

Works on Paper 1970 - 2002

Samuel Bak



St. Botolph Club
Boston, Massachusetts



SAMUEL BAK: Works on Paper at the St. Botolph Club

An artist's drawings are often a kind of handwriting, revealing typical preoccupations and characteristic style. Sam Bak's thirty-seven drawings shown here are revelatory in that way.

As for Bak's preoccupations: you can see at once that the world he everywhere depicts has been shakily restored from some terrible catastrophe, cobbled together out of the shards and remnants of a shattered civilization and a ruined nature. *Remembering*, for example, is composed like a conventional still life: a pitcher, bottle, and pear stand arranged on a table. But unconventionally these familiar objects prove to be not "real," but rather makeshift facsimiles of the familiar. The pitcher has been prosthetically mended and will never hold water, the bottle is made of wood, the pear seems to have been cast from a plaster mold, and in the background stand wounded trees, framing this detritus. In Biblical terms this is the fallen world. In Bak's own experience it is the physical and spiritual fallout from the Holocaust. At every level it is a vision of our world broken and in need of mending, *of tikkun*.

As for Bak's style: he works closely within the main traditions and techniques of western art, from Renaissance to modern, while at the same time challenging and amending them. In this sense he could be considered post-modern. Works like *On a Table* show a reverence for Cezanne and the Cubists who

Front Cover: *Candlelight*, c. 1980, mixed media on paper, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", **z88**

Above: *Mask*, Color Lithograph, Edition of 120, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ "

Back Cover: *Early Light*, 1989, mixed media on paper, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ " **BK59**

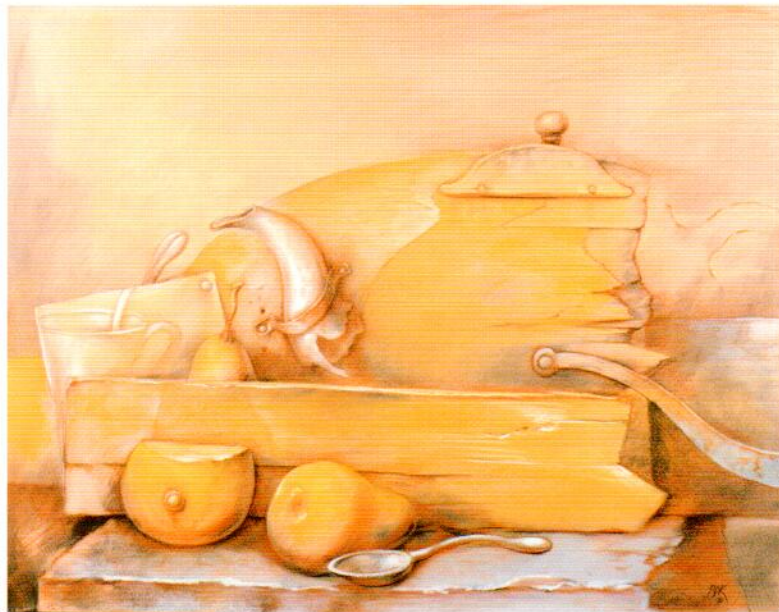
followed him. Others allude to Picasso's and Braque's geometric play of flat planes and their use of collage, of incorporating bits of actual cloth, newspaper, and sundry objects directly into their picture plane. Bak, of course, *paints* these, calling our attention that much more sharply to the fact of fabrication. Finally, there is a strong scent in Bak's work of the Surrealists, especially Magritte: look at *Escape*, for example.

Yet Bak's use of paint is much more reminiscent of those Renaissance masters like Dürer and Michelangelo whose images he so often draws on in his own work. Like them he paints as if the drapery and fruit we see before us were there to be touched, the pears and cups to be handled, the surfaces to be pried apart and inspected. This forced conjunction of the palpable and the visionary must give us pause precisely because Bak's visions – unlike those of the surrealists – are drawn not from the unconscious or the world of dreams, but from the actual and public human world. Postlapsarian, post Holocaust, it reminds us always that *tikkun*, repair, is hard to do well. Look closely at *Banishment*, where Adam and Eve are not yet human figures, but rather rude constructs from the ruins of those human ideals traditionally expressed in statuary. This is a surrealist visual idiom, yes, but Bak moves art further, seeming to provoke us with a moral challenge: to make of our ruins an Adam and Eve that are *human*.

Concluding with a look at *Candlelight*, pictured here on the catalogue cover, we recognize Bak's broken world rendered by the familiar geometry of cubism. The illusion of solidity is undercut by technical complexities that dramatize the instability of perspective and perception. The domestic scene of our first glance soon dissolves into a disorienting display, an artist's drawing that presents conflicting visual cues and a seemingly infinite regression of planes. Do we see a candle illuminating a cup and pitcher on a wooden table above a wooden floor? No: we see a scene of receding surfaces, disjointed perspectives, inexplicable lights and shadows. The candle and its circling glow are "actually" drawings on a paper affixed to the back wall. So is the upper section of the pitcher that reflects the candle's fictional light and somehow meets its own lower section on the table's top. Yet the table itself decomposes into veneers that peel away from one another above a floor whose long planks suggest a governing perspective even as they disavow it. We have then a small paradigm of Bak's preoccupations and characteristic style. Given that we are the broken survivors of catastrophe, how shall we mend? Given that our vision is fallible, tempted always by the comforts of self-delusion, how shall we learn to understand what we see?

Appropriately this whole visual arrangement centers on a keyhole. Inevitably each viewer must bring his own key.

-- Irene Tayler and Saul Touster





Left Top: *Envelope*, 1989, mixed media on paper, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", **BK269**

Left Bottom: *Behind the Board*, 1987, mixed media on paper, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ ", **BK50**

Above: *With Arrow*, 1989, mixed media on paper, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ ", **BK44**



Still Life with Two Bottles, 1981, pastel and oil, 25½ x 19½", z89



Top Left: *Still Life / Blue Sky*, c. 1980
 pastel and gouache, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", **z57**

Top Right: *Vino for Juan Gris*, c. 1981
 pastel and oil, 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", **z90**

Bottom Right: *The Visitors*, 1990
 oil on paper, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", **BK65**



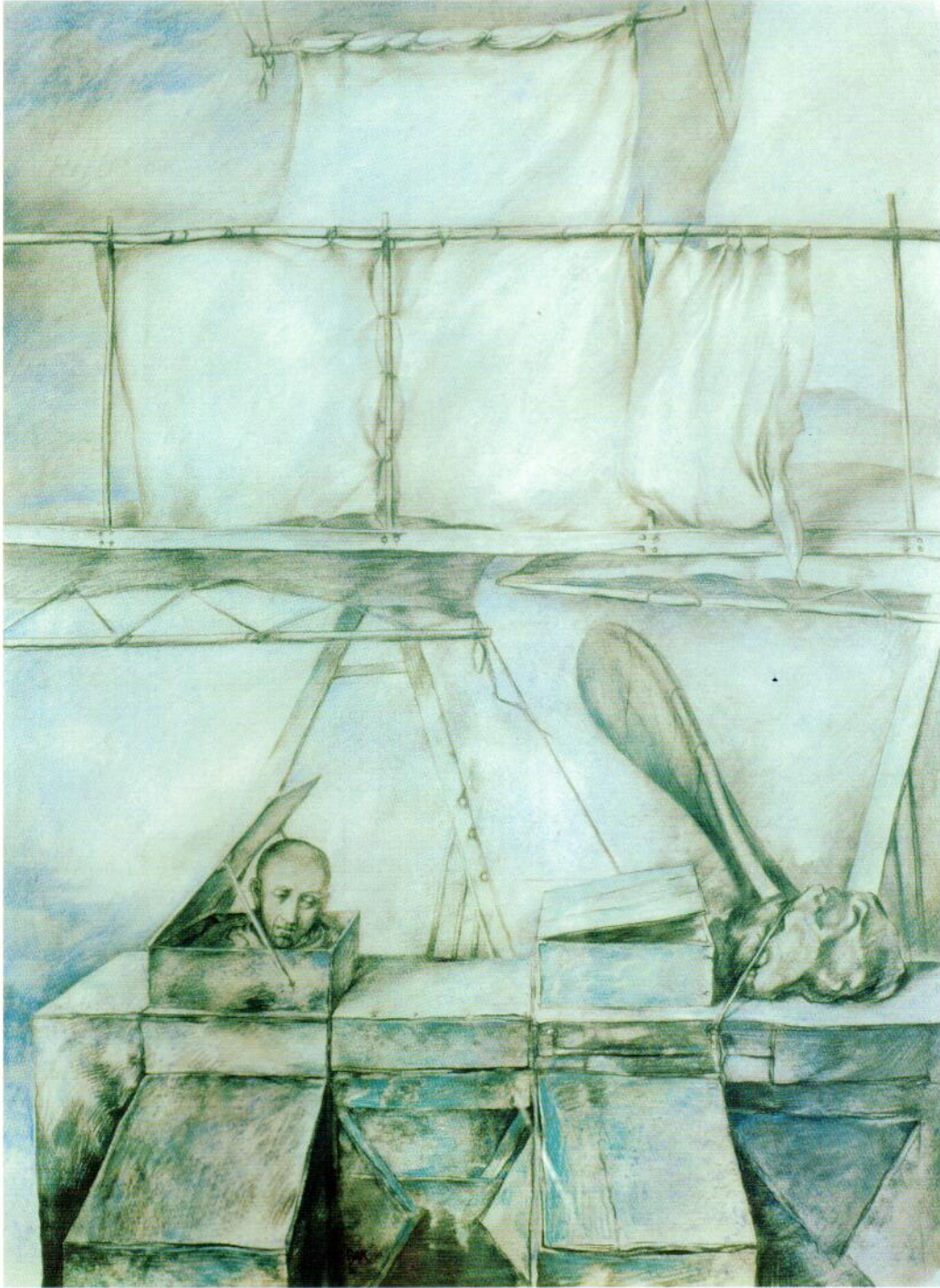


Top Left: *Escape*, 1983, mixed media on paper, 30 x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", **BK253**

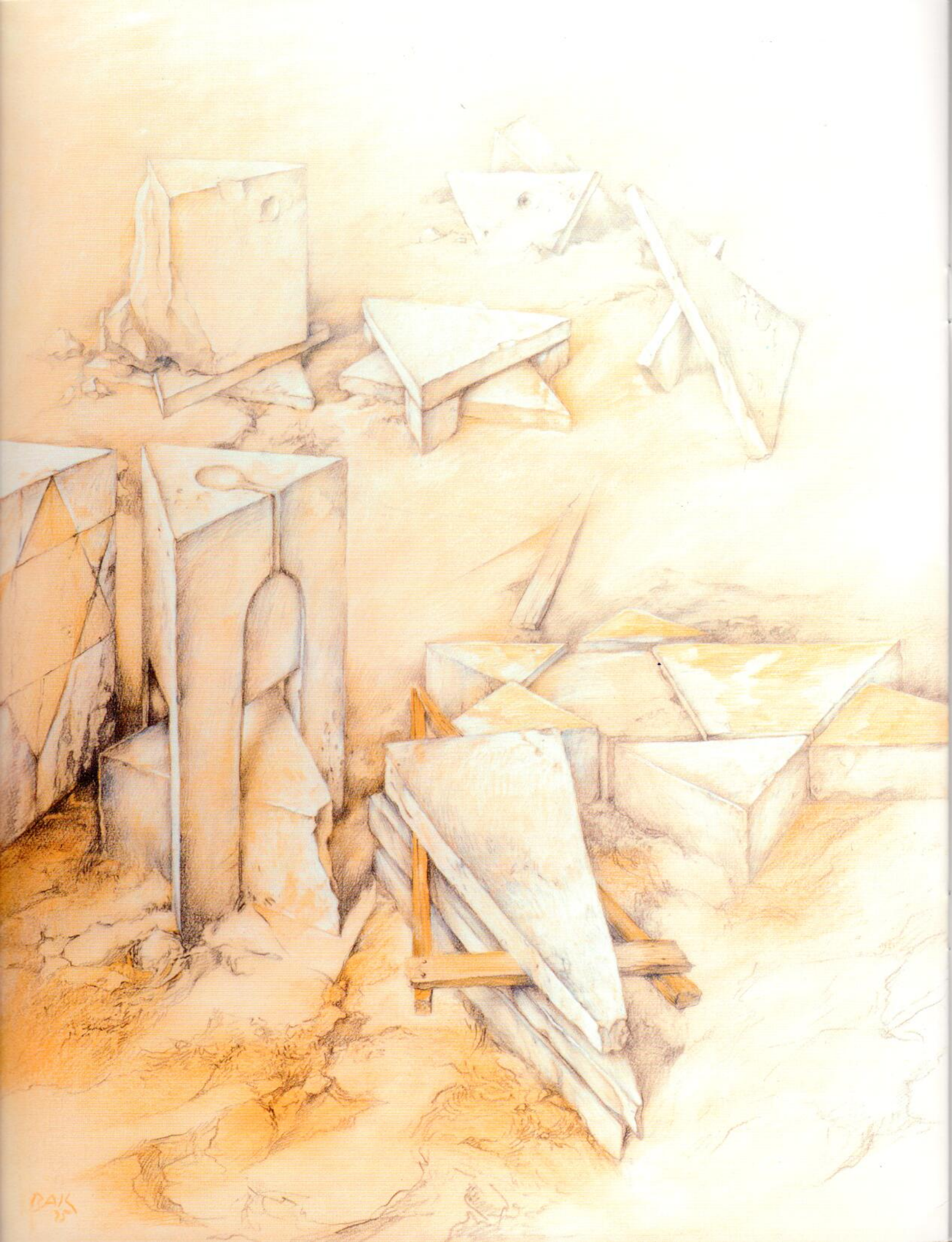
Top Right: *Two Figures*, 1975, charcoal, 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19", **071**

Bottom Left: *With a Hidden Face*, 1999, crayon/oil on brown paper, 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", **BK693**

Bottom Right: *Rembrandt's Angel*, 2000, crayon/oil on brown paper, 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", **BK689**



Experiment in Flight, 1976, mixed media on paper, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", BK254



DAK
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Samuel Bak

1933, Born August 12 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 camps in Germany; studied painting in Munich | 1948 Emigrated to Israel | 1952 Studied at the Bezalel Art School, Jerusalem | 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.

Bak's art has been exhibited since 1959 in private galleries in Paris, Berlin, Munich, Zurich, Boston, New York, London, Brussels, Rome, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and many other cities.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS IN MUSEUMS

Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem - 1963
Tel Aviv Museum - 1963
Brockton Art Center, Fuller Memorial - 1969
Bronfman Center, Montreal - 1970
Rose Museum, Brandeis, Waltham, MA - 1976
Heidelberg Museum - 1977
Kunstverein Esslingen - 1977
Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg - 1977
Kunstmuseum, Dusseldorf - 1978
Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn - 1978
University of Haifa - 1978
Museum Der Stadt, Landau - 1979
Kunstmuseum, Wiesbaden - 1979
Kunstverein Braunschweig - 1980
Stadtgalerie Bamberg, Villa Dessauer - 1988
Temple Judea Museum, Philadelphia - 1991
"Bak and Dürer" Dürer Museum, Nuremberg - 1991
Jüdisches Museum, Stadt Frankfurt am Main - 1993
Janice Charach Epstein Museum, W. Bloomfield, MI - 1994.
Spertus Museum, Chicago, IL - 1995
Holocaust Museum, Houston TX - 1997
B'Nai B'Rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum, Washington, D.C. - 1997
"Retrospective", Panorama Museum, Bad Frankenhausen - 1998
Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame University, South Bend, IN - 2001
Florida Holocaust Museum, Saint Petersburg, FL - 2001
National Museum of Lithuania, Vilnius - 2001
Neues Stadtmuseum, Landsberg am Lech - 2002

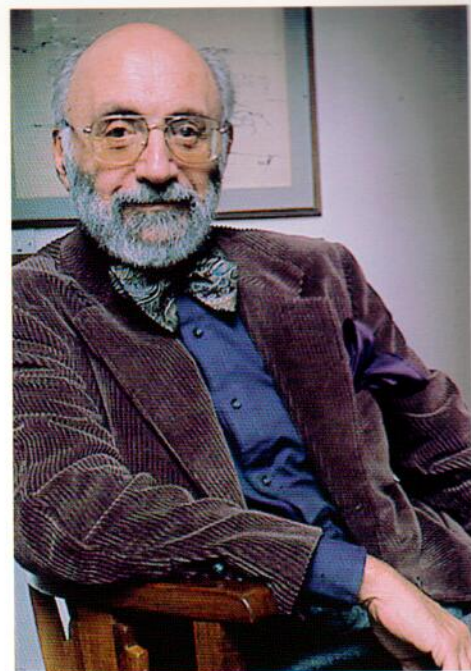
Canton Museum of Art, Canton, OH - 2002
Clark University, Worcester, MA - 2002

SELECTED GROUP 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
"Nachbilder," Kunstahalle, Hannover - 1979
"Bilder Sind Nicht Verboten," Stadtische Kunstahalle, Dusseldorf - 1982
"Still Life," Tel Aviv Museum - 1984
"Chagall to Kitaj", Barbican Art Center, London - 1990
"Witness and Legacy", Traveling Exhibition in North America - 1995 - 2001

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
Ben Uri Gallery, London
Boston Public Library, Boston, MA
Constitutional Court of South Africa, Braamfontein
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
Dürer House, Nuremberg
Florida Holocaust Museum, St. Petersburg, FL
Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg
German Parliament, Bonn
Hobart & William Smith College, Geneva, NY
Holocaust Museum Houston, Houston, TX
Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
Imperial War Museum, London
Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Jewish Museum, New York, NY
Kunstmuseum, Bamberg
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON
National Museum of Lithuania, Vilnius
Panorama Museum, Bad Frankenhausen
Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH
Rose Museum, Brandeis, Waltham, MA
University of Haifa
University of Scranton, Scranton, PA
Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
Tufts University, Medford, MA
Tweed Museum, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN
Yad Vashem Museum, Jerusalem
Vaud State, Switzerland
Jüdisches Museum, Stadt Frankfurt am Main
Simmons College, Boston, MA
Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame University, South Bend, IN
Springfield Museum of Fine Art, Springfield, MA



MONOGRAPHS/BOOKS

Bak, Paintings of the Last Decade, A. Kaufman and Paul T. Nagano. Aberbach, New York, 1974.
Bak, Monuments to Our Dreams, Rolf Kallenbach. Limes Verlag, Weisbaden & Munich, 1977.
Samuel Bak, The Past Continues, Samuel Bak and Paul T. Nagano. David R. Godine, Boston, 1988.
Chess as Metaphor In the Art of Samuel Bak, Jean Louis Cornuz. Boston & Montreux, 1991.
Ewiges Licht (Landsberg: A Memoir 1944-1948), Samuel Bak. Jewish Museum Frankfurt, 1996.
Landscapes of Jewish Experience, Lawrence Langer. University Press of New England, 1997.
Samuel Bak - Retrospektive, Bad Frankenhausen Museum, Bad Frankenhausen, Germany, 1998.
The Game Continues: Chess in the Art of Samuel Bak, Pucker Art, Boston, & Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2000.
In A Different Light: Genesis in the Art of Samuel Bak, Lawrence Langer. Pucker Art, Boston, & University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2001.
Painted in Words: A Memoir, Pucker Art, Boston, & Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2002.
Speaking About the Unspeakable, A VHS Video, Produced by Rob Cooper, Pucker Art, 2002.
Between Worlds: The Drawings and Paintings of Samuel Bak from 1946-2000, Pucker Art, 2002.
Samuel Bak: Painter of Questions, A VHS Video Produced by Christa Singer, 2003.

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3 March – 31 March 2004

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