

SAMUEL BAK



Knight, o/c, 116 × 89 cm

CHESS AS METAPHOR

In the Art of Samuel Bak

SOUFER GALLERY

1015 MADISON AVENUE
NY, NY 10021 • 628-3225

Each painting by Samuel Bak can be viewed and experienced as a short story; as a chapter in the history of modern times; or as an exploration of the essential questions which inform the meaning of human existence.

The images, the ideas, the composition, color and textures all engage our eyes, mind and spirit. We are provided with questions, challenges, answers and promises.

For the past three years, Bak has re-discovered the theme of Chess which first entered his artistic vocabulary in 1946. While in the Landsberg Displaced Person Camp, he created a watercolor featuring Chess imagery as a gift for his new stepfather. Nearly 25 years later, as an established artist, he more thoroughly explored Chess and now two decades later he re-engaged the Chess theme with renewed energy and creativity.

Each encounter has provided us with a clearer appreciation for the profundity of Bak's imagination and his ability to delve deeper and deeper into a single theme without exhausting its creative potentialities or our interest in his images.

The most recent works which are featured in this exhibition carry us into a realm of ideas, questions and answers that can only reaffirm our faith in the greatness of the human spirit. Each chess piece - the King, the Queen, the Bishop, Knights, castle and pawns are artfully arrayed within the confines of Bak's canvases. Their functions as specific chess pieces are transformed by the dictates of each mythical tale and fabricated by the will and wit of the painter.

Knight presents an armor clad pawn astride a hobby horse within a chessboard defined landscape. The chessboard is the traditional surface for the battle: the pawn and the knight (horse's head) have exchanged positions of power. We are engaged by their role reversal and captured by the extraordinary design and color of this painting. Have they returned from battle? Were they successful? Are they caught up in a contemporary fairy tale?

Bak's great ability to render textures is expanded in Element of Change. Water, stone, sky combine to describe a real world which addresses the ideas of time, erosion, survival and hope. The clock of human time has run aground and is being battered by the stone like waves of fortune. The few pawns struggle to mount the singular fortress with little hope of success. Atop the fortress a king, a knight, a small group of pawns look down on this scene. Suddenly we realize that the "fortress" is a die - a reminder that it is all a matter of accident or good fortune that they have survived.

With each painting, Bak invites us onto the stage of life; each chess piece is an actor in the drama of modern history. We are those actors and actresses; we are also the audience about to be dazzled by the remarkable performances of human kind's behavior. With a Target has assembled these figures onto the stage of Bak's chess drama. The pawns, castles, knights, bishop, queen and king are gathered. The curtain is up and we are invited to write our own script. Is this the last act for human kind? Or are we now ready to move onto better days? Chance, order, growth, rebirth are all presented and we are now invited to make a choice and a commitment.

Bak the painter, the philosopher, the survivor, the human soul continues to create these visions of intrigue, provocation, splendor. We can only express gratitude for his survival, his spirit, his talent as our universe is greatly expanded and enriched.



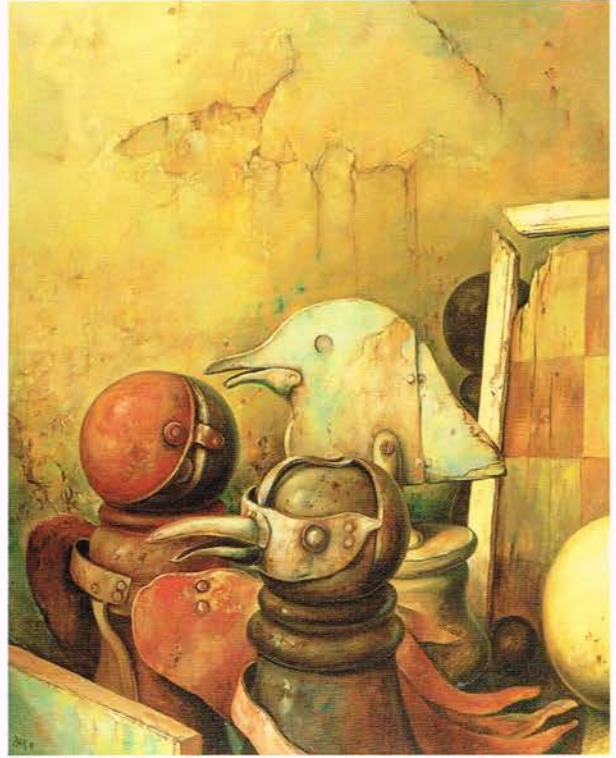
Future Projects, o/c, 81 × 100 cm



The Eternal Promise, o/c, 65 × 81 cm



Transformation, o/c, 81 × 65 cm



Outsider, o/c, 81 × 65 cm



Travesties, o/c, 81 × 65 cm



Chess Tree, o/c, 81 × 65 cm



Element of Change, o/c, 81 × 100 cm



With a Target, o/c, 81 × 100 cm