



Artist Biography: RICO LEBRUN



Rico Lebrun, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1940

Preface

Rico Lebrun's active career spans forty years.

He could have joined any of the art movements that came and went during his lifetime. His technical ability would have allowed this easily. His heart would not.

Not content to portray merely the physical aspects of the human form, Lebrun sought to express the **metaphysical** and emotional aspects of the human spirit.

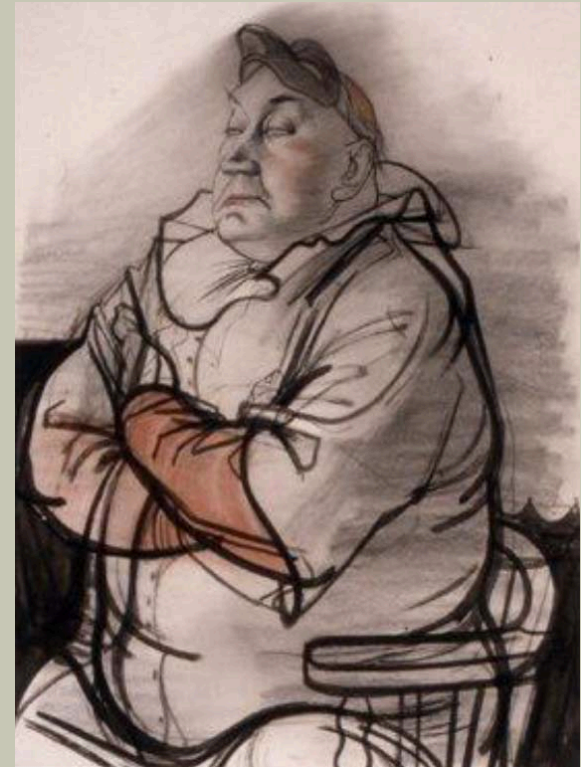
Michael T. Ricker, curator
from the foreword to *Rico Lebrun, Consulting the Tangible World*



Note to Viewers:

This presentation includes several terms from the lexicon of artists – words they use frequently when thinking or talking about art.

These words are **color-coded** in the presentation, and described in the glossary (final slide).



Rico Lebrun, *Seated Clown*, 1941. Ink and wash



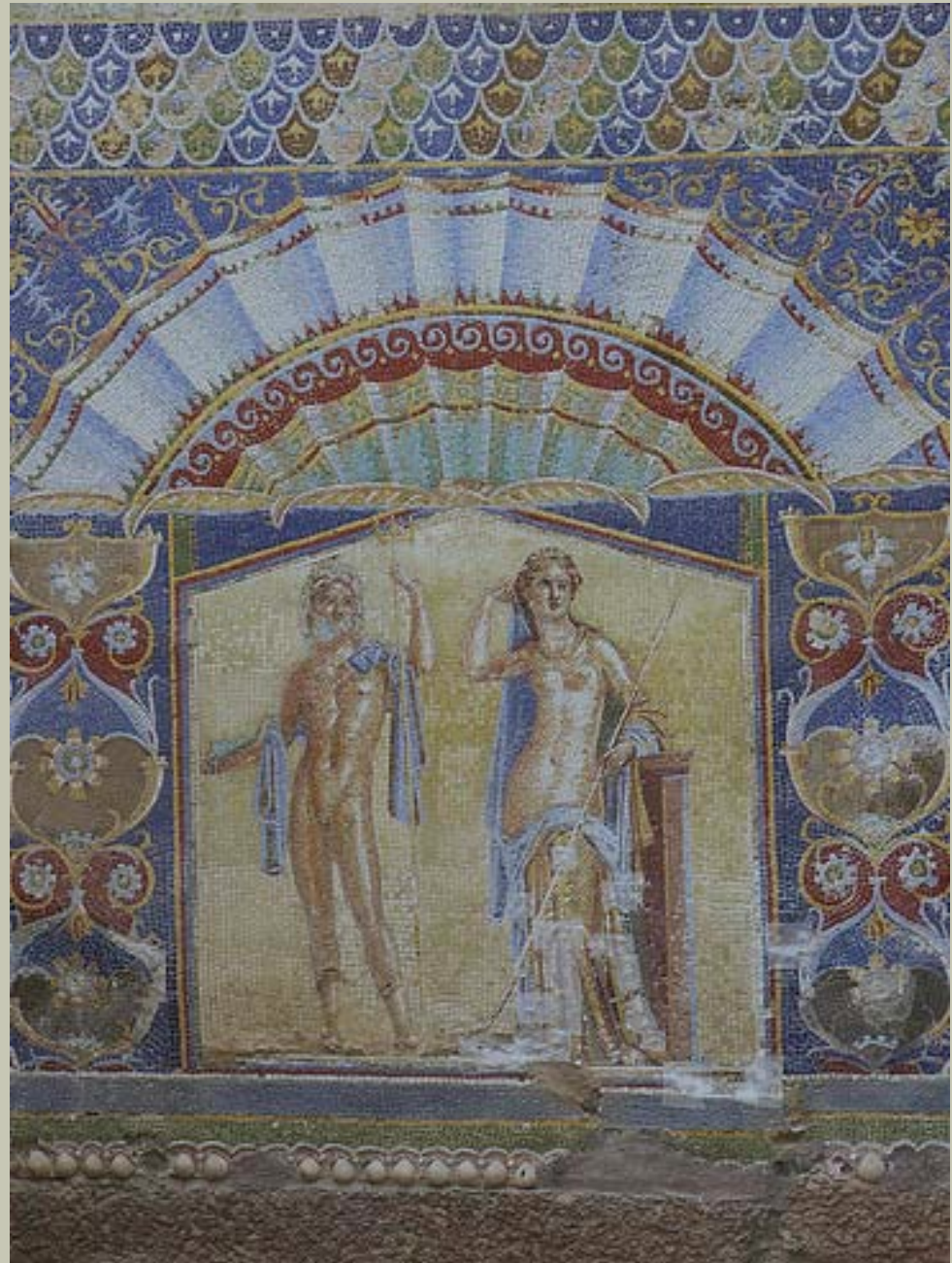
Rico Lebrun was born at the turn of the century, on December 10, 1900. His family lived in in Naples, Italy. Naples was a busy, exciting place to live.

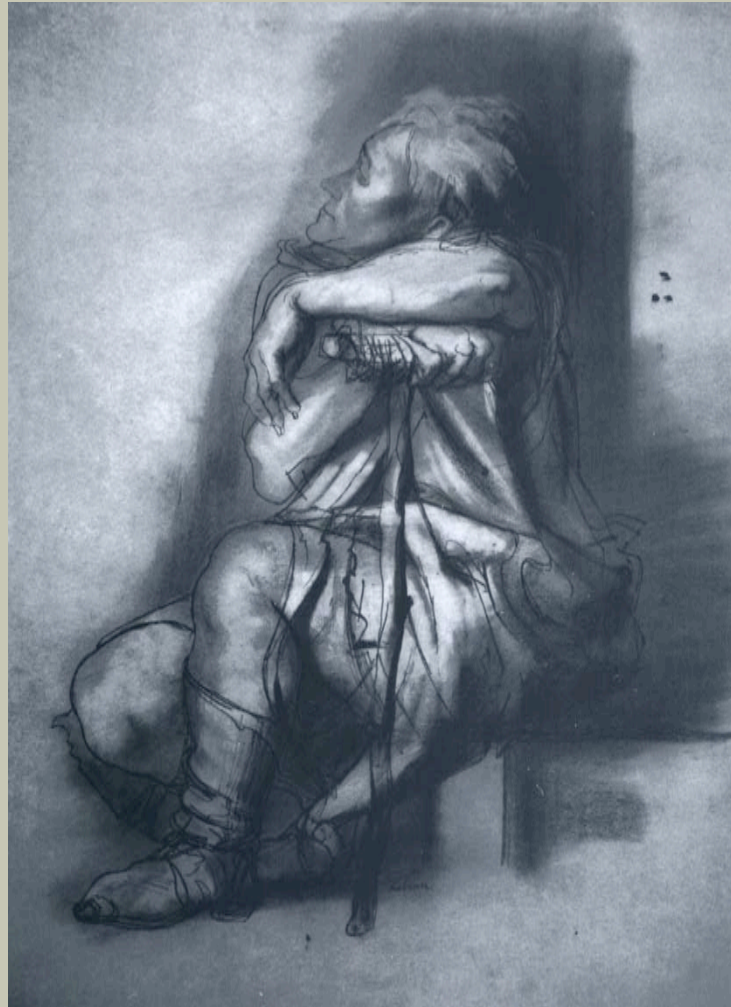


Naples is known for its rich history, art, architecture, music, and delicious food. It is situated on the west coast of Italy, very near Mt. Vesuvius, the famous volcano.

Naples, like many Italian cities, is filled with art.

As a child and a young man, Rico studied the art found throughout Naples, often sketching the work of the masters.





Untitled (Seated Woman with Crutch), 1936

He also sketched the common people
that he noticed around him.

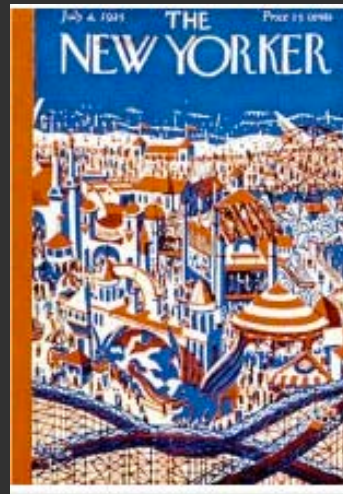


When Rico was 17 years old, he finished high school and joined the Italian Army. For two years, he served in the army during World War 1.

After serving in the army, Rico attended the Industrial Institute in Naples and began his first art classes at the Naples Academy of Fine Arts. He also worked as a designer at a stained glass factory.



Rico moved to New York City, where he found work as a commercial artist drawing advertisements and fashion plates for some of the most notable American magazines. Although he was financially successful, Rico wasn't satisfied.





Immaculate Conception by Luca Signorelli, 1523

With his savings, Lebrun was able to take a trip back to Italy where his passion for fine art was rekindled. During these six years, he studied the **fresco** paintings of Italian Renaissance artist Luca Signorelli (1441-1523).



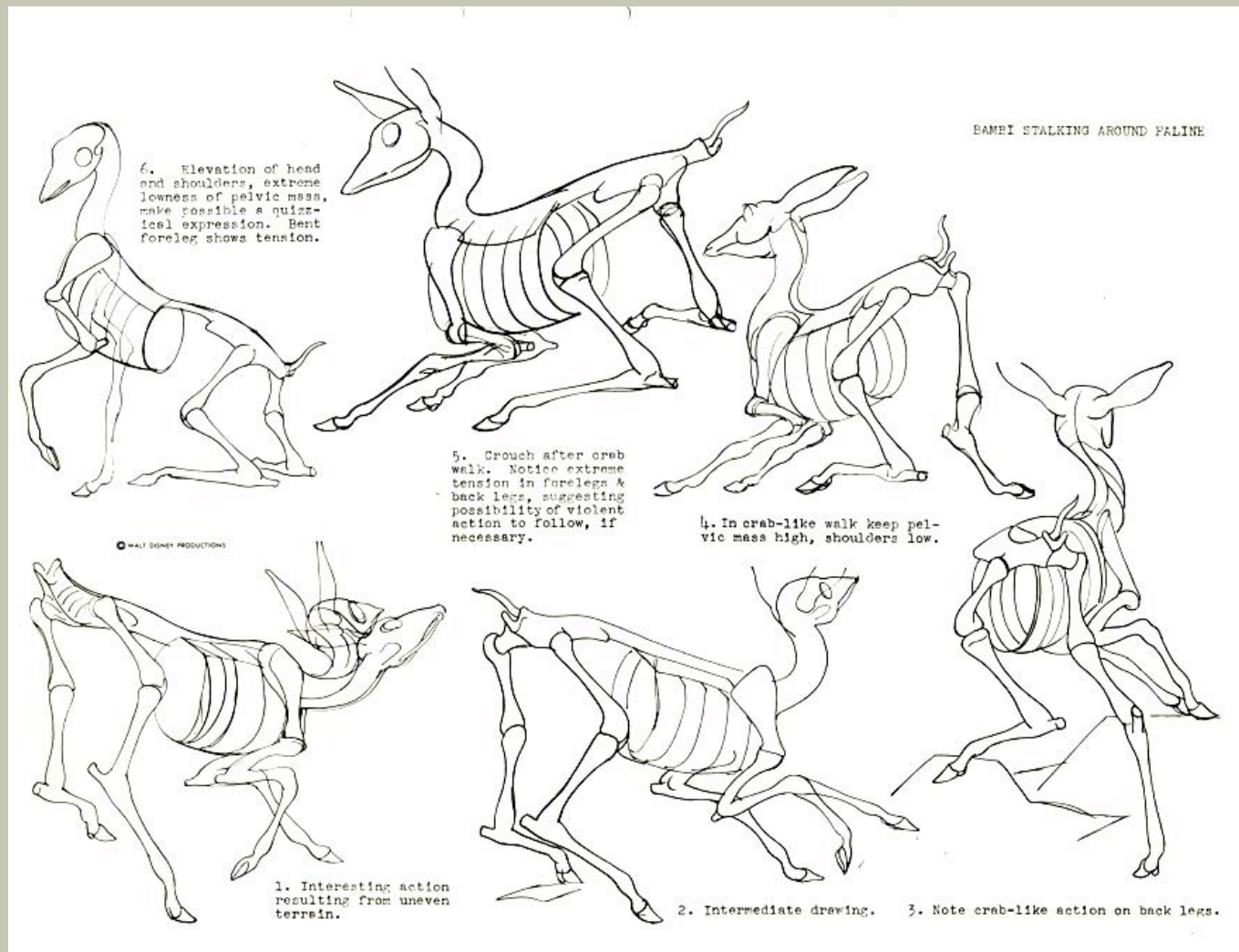
In 1936 Rico returned to New York. The following year, he moved to Santa Barbara, where he found friendship and support from the local art community. He commuted to Los Angeles, where he taught art classes at the Chouinard Art Institute.



Rico's talents soon became well known within the artistic community, and Walt Disney hired him to teach drawing lessons to his group of illustrators. Can you guess which animated film they were working on?



Rico Lebrun taught the Disney illustrators an **anatomy** lesson.
A very famous deer would soon be introduced to the public:
Bambi.



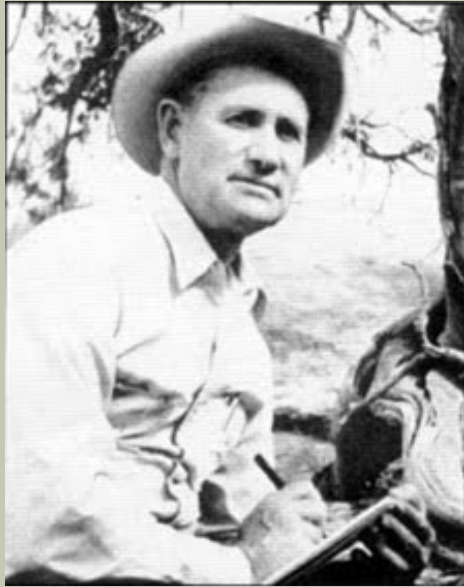
Here is an example of his sketches for Bambi. He produced a notebook with page after page of drawings of a deer in many different positions. He looked at the internal structure of a deer to get the drawings right. Look at the last drawing.

Rico writes: *Note crab-like action of the back legs.* Do you see it?



Santa Barbara Post Office, future site of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

During this time he became friends with Donald Bear, who was the new Director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Rico was invited to become an Artist-in-Residence at the Museum, where he gave lectures and taught drawing classes.

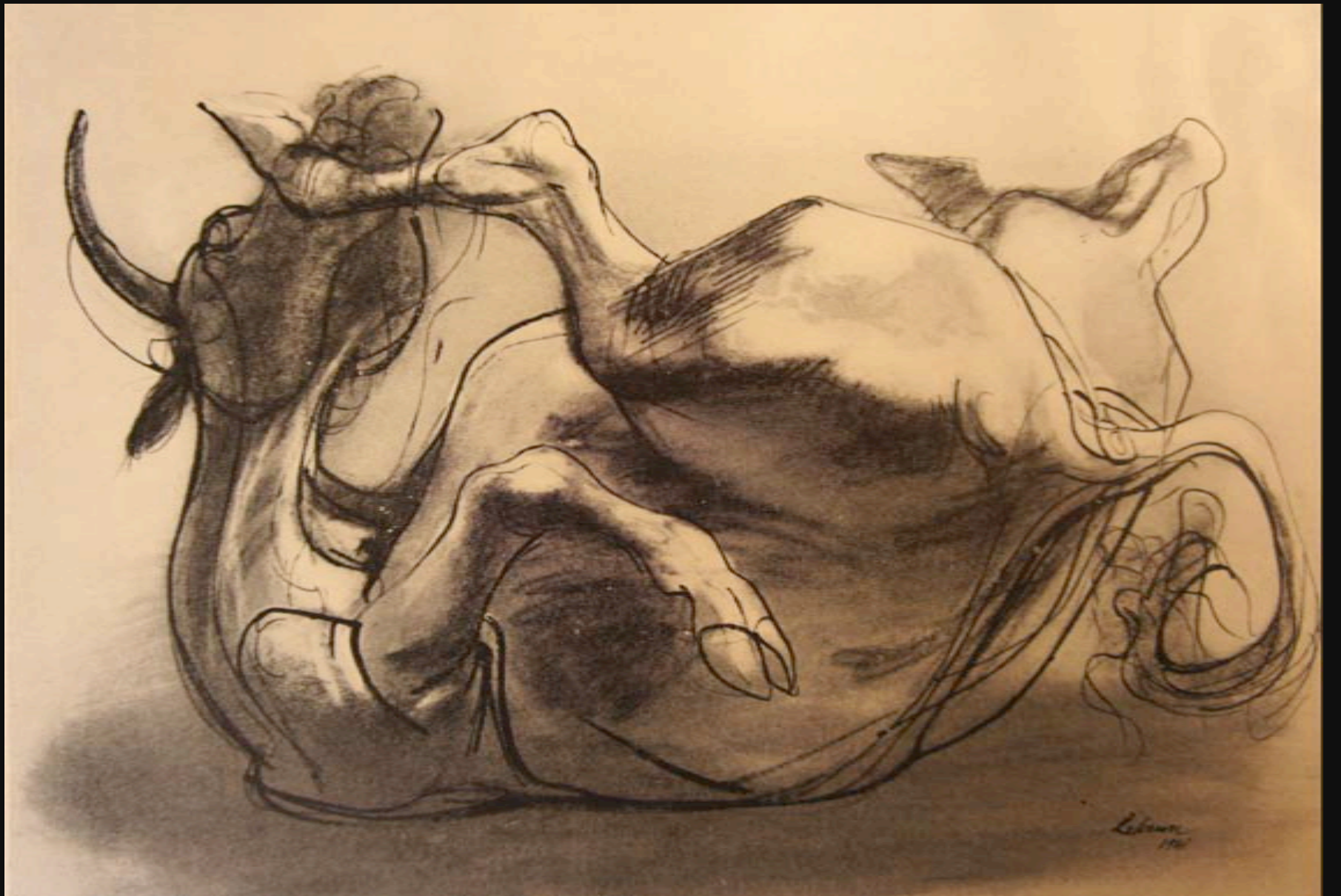


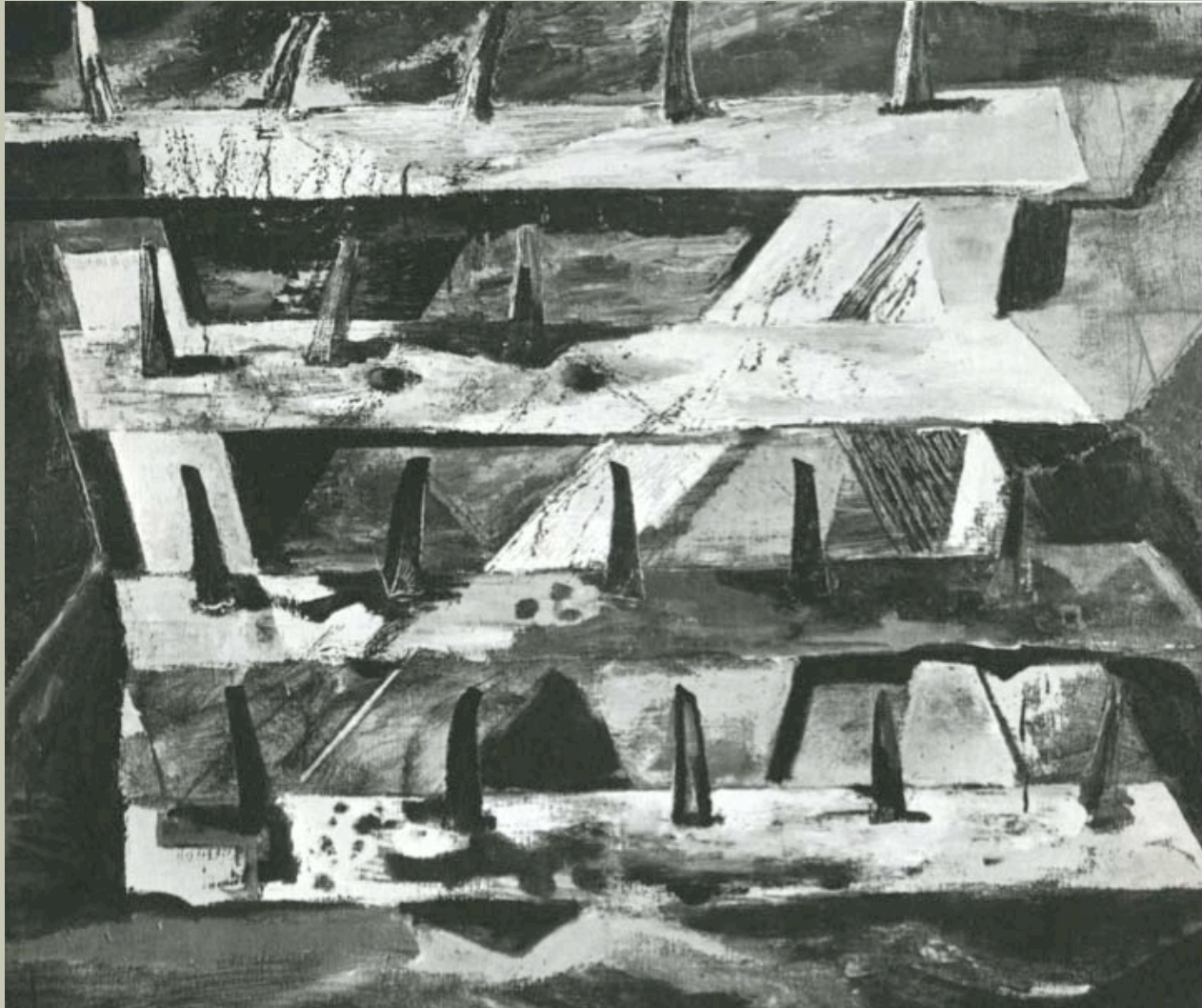
Channing Peake



Rico Lebrun, *Reclining Ox*, 1932

While in Santa Barbara, Rico spent time with artist friend Channing Peake, who owned a ranch in Santa Ynez. In the country, Rico spent hours hiking and sketching. Some of his favorite subjects were farm implements and tools and ranch animals.





Rico Lebrun, *Portuguese Harrow*

Rico looked at the **anatomy** or structure of the farm tools and machinery in the same way that he studied animals. This is a harrow, and the sharp spikes are dragged across soil to break it up.



Rico Lebrun in his studio.



Soon Rico began experimenting with **abstraction**, and he revisited the religious themes he studied as a very young man in Italy. This is part of the *Crucifixion Cycle*.



Untitled (Mary at the Cross), 1951

How do you think this woman feels? What do you see that makes you say that?
This is Rico's study for *Mary at the Cross*.

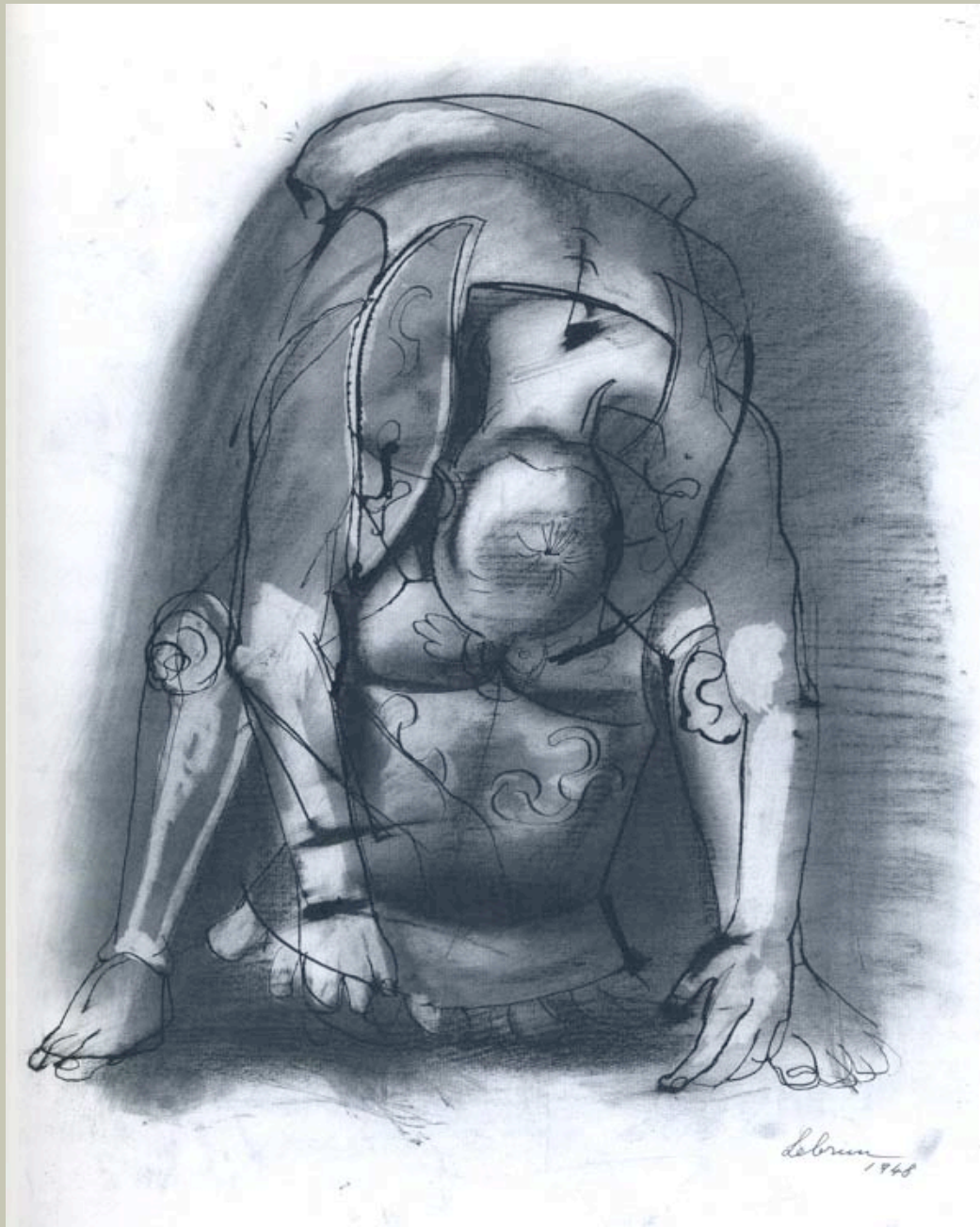


Rico's son, David Lebrun, has written about his childhood memories of growing up with his father, the artist:



When I was four or five years old I would go to Rico's studio and we would paint things together, lions and tigers in bright poster paints. Once we painted a very scary wolf, and Rico pasted on a red eye of bright metallic foil.

We then had a game in our house at night in which Rico would hide the wolf in some closet and turn off all the lights in the house. Then Rico and I would put on hunting caps, and we would go wolf hunting with flashlights. This would end in the thrilling moment when the beam of the flashlight would catch the glowing red wolf's eye in the darkness. At five or six years old, you like nothing better than being really well scared.

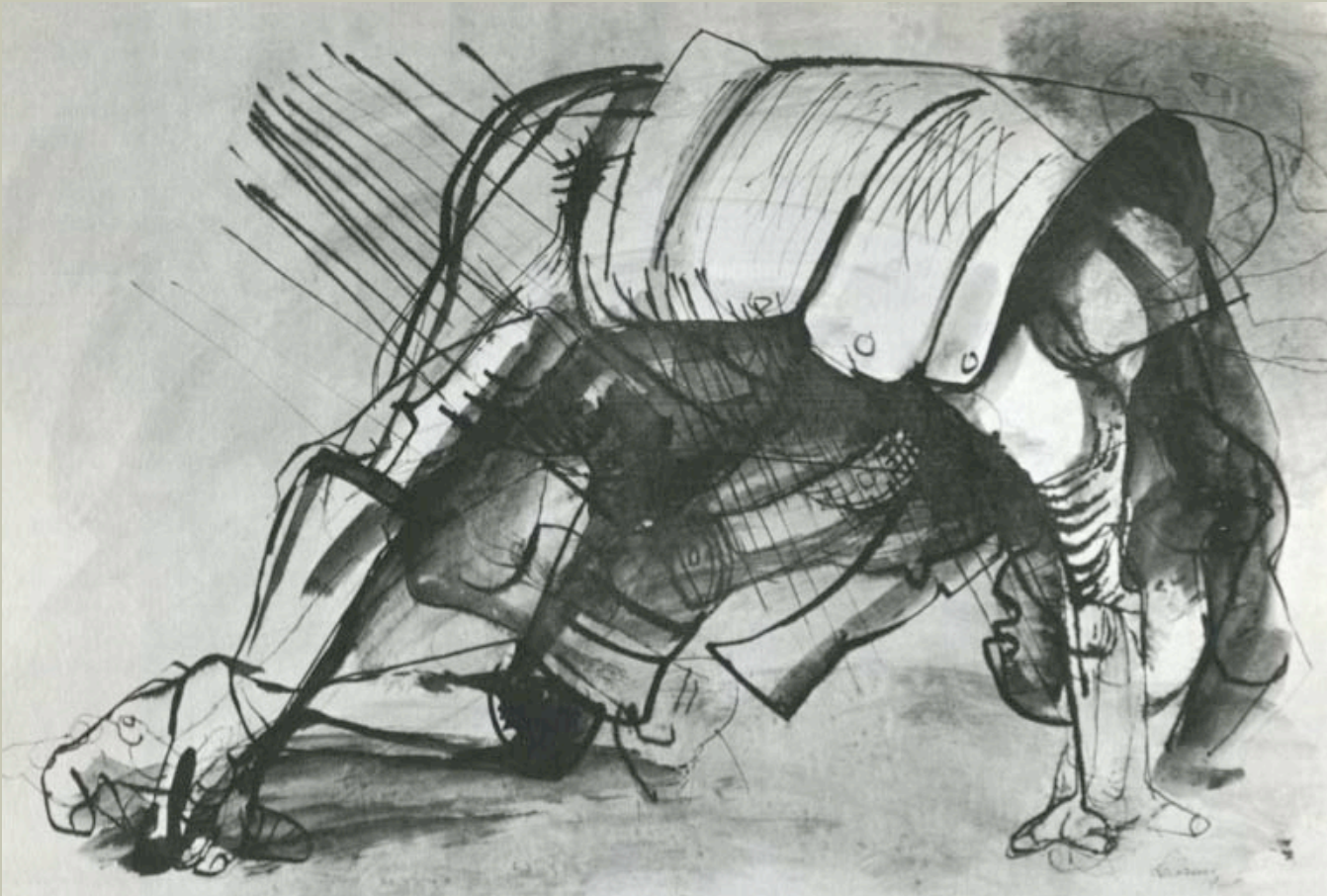


Untitled, (Sleeping Soldier), 1948

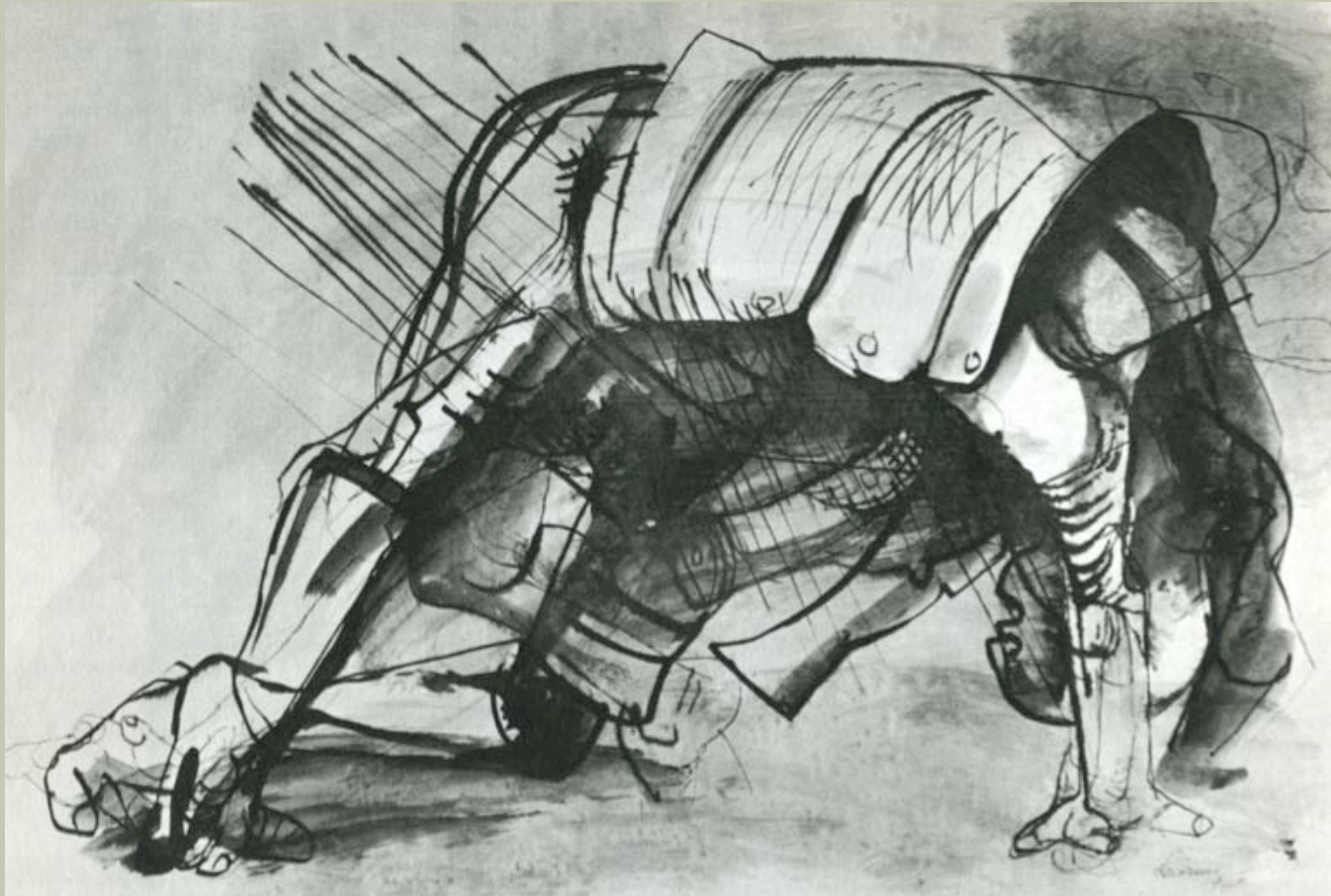
This piece, which was originally untitled, is now referred to as *Sleeping Soldier*.

Look carefully:

What are the clues that this man is a soldier? What kind of a soldier is he? What do you see that makes you say that?



Here is another soldier. Can you guess the title of this piece?



Rico Lebrun, *Turtle Soldier*

It is titled *Turtle Soldier*. Why? What do you see that makes you say that?

During the 1950's, Rico taught art at the *Instituto Allende* in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.



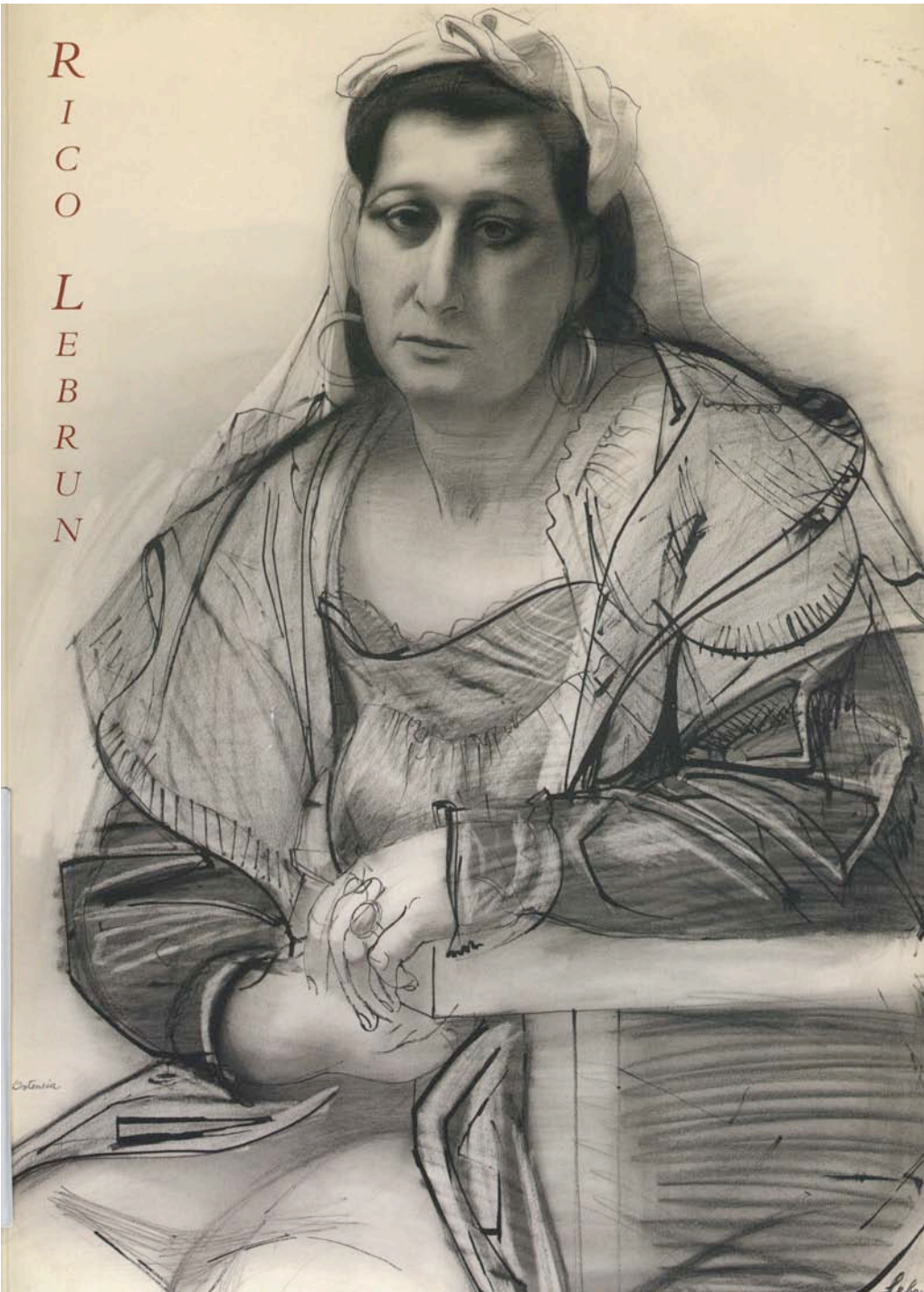
Paintbox Street, San Miguel de Allende, Joni Chancer



He experimented with **abstract** interpretations of the city, the Mexican landscape, and village markets.



Rico Lebrun, *Mexican Street In the Rain*, 1954



What do you notice in this image?

What materials do you think Lebrun used to create this **portrait**?

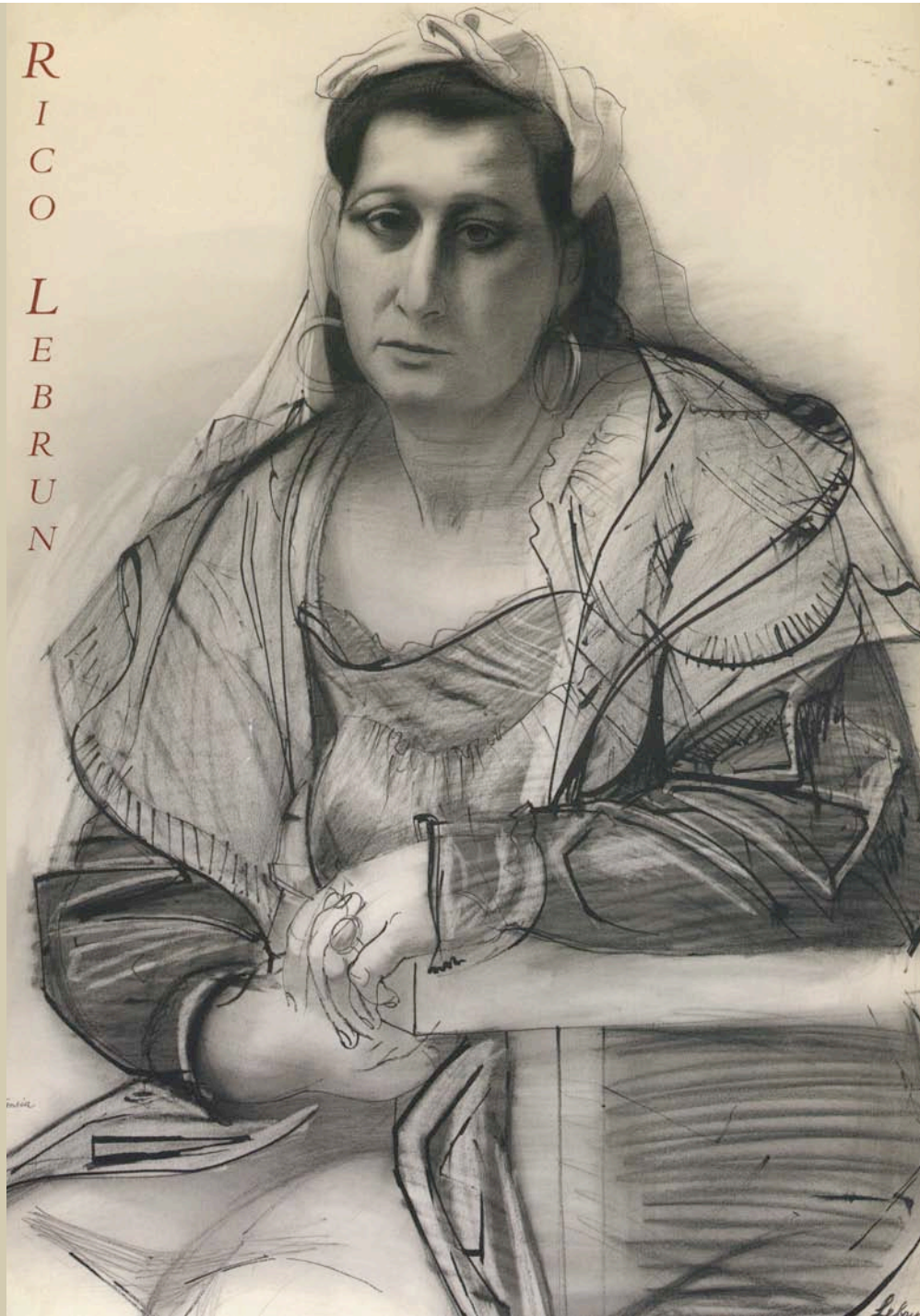
How are sections of this portrait similar and different?

What do you notice about the **LINES** in this portrait?

Which parts do you think were drawn quickly, and which parts took Lebrun more time to complete? Why do you say that?

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Rico Lebrun, *Ortensia*, 1941
Ink and chalk on board



How are these two images similar? How are they different?
What do you see that makes you say that?



John Singleton Copley, *Lieutenant Joshua Winslow*, 1755



Rico Lebrun, *Portrait of Spanish Nobleman*

Look at John Singleton Copley's portrait of Lt. Winslow, and Rico Lebrun's portrait of a Spanish gentleman. How are they similar? How are they different? How would you describe Lebrun's style, approach, and technique?

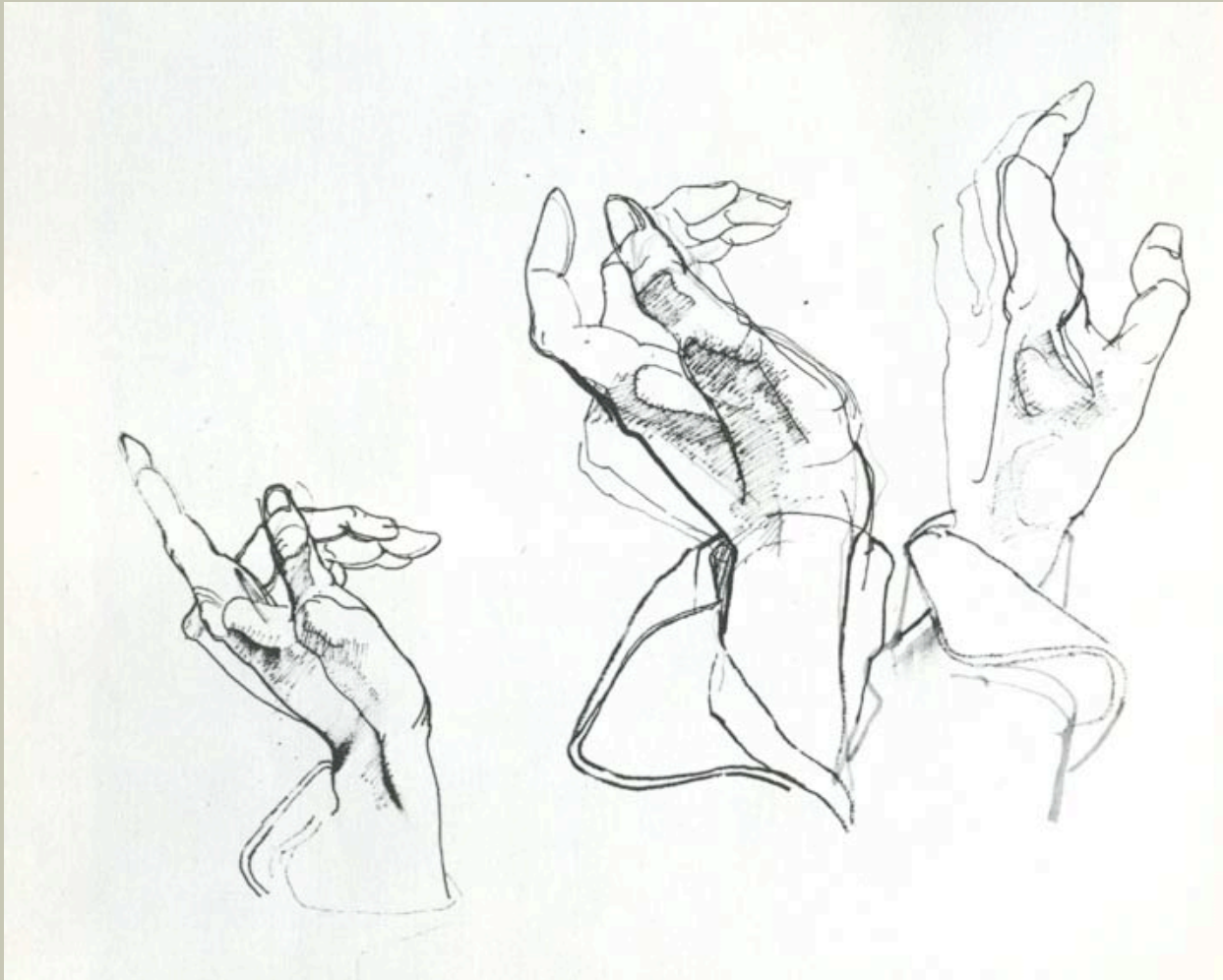


Rico Lebrun in his studio, early 1960's

In 1958, Rico spent a year as a visiting lecturer at Yale University before returning to Italy to become artist-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome. A few years later, Lebrun took on a position as faculty member at the University of California at Santa Barbara and for the first time devoted his career to **sculpting**. He died in 1963 at his home in Malibu, California.



Rico Lebrun's work evolved throughout his artistic lifetime, but his gift of capturing form, contour, movement, and underlying structure, and his ability to reveal the essence of his subjects were constants throughout his career.



Rico Lebrun, *Three Hands*, May 1964

Rico Lebrun had no truck with the nonsense of “beautiful painting”. Little by little he learned how to create much more with much less, and at the very end of his life his golden hands finally belonged only to him.

Henry J. Seldis

Rico Lebrun, Beyond Virtuosity
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Now it is your turn to create art under the influence of Rico Lebrun.

What kind of lines will you use?

What kind of attitude will you portray?

An SBMA Teaching Artist (see the presentation (PDF) on painting in the style of Rico Lebrun) will guide you as you experiment with the Art of the Self-Portrait.



Rico Lebrun, *Seated Clown*

Glossary of Art Terms

Abstraction: Nonrepresentational art; **abstract art** can be a painting or sculpture that does not depict a person, place or thing in the real or natural world.

Anatomy: The bodily structure of a plant or an animal or of any of its parts.

Fresco: 1. The art of painting on fresh, moist plaster with color pigments dissolved in water. 2. A painting created in this way.

Metaphysical: Concerned with abstract thought or subjects, such as existence or truth.

Portrait: A painting, drawing, photograph, sculpture or other representation of a real person, especially of his/her face.

Self-Portrait: An artist's portrait of him/herself.

Sculpting: Shaping or carving.



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