

SAMUEL BAK

A RETROSPECTIVE JOURNEY

PAINTINGS 1946-1994



JANICE CHARACH EPSTEIN MUSEUM/GALLERY

FRONT COVER:

NÜREMBERG ELEGIE, 1986

Oil on Linen

55 x 55"

FRONTISPIECE:

GUARDIANS OF MEMORY, 1990

Oil on Linen

30.5 x 32.5"

SAMUEL BAK

A RETROSPECTIVE JOURNEY

PAINTINGS 1946-1994



In cooperation with the artist and the
Pucker Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts

Letter to the artist:
Bernard H. Pucker



The Janice Charach Epstein Museum/Gallery, established in July, 1991, is the fine arts showplace at the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit. Many exhibits a year fill the multi-level space with an ever changing visual experience ranging from contemporary art to exhibitions of religious significance and relevance to Jewish history and culture. The Museum/Gallery explores and examines how the various disciplines have affected and impacted on Jewish values.

We gratefully acknowledge our sponsors for their generosity in helping us to bring the profound imagery by the celebrated Samuel Bak to our gallery. Special thanks go to Bernard H. and Suzanne Pucker, Directors of the eminent Pucker Gallery, Boston, for their extraordinary efforts in sharing Samuel Bak's collection by making these creations available to us.

A Samuel Bak painting challenges the viewer to examine, question, seek universal truths. His work heightens our awareness of the suffering inflicted on the Jewish people; we experience in his work the struggle that is life. Yet, though we recognize the sinister quality of devastation, our lives are enhanced as we stand before the paintings, feeling at once empowered and humbled by the genius that is Samuel Bak.

We are proud and privileged to have the opportunity to present the Samuel Bak retrospective exhibition in the Janice Charach Epstein Museum/Gallery.

Sylvia Nelson
Director
March 1994

A LETTER OF THANKS

Dear Sam,

As we wander through your collected artwork in an attempt to select works for the initial retrospective exhibition at the Janice Charach Epstein Museum/Gallery, I am thinking about your life, your story, your work and the world in which we live, and I realize that it would be impossible to write an accurate biography, an adequate description, an appreciation and an analysis of your creative gift in the space allocated. Rather I have chosen to paint my personal response to the miracle that is your work and your life.

It is clear to me that you and your art are tied to your experience, your talent and your vision. Born in 1933 in Vilna, the Jerusalem of Lithuania, your early years were ones of love, support and caring, you were surrounded by adoring and loving parents and grandparents as you flourished.

Your Mother especially protected your earliest drawings and indeed she continued to nurture your talent and gifts until her untimely death in 1971. Her courage, ability and confidence in you continue to provide you with the foundation and faith to create your own world through your art.

Throughout the days and nights of the War, she was your guardian angel. Her protective acts served as the armour that saved you physically and psychologically from the horrors, depravity and insanity that abounded in the Vilna Ghetto, in the Labor Camp; and eventually in the D.P. camps. Each moment and turn she enabled you both to survive and continue onward.

1. TWO FIGURES, 1975
Crayons and Gouache
25.625 x 19"
- 2.

Your early childhood world had been broken. It had been shattered into hundreds, thousands of pieces. The original forms of your safe, complete life would never exist again. Only within the confines of your canvas would you be able to re-construct, re-pair, re-constitute what had been, and what would never be again.

You gave these fragments a renewed presence and importance. The simple objects of your still life have gone through and continue to go through exceptional transformations, yet these objects act as your password. Each viewer finds your teapot, spoon, bottles, pears as friends that struggle to stay together. Sometimes these quiet objects huddle together as a family; other times they float across the heavens as the ephemeral clouds on a Spring day; occasionally they are revealed as objects that have been recently excavated from the layers of a civilization long gone. In each metamorphosis the fragments of the past are seen and experienced anew.

Not only do the ordinary objects of your still life paintings people your canvases but you have enhanced them with clocks, chess pieces, keys, candles. These additional objects carry their own direct meaning and when placed within your world, suggest many more questions and fewer answers.

Each time I review one of your works, I feel that I can discover new meanings- visually and philosophically. Your personal journey through the techniques and styles on the decades of 1950 and 1960 has produced an identifiable and yet evocative style of realism that is based on the fantastic, the improbable, the unreal. You render your images and spaces with great fidelity to texture, tonality and color and in doing so convince the viewer of the reality of the unreal. You awakened in us the need to explore and question the reality of the events of the Holocaust, of our modern world, of our own lives.

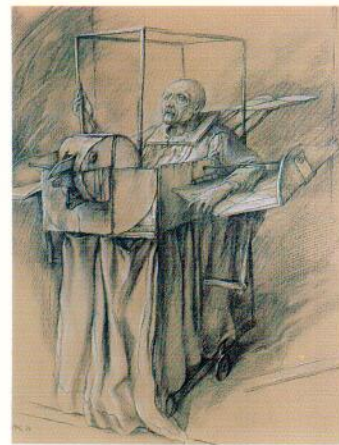
Each painting is an opportunity and a challenge. It is a moment to understand the Nature of Truth; it is also a chance to learn and to grow. Each of us takes so much for granted and your work reminds us of the fragility of the human condition. We must invest in the opportunity of the moment and in doing so improve the quality of life.

Your paintings speak to the universal issues of meaning and survival. Yet for me your most poignant works using the Jewish themes eg. the Tablets of the Law, the Magen David, the Tallit- flow from your Jewish roots and resources. These images speak of the profound assault on the Jewish people and yet cry out against the savage destruction of the fundamental values at the base of Western Civilization. As these objects are recognizable and their meanings are revealed differently to each person who stands before them, we are all exhorted to act.

This initial retrospective journey through your works from 1946 through 1993 represents a glance into the treasury of your imagination and vision. For me each glance provides renewed joy and new questions. In so many ways your paintings represent a fresh window to the soul.

Thank you for allowing your works to be seen and shared. We are enriched by the clarity of your vision and the strength of your creativity.

With thanks,
Bernie
Boston
17 March 1994



2. OLD MAN'S DEPARTURE,
1977
Drawing
24.75 x 19"



3. RAIN, 1947
Watercolor
14 x 20"

4. RUMOURS, 1946
Ink
24 x 32.5"

4.



5. SELF PORTRAIT, 1947
Watercolor
15 x 12"



6. STILL LIFE, 1946
Watercolor
22 x 15.5"

7. TREES, 1946
Watercolor
15 x 11"

6.



8. MOTHER & SON, 1947
Gouache
21 x 14"

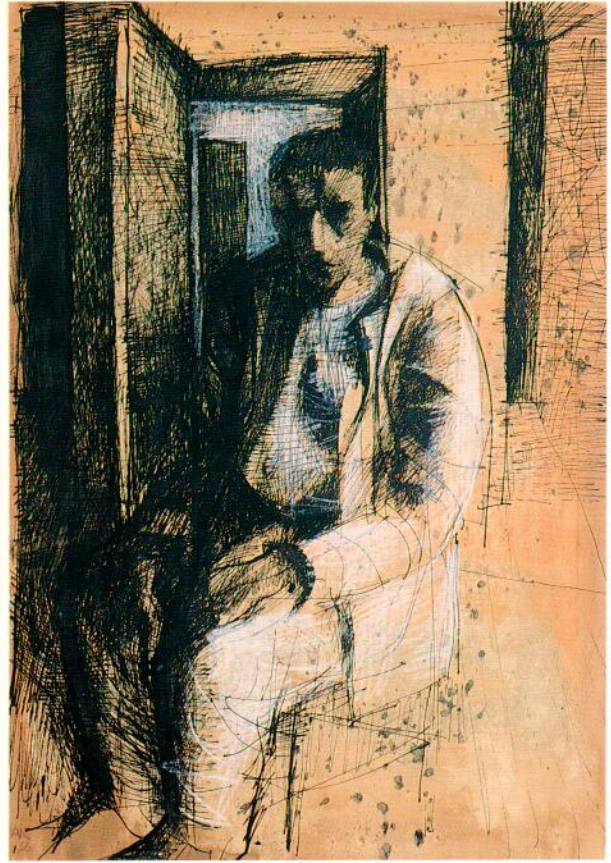






9. CHILDREN IN FIRE, 1948
Oil on Paper
26 x 20"

10. MA'ABARAH, 1954
Gouache
13 x 19.5"



11. FEMALE FIGURE (DRAWING 1), 1957

Ink
20 x 13.5"

12. SEATED MAN, 1956

Ink and Crayon
15.5 x 14.5"

10.

13. FROM THE WINDOW, 1957
Ink
17.5 x 21.5"

14. URBAN LANDSCAPE, 1958
Oil on Linen
31.5 x 47"





15. HIDING, 1960
Oil on Linen
46 x 35"

16. VILNA, 1960
Oil on Linen
35 x 46"

12.



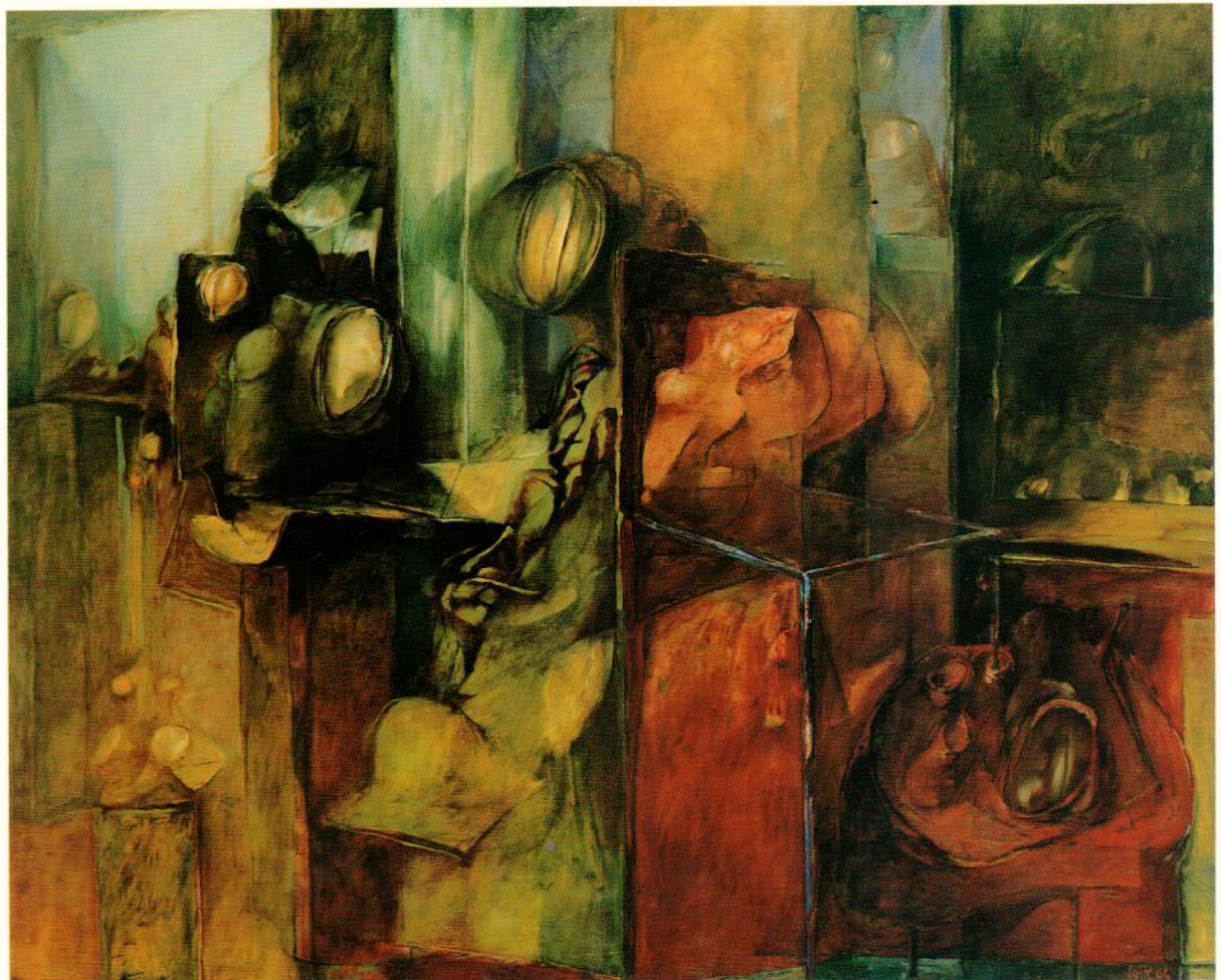
17. DOPO IL CAFFE, 1963
Oil on Linen
31.5 x 25.5"

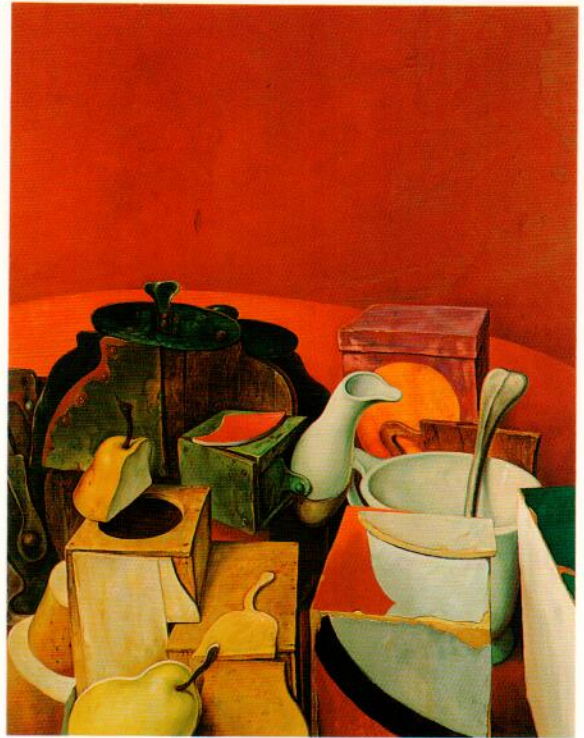




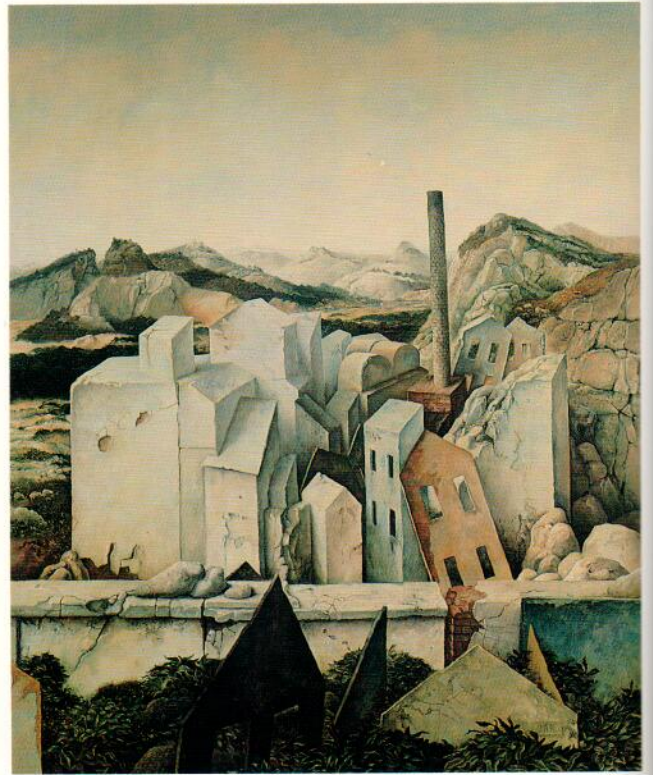
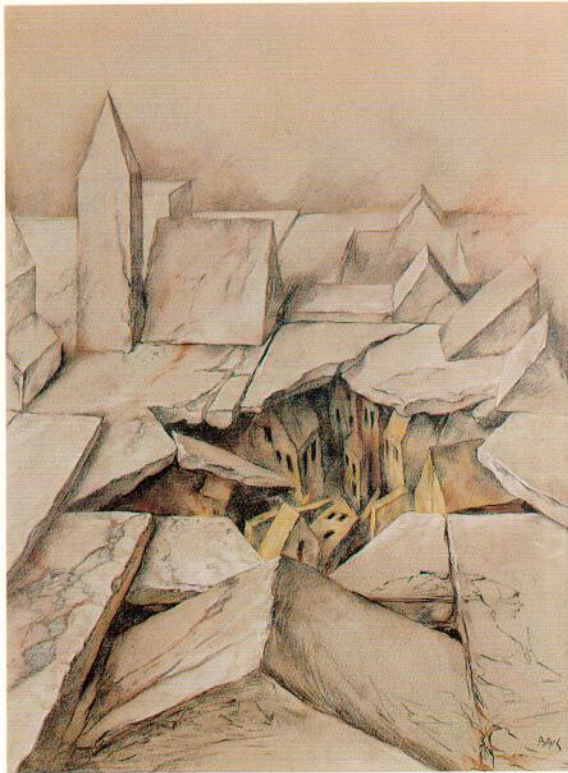
18. RED-INTERIOR, 1964
Oil on Linen
32.5 x 39.5"

19. REFLECTIONS, 1964
Oil on Linen
40 x 48"





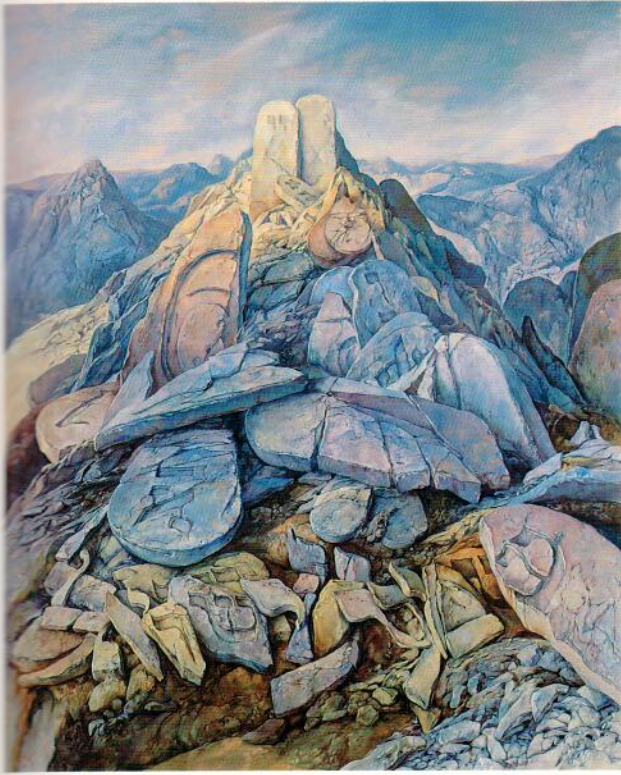
20. RED STILL LIFE, 1980
Oil on Linen
39.5 x 32.5"
100 x 81 cm



26. GHETTO, 1975
Mixed Media
26 x 20"

27. TOWN PLANNING, 1967
Oil on Linen
39.5 x 39.5"

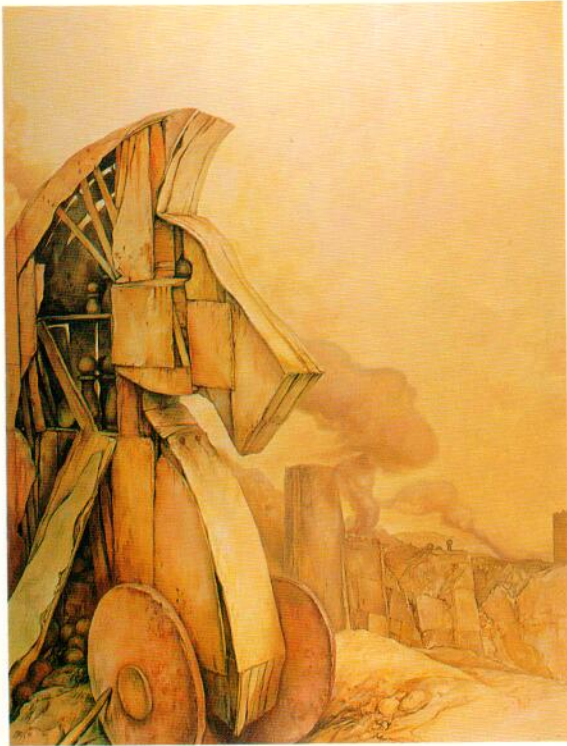
18.



☞ SHEMA YISRAEL, 1992
Oil on Linen
78.75 x 63"

☞ ELEMENTS OF TIME
Oil on Linen
81 x 65cm





30. MYTHOLOGY, 1991
Oil on Linen
35 x 46"

31. PORTRAIT WITH OWN INNER SELF, 1967
Oil on Linen
24 x 19.5"

32. FLIGHT FROM BERLIN, 1990-91
Oil on Linen
130 x 162 cm

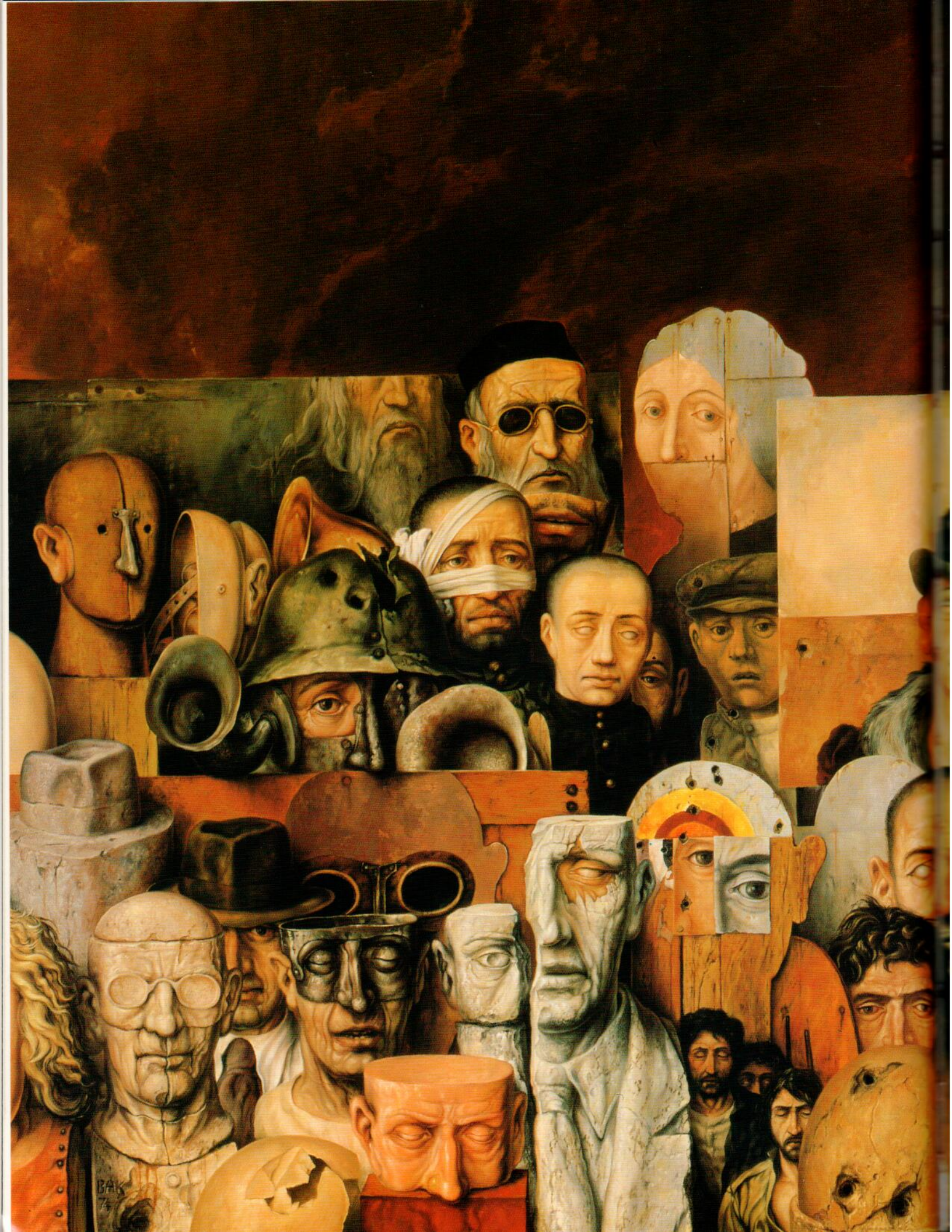




33. THE EXPLANATION, 1977-93
Oil on Linen
51 x 51"
22.

34. LES ADIEUX, 1974
Oil on Linen
45 x 76.5"







35. THE FAMILY, 1974
Oil on Linen
63 x 78.75"



36. SMALL LANDSCAPE, 1973
Oil on Linen
8.5 x 11"

37. THE QUESTION, 1988
Oil on Linen
21.5 x 25.5"

26.



38. GROUP PORTRAIT WITH A BLUE ANGEL
Oil on Linen
52.5 x 39.25"

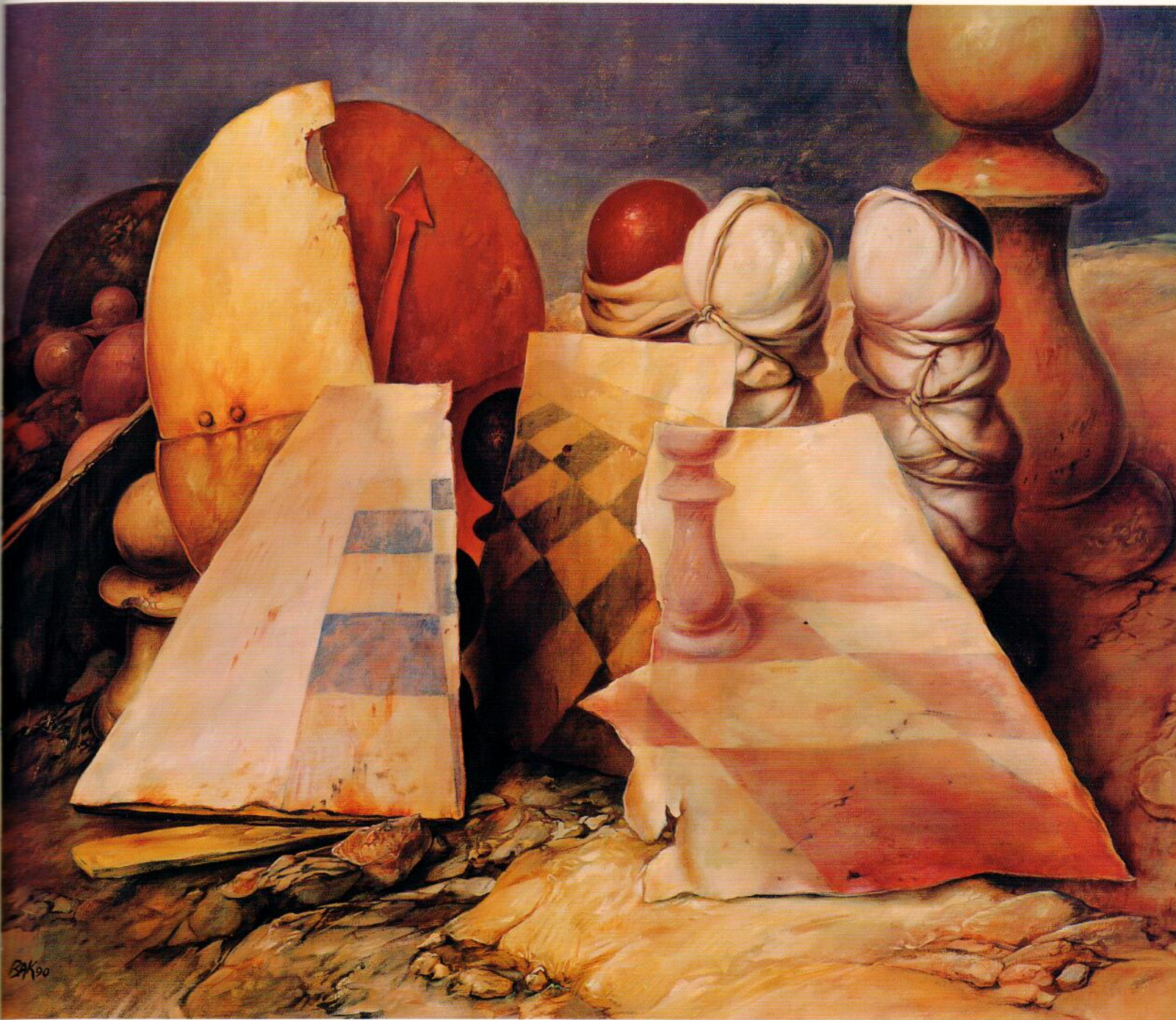




39. ROUND TABLE, 1990
Oil on Linen
55 x 55"



40. BETWEEN THE BLACK AND THE
WHITE, 1990
Oil on Linen
35 x 57.5"



41. POINTS OF VIEW, 1990
Oil on Linen
21.5 x 25.5"



42. ARTE POVERA, 1980-93
Oil on Linen
45 x 57.5"

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
of Vilna.
1945-48 Displaced Persons camps 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-Israeli 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; 1977-80 in Israel;
1980-84 in Paris; 1984-93 in
Switzerland.
1993 Moved to Weston, Massachusetts.

SOLO GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

- Galleria Schneider - 1959, 1961, 1965, 1966.
Galleria Liguria - 1963.
L'Angle Aigu, Brussels - 1965.
Alwin Gallery, London - 1965.
Gordon Gallery, Tel Aviv - 1966.
Roma Gallery, Chicago - 1967.
Modern Art Gallery, Jaffa - 1968.
Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston - 1969, 1972, 1975,
1979, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991.
Hadassah "K" Gallery, Tel Aviv - 1971, 1973, 1978.
Aberbach Fine Art, New York - 1974, 1975, 1978.
Ketterer Gallery, Munich 1977.
Amstutz Gallery, Zurich - 1978.
Vonderbank Gallery, Frankfurt - 1978.
Goldman Gallery, Haifa - 1978.
DeBel Gallery, Jerusalem - 1978, 1980.
Galerie Levy, Hamburg - 1980.
Thorens Fine Art, Basel - 1981.
Kallenbach Fine Art, Munich - 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987.
Soufer Gallery, New York - 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992.
Galerie Ludwig Lange, Berlin - 1987.
Galerie Carpentier, Paris - 1988.
Galerie M.A.G., Paris - 1989
Galerie Marc Richard, Zurich - 1990.
Galerie de la Cathedrale, Fribourg - 1991, 1992.
Galerie Picpus, Montreux - 1991, 1992.
Pucker Gallery, Boston - 1993. "Landscapes of Jewish
Experience"

RETROSPECTIVES IN MUSEUMS

- Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem - 1963.
Tel Aviv Museum - 1963.
Brockton Art Center, Fuller Memorial - 1969.

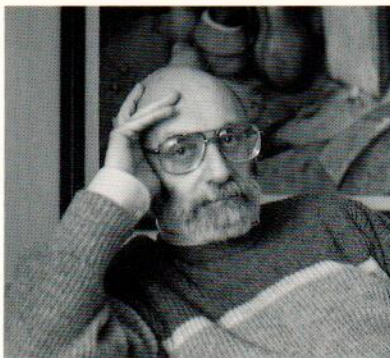
- Bronfman Center, Montreal - 1970.
Rose Museum, Brandeis, Waltham, Mass - 1976.
Heidelberg Museum - 1977.
Kunstverein Esslingen - 1977.
Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg - 1977.
Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf - 1978.
Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn - 1978.
University of Haifa, Israel - 1978.
Museum Der Stadt, Landau - 1979.
Kunstmuseum, Wiesbaden - 1979.
Kunstverein Braunschweig - 1980.
Traveling Exhibition organized by Ministry of Culture and Education - vis-
ited 30 cultural centers in Israel - 1980-85.
Stadtgalerie Bamberg, Villa Dessauer - 1988.
"The Past Continues - Two Decades" Koffler Gallery,
Toronto Ontario - 1990.
"The Past Continues" Temple Judea Museum, Philadelphia - 1991.
"Bak and Dürer" Dürer Museum, Nurember - 1991.
"Samuel Bak - Landschaften Jüdischer Erfahrung" Jüdisches Museum,
Stadt Frankfurt am Main - 1993

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Durer House, Nuremberg.
Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg.
German Parliament, Bonn.
Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Jewish Museum, New York.
Kunstmuseum, Bamberg.
Municipality of Nuremberg.
Rose Museum, Brandeis, Waltham, Mass.
University of Haifa, Israel.
Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel.
Yad Vashem Museum, Jerusalem.
Vaud State, Switzerland.

MONOGRAPHS

- Chess as Metaphor In the Art of Samuel Bak, Jean Louis
Cornuz. Boston & Montreux, 1991.
Samuel Bak, The Past Continues, Samuel Bak and Paul T.
Nagano. David R. Godine, Boston, 1988.
Bak, Monuments to Our Dreams, Rolf Kallenbach. Limes
Verlag, Weisbaden & Munich, 1977.
Bak, Paintings of the Last Decade, A. Kaufman and Paul
T. Nagano. Aberbach, New York, 1974.





43. HOME, 1992
Oil on Linen
78.75 x 63"

44. STAR ON WALL, 1976
Mixed Media on Paper
20 x 26"

32.



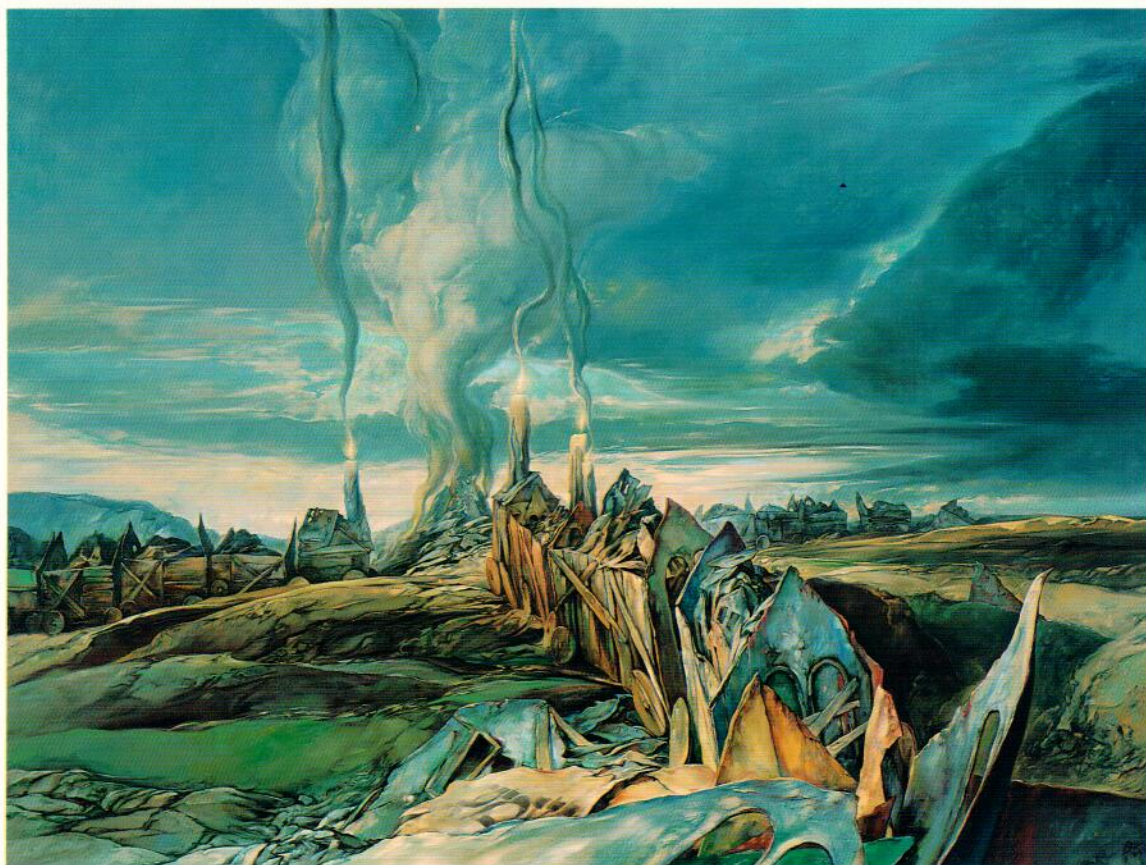
45. DE PROFUNDIS, 1992
Oil on Linen
78.75 x 63"





46. SMOKE
Oil on Linen
78.75 x 63"

47. BLUE TRAINS, 1992
Oil on Linen
48 x 63"

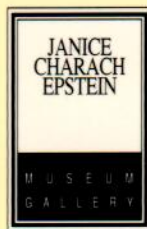




48. OTHYOTH, 1992
Oil on Linen
51.18 x 38.58"

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Printed in Hong Kong by South China Printing Company (1988) Limited
Photography, Kristin Roy and David N. Israel Design, Donna Bodell Editor, Jill K. Richardson

BACK COVER:
VOYAGE
Oil on Linen
39.37 x 31.9"



Jewish Community Center
6600 West Maple Road
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(810) 661 - 1000

Gallery Hours:
Monday-Wednesday, 11:00 am - 6:00 pm
Thursday, 11:00 am - 8:00 pm
Sunday, 11:00 am - 4:00 pm
(810) 661 - 7641