

David Schluss

drawing upon himself

BY FRAN ROBBINS



Study a painting and you study the artist. The painting is the playbook that reveals everything. Jackson Pollock's electrifying drip paintings are incomprehensible: Splatters and blobs compete against each other. Mark Rothko brought forth studies of black on darker black, his work detailing his struggle with depression. Even a quick glance at the work of David Schluss will enable the viewer to see the artist who finds joy in the everyday world. His favorite subjects, rotund, chubby people laughing their way through song and dance, threaten to overwhelm the canvas with sheer abandon. In studying them, the viewer is made privy to a happier world. What kind of artist dedicates himself to images such as these?

Schluss will tell you. It's the man who makes a conscious decision to do so.

"I like funny things; I like humor. I have come to this over the years as my youth was quite sad in a way, and as I grew up, I realized that there is more to it than being sad and melancholy. I like to laugh. Absolutely, it was a choice," he says.

His career is surprising when you consider his beginnings. Schluss describes his family as "nonartistic." His father was a businessman in Jaffa (near Tel Aviv) who owned secondhand-clothes stores and items he would sell at the flea market. There Schluss began to train his eye.

"I used to help him when I was young, the flea market stuff, and see all kinds of expressions of people," he says.

Living on a kibbutz became his major source of inspiration.

"I would say 90 percent of the subjects in my paintings will be folklore, probably from my background in Israel, you know, the dancing, the music," he notes.

His parents left Israel — and Schluss — behind when he was 23 years old. He left the following year and went to Paris for six months, studying at the *École des Beaux Arts*. He followed his parents to Canada, studied at Montreal's *École des Beaux Arts* and graduated from



Limited edition silkscreen serigraph, "Moonlight Jazz" - 37" x 54"



Original mixed media on canvas, "Bella Duet" - 24" x 30"

Sir George Williams University with a bachelor of fine arts degree.

But the cold of Canada was daunting, not only in terms of his comfort, but in terms of his work. Here in South Florida he has found his proper voice.

"I didn't change my style, but I changed my colors when I came to Florida, because I used to paint in very somber, very earthy colors when I was in Canada. I don't know why, probably the lack of sunshine. When I came here, I started doing bright colors: the green fields, the sunshine and everything else. It reminded me of Israel."

There have been several constants in his life: the desire to be an artist, struggles to overcome and his determination to seek out the light in the world. It's that last idea — the need for humor — that aids him in his work. It informs his characters, the roly-poly musicians and dancers who come off his fingertips.

"One day I came back to my studio, I remember in Canada, and I used to (paint) like everybody else. I didn't like what I did, and wiping the canvas I did a chubby personality and said, 'O-o-h, I like that, I'll continue this!' And I finished a whole painting and I said, 'OK, from now on, this is my style, I really like that.' It was totally by mistake."

He perfected his "mistake" by perfecting his technique. "Sculpting a painting" is its improbable title.

"I paint with my hands, with my fingers. I did wipe a painting with a piece of cloth. Seeing the result of that, I said, 'O-o-h, I like that!' ... I have never touched a brush since."

"Don't forget, I work on my canvases before the drawing itself, before the painting itself. You have all kinds of curves and touching with the epidermis, touch-

ing the canvas you are, like, sculpting a painting," he adds.

His work is original and personal, and in that respect he follows in the footsteps of the masters who influenced him.

"Marc Chagall is a Semi-Realistic artist, where Miró is a totally Abstract artist, and they're totally different styles, but I swallow a little bit of Chagall and I swallow a little bit of Miró, and the combination of both, I just love it."

Now settled in Deerfield Beach with his beloved wife, Renata, whom he describes as "young in spirit and just beautiful," Schluss is pleased to call South Florida home. And he's eager to help out. His art helped ease the pain of a local hate crime: In July 2002, vandals desecrated his synagogue with a series of swastikas. The synagogue's rabbi turned to Schluss, who knew what to do. Brandishing brushes and paint, community members followed instructions from Schluss to bring forth what's now called the Mural of Hope.

"I changed the swastika signs...from hatred to dancing and music and folklore on the walls of the synagogue."

From hatred to dancing. It's further proof that Schluss commits a generous spirit to the canvas when he paints his joyous whirling dancers. One wouldn't be too far off in saying that in painting his laughing characters, he's painting a part of himself.

"It bothers me to see other people that are not in the same position where I am, people who are sad. Not only fellow artists, but people in general," he says.

Jackson Pollock died behind the wheel, a broken alcoholic. Mark Rothko took his own life. David Schluss, imbued with spirit and humor and whimsy, strides firmly in the opposite direction. **A**



Bronze sculpture, "Harmony" – 23" x 26"



Limited edition silkscreen serigraph, "Dance For Me" – 16½" x 12"



Limited edition silkscreen serigraph, "Solo Sonata" – 16½" x 12"



Bronze sculpture, "Camilia" – 24" x 9"