

ART & GALLERIES

# Painter Nadine Sacha survived Holocaust, celebrates art, life

By Alexi Melvin- San Francisco Chronicle

July 1, 2015 Updated: July 2, 2015 3:33pm

Artist Nadine Sacha holds one of her recent paintings in the parlor of her San Francisco flat Tuesday April 21, 2015. Nadine Sacha is a worldly impressionist painter who sells her art at salons and has been exhibited in hotels and other galleries. She makes her home now in San Francisco, Calif. where she maintains a studio.



Artist Nadine Sacha sits at the desk in her painting studio surrounded by some of her work Tuesday April 21, 2015. Nadine Sacha is a worldly impressionist painter

who sells her art at salons and has been exhibited in hotels and other galleries. She makes her home now in San Francisco, Calif. where she maintains a studio.

Local artist Nadine Sacha remembers being relocated several times as a young child during the Holocaust, but was first taken to what Sacha called a “grouping center” in the middle of Paris.

One night, a group from the French Resistance loaded Sacha; her younger brother, Bertrand; and a few other children onto a truck and took them away. It was not until later that Sacha realized that they had been rescued from a center set up by the Nazis. The children left behind were taken to the concentration camps the next day.

Throughout World War II, many Jewish families went into hiding, and in some cases were only able to conceal their children — mainly among other non-Jewish acquaintances and/or in rural areas. The majority of the children who survived were in hiding. Throughout Europe, it is estimated that no more than 14,000 Jewish children were found alive.

Sacha is one of those hidden children of the Holocaust.

Today you can find Sacha painting in the back room of her cozy San Francisco apartment in the Richmond, but she seldom reveals it to company. She calls her studio “too messy,” compared with her otherwise immaculate home. Vintage dance posters, scattered and unfinished paintings, and photos from postwar Europe adorn the walls, while Brazilian tango music softly emanates from her compact cassette player.

The French Impressionist painter has resided in San Francisco for 25 years, since the death of her fourth husband, Carl Otto Baum, a successful business consultant. “I am now starting over again, like I always do,” she said with a smile.

In addition to painting, Sacha is a member of the Art Deco Society and has been an avid tango dancer for more than 20 years. “Art is my life. Dance is my passion,” said Sacha, who politely declines to reveal how old she is, claiming that mature Frenchwomen refer to themselves only as “women of a certain age.”

Sacha — who also wrote a book about her life, “Self Portrait: An Artist’s Memories” — sells her paintings out of her home studio and from her website ([www.artistsacha.com](http://www.artistsacha.com)), and often organizes showcases in the homes or businesses of her clients.

One of Sacha’s latest paintings is of a woman of the late 1800s in a Parisian cafe. “She is waiting for Toulouse-Lautrec,” Sacha said with a giggle. “I like to include a little story in each of my paintings.”

Sacha's earliest memory of her relationship with art was at age 6, studying her father, a glove cutter from Lithuania, as he designed gloves. "I sat on the floor and tried to imitate him, drawing the outline of my own hand," said the artist, who was born in Poland and immigrated with her family shortly afterward to France, where for a while they lived in a one-room apartment.

According to Sacha, in 1941 during the Nazi occupation of Paris, her family often had to survive on one orange to last a week. The occasional loaves of bread they could salvage would become progressively grayer due to the sawdust in them.

### **Reunited with brother**

After Sacha's father was arrested and eventually killed in the gas chamber, her mother hid Sacha and Bertrand at a farm in the country. They were 10 and 4. Sacha would learn that her mother and her other brother, Albert, died in Auschwitz.

After the war, Sacha was evicted from an orphanage at age 13. She began selling sketches in Montmartre and soon expanded her horizons all around Europe through her teenage years.

Sacha's brother Bertrand was adopted from the orphanage and taken to America. "I know someday I will see him. I will go to America, I thought," Sacha said.

Sacha indeed reunited with her brother after marrying her first husband, Scott Chauncey, an American soldier, and traveling with him to the United States. Bertrand Huchberger, as he is now known, was still in high school at the time, but soon left to serve in the armed forces, primarily in Germany, with two tours in Vietnam.

"Nadine and I led very different lives — she in Europe as a young woman, I in the U.S. from the age of 12 when I was adopted, through my appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy," said Huchberger, 77, who has lived in San Francisco with his wife, Heidi, since 2011. "We have always been very close, in large part because of our shared childhood survival."

Sacha's road from Nazi-occupied France to the thriving Bay Area was paved with many different stones, which included teaching art on cruise ships, modeling in Hollywood and Miami in the 1950s, setting up a gallery in Dallas and selling her art to the elite in Monaco. "Just go forward," Sacha has always reminded herself. "Always go forward."

## **Celebrity customers**

Frank Sinatra and his wife, Barbara, and Prince Albert of Monaco were among the most noteworthy examples of the celebrities to whom Sacha sold her paintings during her 10-year residence in Monte Carlo.

Recently, she received an unsolicited phone call from an art collector from Boca Raton, Fla., saying, "I finally found you!"

The collector had purchased a painting at a Christie's auction from Frank Sinatra's personal art collection. The artist had signed it simply "Sacha." The art collector, determined to seek out more of Sacha's work, eventually stumbled upon a photo of the artist with Sinatra and knew she must be the one.

"The driving force was ambition," Sacha said of her full life — four husbands, one son, Alex, who lives in San Diego, and an extended family for whom she is eternally grateful.

"I wanted to live for the families that couldn't," said Sacha, who is very active with the Hidden Children Foundation, attending conferences and gatherings with other survivors. "I think that God saved me for one purpose, to bring art into people's hearts."

*Alexi Melvin is a freelance writer.*

## **Nadine Sacha**

For more information about the Hidden Children Foundation, go to [www.adl.org/education-outreach/holocaust-education/hidden-children-foundation.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/holocaust-education/hidden-children-foundation.html).

For more information about Nadine Sacha and her work, go to [www.artistsacha.com](http://www.artistsacha.com) and watch a video at [www.youtube.com/watch?t=10&v=YsrL5cVeZhQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?t=10&v=YsrL5cVeZhQ).