Who is Miki Kratsman?

Directions: As you read, highlight or underline key terms and concepts. Jot down notes on the accompanying Concept Map.

Introduction
Miki Kratsman is a contemporary artist, photojournalist, and human rights activist whose work has been exhibited at museums and galleries around the world. Born in Argentina, he has been living and working in Israel since 1971. For his work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he has received various prizes and awards.

Early Life and Education
Miki Kratsman was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1959. His family were Zionists (those who support the establishment of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews). He remembers his Russian-born grandfather having in his home a blue-and-white Jewish National Fund box in which money was collected for the Jewish homeland.

When he was growing up, there was much political upheaval in Argentina and some political dissidents were captured by the government and became known as the "Disappeareds." The young Kratsman also became aware of the work of photojournalists who were documenting the Vietnam War and his interest in photography began.

In 1971 when he was 12 years old, Kratsman's family experienced some economic difficulties and the family immigrated to Israel, settling in Tel Aviv. At the age of 16, he began attending political demonstrations, becoming aware of the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian territory.

Despite his political awareness, Kratsman joined the military, without thinking there were other options. He said: "I entered the army because everyone entered the army."

After Kratsman's time in the army, he studied photography in Israel's Kiryat Ono College of Photography. Upon completion of his studies, he became a photographer at the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Tel Aviv.

Photojournalism
One of his first jobs was as a photojournalist for the Hebrew language daily newspaper, *Hadashot*. He worked there until the newspaper stopped publication in 1993.

Soon Kratsman was hired by the longest-published newspaper in Israel, *Ha'aretz.* Founded in 1918, the newspaper is now published in both Hebrew and English. Sold together with the *International New York Times,* it is a leading source of information about the Middle East. Kratsman worked for *Ha'aretz* until 2012.

Kratsman has shared his knowledge and skills by being a photography educator. He has taught at Camera Obscura College of Photography in Tel Aviv, the School for Geographic Photography of Tel Aviv, and the Department of Art in Haifa University. In 2006, Kratsman was appointed as the Chair of the Department of Photography in Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Israel's National School of Art; he chaired the department until he retired in 2014.

Focus of Work

The main theme of Kratsman's work is the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the ongoing struggle over territory, water rights, control of Jerusalem, and the movement of Palestinians. His work is particularly sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians, documenting their hardships and the violence they face.

Many of Kratsman's images document people's everyday lives. He has photographed Palestinians in their daily activities, at celebrations and funerals, at political demonstrations, and in their interactions with the Israeli government and police. Kratsman explains: "For me it's more than a piece of art. It's an action. Israelis don't usually see Palestinians [on a regular basis]."

Despite Kratsman's activism on behalf of Palestinians, he is deeply loyal to Israel. He says: "I would prefer to boycott only the settlements and not boycott all of the country. I cannot boycott myself. I wake up every morning. The problem is that I am an optimist. I can't live in any other place."

Photographic Approach

In 1994, Kratsman had his first solo show. It was at this show that he believes his artistic approach --- of combining photojournalism with activism--- emerged. He remembered: "From an early age I read a great deal of philosophy, but I had never connected the world of photography to that…Suddenly the question of where I stood when taking a photograph did not stem from what would benefit the picture, but functioned at the moral level."

Filmmaker and professor of photography Ariella Azoulay believes that the choices Kratsman makes are both political and photographic: "Each of Kratsman's photographs expresses a complicated, split-second decision that he made in real time, under difficult conditions of violent eruptions, as well as demanding conditions of daily withheld violence."

As a photojournalist for newspapers, Kratsman uses digital photography; as an artist, he shoots photographs with film. Kratsman notes: "I like the interpretation of film more, I like to hold the film in my hand, I like the fact that there are not many frames in every roll and I like the fact that it costs money."