

BAK

SAMUEL BAK

born: Vilna, Poland, 1933

immigrated to Israel: 1948

studied: Bezalel Art School, Jerusalem

1956: prize-winner of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation

1956-1959: Paris

1969-1966: Rome

Since 1966: Israel

One-man exhibitions

1959 Galleria Schneider, Rome

1961 Galleria Schneider, Rome

1963 Galleria Liguria, Rome

1963 Bezalel National Museum, Jerusalem

1963 Tel Aviv Museum, Beit Dizengoff

1965 Galleria Schneider, Rome

1965 Galerie d'Art l'Angle Aigu, Brussels

1965 The Alvin Gallery, London

1966 Galleria Schneider, Rome

1966 The Gordon Gallery, Tel Aviv

1967 Galleria Roma, Chicago

1968 Modern Art Gallery, Jaffa

1969 Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Boston

1970 Saidye Bronfman Center, Montreal

1971 Hadassah "K" Gallery, Tel Aviv

1971 Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Boston

Group exhibitions

1960 Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Astratta, Prato

1961 Carnegie International, Pittsburgh

1961 Mostra Nazionale di Pittura, Palermo

1962 Forms Today, Bezalel National Museum, Jerusalem

1963 Mostra Mercato d'Arte, Firenze

1965 Rassegna delle Arti Figurative di Roma e del Lazio

1965 Alternative Attuali, l'Aquila

1965-1966 "Contemporary Art in Italy" in: Chicago, Ill.; Columbia, S.C.; Chapel Hill, N.C.; Charleston, S.C.

1967 Image and Imagination, Tel Aviv Museum, Beit Dizengoff

1968 Rassegna delle Arti Figurative di Roma e del Lazio

1969 Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Boston

1969 Brockton Art Center, Fuller Memorial

cover:

ORIGINS OF THE ENDGAME

oil

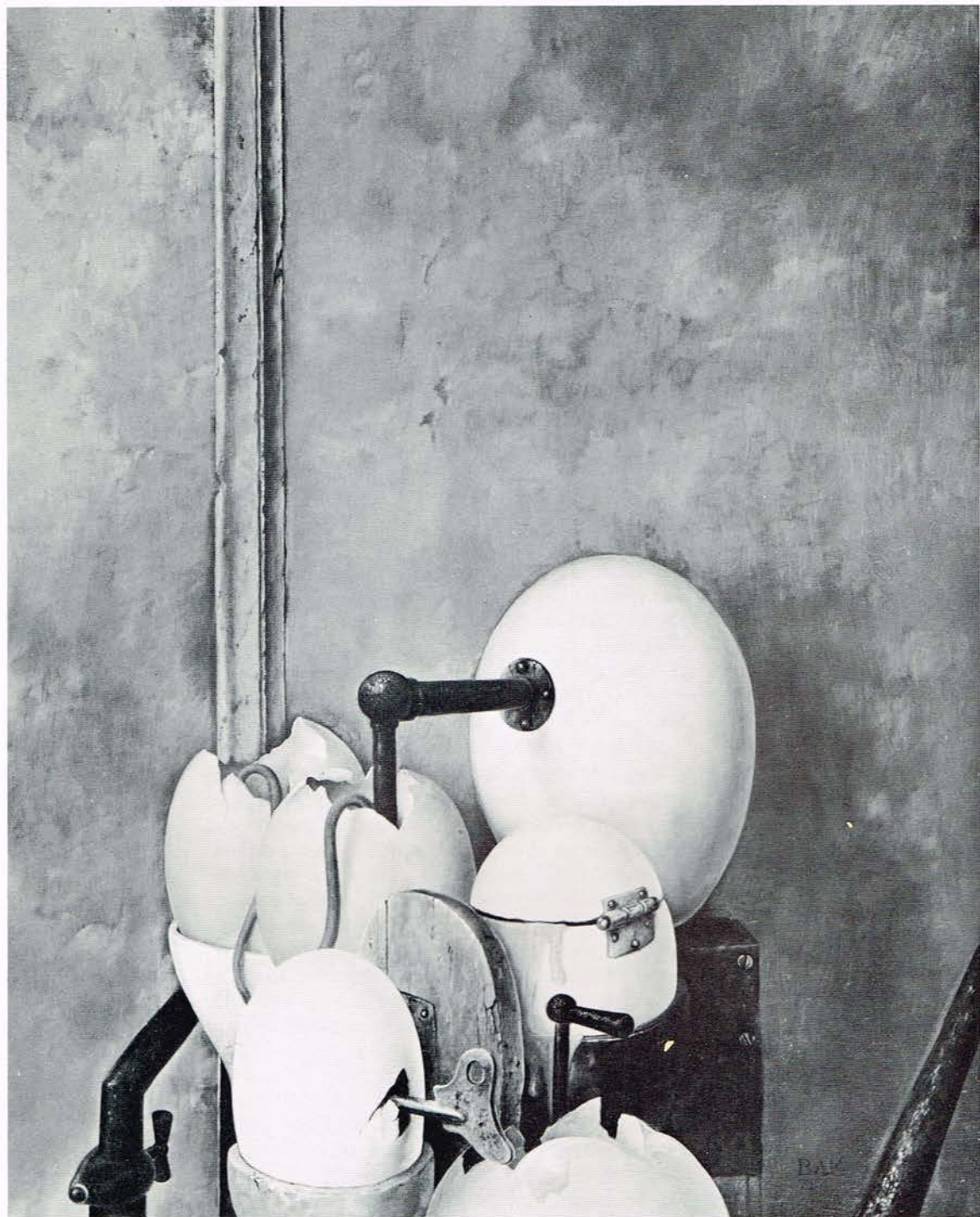
14⁷/₈" x 18¹/₄"



Interrupted Journey
oil
31 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{1}{2}$



The Moving Landscape
oil
31⁷/₈ x 25¹/₂



A Life of Experience
oil
25½ x 31⅞



The Secret
oil
13⁵/₈ x 10³/₄

SAMUEL BAK: THE ETERNAL ENIGMA

It hardly seems possible that the paintings of Samuel Bak are the works of a contemporary artist, a World War II refugee of Poland and present citizen of the young state of Israel. His works seem more appropriately to be either the futurist visions of some past fantasist or the remembrances of some artists yet to be born looking back on a world that was. This impression results, probably, from the extreme sense of disorientation that Bak's paintings are in the habit of perpetrating on the viewer. They are simultaneously witty and deadly serious, irrational and irrefutably actual, frightening and delightful.

These very contradictions, however, are a confirmation of the fact that Bak is a man of our times. How troubled he is with humanity; how restlessly he must spend his days and nights in philosophical contemplation. Each painting is a measure of the depth of his concern and the extent of his probing into the nature of his — and our — existence.

In *Difficult Questions*, for example, the frustrations of our anxious age are given perfect symbolic form: a landscape of gigantic useless keys. The door ajar at left with a bolt thrown in locked position cannot be closed again; while the keys on the ground and the key thrust through the wall of a roofless abandoned house will remain forever purposeless. Nothing functions as we expect it to. We are helpless. As a metaphor of the human condition it is an expression of dire pessimism.

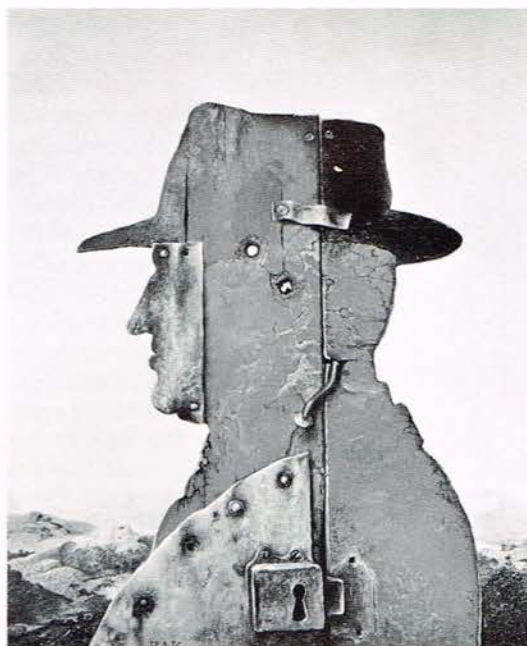
One cannot avoid the analogy to Samuel Beckett, whose dark absurdist dramas won him the Nobel prize. Bak the painter seems, strangely, more closely related to this man of letters than to any other living painter. Even the title of the cover piece, *Origins of the Endgame*, must owe as much to Beckett as it does to the subject of chess. For this painting, too, evokes that unrelieved melancholy characteristic of both Beckett and Bak.

But this literary association may be carried just so far. Bak is, after all, a painter; and he reminds us of his tradition as well as his wit in a brilliant pair of portraits inspired by the celebrated profiles of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino painted by Piero della Francesca. In *Descendants I* and *Descendants II* Bak has almost literally constructed an elaborate parody of Piero's portraits. As in the latter, Bak has painted a continuous landscape behind the figures. But instead of an Italian prince of the Renaissance and his gracious wife, he has "built" out of scrap wood, metal, and rope the saggy-chinned profiles of a modern businessman in snap-brimmed hat and his expressionless spouse. It is a wry commentary on the "progress" of man in the four centuries that separate Piero's and Bak's couples.

If one could imagine when, centuries from now, the Age of Anxiety comes to an end and is displaced by an Era of Euphoria; when the emotional force of Bak's paintings lose some of their immediacy by the difference in time — the beauty and mystery of his works will remain. The skies like the insides of shells, the landscapes that dissolve into the horizon, the dull glint of light on old metal, its shimmering skin on water, the smoothness of marble and the roughness of rocks — these will be the ultimate enigma, beyond the mystery of meaning, for the connoisseur of the future. How, he will wonder, could this artist of such dark philosophical concerns have painted works of such luminous beauty? — P.T.N.



Descendants I
oil
15 x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$



Descendants II
oil
15 x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$



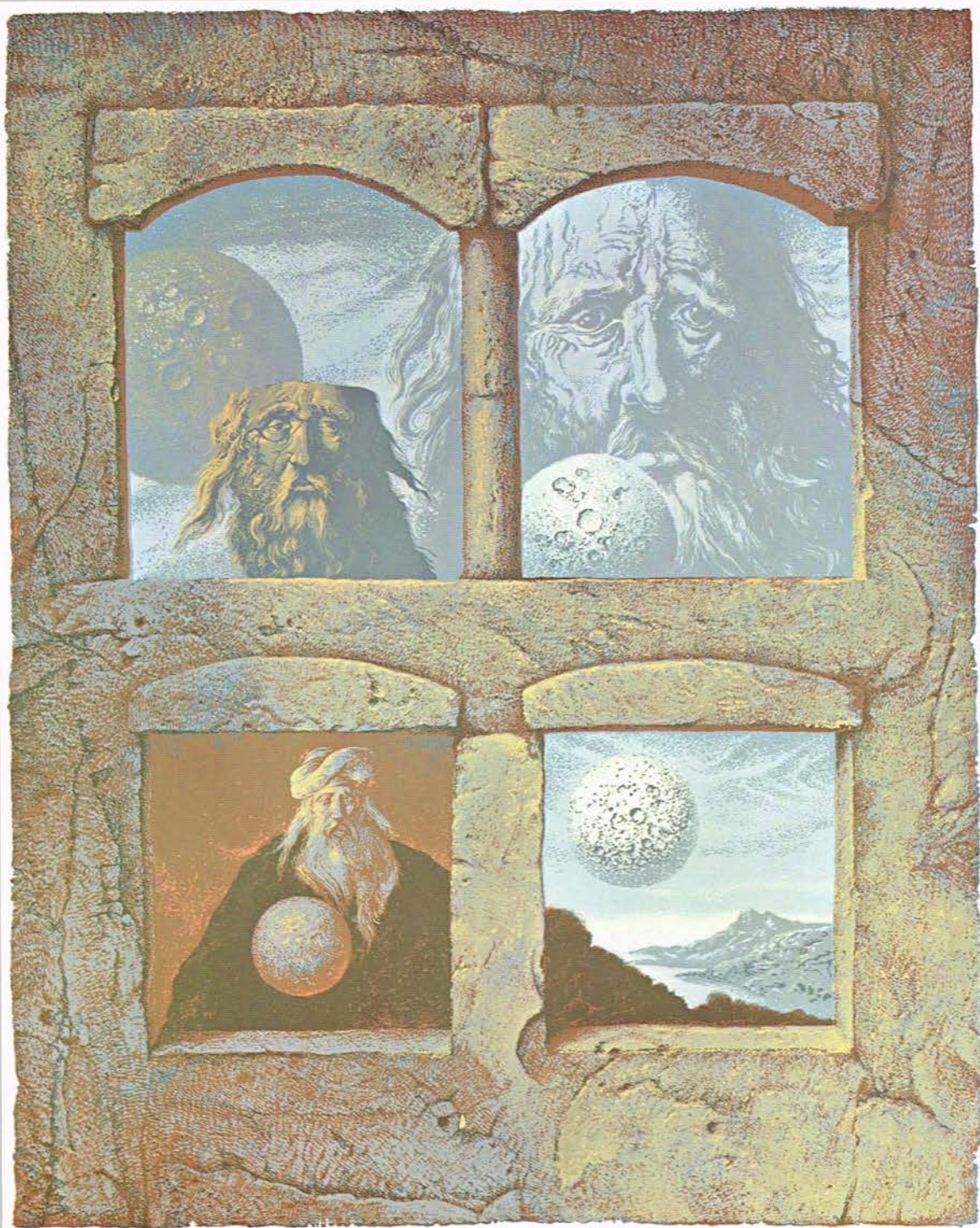
Forbidden Still Life
oil
29 x 36¼



Difficult Questions
oil
25½ x 31⅞



detail from:
INDUSTRY AND THE PAST
charcoal heightened with white



THE FOUR WINDOWS
serigraph
20" x 25"
edition: 200

pucker/safrai gallery 171 newbury street boston massachusetts 02116



safrai gallery 17 shlomzion hamalka street jerusalem israel