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Exiled European Jewish Artists in a Caribbean Dictatorship: Navigating Trujillo's Dominican Republic

Introduction: Artistic Survival in the Shadow of Trujillo

Fleeing Nazi Germany, several European Jewish refugees sought sanctuary in an unlikely haven: the Caribbean dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic that lasted from 1930 to 1961. Their arrival was facilitated not by humanitarian idealism, but by a dictator's calculated strategy to rehabilitate his international image and to pursue a eugenic vision of national "blanqueamiento" (whitening). Within this authoritarian context, a community of artists found themselves navigating a difficult tension: how to sustain creative practice and personal integrity under a regime that offered physical safety yet often implicated artists in state propaganda and the cultural legitimization of its rule. This article explores the lives, works, and survival strategies of three such exiled artists—German-Jewish ballerina Herta Brauer, painter George Hausdorf, and Austrian-Jewish photographer Kurt Schnitzer—to illuminate the fraught intersection of art, exile, and authoritarianism.

Methodologically, this study employs a tripartite approach: First, it reconstructs the artists' biographies through archival research, personal correspondence, and oral histories to trace their migration, professional trajectories, and lived experiences of exile. Given the fragmented nature of transit documentation and the ephemerality of certain performance mediums like dance, this biographical reconstruction occasionally relies on local commemorative records and digital community archives, particularly regarding Brauer. While these unconventional sources require cautious critical evaluation, they serve as vital repositories that preserve marginalized exile narratives where formal institutional state archives remain silent. Second, it conducts critical analysis of their Dominican-era works to discern how displacement and dictatorship shaped their creative expression. Third, it comparatively analyzes the distinct strategies of cooperation, neutrality, and resilience each artist adopted to navigate Trujillo's regime, moving beyond simplistic resistance/collaboration binaries.

Through this multifaceted lens, we argue the varied modes of engagement adopted by Brauer, Hausdorf, and Schnitzer allowed them to endure and create within Trujillo's Dominican Republic. Their stories reveal profound ironies: artists escaping one authoritarian regime found refuge within another; their artistic contributions, sometimes initially serving regime propaganda, ultimately contributed to enduring Dominican cultural institutions; and their presence, used by Trujillo to advance demographic and international political objectives, left legacies that transcend and complicate the dictator's intentions. By examining Brauer's founding of Dominican ballet under Trujillo patronage, Hausdorf's transformation into a painter of the Caribbean landscape while teaching at the state art academy, and Schnitzer's dual role as regime photographer and subversive documentarian, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of exile art as a vital site of adaptation, subtle subversion, and cultural survival. Furthermore, it places their individual experiences within the broader context of Trujillo's racialized dictatorship and its instrumental refugee policies, challenging celebratory narratives by foregrounding the regime's anti-Black racial policies and the enduring contradictions these artists embodied within Dominican identity formation. To contextualize these exiled artists' biographies and the strategies they employed in Trujillo's Dominican Republic, this article begins with a brief introduction to the Trujillo system and the role of European refugees therein.

Trujillo's Dominican Republic and its Refugee Policies

Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship between 1930 and 1961 rested on a fusion of political repression, extensive propaganda, and carefully cultivated politi-

cal alliances. Trujillo constructed a personality cult as the “Benefactor” and “Father of the New Fatherland,” saturating schools, media, and public spaces with his image to legitimize his rule. Alongside this public image, Trujillo and his circle amassed fortunes by monopolizing sugar, tobacco, and manufacturing. U.S. backing—secured through favorable trade agreements, low corporate taxes, and mutual anti-Communist positions in the Cold War—provided both a model via his early training in the American-established National Guard and a shield against international censure.¹

Central to Trujillo's rule was an anti-Haitian ideology drawn from Eurocentric and U.S. Jim Crow–influenced racial hierarchies.² Despite centuries of intertwined border communities on Hispaniola, the island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Trujillo's regime sought to more rigidly define national boundaries through a racial doctrine enforced by state-sponsored violence and legal exclusion.³ Trujillo bound Haitians discursively to African ancestry and portrayed Blackness as an obstacle to national “modernization,” prompting widespread adoption of the term *indio* (literally, Indian, in a sense of Indigenous) among Dominicans to deny their own African roots. The regime institutionalized anti-Black racial ideologies as a cornerstone of Dominican identity and governance under his absolutist regime.⁴ As a result, Haitians were targeted both for mass exploitation as plantation labor and, in its most extreme form, for mass violence.⁵ In October 1937, Trujillo's military carried out the Parsley Massacre along the Haitian border—using a simple linguistic test (pronouncing the Spanish word for parsley, *perejil*, is challenging for Creole-speakers) to identify and kill an estimated 10,000–30,000 men, women, and children.⁶ Many of the victims were Dominicans of Haitian descent, a testimony to the historic cultural hybridity of the borderlands' region.⁷

Following the Parsley Massacre, the Dominican Republic's international image was significantly damaged. Trujillo introduced an open border policy to refugees to avoid further isolation.⁸ This message of tolerance was also meant to hide Trujillo's authoritarianism; as with the growing influence of Nazism and then Communism, it became clear that the US became increasingly sensitive to overt authoritarianism.⁹ When the 1938 Évian Conference was convened, attended by thirty-two nations, Germany pressed other countries to accept German and Austrian Jewish refugees; the Dominican Republic emerged as the only participating country to publicly offer large-scale resettlement for them.¹⁰ Beyond German and Austrian Jews, the regime extended asylum to approximately 5,000 to 6,000 Spanish Republican exiles between 1939 and 1942, comprising artists, intellectuals, and political dissidents fleeing Francisco Franco's regime. Furthermore, following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution against Soviet control, Trujillo offered refuge to non-communist Hungarians, providing housing, medical assistance, and employment in agriculture and arms manufacturing.¹¹

Together, these successive programs underscore how Trujillo instrumentalized humanitarian immigration to secure international standing. The European immigration also served to further Trujillo's vision of a "civilized," racially "improved" populace—a deliberate project of racial engineering, a systematic effort to reshape a population's ethnic composition for ideological ends. His regime sought to "whiten" the population through a policy of *blanqueamiento*, a policy practiced also elsewhere in Latin America,¹² whereby preferentially white European migrants—men under thirty-five and women under thirty—were admitted, precisely to ensure their reproductive potential and accelerate racial "improvement" of the citizenry.¹³ The most famous case study for a European Jewish settlement in the Dominican Republic was the settlement of Sosúa.

Sosúa and the German-Jewish refugees

In the aftermath of the Évian Conference, the Dominican Republic Settlement Association (DORSA) was created to recruit up to 100,000 European refugees into a designated settlement at Sosúa.¹⁴ Although a preliminary survey by agricultural experts rejected the site for its poor soil and limited rainfall,¹⁵ DORSA leaders Lawrence Rosen and Isaac Rosenberg selected it for its vast available territory and existing United Fruit Company infrastructure—houses, running water, and electricity—that would simplify initial settlement.¹⁶ To underwrite the project, the United States provided an initial \$200,000 grant, reflecting diplomatic alignment with Trujillo's development goals.¹⁷

The centerpiece was the 26,000-acre Sosúa settlement on the northern coast, while an adjacent 50,000-acre mountain tract stood ready to accommodate future expansion.¹⁸ Homesteads were offered on loan with the stipulation that settlers engage in productive economic activity and eventually repay their grants. DORSA's recruitment efforts focused on younger, physically fit agricultural workers, but wartime travel restrictions and neutrality laws severely limited arrivals; most incoming settlers were professionals—artists, merchants, and academics—who viewed Sosúa as a last resort. Ultimately, only about 800 Jewish refugees arrived, far below the original proposal.¹⁹

This emphasis on youth, whiteness, and peasant labor underscored a broader vision of social engineering by encouraging intermarriage to cultivate a "civilized" populace that would bolster both Trujillo's domestic authority and international prestige.²⁰ In practice, these preferential entry rules and pronatalist criteria aligned the Dominican Republic with Euro-American standards of beauty and progress,²¹ even as they coexisted uneasily alongside contemporary intellectual appeals to "mestizaje" or racial mixing, which

some argued might dialectically transcend rigid categories of race.²² Both approaches, however, rested on the same foundational conviction—that the country's social and political advancement required direct manipulation of its demographic makeup, a premise firmly rooted in the era's prevailing eugenic and scientific-racist discourses.²³

Early operations adopted a communal, kibbutz-inspired farming model, pooling labor to cultivate crops and livestock.²⁴ After successive harvest failures, settlers pivoted to mechanized dairy and meat production, which fostered a self-sustaining local economy but did little to ease broader discontent. Many refugees struggled with the tropical climate, social isolation, and a heavily skewed male-to-female ratio.²⁵ Promises of rapid population growth and interracial marriage proved hollow. Nevertheless, those who remained established an active communal and cultural life—founding synagogues, schools, concert halls, and choral societies—that became essential to their collective identity. This isolation and subsequent community-building forged a unique linguistic and social ecosystem within the broader Dominican context, adding a vital layer to the region's complex migrant history.²⁶ Contemporary reports—most notably Rosenberg's 1940 *New York Times* article lauding 20 to 30 acres of cultivated homesteads and contented young settlers—also functioned as promotional material for the settlement project, masking the difficult living conditions of poor soil quality, inadequate infrastructure, and social isolation.²⁷

By the mid-1940s, many Sosúa settlers had departed—some for the United States, others to Santo Domingo, known as Ciudad Trujillo (Trujillo City) at the time, in search of urban employment—yet those who remained forged a vibrant communal life.²⁸ Although Trujillo's agricultural experiment served his own demographic and political aims, the refugees' entrepreneurial ventures, academic initiatives, and cultural institutions outlasted his regime. Arriving with considerable personal wealth and taking advantage of state-sponsored incentives, many became among the country's most prosperous citizens, underwriting local industry, patronizing the arts, and establishing charitable organizations. In doing so, they not only diversified the Dominican Republic's demographic landscape but laid enduring foundations for post-war economic and cultural modernization.²⁹ The following sections will introduce German-Jewish artists who arrived in the Dominican Republic fleeing the German persecution of Jews and ended up having three different strategies in handling the dictatorial context.

Embodied Resistance in Herta Brauer's Ballet

Herta Leonore Brauer, née Stadach (1904–1983), was a German-Jewish artist who transplanted ballet to Dominican soil under Trujillo. Born

in Neumünster, Prussia, Brauer trained in ballet before marrying Jewish Egyptologist Ernst Hanns Brauer (1902–1971) in Berlin in 1932. Facing Nazi persecution, they escaped to the Dominican Republic in 1941, where they settled in the town of Jarabacoa in the Dominican central highlands, but soon relocated to Santo Domingo for labor opportunities.³⁰

Initially, Brauer taught ballet classes in her living room,³¹ using what former student Lavi Fiallo recalled as “strict European methods.”³² Her work gained institutional support when Flor de Oro Trujillo (1915–1978)—the dictator’s daughter and a prominent socialite—started supporting her work. Flor de Oro provided scholarships, costumes, and pianists, while also securing a converted gymnasium in Parque Ramfis (named after Trujillo’s son) to serve as a dedicated studio. In 1943, Brauer’s ballet school formally opened in this space, adopting its sponsor’s name as the *Academia de Ballet Flor de Oro* (Flor de Oro Ballet Academy). The sponsorship typified the regime’s pervasive influence: just as cities, institutions, and public spaces bore the Trujillo family’s names, even cultural projects became entwined with the dictatorship’s iconography.³³

Trujillo mobilized culture for both propaganda and distraction, forcibly elevating merengue, the traditional music and dance originating in the Dominican Republic, to national dance status. The regime even spawned a genre of sycophantic merengues composed to glorify the dictator. Brauer, too, participated in this glorification of the regime. In her 1944 recital, she premiered a ballet adaptation of the merengue “El general llegó” (The general has arrived), Trujillo’s personal anthem.³⁴ While ostensibly conforming to regime propaganda, this fusion of European technique with Afro-Caribbean rhythm laid the groundwork for a distinctly Dominican neoclassical vocabulary. Thus, Brauer helped institutionalize a Dominican neoclassical ballet vocabulary, planting seeds for future Dominican choreographers like Carlos Veitía and Marily Gallardo.

According to oral history records, Brauer’s artistic compromise became untenable when Trujillo’s interest shifted from cultural sponsorship to sexual predation.³⁵ Facing Trujillo’s documented pattern of sexual coercion—a serious personal threat to women who refused him³⁶—Brauer abandoned her academy and left the country for Puerto Rico in 1947. This departure, motivated by the threat of gendered violence and coercion, was arguably her clearest form of refusal. Family testimonies from Kamali Chandler, whose grandmother sheltered Brauer’s children till they reunited with their parents in San Juan two years later, confirm Brauer fled the Dominican Republic because of Trujillo’s advances.

In San Juan, Brauer co-founded the *Ballet Universitario de Puerto Rico* at the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras,³⁷ where she and her husband

supported the local theater,³⁸ directing community performances in smaller towns and mentoring future stars like Velda González and Sandra Rivera.³⁹ The Brauers were also involved in a ballet school in Mallorca, where Ernst Brauer died in 1971. Herta Brauer died in San Juan in 1983—according to some sources in Mallorca.⁴⁰ The uncertainties about the later life of Brauer underscore how dance's ephemerality obscures women's contributions.

Brauer's legacy, however, remains visible in Dominican dance, and her ballet school became foundational, as it was taken over by Hungarian émigré Magda Corbett after Brauer's departure in 1948. In the 1960s, Clara Elena Ramírez's Cuban-style classical repertoire extended the ballet education in the country.⁴¹ The *Ballet Nacional Dominicano*, founded in 1981, traces its lineage to the school that Brauer established and Corbett and Ramírez carried on. A 2018 communication proposal for the Palace of Fine Arts mentions Brauer as a pioneer of Dominican dance.⁴² Brauer is also featured in Óliver Olivo's 2025 performative documentary *Los Pasos del Tiempo* (The Steps of Time), hosted by choreographer Carlos Veitía, showing her ongoing influence on the island.⁴³

The Artistic Transformation of George Hausdorf

The second case study examined here is the painter George Hausdorf. Born in 1894, in Breslau, Germany—now Wrocław, Poland—into a Jewish family, Hausdorf studied painting for five years at the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts, and later furthered his skills in the Netherlands, gaining exposure to modernist influences. Before the electoral victory of the Nazi Party, he worked as a painter and art educator, even founding and directing a private painting academy in Berlin, which he led for twenty years. His early works, such as *Dom St. Marien Havelberg* (1913), reveal a classical approach grounded in German landscape and architectural painting.⁴⁴

In 1939, fleeing the German persecution of Jews, Hausdorf went into exile in the Dominican Republic. In 1942, when the Dominican government opened the National School of Fine Arts (*Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes*, ENBA) in Ciudad Trujillo, Hausdorf was invited to join its founding faculty. The original faculty of four included three European refugees—alongside Hausdorf, two refugees from Spain, Manolo Pascual and José Gausachs.⁴⁵ Hausdorf taught drawing and painting to a generation of Dominican students. Notable pupils include Aquiles Azar García, Ada Balcácer, Gilberto Hernández Ortega, Marianela Jiménez, Clara Ledesma, Tomás López Ramos, and Eligio Pichardo, many of whom became leading Dominican modernists, went on to win prizes and join the faculty themselves.⁴⁶

Hausdorf was not just a professor, but also a practicing artist. In exile, his style shifted to local subjects and colors. Both contemporaries and

later accounts note that his Dominican-period paintings feature beaches, rural huts, tropical flowers and jungle foliage in bright, contrasting hues. Hausdorf's "naturalistic paintings" of his Dominican period show "beaches, huts and tropical flowers in brilliant colors."⁴⁷ Similarly, biographical sketches emphasize that in the Dominican Republic his palette became "tropical": vivid blues, greens and yellows depicting everyday rural scenes. This reflects how Hausdorf adapted to Caribbean light and culture, moving beyond his European landscapes to capture Dominican life.⁴⁸ Notable works include *Conversation on the Dominican Shore* and *Dominican Countryside*, both of which express a deep engagement with his surroundings.⁴⁹ Dominican art historian Danilo de los Santos notes how Hausdorf's style changed in exile: "Hausdorf is recognized for a body of work deeply rooted in Dominican reality—both its landscapes and its social fabric. There is a vast difference between his work referencing the European milieu and this other work, which captures the gaze and style of a somewhat rigid master."⁵⁰

The tropical light and the blue of the Dominican sea and sky, de los Santos argues, "liberated" Hausdorf's gaze from the preceding norms of German realist tactility, and thus he gradually became an Impressionist Dominican painter. Hausdorf exhibited regularly in Santo Domingo and elsewhere. Archive catalogs record solo shows, e.g. Dec 1945–Jan 1946 in the Galería Nacional de Bellas Artes.⁵¹ He also joined the biennale art exhibitions, winning prizes in both 1944 and 1946. In these shows he presented the landscapes, still life paintings, and village scenes characteristic of his Dominican period. Thus, primary sources and press of the 1940s confirm the shift: Hausdorf's Dominican oeuvre is dominated by colorful oil and watercolor landscapes and genre scenes of the Caribbean setting. Hausdorf also exhibited internationally, for instance, in 1948 in New York, where he was presented as a "Hispano-American painter" from Santo Domingo.⁵²

Yet, refugee professors like Hausdorf played a complicated role: the ENBA and its European faculty were respected but also used by the regime's propaganda to boast about Dominican cultural progress.⁵³ In addition, the government commissioned numerous portraits and busts of the dictator from the school's artists. Hausdorf's colleague, Manolo Pascual, for example, cast dozens of bronze busts of Trujillo.⁵⁴ Hausdorf, too, contributed to the cultural prestige of the regime as the designer of the official centennial poster celebrating the Dominican Republic's 100th anniversary of independence from Haitian occupation. The image is highly propagandistic and reveals layers of authoritarian symbolism, nationalist myth-making, and strategic visual rhetoric, reinforcing Trujillo's anti-Haitian narrative of the Dominican Republic as racially and culturally distinct from Haiti. On the poster, central and flut-

tering dominantly, the Dominican flag is illuminated, glorified, and heroic. The structure beneath the flag resembles the Puerta del Conde, the site of the first raising of the Dominican flag in 1844; the flag, flame, and fortress imply that the state's authority is sacred and timeless.⁵⁵

Notwithstanding Hausdorf's compliance with the regime, he immigrated to the United States in 1948, although detailed records are scarce, where he died in 1959.⁵⁶ Despite spending only around a decade in the Dominican Republic, his impact was profound. He influenced numerous Dominican artists, shaped the institutional development of the national arts curriculum. Even after he left, his paintings were prominently featured and continue to be seen in several public offices in the Dominican Republic, including in the Central Bank, the Chamber of the Deputies, and the Jewish Museum of Sosúa.⁵⁷ In 2005 the Museo Bellapart in Santo Domingo staged a retrospective of his work; the exhibition guide observed that Hausdorf's work and teaching left a lasting mark on 1940s Dominican art. The press notes recall that he is "forgotten" in Germany but remembered in the Dominican Republic.⁵⁸ The 2021 international traveling exhibit "The Republic of Color" sponsored by the Dominican government also featured Hausdorf's work, showing the German painter's ongoing legacy.⁵⁹

Kurt "Conrado" Schnitzer, Doctor-Turned-Photographer in Exile

Kurt Schnitzer (1908–1972) was an Austrian-Jewish physician who escaped the German persecution of Jews and arrived in the Dominican Republic in October 1938, bringing only his Rolleicord twin-lens reflex camera made by the German manufacturer Franke & Heidecke. Unable to practice medicine due to bureaucratic obstacles and language barriers—he spoke little Spanish—he turned to photography to earn a living.⁶⁰ Locals nicknamed him Conrado, Kurt being a short form of the Germanic Konrad, first popularized by cartoonist and intellectual Bienvenido Gimbernard in the magazine *Cosmopolita* (1938) when it published one of Schnitzer's early photos.⁶¹ It was also around Schnitzer's arrival that the first photography exhibitions and competitions were hosted in the Dominican Republic, as the genre was promoted by Trujillo in his attempt of creating a "new homeland," which further elevated his role.⁶²

Schnitzer developed a distinctive visual style characterized by black-and-white 6×6 medium-format compositions. His camera produced square negatives that lent themselves to strong geometric framing, which was common among German photojournalists of the period.⁶³ Beyond format, his technical innovations set him apart from conventional Caribbean photography of the era, including dramatic aerial views and expansive urban panoramas

that broke from the prevailing tradition of static portraiture. This technical mastery extended to the darkroom, where his medical training informed a rigorous approach to chemical processing; he personally supervised the fixing and washing of negatives—a meticulous process that ensured the longevity of his archive.⁶⁴

Schnitzer's photographic approach captured the full spectrum of Dominican society under Trujillo. His images eschewed staged poses in favor of dynamic slices of life, creating a vivid photo-reportage of the era. Thematically, his work encompassed both the regime's official pageantry—military parades, political rallies, diplomatic events—and the Trujillo personality cult, while documenting everyday Dominican realities: market scenes, church gatherings, field laborers, and children at play.⁶⁵ Significantly, he did not shy away from social truths often suppressed under dictatorship, photographing poverty, rural hardships, illness, and crime scenes - including his famous documentation of a suicide and police investigation. This unflinching approach extended to his coverage of fellow Jewish exiles, with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee preserving several of his Sosúa refugee photos credited to “Dr. Kurt Schnitzer, Photo Conrado” from the 1940s.⁶⁶

In 1941, Schnitzer joined the pro-regime⁶⁷ newspaper *La Nación* as graphic editor and studio director. From his studio in Santo Domingo's Colonial Zone, he became the go-to photographer for Dominican high society, politicians, artists, and even the Trujillo family. In fact, he eventually served as the dictator's personal photographer. Internationally, he sold images to *Harper's Bazaar*, *National Geographic*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and the *New York Times*.⁶⁸ During his Dominican years, he exhibited alongside artists and attended intellectual salons; he even captured fellow refugee artists like Hausdorf, contributing to visual documentation of the artist community in exile. For Dominican visual culture, Schnitzer became *the* chronicler of the Trujillo era.⁶⁹ He also sparked debates about photography as art: At one show, he reportedly answered “Conrado is an artist” when asked if photography is art.⁷⁰

Schnitzer's career unfolded under the authoritarian regime of Trujillo. Paradoxically, the dictator both empowered and restrained him. On one hand, Trujillo's government sponsored Jewish refugee settlement—leading to Schnitzer's visa—and made Schnitzer the personal photographer to the president's family.⁷¹ Schnitzer, too, contributed to propaganda images celebrating the dictator, as manifested for example by his 1942 photo montage with Trujillo on a horse entitled *Y seguiré a caballo* (“I will keep riding”), making use of the dictator's slogan.⁷² On the other hand, Schnitzer maintained a discreet distance from regime ideology. His images reportedly

discomforted Trujillo's inner circle because Schnitzer often turned his lens to marginalized social realities. Historian Nurys Abreu observes that Trujillo "hid" Schnitzer's work from the public, fearing the candid portrayal. Schnitzer's photos became a kind of an alternative visual record to official propaganda." In fact, Abreu notes, Schnitzer's most valuable archival images were discovered decades later, illustrating how he straddled both roles of propagandist and documentarian.⁷³ Art historian Jeannette Miller, too, noted that Schnitzer's juxtaposing depictions of state propaganda with the harsh realities of everyday people "projected a high level of irony."⁷⁴

By 1944, Schnitzer immigrated to Los Angeles, California, with his wife Lilli Ried and son George. His approximately 30,000–40,000 negatives taken from 1939 to 1943 were donated to the General Archive of the Nation of the Dominican Republic (*Archivo General de la Nación*, AGN). He remained a member of professional associations, and the American Medical Writers Association noted his death from a heart attack on September 21, 1972, thus he spent roughly three decades in Southern California as Dr. Kurt Schnitzer.⁷⁵ His American years are less documented, but Dominican journalists and scholars continue to reconstruct that period.⁷⁶

Schnitzer's photographic archive has been extensively preserved and exhibited, most notably through the Spanish Cultural Center (CCE)'s 2004 exhibition *Archivo Conrado: Fotografía histórica dominicana 1939–1943*. Javier Aiguabella of the CCE called Schnitzer an "avant-gardist" who brought European modern photography to the Caribbean.⁷⁷ The exhibition's accompanying catalog catalyzed public and institutional interest in his work, and led to the AGN cataloguing over 35,000 of his negatives, later showcased in a second major CCE exhibition in 2007. By 2023, roughly 15,700 of these glass-plate and film negatives had been digitized as part of the Fondo Conrado collection, accessible online through AGN catalogs organized by subject.⁷⁸ His images remain influential in contemporary art, as seen in José Morbán's 2018 painting *Güibia (c.1943)*, derived from a Schnitzer photograph.⁷⁹ Morbán selected Schnitzer's work because it "eludes the misery and violence of those years."⁸⁰ While Dominican media have published retrospectives contextualizing his work locally, international coverage often frames him within Jewish diaspora narratives, as exemplified by reports on the Sosúa museum featuring his prints.⁸¹

Schnitzer's legacy endures on multiple levels. In the history of photography, he is recognized as a pioneering Caribbean photojournalist who blended European techniques with Caribbean subjects. Culturally, he is remembered both in Dominican history as the perceptive observer of Trujillo's Republic and in Jewish-Caribbean history as part of the diaspora story around Sosúa. Analyses emphasize how his exile identity informed his vision: a refugee

documenting another authoritarian regime, often with empathy for the marginalized.⁸² In sum, Schnitzer/Conrado occupies a unique place in the Caribbean visual history as a transplanted European whose photographic archive is “an exceptional witness of an era,”⁸³ bridging the worlds of exile, art, and the harsh realities of dictatorship.

Artistic Adaptation as Survival and Subversion

The experiences of Herta Brauer, George Hausdorf, and Kurt Schnitzer reveal the complex negotiations required of artists operating within oppressive systems. This paper identifies five strategies they employed—artistic adaptation, strategic collaboration, performative conformity, embedded subversion, and ultimate flight—demonstrating how refugee artists navigated the dual pressures of survival and creative integrity under dictatorship. By examining their biographies, we can illuminate broader patterns of cultural production under dictatorship and the ways in which art both served and exceeded the ideological boundaries of official cultural production.

For refugee artists, adapting their work to the host country's cultural and political landscape was a necessity for survival. Hausdorf, a classically trained German painter, shifted from European realism to vibrant tropical impressionism, capturing Dominican rural life. Similarly, Brauer fused European ballet technique with merengue, laying the groundwork for an independent Dominican ballet tradition. Schnitzer brought a geometric composition to Dominican photography, but his real contribution was the archive that he left behind documenting Dominican life.

All three artists relied on regime-affiliated patronage, illustrating the compromises required to sustain artistic practice under authoritarianism. Brauer secured the support of Flor de Oro Trujillo, whose sponsorship provided her academy with resources. Hausdorf became a founding professor at the state-sponsored ENBA, where his European credentials lent prestige to the regime's cultural projects. Schnitzer, employed by the pro-regime *La Nación*, gained access to elite circles. But patronage entangled the artists in regime propaganda: Brauer choreographed Trujillo's anthem, Hausdorf designed nationalist posters, and Schnitzer photographed state spectacles.

While the artists fulfilled the regime's expectations, their broader contributions subtly undermined Trujillo. Hausdorf's landscapes, though apolitical, centered on everyday Dominican life rather than regime mythology, while his teaching nurtured a generation of modernist artists who later helped diversify Dominican modernist aesthetics. Schnitzer's case is particularly revealing. His official photography served the regime's propaganda needs, but his lens also captured the social realities Trujillo sought to erase—poverty,

police brutality, and the lives of fellow refugees. His work can be read through James C. Scott's concept of "hidden transcripts"—seemingly compliant acts that contain subtle defiance.⁸⁴

Despite their complicated relationships with the Trujillo regime, all three artists left enduring legacies in Dominican culture. Their work, initially enabled by the regime, ultimately transcended it—demonstrating how art can outlive its political instrumentalization. The experiences of Brauer, Hausdorf, and Schnitzer reveal the precarity of arts under authoritarianism. Their strategies reflect the limited agency available to those navigating oppressive systems. Yet their stories also highlight the resilience of artistic expression: even when co-opted by power, art can preserve alternative narratives, nurture future artistic traditions, and ultimately outlast the regimes that sought to control it. As refugees who fled one dictatorship only to confront another, their lives underscore the recurring tensions between survival, complicity, and the enduring power of creative dissent.

Discussion: Exile, Memory, and the Enduring Contradictions of *Dominicanidad*

This study, while centered on the experiences and contributions of three Jewish refugee artists, illuminates a broader phenomenon: the complex navigation of European exiled artists within Trujillo's authoritarian and racially motivated regime. Their stories, alongside figures not examined here, such as the painter Ernest Lothar, a Sosúa settler who became an ENBA professor, historian Erwin Walter Palm, whose foundational surveys of colonial architecture shaped Dominican cultural preservation, and educator Kurt Luis Hess, whose lifelong commitment to Sosúa was remarkable, reveal a multifaceted exile experience. Artists employed diverse strategies to sustain their practice and identity amidst political constraint, and left a legacy celebrated in the country.

However, this celebratory narrative often exists in a state of selective historical memory. The commemoration of European exiles, particularly visible in Sosúa's transformation into a tourist destination marketing its "European-Jewish past," frequently elides the regime's instrumental motives. Trujillo's welcome was inextricably linked to "blanqueamiento" and a strategic effort to rehabilitate his international image after the Parsley Massacre. The artists' integration and success, facilitated by state support, served this agenda, projecting an image of European-aligned modernity while obscuring the regime's foundational anti-Black racism and anti-Haitian discrimination. This selective memory creates an ethically fraught contrast: the veneration of white

European refugees coexists with the systemic exclusion and discrimination of Haitians and darker-skinned Dominicans.

This dichotomy is not merely historical, but actively reproduced in contemporary Dominican society, demonstrating the profound and lasting impact of the racial hierarchies institutionalized under Trujillo. The concept of *dominicanidad* (Dominicanness), emphasizing a mixed-race national identity rooted in heritage rather than discrete racial categories, functions as a powerful unifying force.⁸⁵ Yet, as scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant and others argue, *dominicanidad* has historically been constructed in opposition to Haitian identity and blackness, a legacy directly traceable to Trujillo's manipulation of racial categories (e.g., promoting the racial category of *indio* to deny African heritage, as mentioned before).⁸⁶

This historical lineage of structural exclusion also manifests legally: The 2013 Constitutional Tribunal ruling, *La Sentencia* retroactively stripped citizenship from approximately 245,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent, rendering them stateless, which is the most potent modern manifestation of this exclusionary logic. Framed as migration policy but widely criticized as discriminatory as it did not apply to descendants of other immigrant groups, *La Sentencia* exemplifies how "racial citizenship" persists.⁸⁷ Access to fundamental rights remains contingent on perceived distance from Haitian ancestry, perpetuating legal marginalization and pervasive social prejudice against the very group constituting around 85 percent of the country's essential foreign labor force.⁸⁸ Contemporary expressions of Afro-Dominican identity and resistance, particularly within global diaspora narratives, frequently address this systematic erasure and the enduring socio-political parameters of racialized citizenship to redefine belonging within the Dominican national fabric.⁸⁹

The experiences of the European exiled artists, therefore, offer more than compelling individual stories of cultural adaptation; they serve as a critical lens through which to examine the enduring contradictions of Dominican identity politics and historical memory. Sosúa's tourist economy celebrates European refugees while ignoring the racist statecraft that brought them. *Dominicanidad* embraces a fluid mestizo identity, while structurally excluding those deemed "too Haitian" (and thus "too Black"). Future research must delve deeper into the strategies of the larger exile community in Santo Domingo and expand the focus on other German-Jewish figures like Palm and Hess to further illuminate the spectrum of exile experiences. Crucially, scholarship must continue to challenge the selective memory that celebrates European contributions while marginalizing the Haitian experience and Trujillo's racist motives. Understanding these artists' legacies necessitates confronting the uncomfortable reality that their sanctuary was part of a regime project

predicated on anti-Blackness, a project whose legacies—embodied in policies like *La Sentencia* and the concept of *dominicanidad*—continue to shape the Dominican Republic's contested social landscape. A fuller understanding of this artistic heritage demands acknowledging this complex and often contradictory history.

Notes

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