in the United States. So is an interest in "natural" things—natural foods, natural environments, natural movements. The word "organic" is on the point of being terribly overused.

All this "naturalness" can be traced back to Isadora Duncan's family—their eating habits, ways of dressing, most of all on Isadora's insistence on natural movement as the basis of real dance.

Long before sandals became fashionable, Isadora's brother, Raymond, made and wore them, and he lived on a vegetarian diet of nuts, berries, and yogurt that seems to be the staple diet of half the kids in the country at present.

The message that the world is slow to catch up with the visions artists have of the future is nothing new. What is new is the collection of memorabilia Ms. Berg has at the gallery as an added attraction to Abraham Walkowitz' by now famous drawings of Isadora.

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dora dancing. There is the rounded form of Isadora, the hard-working dancer and teacher, the woman who introduced, or rather re-introduced, the plain Grecian toga and bare feet to the stage.

She ran into opposition from the world of formal dance at first, but she was a dedicated, passionately committed woman, and new what she was doing. She came to be a source of inspiration to the great men and women of her time.

Isadora, glamorous in beautiful clothing, wasn't really a beautiful woman, not a long, thin Vanessa Redgrave-Isadora at all.

**SHE WAS FIVE FEET, SIX INCHES** tall, but on the voluptuous side. Her mobile face changed with the music she danced to, the roles she became. She is the heroine who freed women from tight corsets, layers of clothing, pinches, high-button shoes and the notion that a "lady" had to have small, delicate feet.

Many of the free-flowing fashions women wear today can be traced back to Isadora's monumental influence on the stage designers, poets, artists, musicians, fashion designers, and photographers of her day.

It is touching, in a way, that Abraham Walkowitz—five feet, three inches tall—was so enamored of Isadora that he sat in the theater and stood up for her for hours at a time.

To Walkowitz, Isadora was movement itself, and he did thousands of watercolors, pen drawings, paintings, and sketches of her in every dance position.

Walkowitz, who was born in Siberia, came to America in 1889. A child of 11 when he arrived here, he was part of the great art movements of the early 20th century. Along with the Soyer brothers, he taught at the Educational Alliance on the Lower East Side of New York.

If the world didn't give him sufficient recognition while he lived, his fellow artists did. He found himself welcome in their homes and their clubs. Like many of them, he went to Paris in 1906. He visited Rodin, and saw Isadora dance for the first time in a private salon.

In 1912, Walkowitz met Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer. Marsden Hartley introduced them and Stieglitz gave Walkowitz his first show at his gallery 291 that year.

In 1913, Walkowitz had 11 pieces in

the famous Armory Show, plus a second show at Gallery 291. In 1914, he went back to Europe and returned muttering about what war was going to do to the world.

Walkowitz stayed home and played host to many artists who fled Europe in the next few decades. In 1928, he showed work Kandinsky, Man Ray, and Joseph Stella. He was overshadowed by the enormous explosion of talent around him. It was the energies released by America in the artists who emigrated here during and after World War II.

In 1941, Walkowitz had shows at the Brooklyn Museum; in 1949, at the Jewish Museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum; and in 1962, he was awarded

the Distinguished Elderly Artist Award by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Walkowitz said sadly after this event, "It came too late somehow."

In 1964, he had a show called "Improvisations of New York" at the Zabriskie Gallery in New York. He died in 1965.

**A FUNNY, FURIOUS, SAD LITTLE MAN** who loved quickness, movement, gayety, he died the height of the year's movement's most bizarre attempt at what it considered naturalness.

It is Abraham Walkowitz, however, who understood what Isadora Duncan meant when she said, "The feet must not point like knives, the body must

not be encased in steel. The right way to educate children is to bring them up with beauty around them, sunlight to play in, natural foods, music and music and movement."

Walkowitz understood, as did Isadora, that dance, like any other art, is hard labor. Her naturalness on stage, like his on paper, was hard-won and disciplined.

She was an indefatigable worker, openhanded, determined. Her Berlin, in Russia and in Paris. She tried to establish a school in Greece.

The United States, the land of Isadora's birth, has never quite understood her or the adoration the avant garde of Europe lavished on her.

Isadora, born of Scotch and Irish parents, raised by Dora Grey, a mother who read Ingersoll, taught piano and knit scarves to survive after her husband deserted the family, has been given her due by Europe. America has yet to come to grips with the lady.

Walkowitz did. He caught Isadora as she really was and what she meant, at her best.

And he translated her ideas of natural movement into works that transmit the joy she found in music and dancing—even if her life was not particularly happy.

Most of Walkowitz' works have since disappeared into art collections.

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