

Friday Art

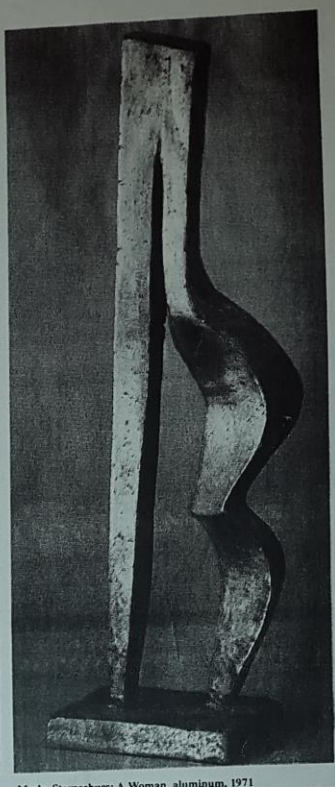
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Moshé Sternschuss: *A Couple*, mixed media on paper (Tel Aviv Museum of Art)



Moshé Sternschuss: *Woman Standing*, cement, 1939 (Tel Aviv Museum of Art)



Moshé Sternschuss: *A Woman*, aluminum, 1971 (Tel Aviv Museum of Art)

A saga of the merely competent

By Gil Goldfine
After surveying the exhibition of sculptures and drawings by Moshé Sternschuss (1903-1992), currently displayed in the Kramer Galleries of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, I came to the conclusion that Sternschuss was a master technician, a competent draftsman, faithful in his understanding of the dimensional concepts of sculpture and able to handle most mediums with ease, but hardly, he was neither innovative nor adventurous. He didn't reach out to the limits of his imaginative powers in order to create sculpture, neither in content, subject nor materials. Still, the exhibition is an impressive dedication to one of



Moshé Sternschuss: *Biblical Figure*, preliminary drawing, pen, brush and ink

curator Irith Hadar, moves chronologically from classical portraiture and standing female nudes of the late 1930s, modeled in rough-textured cement or plaster, to his reductive abstract forms of the 1980s in wood and bronze. Sternschuss created sculptures around four subjects throughout his life. The female figure, the central source of his inspiration, was supplemented by mother-and-child themes, animals and couples. It should be noted that when Sternschuss was modeling his first important pieces - Matisse had already completed his four monumental *Bucks*, Brancusi his *Bird in Flight* and Duchamp-Villon his *Futurist Horse*, not to mention major breakthroughs by Arp, Giacometti, Lichitz, Picasso, 1929, 1929, 1929, 1929.

and one of its most important teachers of art. This comprehensive exhibition is like a walk down memory lane where one inadvertently meets old friends and even strangers who look familiar, for numerous and varied pieces are a condensed review of several significant sculptural styles shaped by 20th-century masters. Sternschuss was born in Galicia, came here in 1926 and was as a student at the Old Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem under the tutelage of Boris Schatz and Ze'ev Raban. Upon completion of the course in 1929 he continued his education in Paris at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs and returned here in 1934, settling in Tel Aviv where he spent the rest of his life. In 1948 Sternschuss was one of the founders of the influential New

dominance of partners, Sternschuss had the background and French connection to fit easily into the modernist Francophile agenda of Zaritsky, Strechman and Semansky. Strangely enough, although he participated in many group shows, including in all the New Horizon exhibitions except one, Sternschuss rarely exhibited alone. During the Forties and Fifties he was a prominent figure in Tel Aviv avant-garde circles. Together with painter Aharon Avni he founded the Hivradut Studio for Painting and Sculpture in 1936 and headed the Sculpture Department, and from 1953 taught at the Avni Institute. In 1984 he was appointed senior lecturer in sculpture at Haifa University. The exhibition, beautifully designed and installed by David Gal and critically documented by

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Biblical Figure (1947), the former an immature understatement of cubism and the latter a nod to lyrical symbolism. Once Sternschuss committed himself to pursuing an abstract idiom his figures became more and more simplified. But regardless of the final outcome, he forever retained a discernible predisposition for the human body. To comprehend this presence one should consider a cross-section of works covering several years. *Outretched Figure* (1952), a small terracotta abstraction with an intense life of its own post-dates major Henry Moore reclining figures; *Movers* (1960) carved and assembled from wood laths; and *Lot's Wife* (1962), a three-meter-high outdoor, monumental stone sculpture in Mizpeh Ranon compressing four rectangular masses, nevertheless retains a figurative

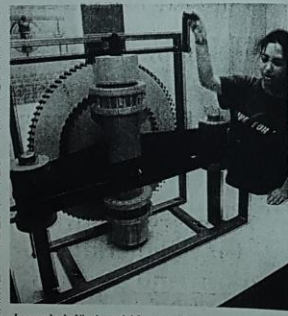
bias. A cast aluminum composition, *A Woman* (1971), is composed of a vertical upright fashioned into a cascading arabesque that represents breasts, hip curvature or the permanent wave in a woman's hair. An almost non-objective painted polystyrene maquette, also called *A Woman* but from the late Seventies, on closer scrutiny and with the assistance of accompanying drawings, is discerned as the open legs and genital area of a reclining female. A special section of the exhibition has been set aside to deal with images of couples, which, as pointed out by Hadar "Represents the essence of the Sternschuss oeuvre." Starting with static banal compositions in the late 1930s, Sternschuss went on to experiment with just about every medium and style for the next 50 years. Geometric terracotta and plaster figures *à la* Brancusi and intertwined bronzes that echo Archipenko culminate in the most progressive work he produced, *The Globe of Love* (1986), a large cast bronze depicting two polished interlocking spheres suspended between two verticals and cut away to expose flat planes and circular shapes suggesting facial details. Essentially the Couple theme provided Sternschuss with a framework for amalgamating a pair of contrasting volumes over and over in a refreshing, harmonious and unique manner. Also, it rendered the means to express compassion, responsibility and consolation. Then again there is the ever-present erotic factor which gave expression to his introverted, libidinous side. A substantial portion of the exhibition is devoted to his drawings, both in color and black-and-white. His preference for sketching on bits and pieces of old paper, computer printouts and even discarded paintings by his daughter Hagit, is pronounced. The entire graphic cab-

inet mirrors his three-dimensional work stacked with self-portraits, studies for sculptures, the female nude - quite often in erotic poses - cats, dogs, angels and most beautiful couples embracing, copulating and cajoling. The drawings are mostly gestural linear studies rapidly scrawled from imagination. There are no carefully observed academic renderings, drawings from life that consider the interplay of form, line, light and shadow. The expeditious ink-and-wash technique simply captures contours while neglecting the subject's emotion state and fundamental volume, reducing them to insignificant characters. Several oil pastels, watercolors and graphic drawings do not fare much better. The Sternschuss exhibition is accompanied by a book in English and Hebrew (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, King Saul Boulevard).

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IN THE FRAME

The exhibition *Leonardo da Vinci: Scientist and Engineer*, after traveling around the country for the past two years, has come home to roost at the National Science Museum in Haifa where it will be installed in a permanent gallery. The 30 models, with accompanying facsimile drawings, point to the scientific and technological genius of the great Renaissance master in the fields of mechanics, hydraulics and automation. Among the models are a unique threading machine used to manufacture screws; an automated polishing machine; a simple solution that reflects a modern pile driver and a lathe that includes cranks, flywheels and pedals very similar to those still in use at the beginning of the 20th century.



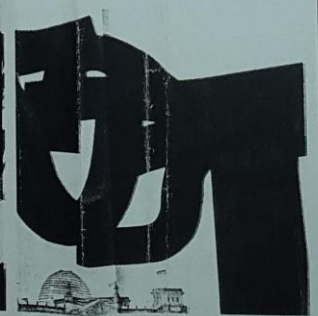
Leonardo da Vinci: model for a sprocket gear, reconstruction (National Science Museum, Haifa Technion)

Leonardo believed in the possibility of manned flight and was a pioneer in experimenting with flying machines. At the time of his death in 1519, at age 67, he left behind a codex of extremely detailed engineering drawings of his flying machines, including a precursor of the modern helicopter, a model of which is being exhibited. The exhibition, including a fully illustrated catalog, was curated by Prof. Zvi Dorn and Dr. Rivka Hashimshoni, (Historic Technion Building, Haifa).

This agricultural community has attracted many families connected with the visual and performing arts who are looking for an improved quality of life outside the urban areas. This is the third year the Spring Open House function will be taking place. Visitors can explore works in design, sculpture, painting, vitrage, pottery, jewelry and ironwork. Bicycles are available for getting around the village. For information call: 051-508597 or (04) 627-1430.

ARTISTS AND craftspeople living and working in Pardes Hanna-Karkar will be opening their homes and studios to the general public on Friday and Saturday, March 23 and 24.

Gil Goldfine

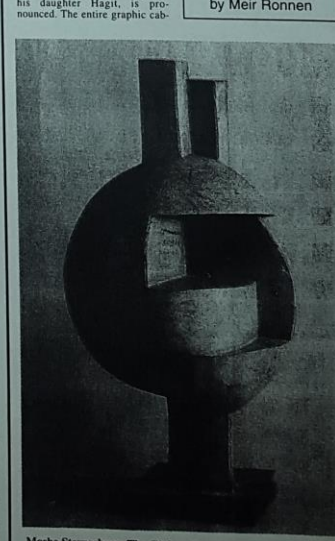


Eduardo Chillida: detail of reunification memorial, Berlin

Rispoli (Giv'atayim Theater), Till March 31. THE BASQUE sculptor Eduardo Chillida was commissioned by the German government to create a monumental sculpture for a reunified Germany to be installed in the inner courtyard of the Federal Chancellor's Office in Berlin. The result was recently unveiled to mixed reviews. Critics saw it as a 90-ton rhetorical steel sculpture; as an outdoor, site-specific work; and as a paper puppet on an office desk. Two five-meter-high T-shaped

uprights stand opposite one another and each supports an horizontal arm branching out at the ends into roughly bent-steel fingers that almost touch, in something directly related to a handshake. Peter Klaus Schuster, director of the Berlin Museum, says the work could be read as both a symbol of division or inextinguishable separation; and as a forced attempt at closeness and contact. Chillida, 77, was born and lives in San Sebastian. His mastery of steel is almost unmatched. Chillida was a recipient of the coveted Wolf Prize two years ago.

The Art Page is edited by Meir Ronnen



Moshé Sternschuss: *The Globe of Love*, bronze, 1986 (Tel Aviv Museum of Art)