

DAVID SCHLUSS: SCULPTOR OF PAINTINGS

by Sylvia Tiersten

Lucky accidents inform the work of artist David Schluss. As a young student, he was working on a painting and created a passage he did not like. As any artist might, he grabbed a rag to undo the damage. But in wiping off the robust female form, he made a discovery that changed his artistic life. The smudged, semi-realistic image created with the rag was more interesting than the image he had created with a brush.

Ever since that fortuitous day, the Israeli-born artist has been "sculpting a painting" with his hands. He never uses brushes or spatulas to achieve his novel effects. "I start with the abstract and figures emerge," says Schluss, who describes his style as semi-realism or abstract-realism. "With the palm of my hand I can get a play of light that could never be achieved with a brush."

He begins by applying a mixture of gesso, glue, and egg white to the canvas or paper. Cracks emerge as this compound dries. Using his fingers, he sketches with black oil onto the canvas. Still working with his fingers and moving them up and down in the cracks, he applies the colored oil paints.

If he is planning to work on a painting a month or so from now, he creates a preliminary sketch and saves it as a reminder. But often the trip from inspiration to canvas is more spontaneous. "I stand in front of the canvas, think of an idea, and immediately apply it," he says.

Drawing on the biblical and somber religious influences of his childhood, Schluss creates secular works of celebration and whimsy. His playful imagery and brightly-colored canvases are in the tradition of Marc Chagall, Joan Miró, Fernando Botero, and Wassily Kandinsky. "In all of my paintings," says Schluss, "I try to make people understand that life, after all, is beautiful—that we should try to make the best of the worst."

The background of his 8.2- by 2.5-foot triptych, "A Day in Tel Aviv," is a monochromatic and abstract rendering of Israel's ancient cities. The overlay is a whirling dervish of color, folkloric images,



David Schluss

and cosmopolitan life as it is lived in Jaffa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Tango dancers leap and twirl, horn players proclaim a joyous future, and a portly female figure conjures

up the past by plucking the strings of an ancient harp. In "Lilian," a 20- by 24-inch mixed-media silhouette of a woman, the melancholy image is a universal one. "The thought, the look, the position could be myself—could be anybody," says



"Nirvana" is a serigraph with a 40- by 19 1/2-inch image in an edition of 350 on paper retailing for \$1,200, and an embellished edition of 99 on canvas, \$2,800.

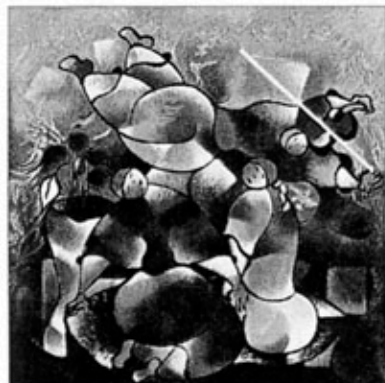
Schluss, who expects his viewers to interject themselves into his paintings; to imagine themselves as an element in his paintings.

Another of the artist's personal favorites is "Leading." It is a melancholy portrait of a blind man who sees the world through the eyes of a lady—the other figure in the piece. During an exhibition several years ago in the French city of Nantes, Schluss noticed an elderly woman staring at the work for nearly 20 minutes. Afterward she told him, with tears in her eyes, "This painting reminds me of my late husband who was blind." "When things like this happen, when people react to your work so strongly, you know it was worthwhile doing it," says Schluss.

His more recent work, where celebration rather than sadness is the mood, reflects his move from chilly Montreal to sun-drenched Florida. His publisher, Smart Publishing owned by Rami Rotkopf, is based in Fort Lauderdale, and it is here, in

a studio above the corporate offices, that Schluss creates his work during much of the year—for the remainder he works in Tel Aviv.

Born in 1943, Schluss attended school in the ancient city of Jaffa, central Israel's historical seaport. Fascinated by form and texture even as a child, Schluss remembers using bits of red, blue, and green yarn pulled from



"Love Song" is a serigraph with an image measuring 13 by 13 inches in an edition of 350 on paper retailing for \$300, and an edition of 99, hand-embellished on canvas, priced at \$800.

Lauderdale, and in many private and public collections throughout the world. Galleries that have exhibited his work include Smart Gallery in the Hilton Tel-Aviv, Art Beapue, Hong Kong; Galerie Matisse, Montreal; Galerie Gallien in Nice, France; and Wentworth Galleries throughout the U.S.

Prices for a Schluss limited edition serigraph range from \$200 to \$2,000. "Days of Peace," a hand pulled serigraph on paper with a 33- by 46-inch image, is \$1,500 for an edition of 350. The deluxe embellished edition on canvas is \$3,200 for an edition of 99. "Symphony," a hand pulled serigraph on paper with a 17- by 17-inch image in an edition of 350, is \$500. His 24-inch bronze sculptures, "Lean On" and "Tango," editions of 150, are \$6,000.

sweaters to sculpt arrangements of people, houses, and various objects. Eager to paint as a boy but unable to afford the necessary materials, he sketched instead with charcoal and cheap pencils.

While still in his twenties, Schluss migrated with his family to Montreal. In 1969, he enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux Arts school and in the 1970s was awarded a fine arts degree at the University of Sir George Williams in Montreal. Schluss is currently working in wax with the aim of creating three-dimensional bronze versions of his painted figures.

He frequently donates paintings to charitable causes, including the American Cancer Society, several local synagogues and churches in Cold Springs and Fort Lauderdale, The Children's Home Society of Florida, and Special Olympics.

His paintings are on display at the Teffen Museum in Israel, the Museum of Modern Art in Fort



"Embrace" is a serigraph with a 17- by 30-inch image in an edition of 350 on paper (\$600), 99 on canvas (\$1,400).