

## Redemption of the Son, Redemption of the Father (excerpt)

Gideon Ofrat

Isaac I The left-hand stump is weakened as though hanging from a cross. Isaac crucified? Is his right arm no more than a bone? The nape of his neck is lowered. Isaac is routed, defeated. Isaac, whose arms are not doing anything and whose head makes no resistance. Can this be Isaac? We are confronted with a man of the age of a father, or, in other words, Abraham. Isaac as Abraham? And, at the same time, look at the shoulder, the nape and the head put together as a kind of saddle, a place to put a small child on the way to his Akkedah. Isaac as the ass? And one shouldn't miss the view from the side: the double vav (vav=reversal, the letter which overturns destiny), signifying gallows.

It is a sculpture which engages in a dialogue with the heroics of the body and the ethos of the sacrifice · the ethos which quietly overawes the oriental, Temple-like, or perhaps sarcophagus-like base (at least, from the point of view of Isaac, standing over his grave), imbuing it with tranquility and sadness. It would seem that, before it can raise a man from the sacrificial altar, the sculpture is eclipsed from above by the head bent in resignation, by the eyes that are eaten away or Blinded.

This sculpture of a blind Isaac, raised on a high pedestal (here we have the echo of the architecture of a temple, or a memorial stele or coffin), is an anti-monument, the answer to the statues of generals and kings proudly placed on columns. This figure, whose physical bulk is neglected in favour of the head, preserves the drippings of wax melted with fire. One can therefore say it is a sculpture which retains the process of loss and is even created out of it. This sculpture created from loss is created through the action of fire as a sacrifice and as a sanctification of the Name. The metaphysical Akkedah in which the sacrifice is God.

It is doubtful if Israeli sculpture has ever known such a profound theological moment. Zvi Lachman's Akkedah are outstanding religious statements, silencing by means of Being and absence a negative theology.

("Shishi," Maariv January 2000).

Adam Baruch

"An extraordinary exhibition ([Ransom of the Father](#)) by Zvi Lachman. Sculpture which is conservative, independent, monumental, personal, physical, psychic, philosophical, symbolic, concrete, protesting and comforting. All in one. Sculpture which is devoted to the [Akkedah](#), to the figure of the father, to memory, to witnessing, to chiseling the core, and to the very act of sculpture. The son redeems his father by sculptural means which bring in echoes of Giacometti and Rosso capturing of the movement. Set apart of almost any present Israeli identity. Pure quality".

( From "Il Dolore della Materia," a review in Coevit, Bologna , 2001).

Stephanie Aluigi

Lachman innovates the quest undertaken by Rodin, Rosso and Giacometti before him, and re-shapes Man's tragedy and his spiritual struggle. Neither the body's contours, nor the lines of a face are ever presented to the viewer in their wholeness. They burst into space as if dug by a subterranean force, as if time has consumed and corroded them. Notwithstanding, a vitality not engulfed by the corrosion of matter emerges from these works. This vitality is the mark of a powerful interiority which beats inside them and allows them to exist in the grace of threatened light and a vulnerable humanity.

(from Ransom of the Father, 1999).

Gideon Ofrat, Israel

"What is this Witness-Head if not a "stalactite" · this frenzied mass which knows no compassion but simply spreads through the power of blindness, the power of death? If you will, it is a head formed by its own burial, by the mud to which it has returned.

"In this Witness-Head, the divinity is banished from the witness and the material alike. This is requiem for man and God, a Parmenideanism which gives no chance to the spirit.

"With his new sculptures, Lachman has not only placed himself in the first rank of Israeli sculptors, but he has reached a sculptural level which has never been surpassed in this country."

Inauguration of Conventional Head III, in the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzlia , 2001).

Yoav Dagon

"At the moment of eruption, when the shapes are being formed, this sculpture acquires the quality of bursting lava. As in nature, so for the sculptor, the fire melts the material, changing its state of matter, aspiring to tame and culture it. Both Nature and the sculptor release the spell of fire in its unrestrained power. The sculpture is the making of opposites. On the one hand, the form freezes for ever as the bronze is cooling and becoming cold metal; on the other hand, and here lies Lachman's power, the sculpture is constantly altering in the viewer's eye, the light, changing intensity, shifting position along the orbit, in the gaze of the beholder."

New York (from Head, 1993).

Bruce Gagner

"Lachman's sculptures give us an image of ourselves in a precarious relation to space. Through form which repeats this message to sophisticate and novice alike he is able to lift the everyday commonplace of the human figure to the abstract realm."

Lachman: The Act of Seeing

Geoffrey Hartman (NYArt 2003)

I have followed Zvi Lachman's work for many years with growing interest. He is surely one of the best, if not the best sculptor working presently in Israel. His series of "Heads," at once so material and yet porous, fully modeled, and which must be viewed from all sides, bear witness (in the fullest sense of "bear") to the responsibility of giving body to what is rarely perceived as carrying rather than being carried. The heads become a kind of microcosm, recapitulating an archaic as well as modern gravity. Because sculpture, like painting, is a form of silent poetry, the force of Lachman's creations persuades us not by way of any didactic imposition but by intensifying the act of seeing itself, adding to it a reflective kind of weight, very similar to the impact of thought on the intense thinker.

It is interesting that in many of Lachman's sculptures and pastels the act of seeing is linked to an imminent transgression, that an unease of the eyes is strongly suggested, one that makes this act more burdened still. The transgression, moreover, is as much in the artist (who takes up topics of vanity, as well as scenes of massacre and misery from the treasure house of previous art) as in the subjects he portrays. This theme, however muted, of the artist as (necessarily) a voyeur seems to flow from Lachman's sensitivity to a tradition-inspired scruple concerning idolatry and the making of images.

While Zvi Lachman was in America this past summer, I was able to observe him at work, and particularly on a new series of paintings which, basically, are homages to certain classic paintings in our canon, such as

"Las Meninas," "The Raft of the Medusa," and "The Murder of the Innocents." Lachman's ability to renew these paintings is remarkable. It reminds one of what Cezanne did to certain works of his great precursor Delacroix, whom he "abstracted" to bring out oblique lines of force as well as color values that, in Cezanne who is focused on landscape, no longer have the support of a topical, that is, realistic or quasi-realistic subject-matter (whether historical or Biblical, and almost always oriental or exotic). In Lachman also, these classic paintings are abstracted, but very differently: they are seen through a veil that makes them harder rather than easier to see, and that not only takes away their reliance on an exotic or dramatic interest but reveals their as if archeological affinity to archaic media. As with his "Heads," but relying purely on paint or pastel, what was a primal "earth-work" in the sculptures becomes an elemental work of light, air, and shimmering color nuance uncovering an ancient substratum—say the luminous shadow of a pre-Roman fresco.. I would call Lachman's technique one of over-painting: intellectually as well as palpably it is a technique that pays homage to the priority and influence of the great masters, yet at the same time refers us back to something primal from which they themselves had to emerge: an assault of too much light, of too much matter, of an overbearing—and seductive—chaos of perceptions.

This labor of emergence, in Lachman, has always to contend with an opposite tendency: an Abrahamic iconoclasm, a distrust of the simulacrum. Lachman's paintings, therefore, are powerful simplifications, like those of Cezanne when taking on Delacroix, yet also more mysterious, in the sense of withdrawing from sight. The artist seems to grasp at what is about to be lost, or what he feels he must forfeit: his is a memorial as well as truly contemporary art, and it suggests the possibility of founding a new, postmodern, even—I would venture to say—Hebraic kind of classicism.

It would be wonderful if this important Israeli artist could exhibit in the United States works from this new phase, as well as some of his already acclaimed paintings, drawings, and sculptures.

## POETS' PORTRAITS: LINES FOR MY IMAGE:

Drawings and Sculpture by Zvi Lachman, Tel-Aviv

Eric Gelber, Center for Jewish History

"Poets' Portraits," on view at the Center for Jewish History, consists of charcoal and pastel drawings on paper by the 55-year-old Israeli artist Zvi Lachman. They are all portraits of well-known — and not-so-well-known, at least in this country — poets and writers, including Avot Yeshurun, Taha Muhammad Ali, and Yona Wallach. Many of the drawings of poets are accompanied by the text of one of their poems. Mr. Lachman makes drawings that are constructed with agitated linear fragments, a network of short, blunt and feathery marks that vacillate between solidity and chaos. The solid form of the head becomes clearer when the drawings are viewed from afar, but close up it is easy to focus on isolated areas. Mr. Lachman's art suggests that the human psyche is always in a state of transition. Often the eyes of the sitters are drawn in a faint and hazy manner, or one eye is rendered much more sharply than the other. Like Cézanne, Mr. Lachman gazes again and again at the subject at hand in order to discover complex relationships that avert the naked eye. These agitated and fluid portraits represent the restless and shifting minds of the sitters and the portraitist. The interplay between dark lines and faint smudges and erasures indicate depth in space, varied skin tones, and the rhythm of the sitter's body.

A few small figural sculptures are placed on wooden pedestals in an enclosed outdoor space that can only be seen by viewers indoors, from behind glass. The sculptures follow in the tradition of such existential humanists as Rodin, Medardo Rosso, and Giacometti, in that the textures and contours of the figures resonate with psychological meanings. The figures, some seated at sepulchre-like tables or wedges, are pockmarked and penetrated by space. We look into them as much as we look at their surfaces.

## Figures in bronze and wax

### Gil Goldfine, Jerusalem Post

An exhibition of bronze figures and wax vignettes by Zvi Lachman (b. Ramat Aviv, 1950) unites secular genre scenes with the spiritual sublime. Installed in the Golconda Gallery, a venue tucked into the corner of a gentrified building from the early 1920s on Tel Aviv's Sderot Rothschild, the main display area is an intimate, darkly lit and shrine like foyer. A half-dozen Lachman figures, set on massive pedestals of wooden railroad ties, are dramatically illuminated to highlight features, but rarely the entire forms. Those who have visited the Sforza Castle in Milan and confronted Michelangelo's last great sculpture, the Rondanini Pieta (left unfinished before his death in 1564), will be astounded by the attitudinal similarities of form and gesture of the Pieta's Christ figure with several of Lachman's works. The figure of the dead savior, head bent and knees buckling under the weight of his tormented body, held passionately by a solemn figure of the Virgin Mary, are shadowed by the mournful standing male figures that Lachman has sculpted in an additive manner and then cast in bronze using a lost wax technique.

Standing Figure, a truncated composition that projects a sacrificial image of a biblical epic, is less than one meter high but is imbued with a monumental quality that can be equated with a combination of grave archaic and fluid Renaissance compositions, the mannered impressionism of Medardo Rosso as well as the spatial concepts and crusty surfaces of Alberto Giacometti. What is special about Lachman's sculptures is not what is revealed, but what the viewer brings to them. The lack of explicit anatomical and facial details and the solitude of each personality is merely the framework for each viewer to define his or her reality. But in no case are these figures narrative sculptures.

From the sublime to the ordinary, Lachman presents a few genre pieces, also set on high wooden plinths so the viewer looks directly at the center of the composition. They are entitled Mother Listening and Lilach Reading, and are shown in their wax state. Using wax with a deep reddish hue, the mellifluous material seems to have been poured over prepared armatures as bits and pieces of wire mesh and newsprint peek through sections of

the wax surface. Each sculpture, small in scale, captures the gentleness and matter-of-factness of the instant Lachman has chosen to portray, reminiscent of Greek Hellenistic terra cottas from Tanagra.

Traditional bronze casting commences with plaster forms covered in a thin layer of wax used as an original figure or object to be dispensed with during the process of making a final bronze cast. The sculptor or artisan covers the wax shape with a second layer to create a negative mold. When molten bronze is poured into the mold, the wax melts and leaves a metallic form in its stead. After cooling, the mold and original plaster figure are discarded and the artist completes the sculpture by scraping the burrs, burnishing the surface to his taste and providing the bronze with a specific patina. Lachman is showing us work-in-progress. The genre pieces, because of the material and state of completion, seem to be in the throes of formation, seemingly unresolved while the saga of his bronze heroes must be completed by the visitor's insight and imagination.