

david aronson: the artist
as warrior

pucker gallery,
boston

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"I push things around," David Aronson explains when speaking about his work method. "A small painting takes me as much time to complete as does a large one; the same problems exist in each. It is a process that revolves around an ongoing struggle and I tear down much more than I allow to remain." Then he adds, thinking about his most recent sculptures, "That's why the Warriors. I am an Art Warrior. I lose a lot of battles, but once in a while I win the war." Aronson's warriors confirm their maker's observations and bring to a new threshold his half-century of contest with his world. Recalling the monumental presence of Benin Warrior bronzes, the swelling forms and sweeping planes of the simultaneously futuristic and ancient armor attest to Aronson's mastery of the modeler's medium and the sculptural issues of void and mass of the armor itself.

At the same time, these ostensibly protective shells seem about to burst under the pressure of the figures within who strain to break free. While *Warrior III* closes his eyes in tacit acceptance of his situation, *Warrior* and *Warrior II* yearn to escape the armor which confines them and covers their eyes. In his 1949 *Christ Before Pilate*, Aronson painted a gladiator with a helmet awkwardly pressed down to obscure his vision. The caricature of that image, however, gives way now to warriors of mass and volume whose corporeality is defined by the fragmented armor which wraps around them but whose humanity presses against and ultimately transcends these physical bounds.

In his oil-pastel paintings, too, Aronson "pushes things around" and presses the boundaries of his imagination. His *Samson* is a warrior whose blindness is self-imposed by the blind-fold he wears. He reaches upwards as if to break the frame which holds him within the painting. Legs apart, Samson's large dark form presses against the pillars and blocks tumbling behind him, and galvanizes the small space that encloses him – seemingly, only for the moment. The artist uses the rapid calligraphy obtainable with oil-pastel to render both Samson's massive and flattened form and the momentary quality of the situation. The translucency of the medium permits Aronson to push the planes around and over one another to construct the sort of complex colors and forms he has often achieved in encaustic. The largest of his intimately-scaled new paintings, *Samson* translates the monumental tensions of the *Warriors* into the light and color of oil-pastel.

Most of Aronson's new paintings resolve these combative tensions in subtle, poetic ways which capture the humanity and unique personalities of even the quietest of figures. Many

of the figures look out at the viewer from just the other side of the frame, not so much confronting as questioning and wondering. Several, such as *Young King*, *The Wreath*, *The Jester* and *The General*, present themselves with jaunty animation, while others like *The Collector*, *The Alchemist*, and *Figure with Bird* are caught in their own reverie. Many figures present attributes – bottles, birds, flowers, playing cards – as offerings of friendship or as signs of mysterious ritual. These attributes are part of a personal iconography which the artist has constructed to facilitate communication and to cope with his world.

Belief systems and magic or chance have always fascinated Aronson, who long struggled to reconcile the competing religious and secular worlds of his youth. That tension is now transformed into the poetry of acceptance as even Adam and Eve are able to depart the Garden in peace while God's angel looks on the outcasts with sympathy. In this *Expulsion*, the three participants seem equally human. Aronson models his figures firmly and sets them in a painterly space at once flat, animated and suffused with a golden light. The two protagonists in *Adam and Eve*, now distanced from the Garden they have left behind, move forward in acceptance, and a somewhat older and wiser Adam lifts his arms in praise for the fruits of his labors.

Yet, the story never ends quite so simply or happily for Aronson because he knows that the world is complicated and conflicted. He paints a Bar Mitzvah boy in *The Confirmation* whose sad, thoughtful eyes avoid the viewer's gaze and belie the celebratory golden balloons that seem to wreath his head. The boy's *tallit* is unceremoniously thrust over his arm, ambiguously not quite in place, yet not quite removed. His moment of confirmation is transformed into a moment of doubt. Ambiguity also defines Aronson's bronze *Harlequins*. The first Harlequin holds an open book as though he has paused momentarily to reflect on what he has read. His iconic stance, graceful body, and introspective gaze transform the figure in a frivolous clown's costume into a poignant statement of spirit transcending superficial appearance. *Harlequin II* brings the monumental forms of the *Warriors* into a discourse on the creative process. Here, the sculptural planes of the clown's costume and headdress work like armor to define and contain the expansive forms of the figure. The jaunty, dancing legs express the music which comes not from the broken violin laying silently in the clown's lap, but from within the imagination of the artist. Here, David Aronson's warrior and artist reside in creative tension.

Judith Bookbinder
University of Massachusetts – Boston

2.



3.



4.



5.



2. *Adam and Eve*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, $9 \frac{1}{2} \times 7 \frac{1}{2}$ ", AP174
3. *The Bouquet*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, $8 \frac{1}{2} \times 11$ ", AP179
4. *The General*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, $8 \frac{1}{2} \times 10$ ", AP176
5. *Two Lovers*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, $8 \frac{1}{2} \times 10$ ", AP177

6.



7.



6. *The Unknown*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 6 3/4 x 7 3/4", AP178

7. *Suzanne and the Elder*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 6 5/8 x 7 3/4", AP190



8. *Young King*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 8 5/8 x 7 3/4", AD199
 9. *The Expulsion*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 6 3/8 x 4 5/8", AD162

10.



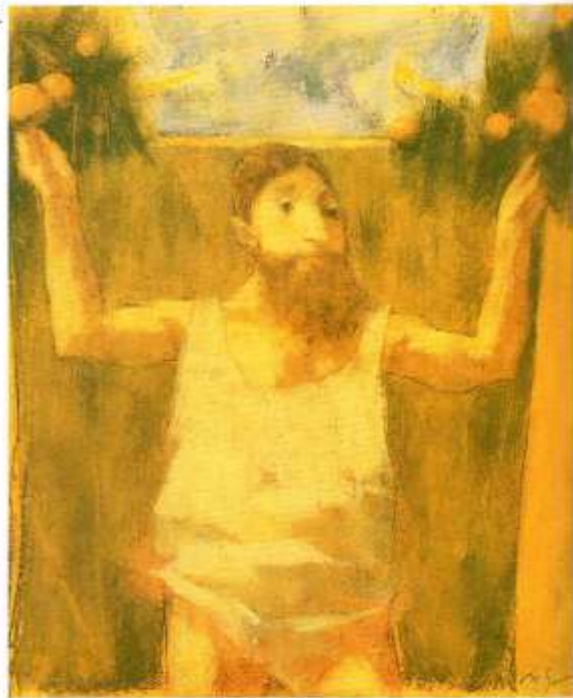
11.



12.



13.

10. *The Lovers* Oil-Pastel on Rag Board: 8 1/2 x 7 1/2", AP18011. *The Fool* Oil-Pastel on Rag Board: 8 1/2 x 7 1/2", AP18112. *King* Oil-Pastel on Rag Board: 7 1/2 x 6 1/2", AP19113. *Adam* Oil-Pastel on Rag Board: 8 1/2 x 7 1/2", AP175

14.



14. Ernestine Chastel (oil on Rag Board, 11 x 11 1/2", 1915)



15. *The Craftsman*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 11 7/8 x 12 1/2", AP185

16. *Man with Book*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 12 5/8 x 16 5/8", AP186

17. *Man with Flower*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 14 5/8 x 11 5/8", AP187

18. *The Collector II*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, 10 5/8 x 11 5/8", AP188

19.



19. *Figure with Bird*, Oil-Pencil on Rag Board, 11 1/2 x 14 1/2", NP193

20.

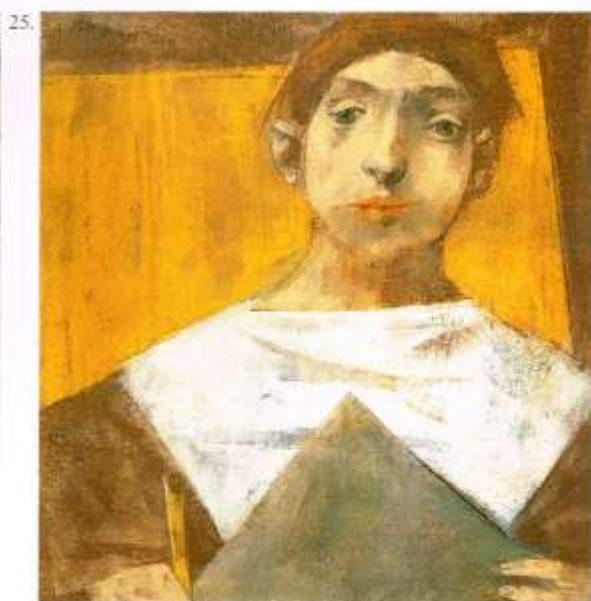
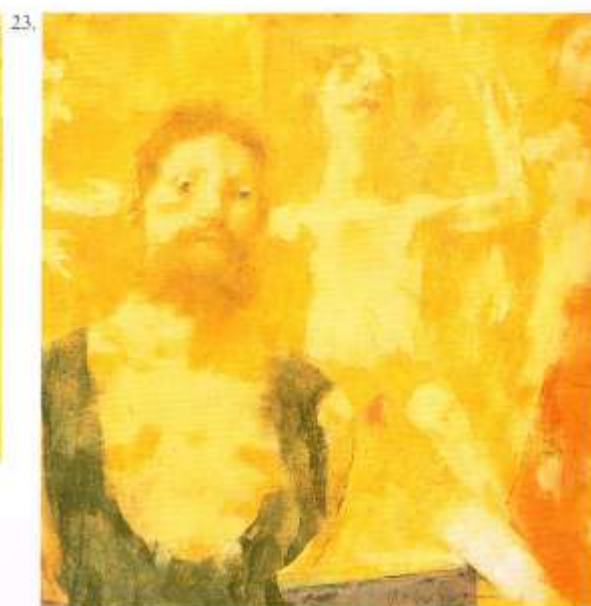


20. *The Drinker*, Oil-Pastel on Rag Board, ca. 1890-1891, AP197

21.



21. Jesus Christ on the Cross, 21 x 30 cm, 1918



22. *Leda et Himénée*, Oil-Panel on Rag Board, $7 \frac{1}{2} \times 8 \frac{1}{2}$ ", AP184

23. *Canova with Apphia*, Oil-Panel on Rag Board, $10 \frac{1}{2} \times 9 \frac{1}{2}$ ", AP190

24. *Tiv Calotte*, Oil-Panel on Rag Board, $7 \frac{1}{2} \times 8 \frac{1}{2}$ ", AP188

25. *The Scribe*, Oil-Panel on Rag Board, $7 \frac{1}{2} \times 8 \frac{1}{2}$ ", AP194

26.



26. *Man with Fruit*, Chl-Pastel on Rag Bonn, 1902, AP192

27.



27. Fritz Koenig, *Felix Asch*, 1950. Bronze, 15.5 x 11.5 x 11.5"



29.



28. *Warrior*, Bronze, Edition of 12, 17 x 12 x 10 1/2"
29. *Warrior II*, Bronze, Edition of 12, 17 x 22 x 20"

30.



30. *Warrior III*, Bronze, Edition of 12, 14 x 9 x 10 1/4"

31.



32.



33.



34.



31. *Odessa II, Bronze. Edition of 12, 20 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 17"*
 32. *Odessa, Bronze. Edition of 15, 19 x 11 1/2 x 17"*
 33. *Odessa II, Bronze. Edition of 15, 19 x 11 1/2 x 17"*
 34. *Hermès III, Bronze. Edition of 12, 14 x 10 x 12"*

david aronson

born:

Shilova, Lithuania, October 28, 1923

education:

School of Boston Museum of Fine Arts
Hebrew Teachers College

teaching:

School of Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1942 to 1955
Boston University, School for the Arts, 1955 to 1989

retrospective exhibitions:

Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, 1979.
Jewish Museum, New York together with The National Academy of Design, New York, NY 1979.
American Museum of Jewish History, Philadelphia, PA, 1979.

solo exhibitions:

Niveau Gallery, New York, 1945, 1956.
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1946.
Boris Mirsky Gallery, Boston, 1951, 1959, 1969.
The Downtown Gallery, 1953.
Nordness Gallery, New York, 1960, 1963, 1969.
Rex Evans Gallery, Los Angeles, 1961.
Westhampton Gallery, New York, 1961.
Hunter Gallery, Chattanooga, 1965.
Zora Gallery, Los Angeles, 1965.
Kovler Gallery, Chicago, 1966.
J. Thomas Gallery, Provincetown, 1964.
Verle Gallery, West Hartford, 1967.
Bernard Danenberg Galleries, New York, 1969, 1972.
Towne Gallery, Lenox, MA, 1982.
SaidyE Bronfman Art Center, Montreal, 1982.
Pucker Safrai Gallery, Boston,
1976, 1978, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1994.
Louis Newman Galleries, Beverly Hills,
1977, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1989.
Horwitch Newman Gallery, 1995
MB Modern, New York, 1997
Pucker Gallery, Boston, 1999

35



35. *Helenus II*, Bronze, Edition of 15, 14 7/8 x 12 1/2 x 14 7/8"

36. *Helenus II*, Bronze, Edition of 12, 41 x 27 1/2 x 13 1/2" (shown as 36)

37. *Back Cover: Helenus II*, Bronze, Edition of 12, 30 1/2 x 22 1/2 x 27 1/2"

group exhibitions:

Art Institute of Chicago
University of Illinois
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Whitney Museum of American Art
Royal Academy of Art, London
Palazzo Venezia, Rome
Charlottenborg, Copenhagen
Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bridgestone Gallery, Tokyo
Museum of Modern Art, Paris
Congress Hall, Berlin
New York World's Fair, 1965

institutional collections:

Albrecht U. Museum of Art, St. Joseph, MO
Art Institute of Chicago
Atlanta Art Association, Atlanta University
Bezalel National Museum, Jerusalem
Boston University
Brandeis University
Bryn Mawr College
Chico State College Gallery, Chico, CA
Colby College
Container Corp. of America
Corecoran Gallery of Art
Cornell University
Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
Fine Arts Center, Cheekville, TN
Guilford College, Greensboro, NC
Hunter Art Gallery, Chattanooga, TN
The Johnson Foundation, Racine, WI
Krannert Art Museum, U. of Illinois
Milwaukee Art Institute
Munson Williams Proctor Inst., Utica, NY
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Museum of Modern Art Print Collection
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts
Portland Art Museum, Maine
David and Alfred Smart Museum, Chicago



Skirball Museum, Los Angeles
Smithsonian Institution
Stone Foundation, Newton, MA
Syracuse University
Temple Israel, Brookline, MA
Tupperware Museum, Orlando, FL
University of Judaism, L.A., CA
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
University of Nebraska
University of New Hampshire
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
Wm. Lane Foundation Leominster, MA
Witherspoon Art Gallery U. of North Carolina
Worcester Art Museum, MA



david aronson

4 December 1999 – 5 January 2000

Opening Reception: 4 December 1999, 3 – 6 PM

The artist will be present.

The public is invited to attend.

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