



Flight: Escape, Hope, Redemption

WORKS BY SAMUEL BAK

SEPTEMBER 8-DECEMBER 29, 1994 THE JOSEPH GALLERY
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION



The Right Key, 1972

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the Joseph Gallery and to share in our extraordinary exhibition *Flight: Escape, Hope, Redemption*. The exhibition features works by Samuel Bak which are the product of the artist's experiences during the Holocaust and of his life journey since. Nevertheless, these works transcend time and space and touch universal themes – loss, hopelessness, exile, promise – and are poignantly relevant for our lives, as well. Bak's paintings and drawings draw on the Jewish past, traditions and memory, as he attempts to rediscover a lost world. In so doing, his work evokes the Jewish struggle to survive and prevail.

This is most evident in the works included in this exhibition, all of which center around birds and angels which carry us from the dreary gloom of horrific destruction to a world of freedom and life. The wooden-winged birds and melancholy angels remind us of our own struggles within the narrow places in our lives and our yearning for wholeness.

We are pleased that you have come to view this exhibition. We hope that you will leave not only with renewed hope and faith in the power of Samuel Bak, but also with renewed hope and faith in the power of the human being and the Jew to survive and flourish.

NORMAN J. COHEN
DEAN



Dreaming Angel, 1972-74

About Flying

I must have been eight or nine years old. We were living in a small room on the ground floor of an old and decrepit building. It was part of the ghetto of Vilna. Before the War, before the people who lived there were sent to Ponari and shot, it served as a home for a family of a poor Jewish shop-keeper.

One day, some men of the Ghetto, clad in their worn and dirty working clothes, started to pile up planks, boards, bricks and other building materials in front of our door. They worked a few days, reinforcing the wall that separated us from the exterior, closing the gaps and the windows, blocking every possibility to have a glimpse of the "other side." Then they went away, but a considerable mountain of trash was left behind.

What an unforgettable moment of joy and happiness!

With two friends, boys my age, we started the construction of a huge bomber. An old crate served as the cabin for the pilot. The wings were made of boards supported by stones and old bricks. There was a tail, a propeller of sorts and even a mast with sails of old sacks to help out with the wind . . . We would sit in the crate, one at a time, and dream. The hands holding a substitute steering wheel made of an old frying pan, our lips producing a noise of a possible motor. We would become one with the bomber, we would decimate the enemy soldiers, we would land as heroes in a promised land, or on the Red Square, next to the Statue of Liberty.

When my turn came, I would linger in the cabin. Behind

my closed eyes the bomber turned into a magical bird. The wooden wings would take on a slow and steady beat. They would carry me away, away from the gray and dreary ghetto into a world of light, of freedom, of life.

Many years later, having dedicated my life to painting, I closed myself in comfortable and protected studios. Embraced by soft northern light, consoled by a pair of ever playing loud-speakers, I spent my days in front of an easel. My imagination would depart into the limitless spaces of white canvas or paper. With force of brush or crayon that my hand would follow, I discovered the man-made birds and the flying-machine made of bits and pieces. Wings appeared and reappeared with figures trapped by them. Anonymous soldiers, Icarus-like men, angels lost in thought, pondering the nature of the human condition, arose.

Was I back to my flight from the ghetto? Did I dream again of an escape from the contraptions of reality into a kingdom of inner freedom? Was such an escape possible without the almost inevitable prediction of failure? Would not the complex wings of freedom turn into instruments of torture and enslavement?

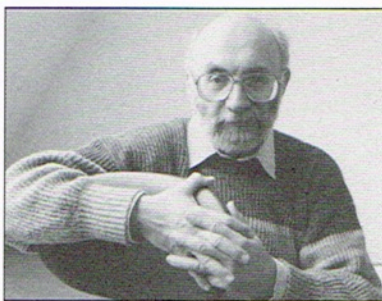
Those melancholy angels are still thinking about it. They try to figure out the price of freedom.

Meanwhile, the older man, thinking of the boy he was in the ghetto, closes his eyes and keeps imagining.

SAMUEL BAK

Samuel Bak

- 1933 Born 12 August in Vilna, Poland
- 1940-44 Under German occupation: ghetto, work camp, refuge in a monastery.
- 1942 First Exhibition of drawings in the ghetto Vilna.
- 1945-48 Displaced Persons camp in Germany; studied painting in Munich.
- 1948 Emigrated to Israel.
- 1952 Studied at the Bezalel Art School, Jerusalem.
- 1953-56 Army service.
- 1956 Received the First Prize of the American-Israel Cultural Foundation.
- 1956-59 Lived in Paris; studied at the "Ecole des Beaux -Arts."
- 1959-66 Lived in Rome; 1966-74 in Israel; 1974-77 in New York City; 1980-84 in Paris; 1984-93 in Switzerland; currently in Weston, Mass.



Selected Exhibitions

- The Carnegie International, Pittsburgh - 1961.
- "Image and Imagination," Tel Aviv Museum - 1967.
- "Jewish Experience in the Art of the 20th Century," Jewish Museum, New York - 1975.
- International Art Fair, Basel - 1979, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1986.
- "Nachabilder," Kunsthalle, Hannover - 1979.
- "Bilder Sind Nicht Verboten," Stadtische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf - 1982.
- "Still Life," Tel Aviv Museum - 1984.
- International Art Fair, Chent 1986.
- "Chagall to Kitaj," Barbican Art Center, London - 1990.

Selected Retrospectives

- Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem - 1963.
- Tel Aviv Museum - 1963.
- Brockton Art Center, Fuller Memorial - 1969.
- Bronfman Center, Montreal - 1970
- Rose Museum, Brandeis University - 1977.
- Heidelberg Museum - 1977.
- Kunstverein Esslingen - 1977.
- Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg - 1977.
- Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf - 1978.
- Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn - 1978.
- University of Haifa, Israel - 1978.
- Museum Der Stadt, Landau - 1979.
- Kunstmuseum, Weisbaden - 1979.
- Kunstverein Braunschweig - 1980.
- Traveling Exhibition organized by Ministry of Culture and Education - visited 30 Cultural centers in Israel - 1980-85.
- Stadtgalerie Bamberg, Villa Dessauer - 1988.
- Temple Judea Museum, Philadelphia - 1991.
- "Bak and Durer" - Durer Museum, Nuremberg - 1991.

Exhibition Checklist

The Angel of Nuremberg, 1986
Oil on linen
32 x 39 1/2"

After Durer, 1978
Mixed media on paper
29 1/2 x 21 1/2"

Desire, 1991
Oil on linen
39 1/4 x 32"

Dreaming Angel, 1972-1974
Oil on linen
36 x 29"

Escape, 1983
Mixed media on paper
30 x 22 1/2"

Experiment in Flight, 1976
Mixed media on paper
21 3/4 x 29 1/4"

Group with Blue Angel, 1973
Color lithograph
19 1/2 x 25 1/2"

In Memory of a Flight Experiment, 1991
Oil on linen
89 x 116 cm

Into the Trees, 1991
Oil on linen
25 1/2 x 21 1/2"

Journey in Blue, 1976
Mixed media on paper
25 x 19 1/2"

Les Adieux, 1973
Oil on linen
26 x 32"

Love at Second Sight, 1991
Oil on linen
25 3/4 x 21 1/2"

Meeting Point, 1982
Oil on linen
32 x 39 1/4"

No Exit, 1991
Oil on linen
25 3/4 x 21 1/2"

Once upon a Time III, 1985
Oil on linen
24 x 18 1/4"

Once upon a Time VI, 1986
Oil on linen
24 x 18 1/4"

Papillons, 1985
Oil on linen
25 1/2 x 31 1/2"

Ready for Departure, 1974
Graphite on paper
29 x 23"

The Reflection After Durer, 1977
Mixed media on paper
25 1/2 x 20"

The Right Key, 1972
Graphite on paper
20 x 11"

Time Machine, 1984
Oil on linen
24 x 18"

War Game, 1970-1992
Mixed media on paper
22 x 29"



Alfred Gottschalk, *President* Paul M. Steinberg, *Vice President and Dean of Faculty* Stanley P. Gold, *Chair, Board of Governors*
Burton Lehman, *Chair, New York Board of Overseers* Norman J. Cohen, *Dean* Lawrence W. Raphael, *Dean of Administration*
Kerry M. Olitzky, *Director, School of Education* Jean B. Rosensaft, *National Director for Public Affairs; Exhibitions Director*

EXHIBITIONS COMMITTEE: Laura Kruger, *Chair* Semmes Brightman Mindy Cantor Jocelyn Chait Phyllis Cohen
Leda Goldsmith Cissy Grossman Reva Kirschberg Judith Maslin Claire G. Miller Myra Ostroff

This exhibition is in cooperation with the Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum.